
The Thessalonian Letters

Comfort from Timothy's Report

1 Thessalonians 3:1-13



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The end of Paul's patient endurance (3:1-2)

- Paul could no longer “**endure**” (*stegō*) the separation from the Thessalonians. He could not continue to “wait in silence.”
- He used the phrase “**left behind**” (*kataleipō*) ~ literally “to leave down,” implying that he felt forsaken or abandoned. He added the word “**alone**” (*monos*) ~ without a companion or destitute of help.
- **Timothy** ~ “our brother” (*adelphos*) and “fellow worker” (*sunergos*). Paul gave Timothy his stamp of approval with authority to carry on the ministry as an official member of the missionary team.
- “**strengthen**” (*stērizō*) ~ to make stable, place firmly, or confirm.
“**encourage**” (*parakaleō*) ~ calling alongside for encouragement and support (translated “exhorting” in 2:11).

Would affliction destroy their faith? (3:3-4)

- **“disturbed”** (*sainō*) ~ agitated, rattled, or unsettled. The cause?
“afflictions” (*thlipsis*) ~ intense pressure of persecution or oppression (also in 1:6). Did persecution cause them to fall away from their faith?
- Previously Paul had taught them that they were **“destined”** (*keimai*) or appointed for this.
- Persecution was not something that should have taken the Thessalonians by surprise, because when Paul was with them he kept **“telling in advance”** (*prolegō*) ~ to say beforehand or predict.
- He called them as eyewitnesses who **“know”** (*oida*) that his prediction came true.

What is the status of their faith? (3:5)

- He sent Timothy to “**find out about your faith.**” Paul had come to the end of his own patient endurance.
- “**For fear that**” (*mēpōs*) ~ “lest somehow” or “perhaps.” There was a real possibility that they might completely abandon their faith, meaning that all of Paul’s “**labor would be in vain**” or emptied of its results.
- He wanted to learn whether the Thessalonians’ faith was still intact.
- “**tempter might have tempted**” (*peirazō*) ~ putting someone to the test in a malicious fashion in order to break their commitment or subvert their faithfulness.

Timothy's report (3:6-7)

- Paul had moved from Athens to the city of Corinth where Timothy found him. Timothy gave a positive report of the “**faith and love**” of the Thessalonians (which Paul praised in 1:3 after hearing about it).
- The tempter had not damaged their commitment to Christ.
- The Thessalonians “**think kindly**” of the missionaries. As much as Paul longed to see them, they were “**longing**” just as much to see him.
- Paul had his own “**distress**” (*anagkē*, “dire straits”) and “**affliction**” (*thlipsis*, pressure from persecution). But Timothy's news “**comforted**” (*parakaleō*) and encouraged him.

Paul's reaction (3:8-9)

- **“we really live”** ~ Timothy's good report brought Paul and his companions new vigor and strength.
- Their main concern was that their spiritual children were standing firm in their relationship to the Lord.
- The Thessalonians' steadfastness gave him such great joy that it would be almost impossible for him to express it in words as they rejoiced before God.
- Paul would need to rely on the indwelling Holy Spirit, who “intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words” when we “do not know how to pray as we should” (Rom 8:26).

Continuing their spiritual growth (3:10)

- Despite Timothy's good report, Paul still longed to visit the Thessalonians again. Paul wanted to continue his ministry among them.
- There was nothing ***lacking*** in their original saving ***faith***, but Paul desired to increase their understanding of God's will and His ways.
- "**complete**" (*katartizō*) ~ put in order, knit together, or equip completely.
- The Great Commission had not yet been fulfilled in their lives ~ it calls for ***making disciples*** of all the nations, "baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, ***teaching*** them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matt 28:19-20).
- There was still much they could learn about the Christian life.

Paul's prayer (3:11-12)

- **"Now may"** marks the beginning of Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians.
- **"our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord"** ~ clearly affirms the deity of Jesus.
- That God might **"direct our way"** (*kateuthunō*) ~ that God might remove the hindrances preventing their reunion.
- That their love would **"increase"** (*pleonazō*, "to have in abundance") and **"abound"** (*perisseuō*, "to overflow beyond measure").
- The Lord Himself works in believers to produce this overflowing increase in their Christian **"love"** (*agapē*). Paul and his companions love the Thessalonians this way, so they should love one another the same way.

Established in holiness (3:13)

- Finally Paul asked God to “**establish your hearts**” (*stērizō*) ~ make the Thessalonians steadfast, certain, settled, and firm in their convictions.
- They should be “**without blame**” (*amemptos*) ~ free of fault and irreproachable. His goal for them would be a life of “**holiness**” (*hagiōsunē*) which expresses itself in purity of thought, word, and deed.
- Believers have been separated from the unbelieving world and set apart as belonging to God. Something that is devoted to God must be separated from sin.
- “the **coming** of our Lord Jesus with all His saints” (*parousia*) includes both His arrival and His direct presence (see 2:19; 4:15; 5:23). Paul will have much more to say about this later.