

# 1 Thessalonians 3 - Practical Examples and Instructions on Caring

## I. Personal section: looking backward (1 Thess 1:1–3:13)

- (4) Defense of Paul's concern for the Thessalonians (2:17–3:13)
  - (C) Timothy's visit to them (3:1-5)
  - (D) Timothy's report of them (3:6-10)
  - (E) Paul's prayer for them (3:11-13)
    - (a) Return to them (3:11)
    - (b) Progressive sanctification (3:12)
    - (c) Blamelessness at the Bema Seat judgment (3:13)

## 1 Thessalonians 3

(C) Timothy's visit to them (3:1-5)

1 Therefore, **when we could no longer endure it**, we thought it best to be left behind, alone at Athens,

1 Therefore when we could endure *it* no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone,

1 Therefore, when we could stand it no longer, we decided to remain alone in Athens

1 Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;

- Paul tells them that, although he could't make it to Thessalonica himself, he did the next best thing and he sent the best he had, Timothy

— Timothy came to Athens to be with Paul, but Paul sent him back to Thessalonica to strengthen and encourage the church (v2)

- "...when we could no longer endure *it*" - does this sound like a person who doesn't care?

2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's **fellowworker** in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you for the benefit of your faith,

2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith,

2 and send Timothy, our brother who works with us for God in the gospel of the Messiah, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith,

2 And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:

- "...fellow worker" - Timothy was Paul's companion in ministry, a person who stood right beside Paul and endured all that Paul had to endure (Cf. Matt 9:37)
- Because of Paul's great love and care for the Thessalonians, he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica from Athens, even though Paul could've really used Timothy in Athens and also in Corinth
- When Timothy returned to Thessalonica, his goal was not evangelism, but edification
- Unlike many ministries today, Paul was not only interested in conversions, but he was also interested in seeing people develop into full Christlikeness

3 so that no one **would be disturbed** by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that **we have been destined for this**.

3 so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.

3 so that no one would be shaken by these persecutions, for which you are aware that we were destined.

3 That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.

- "...would be disturbed" - *sainō*, used in extra-biblical Greek literature of a dog wagging its tail

— Paul was concerned that, as a dog wags its tail, they were being tossed to and fro as new believers. What tossed the around was instability, which was caused by their trials.

— The unbelieving Jews who ran Paul out of town had now turned on the Christians there, causing them as much trouble as they were causing Paul

- "...we have been destined for this" - Paul gives us a completely different way of looking at trials. When we go through trials, we shouldn't be shaken or disturbed by it, thinking that it's something out of the ordinary or that I did something wrong...trials are in God's plan for me. We are destined for trials...trials are our destiny.

— So all of the suffering that happens to us as Christians, all of the things that come into our lives that we didn't cause, unfair treatment, we get disturbed by it but God says all of this is part of your calling. This is what you signed up for (Cf. Matt 10:24; 13:21; Acts 14:22; 1 Peter 4:12).

— For these poor Thessalonians, who didn't even have a NT yet thus could not be aware of the doctrine of suffering, they were brand new Christians, and the apostle who led you to Christ has been driven out of town, it would be normal to think to yourself that you had missed the calling of God. Christianity works for everybody but it doesn't work for me.

— Paul encourages them by telling them that Christianity is actually working really well for them, you don't have to be disturbed by these things that you're experiencing, in fact you're destined for them

— Trials are within the design of God to separate the wheat from the chaff, a spiritual believer from a carnal believer, a spiritually faithful ministry from a woke church.

4 For even when we were with you, we *kept* telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; **and so it happened**, as you know.

4 For indeed when we were with you, we *kept* telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.

4 In fact, when we were with you, we told you ahead of time that we were going to suffer persecution. And as you know, that is what happened.

4 For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.

- Even though the Rapture will occur before the Tribulation period, to remove all living believers from the earth before God's wrath is poured out, this certainly does not mean that Christians are immune or somehow exempt from suffering, trials, and persecution before that event occurs.

