

# 1 Thessalonians

## Chapter 3

**Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, 2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, 3 that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. 4 For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. 5 For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.**

**3:1–2** Paul first went to Athens alone, then sent to Berea for Silas and Timothy (Ac 17:14–15). It is not clear whether Silas, as instructed (Ac 17:15), came to Athens with Timothy. However, when Timothy later returned from Thessalonica to Paul, who was now at Corinth, Silas came with him (Ac 18:5). (CSB)

**3:1 we.** An editorial “we,” referring to Paul alone. (CSB)

Paul had protested his love for the Thessalonian Christians in the strongest terms, stating also that he had tried time and again to visit them, but had been prevented from carrying out his intention. (Kretzmann)

*left behind.* Paul feels the deprivation of being alone very forcibly, as abandonment. (TLSB)

*Athens.* In Achaia, the southern province of the Greek Peninsula. Though Corinth was the capital of the province, Athens surpassed it as a cultural center. (TLSB)

**3:2 we sent Timothy** – So he had done the next best thing: Wherefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought best to be left in Athens alone, and sent Timothy, our brother and servant of God in the Gospel of Christ, to give you strength and consolation in behalf of your faith. The longer Paul had been separated from the Thessalonian congregation, the more unendurable this separation became to him. He felt that he must get into communication with them in some way. Although he shrank from loneliness, therefore, especially where there was little or no Christian fellowship, he disregarded his own comfort and peace of mind. No sooner had Timothy (and Silas) joined him at Athens, where he had waited for them, Acts 17, 15, than he commissioned Timothy to return to Thessalonica. Or Paul may have countermanded the order sent to Timothy by the Berean Christians and sent him word to proceed to Thessalonica first, before joining him in Achaia, Acts 18, 5. He preferred to bear a certain amount of personal inconvenience to the continuation of the anxiety in behalf of his beloved pupils. (Kretzmann)

*God's coworker.* A striking way of viewing Christian service, found also in 1Co 3:9. (CSB)

God works through His servants (Jn 15:5; Mt 28:20). Paul did not consider himself the sole dispenser of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He recognized others, such as Timothy. (TLSB)

*establish and exhort.* In Greek classical literature the word was generally used in the literal sense of putting a buttress on a building. In the NT it is mainly used figuratively, as here. (CSB)

Faith in Christ needs to be “rooted and built up in Him” (Col 2:7) by holding on to the Gospel promises. (TLSB)

**3:3 afflictions.** The opposition and persecution suffered by the Thessalonian converts. Christians must expect troubles (see Mk 4:17; Jn 16:33; Ac 14:22; 2Ti 3:12; 1Pe 4:12), but these are not disasters, for they advance God’s purposes (see Ac 11:19; Ro 5:3; 2Co 1:4; 4:17). (CSB)

The Thessalonians were literally dragged before their city officials, suffering physically as well as psychologically. (TLSB)

*destined.* Suffering for the sake of the Gospel was an intrinsic part of Paul’s self-understanding. Neither the apostles nor our Lord Jesus promised that following Him would be easy (cf Jn 16:33). (TLSB)

**3:4 we kept telling you** – Paul reminds them also of the fact that he, indeed, had during his stay with them told them of this in advance, that it is a part of God’s purpose with regard to His children that they must suffer affliction. The fact, then, that this prediction was being fulfilled should cause them no surprise. It happened so to them, and it happened so to him, and the Christian should be satisfied with his lot, with the cross which he must bear according to God’s will. All this is a part of Christian knowledge, the Gospel winning believers in spite of this undisguised forewarning. Note: The Christians of the present time are inclined somewhat to shirk the bearing of tribulations by equivocating when they should really make a clear confession of their faith in word and deed. It is to be feared that many cases of denial of the Lord grow out of such behavior. (Kretzmann)

*suffer affliction.* Paul and Silas narrowly escaped the mob that came after them in Thessalonica. When they were not found, the hosts (Jason and brothers) were mistreated (Ac 17:5–9). (TLSB)

