

1 Thessalonians Chapter 3

Opening Remarks

Welcome back to our 1 Thessalonians study. It is wonderful to see all of you here tonight. I will join you again for Chapter 5 when we talk about the different views of the Rapture, but tonight we have a wonderful Chapter 3 to discuss. This is such an amazing and encouraging chapter about the Thessalonian Church, and it holds so many lessons for us today.

Pray

1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

“Therefore, when we could no longer stand it, we thought it was better to be left alone in Athens. And we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you concerning your faith, so that no one will be shaken by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. In fact, when we were with you, we told you in advance that we were going to experience affliction, and as you know, it happened. For this reason, when I could no longer stand it, I also sent him to find out about your faith, fearing

that the tempter had tempted you and that our labor might be for nothing.”

We immediately see a bridge here in Verse 1 to the last verse of Chapter 2 with the word, “Therefore” in the CSB and NASB, or the word “So” in the NIV. This link indicates a spiritual angst of sorts within Paul who reminded the Thessalonians at the end of the second chapter that they are the “glory and crown” of Paul and his companions. This first verse of Chapter 3 should not convey worry, necessarily, but instead tells us just how much concern Paul and his team had for the Thessalonian Church. In other words, Paul *greatly* cares about them. As I mentioned when I was teaching you about Chapter 1, Paul speaks about the Thessalonian Church in a similar vein to that of the Philippian Church – both churches were obviously quite close to his heart.

We see here that Paul was so concerned about the Thessalonian Church that he sent Timothy to spend time with them – not just to hang out with them but to strengthen and encourage their faith. There are some key principles regarding *pastoring* in this second verse of Chapter 3!

So many people in the Church today, including many pastors, do not understand the primary roles that pastors are to play in the Church, *especially* in the United States. Too many times, the pastor and his staff

are called upon to do the work that is reserved for the congregants – the Church today has become all too consumeristic for its own good.

Paul, here, tells us two key components of what the pastor *should* be doing:

1) First, pastors should serve as public theologians. Slide: “Every pastor is responsible for communicating Christ and for ministering God’s Word, at all times, to everyone, and in many ways. Ministering the Word of God to the people of God is the pastor’s lifeblood” – Vanhoozer and Strachan.

If pastors cannot effectively and *correctly* teach the Word of God in relation to the mission of Christ, then they are missing their primary responsibility. We see this here in Paul’s words, “Timothy, our brother and God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ...”

The first indicator of Timothy’s qualifications is that he is a coworker of God’s mission *through the Gospel of Jesus*. That, again, is the first responsibility of the pastor – we are preach and teach the Gospel.

2) Second, we see here that Timothy’s job was to also encourage the Church. If Gospel-preaching and teaching is the first job of the pastor, encouraging people through the Spirit and the Word is the second.

Our gifts as pastors – and all spiritual gifts for all Christians – is found in the grace of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. “Our gifts are distributed by God’s grace (Romans 12:3, 6), are manifestations of his grace (1 Peter 4:10), and are enabled by his grace (1 Corinthians 12:11)” (Akin and Pace). Pastors cannot encourage others unless we ourselves serve within the *grace of Christ* and the *power of the Spirit*. We, as pastors, must constantly realize that this ability to encourage others arrives *only* through the Spirit and through the gifts He distributes to us! This obedience and yielding to the Spirit, as described in **Ephesians 4:12-13**, is *how* we “equip the saints” – it is how we rightly encourage you!

In Verses 3-4, Paul tells the Thessalonian Church *why* he feels that Timothy should be with them – he is concerned that they may become “shaken” by the affliction and persecution they are experiencing. He reminds this Church – and this applies to us today – that affliction and suffering should be *expected* in the world in which we live. Although we certainly should not *desire* suffering, we should absolutely *expect* it.

Paul said this to the Ephesian Church too (**Ephesians 3:13**): “So then I ask you not to be discouraged over my afflictions on your behalf, for they are your glory.”

The Church today is not this courageous. We struggle with Christ's command to take up our cross daily and to follow Him. We forget the Heroes of **Hebrews 11:36-38a**: "Others experienced mockings and scourgings, as well as bonds and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawed in two, they died by the sword, they wandered about in sheepskins, in goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and mistreated. The world was not worthy of them..."

The fact is that we in the Western Church have become accustomed to comfort, to preferences, to traditionalism, to a Burger King "have it my way" version of Christianity. How many of us would hear from Jesus what Nathaniel heard (**John 1:47b**) "Here truly is an Israelite [or a Christian in our case] in whom there is no deceit?"