— The Bible tells us that we are candidates for the following types of suffering:

1. Trials (John 16:33)
2. Man's wrath (2 Tim 3:12)
3. Satan's wrath (Eph 6:11-12)
4. World's wrath (John 15:18-19)

— The only type of suffering that Christians are exempt from is God's wrath, which by comparison is much worse than all of the above, by far

- "...and so it happened" - another example of a short-term prophecy, which came to pass shortly after the prophecy was given (Cf. John 13:19; 14:29)

5 For this reason, when I could no longer endure *it*, I also sent **to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be for nothing.**

5 For this reason, when I could endure *it* no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain.

5 But when I could stand it no longer, I sent Timothy to find out about your faith. I was afraid that the tempter had tempted you in some way, and that our work had been a waste of time.

5 For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.

- "...to find out about your faith" - Paul sent Timothy because of his overwhelming love and concern for the Thessalonian church, as they were enduring this persecution

- This does not mean that Paul wasn't sure they were Christians; Paul also did not send Timothy to figure out who were the "real" Christians and who were just professors of the faith. These questions are the furthest thing from Paul's mind here...
- "faith" - Paul is referring to their faith as it relates to their sanctification, not their justification
- It takes faith to go through trials. If you have great faith in the midst of trials or you have little faith in the midst of trials, or if you have no faith in the midst of trials, it doesn't cancel out the fact that you exercised saving faith at justification (Cf. 2 Tim 2:11-13).
- Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica, not to see if there were actually saved, but to check to see if they were trusting God through the trials and persecutions that were happening to them
- "...for fear that the tempter might have tempted you" - a temptation is a solicitation to sin. This church was being tempted to work out their salvation through human power, or doubt whether they had salvation at all.
- Satan was whispering lies in their ears, tempting them away from sound doctrine. A new believer is vulnerable to this type of deception because they just don't know enough about the things of God yet.
- "...our labor would be for nothing" - notice that Paul doesn't say that if the Thessalonians were indeed stumbling in their faith, that they were never saved. He says that his labor, to teach them about the doctrine of suffering and help them grow in the sanctification tense of their salvation, would be in vain.
- "for nothing" - this is where Calvinists and Arminians have almost destroyed accurate Bible interpretation:
  - The Arminian will come to this verse, see this phrase ("in vain") and immediately think that these people lost their salvation, completely ignoring John 10:27-29.
  - The Calvinist comes to this verse and says, Well I guess if your faith is not enduring to the end, you were never given the gift of faith to begin with and thus you're not saved.
  - Paul is not concerned whether these Thessalonians were saved or not...he knows they are saved, and he has already spent a large portion of this epistle confirming to them that they were saved, and gave them evidence of their conversion. What Paul is concerned about is them stumbling in the middle tense of their salvation. When we don't walk with faith in the middle tense of our salvation, we're unfruitful, God can't use us in the way He wants to use us to.
  - He was worried that they would become a Matt 13:7,22 situation, where the seed of salvation was planted and began to grow, but was then choked out by the thorns (trials/suffering/worries of this life).
  - Paul says that if you fall into that category, and you easily could, I've wasted my time with you because God has so much more for you than simply arriving in heaven one day.

He wants you to be fully rewarded at the Bema Seat judgment, and He wants to use your life now to bless others.

— At the least, Paul wanted these Thessalonians to receive crown #3, the Crown of Life, for success in enduring trials

SCRIPTURE'S FIVE CROWNS (Rev 2:10; 3:11; 2 John 8)		
Scripture	Crown	Purpose
1. 1 Cor 9:24-27	Incorruptible	Gaining mastery over the flesh
2. 1 Thess 2:19-20	Rejoicing	Soul winning
3. James 1:12; Rev 2:10	Life	Enduring trials
4. 1 Peter 5:2-4	Glory	Shepherding God's people
5. 2 Tim 4:8	Righteousness	Longing for His appearing

(D) Timothy's report of them (3:6-10)

**6** But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us **goodnews of your faith** and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also *long to see you*,

**6** But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you,

**6** But Timothy has just now returned from visiting you and has told us the good news about your faith and love. He also told us that you always have fond memories of us and want to see us, just as we want to see you.