*just as it has come to pass.* Paul foretold that suffering would come. (TLSB)

**3:5 I.** Paul uses the Greek emphatic pronoun (elsewhere used only in 2:18) to bring out his deep concern. (CSB)

*sent.* Paul, being eager to know about his converts, sent Timothy, his helper. (TLSB)

*tempter.* Satan is spoken of in every major division of the NT. He is supreme among evil spirits (see Jn 16:11; Eph 2:2). His activities can affect the physical (see 2Co 12:7) and the spiritual (see Mt 13:39; Mk 4:15; 2Co 4:4). He tempted Jesus (Mt 4:1–11), and he continues to tempt Jesus’ servants (see Lk 22:3; 1Co 7:5). He hinders missionary work (2:18). But he has already been defeated (see Col 2:15), and Christians need not be overwhelmed by him (see Eph 6:16). His final overthrow is certain (see Rev 20:10). (CSB)

Satan. Cf 2:18. He uses people and other beings to derail disciples from their faith. Cf Gn 3:1–7. (TLSB)

**2:17–3:5** Paul is interested in the well-being of the Thessalonians, whether they stand firm in the Gospel or yield due to pressure from the opponents. When Paul can no more bear the lack of news, he decides to send Timothy, his co-worker and helper. Pastors and leaders in God’s Church need to follow up on their members in the same way. They should take practical steps to know

how they are. The Lord seeks and wants to save and strengthen us through His servants, even in the midst of our problems. We are the apple of His eye. • Lord, give us Your loving heart, so that we may sincerely follow and care for the flock You have put under our care. Lord, help us pass through the various sufferings that will come our way as we follow You. Amen. (TLSB)

*Timothy's Encouraging Report*

**6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you— 7 for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. 8 For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. 9 For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, 10 as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? 11 Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, 12 and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, 13 so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.**

**3:6** *good news.* Not the preaching of the Gospel, but the joyful news that the Thessalonians were well grounded in their faith and love to others. Paul had earlier worried about them, not knowing whether they stood firm or fell from their faith in Christ due to the tempter (v 5). (TLSB)

**3:7** *distress and affliction.* The Gk words, used together for emphasis, describe their anxiety. (TLSB)

**3:8** *now we live.* Rhetoric. Paul longed for their safety in the Gospel, as though his life depended on it. (TLSB)

*standing fast in the Lord.* Keeping true to the message of God's grace for the sake of Christ crucified. (TLSB)

**3:9** *thanksgiving...God.* The preceding shows that Paul's work of evangelism had been effective. He might have congratulated himself on work well done, but instead he thanked God for the joy he had from what God had done. (CSB)

A rhetorical question expressing awe and gratitude to God after hearing about the faith of the Thessalonians. (TLSB)

Words cannot express Paul's deep gratitude for the faith and love demonstrated by the Thessalonian Christians. Grateful that they so well grasped the Gospel under his instruction, he gives thanks to God. Having learned of their firm stand in face of opposition, he reflects affectionately. Psalm 116:12 RSV comes to mind: "What shall I render to the Lord for all his bounty to me?" He is all but ecstatic about their mutual love "in God's presence." (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

It shows that what ever success Paul has had is directly due to what God has helped happen. Paul does well not to grab the credit but recognizes the real source of evangelism effectiveness. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

*before our God* - emprosthen - In front of or in sight of. It reflects a consciousness of God's presence in the Christian's everyday life. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

**3:10** *we pray* – deomai – To beg, binding oneself, petitioning, beseeching or making a request. This is quantified both as to frequency (night and day) and quality (as earnestly as possible). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

*most earnestly*. Translates a strong and unusual Greek compound word (found elsewhere in the NT only in 5:13; Eph 3:20) that brings out Paul’s passionate longing. (CSB)

Ephesians 3:20 “Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.”

1 Thessalonians 5:13 “Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.”

*Night and day*. Not prayer at two set times, but frequent prayer (see 1:2–3). (CSB)

*what is lacking* - eido – To see in a sense to know or be aware of something. To be sure.