Regardless of what one might believe about the politics of the late Charlie Kirk, the fact is that he was unashamed of the Gospel of Jesus, and he spoke what was in his heart. I have a friend much like this, and I have honestly wondered at times if he says too much, or if he is just a little too unfiltered. I have been rethinking this of late. My conclusion, at least today, is that if it comes to talking about Jesus, it is far better that we say too much than too little. Many churches do not tell the whole truth.

The Presbyterians, the United Methodists, the Episcopalians, and the United Church of Christ are among so many mainstream churches which have affirmed lifestyles contrary to the Word of God and which have disaffirmed the truth of Romans 1 and its litany of sin statements. It is no wonder that these denominations' attendance has fallen so dramatically – the truth is that in times of affliction and persecution, churches grow, but in times of compromise and effusive praise of life choices contrary to Christianity, churches shrink. I am not picking on these denominations either – I see *many* denominations which have compromised to the point of ineffectiveness.

The Western Church is full of sin – and we too often do so little to tell the truth in love. Affirmation of sin, regardless of its type, is unacceptable both in our lives and in our speech (**Romans 6:1-2**): “What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply. Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”

This is not meant to discourage you – or even myself – it is meant as it was written in 1 Thessalonians 3: Paul, desiring to encourage the Church under affliction, loved them enough to send away his faithful companion Timothy to them. Paul knew – as we today know – that a *Spirit-filled* person of God can accomplish anything at any time! “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus, because the law of the

Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death” (**Romans 8:1-2**).

Paul’s heart of concern for the Thessalonians is precisely what we should desire in any pastor: he had a heart of *compassion* for his people. “The nurturing aspect includes the general Christian responsibility of showing compassion for others, but this responsibility is accentuated because a pastor must set the example for others” – David C. Deuel.

Paul *knew* the temptations the enemy would throw at the Thessalonian Church because he personally *experienced* such temptations, just as you and I do. He longed to hear that his labor in Christ was still fruitful, that the Thessalonians, despite their many afflictions, were still holding true to the Gospel of Christ, and that they were still being *faithful* to their Lord and to each other. *That’s* why he sent Timothy to them. So, now let’s look at Timothy’s report back to Paul.

1Thessalonians 3:6-10

But now Timothy has come to us from you and brought us good news about your faith and love. He reported that you always have good memories of us and that you long to see us, as we also long to see you. Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and affliction, we were encouraged about you through your faith. For now we live, if you

stand firm in the Lord. How can we thank God for you in return for all the joy we experience before our God because of you, as we pray very earnestly night and day to see you face to face and to complete what is lacking in your faith?

Now this is how you make a good preacher happy! Paul was overwhelmed at Timothy's report about the Thessalonian Church! This Church was not the Galatian or Corinthian Churches, which Paul had to instruct so fervently, or the five of seven Asian Churches which Jesus corrected in Revelation. No, this Thessalonian Church was doing *well!* He particularly noted two special attributes of this Church – their *faith* and their *love!*

We *talk* about faith a lot in the Church, but the truth is that we do not always understand exactly what we are talking about – at least not to the level that we see in the New Testament Early Church. Remember in the Book of Acts when the Jewish Leadership – the Sadducees, Pharisees, and scribes among them – grew annoyed and angry because the Apostles were teaching about the Risen Christ? Peter and John spoke boldly to these purported leaders – in faith! – and the result was a united and powerful Church: “With great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them” **Acts 4:33**). Great faith in God results in great power in the Spirit!

That power was soon put to the test. Stephen was stoned to death and remained faithful; Saul persecuted the Church before his own salvation and then he remained faithful; the Church was scattered because of the intense persecution and *they* remained faithful (see the **Book of Acts**); and according to **Hebrews 11**, *many* other New Testament Christians remained faithful to Christ the Son as their forefathers and mothers had been faithful to the Father: Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Sarah, Issac, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Sampson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets – all of these were found faithful by the Spirit and included in the Faith Hall of Fame. Here in 1 Thessalonians 3, we find that the faithful Paul and his companions were overjoyed to find that the Thessalonian Church was remaining faithful even during their own persecution! Not only that, but they also remained loving to Christ and to each other. Imagine that!

Jesus said to His Apostles, minus Judas Iscariot, at the Last Supper, “I give you a new command: Love one another. Just as I have loved you, you are also to love one another. By this everyone will know you are my disciples, if you love one another” (**John 13:34-35**).

Sometimes it is *hard* to love one another. For example, we remember, again, that Jesus told the Ephesian Church that they had lost their first love (**Revelation 2:4-5**).