**6** But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us **goodtidings of your faith and charity**, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you:

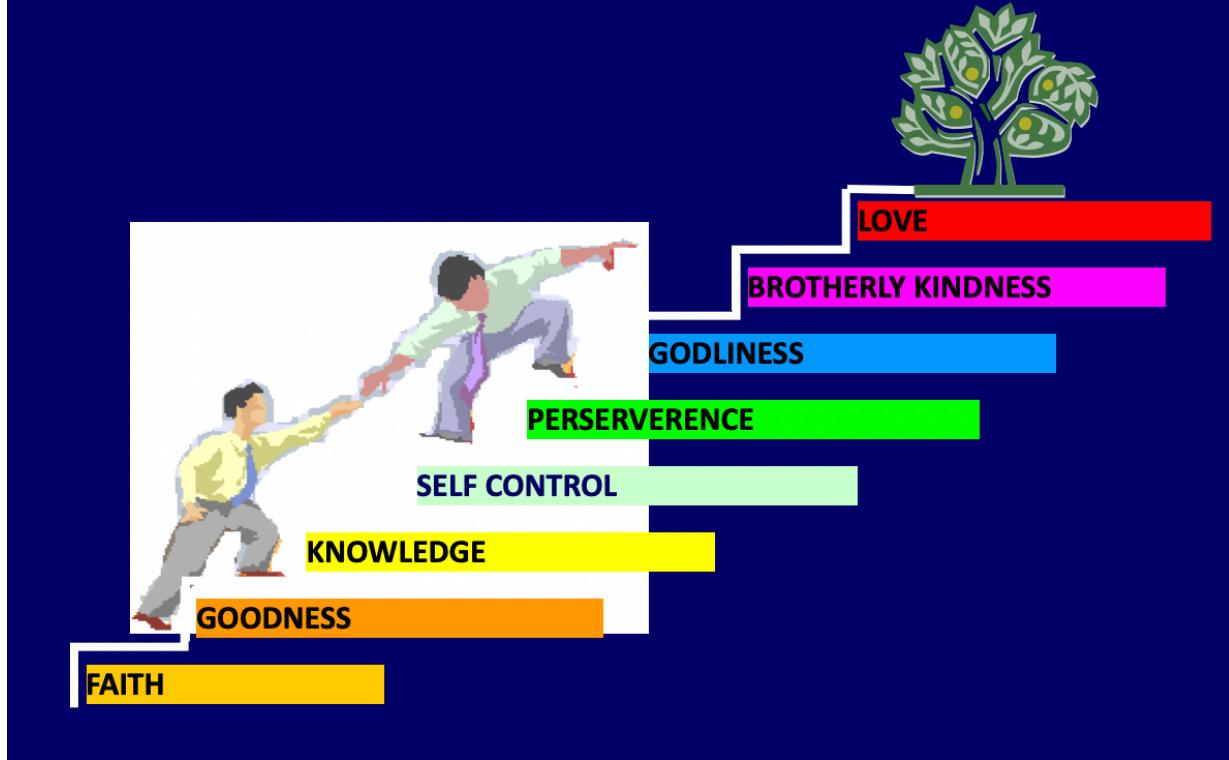
— "...good news of your faith" - the good news that Timothy brought back to Paul was not confirming that the Thessalonians were saved (justified), Paul already knew that.

— When Paul refers to faith in this epistle, he's referring to their faith in the growth/sanctification process, not in justification. The Thessalonians were already justified/saved.

— If the Thessalonians (and us) do not trust God through problems, it doesn't mean I'm not a Christian. It means that that I have a developmental problem...I've been born again, but I'm not developing properly.