*Supply* - katartizo – To complete thoroughly . To repair or restore.

*what is lacking*. Some of the things lacking were of a practical nature, such as moral (4:1–12) and disciplinary matters (5:12–24). Others were doctrinal, such as confusion over Christ’s return (4:13–5:11). (CSB)

husterema - What is in want or has a deficit.

Their trust in God was not defective. Rather, they needed instruction in certain matters. (TLSB)

*your faith*. The fifth time in the chapter that Paul speaks of their faith (see vv. 2, 5–7). (CSB)

Paul really wanted to mingle face to face with these Macedonian Christians. He hankered to build upon their basic beliefs so as to render them stronger still in faith and life. Paul did provide them (4:1-5:22) with a detailed listing for ongoing instruction in the Christian faith. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

**3:11–13** Paul expresses his wishes in a prayer for the Thessalonians after he has heard the encouraging report Timothy brought back. (TLSB)

**3:11** In the middle of a letter Paul frequently breaks into prayer (e.g., Eph 1:15–23; 3:14–21; Php 1:9–11; Col 1:9–12). For the link between Father and Son see note on 1:1. (CSB)

*God and Father...Lord Jesus* – God the Father and Christ are joint subjects of the sentence. The same function is ascribed to God the God the Father and to Jesus, who has divinity and equality with God the Father as the Second Person of the Trinity. (TLSB)

*direct our way* – He breaks into prayer here. He had been previously prevented from coming by Satan (2:18). (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

Paul knows that he will return to Thessalonica if the Lord of the church wills it. The devil may erect blockades, but the Lord “clears the way.” (LL)

**3:12** *the Lord*. In Paul’s writings this usually means Jesus rather than the Father. (CSB)

Ambrose: “Who, then, is the Lord... He has named the Father and has named the Son; Whom, then, has he joined with the Father and the Son except the Spirit? Who is the Lord Who establishes our hearts in holiness” (NPNF 2 10:149). (TLSB)

In the midst of his own persecution, Paul managed to keep his focus on the one in charge, the Lord of the church. The Lord is like the fixed point of reference that allows a spinning dancer or skater to maintain her axis and orientation. The Lord is like the lighthouse that immovably signals land and shelter no matter how great the storm. (LL)

*increase and abound* – They were to love each other and also those outside of their congregation. Many times the great love shown within a congregation comes to the attention of those outside of it and draws them in. (Concordia Pulpit Resources – Volume 8, Part 1)

Spiritually, not numerically. Cf Eph 3:16. (TLSB)

*we do for you* - stayridzo – To set fast, turn resolutely, confirm or establish.

1 Corinthians 1:2 “To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours.”

**3:13** *establish*. Stability encompassing the whole personality. (TLSB)

*blameless* - hageosoonay – Sacredness or holiness.

Holy in word and action; the result of the Holy Spirit’s work in a person’s life through Word and Sacrament. (TLSB)

*holiness*. The basic idea is “set apart [for God].” Here it refers to the completed process of sanctification (see note on 1Co 1:2). (CSB)

Refers not only to the end times but also to the presence of the risen Lord among His people. (TLSB)

*with all His saints*. Even though there are references in the NT connecting angels with the Lord’s appearing (Mk 8:38; 13:27; Rv 19:14), here it may mean “the revealing of the sons of God” in association with the Lord. On the Last Day, the saints will come in glory, not to continue an earthly life. (TLSB)

**3:6–13** Paul gives thanks and prays for the Thessalonians when he hears the good report from Timothy that they are standing in their faith and have the same kind of love for him as he has for them. Our faith in the Lord and love for one another should be as living and contagious as that of the Thessalonians. The Lord, who has promised to be with us until the end of time, will keep us in

His faith and kindle His love in our hearts so that we may love Him and one another. • We praise You, O God, because the gates of hell cannot prevent the sown seed of Your Word from growing. Amen. (TLSB)