Paul said to the Corinthian Church (**1 Corinthians 13:8, 13**) that the greatest attribute of the faithful Christian is love. So how do we love one another? Great question.

Chuck Swindoll once offered Four Ways the Church Can Love Each Other:

- 1) Listen to others, including those who hold viewpoints with which you disagree.
- 2) Demonstrate grace by looking past people's "faults" to see their strengths.
- 3) Recognize the value and dignity of other human beings, regardless of their ethnicity, socioeconomic class, or background.
- 4) Show God's love by selflessly serving and sacrificing for others.

We must love one another!

Now, let's check out Paul's joy at hearing from Timothy about the faith and love the Thessalonian Church was demonstrating despite the

persecution they were under: *Paul* was encouraged by *their* faith! How cool is that?! The encourager was being encouraged.

All good pastors are encouraged when their people are walking in faith and love. There is nothing more encouraging than seeing a faithful, loving people grow in Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. As Paul said, we *live* for that! His response was immediate – he could hardly wait to see them again to help their faith increase even more! This is a sign of a great pastor – he desires *continual* growth in the people that God has given him to shepherd.

This is yet another aspect of pastoring – feeding the flock and helping them become better disciples of Jesus Christ. This is often accomplished through Spirit-filled and -led, effective teaching. **Jeremiah 3:15** says, “I will give you shepherds who are loyal to me, and they will shepherd you with knowledge and skill” (the ESV says “knowledge and understanding”). **1 Corinthians 12**, **Ephesians 4**, and **Romans 12** all talk about these gifts of teaching and knowledge and their use in the Church. We know from **Mark’s** Gospel (**Chapter 4**) that Jesus taught the people, and then He reminded them to listen to the wisdom of His teaching. The Apostles taught the people. In the Old Testament, Moses taught the people. Paul, hearing of the Thessalonians faith and love,

wanted to teach this great church that they should *continue* in their faith and love. He longed to do so face to face!

I love teaching my online students. I love recording podcasts and videos and Zoom calls. All are great. But I am with Paul here – there is *nothing* I am called to that is better than face-to-face teaching. I see in your faces and hear in your voices when you are growing in Christ and in the power of the Word of God. Other than someone being saved, this is my greatest joy in ministry. And I think Paul was saying this to the Thessalonian Church – it is great to hear all these things, but I cannot wait to see you!

1Thessalonians 3:11-13

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you. And may the Lord cause you to increase and overflow with love for one another and for everyone, just as we do for you. May he make your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Amen.

Paul concludes this joyful section by praying – a wonderful reminder that even when things are going well, we should continue to pray. He prays for three specific things and then adds a reminder:

- 1) First, he asks God the Father and Son to guide him to see the Thessalonians again. Clearly Paul and his companions longed to see this Church. It is again apparent how much Paul specifically loved this congregation of believers.
- 2) Second, he comes back to a repetitive theme not only in his Epistles, but also throughout the New Testament: loving one another. He not only commends them for their *current* love but also asks them to prayerfully *grow* in that love. Paul's pastoral heart is ever before us.
- 3) Finally, he calls the Church to personal holiness. We have talked about this theme many times, but it is so very overlooked in many churches today. Although we may not realize it, every human being desires to reconnect with the God who created him or her. As Frank Macchia notes, "We were created by the Word of the Father and in the creative freedom and power of the Spirit, and we will never find fulfillment until we find our way back to that beginning" (see also **Genesis 1:1-3**). This reconciliation, of course, *only* happens through the One who can bring us back to God – Jesus Christ, the Light of the World: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. All things were created through him, and apart from him not one thing was created that has been created. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. That

light shines in the darkness, and yet the darkness did not overcome it” (**John 1:1-5**). Knowing God by and through the Work of Christ in fulness is a constant desire of the faithful, loving Christian, and we need the Spirit of God – the Comforter – to help us accomplish His will and walk in this holiness that Paul spoke of, and of which God demands. We are to be holy for our God is holy (**Leviticus 11:44-45; 1 Peter 1:16**).

Paul’s Constant Reminder

Paul’s constant reminder throughout this first Letter to the Thessalonians is of the future coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in this final verse he adds the phrase “with all his saints.” This is a precursor of the next two chapters, beginning next week with Dr. Scott leading you through Chapter 4. How encouraging it is to remember that Jesus could come any day, and what a strong reminder that we too should walk in the faith and love that was demonstrated by the Thessalonian Church.

1 & 2 Thessalonians Sources (1 Thessalonians 3)

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