- We have many examples of believers who just quit trusting God. The best example is the Exodus generation that came out of Egyptian bondage. They trusted God as they walked through the Red Sea, then once they got on the other side, on their way to Mount Sinai, all they did was panic during on trial after another.
- All the while, God kept coming through and providing for them, but even through that, they began to grumble against God and His ordained leadership (Moses).
- When they got to Kadesh-Barnea, on the border of the Promised Land, the spies saw giants in the land, and they were like grasshoppers compared to these giants. The spies (except Joshua and Caleb) panicked, did not trust God, and the Israelites panicked and lacked faith that the God who freed them from Egyptian bondage and took them through the Red Sea, the God who miraculously provided for their needs, wasn't big enough to take care of the giants for them.
- The Exodus generation was saved (they are listed in the Hall of Faith, Heb 11:29), but what they lost out on was the blessings that they could have had, flowing from their justification.
- Other examples include: Peter; Demas (2 Tim 4:10)
- How did Paul know that these Thessalonians were growing in the second tense of their salvation? Paul mentions their "love" and their "kindness."
- When Peter gives us a description of a growing Christian (2 Peter 1:5-7), he lists eight character traits that a growing Christian will display. "Brotherly kindness" and "love" are the top two traits.
- You know you're properly developing as a Christian when these traits are replicated in your life by the power of the Holy Spirit. Because these traits do not come naturally from our sin nature, they must be infused into our life by God as we depend on the Holy Spirit moment-by-moment.
- Both "love" and "kindness" are fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23)

# PORTRAIT OF GROWTH



7 for this reason, **brothers and sisters**, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith;

7 for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith;

7 That's why, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we have been encouraged about you by your faith.

7 Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith:

- "...brothers and sisters" - see notes on 2:17

- When Paul received the report back from Timothy, he was relieved and comforted

8 for now we **really live**, if you stand firm in the Lord.

8 for now we *really live*, if you stand firm in the Lord.

8 For now we can go on living, as long as you continue to stand firm in the Lord.

8 For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.

- "...*really live*" - shows the height of Paul's relief of their spiritual status and faith; Paul was so relieved and alive that the Thessalonian church continued to trust God in the midst of

their persecution

— Here we see Paul's heart as a pastor, as a shepherd, and that he had a ministry model that is very different than many churches and ministries today. Paul cared deeply that people were saved, but he also cared deeply that they continued to grow into Christlikeness in the middle tense of their salvation.

- "...if" - you can be a Christian and not stand firm in the Lord. You can be saved, born again, going to heaven, and one day wake up and not have your spiritual armor on, and completely fall on your face.

9 For what thanks can we give to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice because of you before our God,

9 For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account,

9 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we have in God's presence because of you?

9 For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God;

- Paul continues to express his utter relief and pure joy that the Thessalonian believer's faith in God remained strong in the midst of persecution

10 as we keep praying most earnestly night and day that we may see your faces, and may **completewhat is lacking in your faith?**

10 as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?

10 We pray very hard night and day that we may see you again face to face, so that we may equip you with whatever is lacking in your faith.

10 Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?

- Paul and his companions (Silas/Silvanus and Timothy) prayed earnestly day and night that they could return to Thessalonica personally and be with them again, in order to "complete" what is lacking in their faith.

— Paul told them earlier (Cf. 2:18) that he eagerly wanted to return to them, but circumstances outside of his control (Satan) prevented him from coming

— Satan threw up every roadblock available to keep Paul from returning to Thessalonica, but he continued to pray night and day for God to open that door

- "...complete what is lacking in your faith" - this was not a ministry of evangelism, it was a ministry of edification

- "complete" - *katartizō*, comes from the same root of the noun for "equipping" [*katartismos*] used to describe the purpose of a pastor-teacher in Eph 4:12
- The role of a pastor is to teach the Bible in a way that can easily be understood, so that the flock of God can grow and become equipped to do whatever God has called each individual member to do in their own sphere of influence or ministry.
- Paul wanted to get back to Thessalonica in order to exercise this gift, to further establish their faith in any area they may be lacking
- The reason why we have so much ineffectiveness among Christians in the world today is because pastors, to a large extent, are really not doing the job that God called them to do, which is to equip the saints.
- We need the gift of pastor-teacher, Eph 4:13 tells us, "to attain the unity of the faith" and "knowledge of the Son of God." As a result of the work of a pastor-teacher, "we are no longer to be children, tossed to and fro by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming" (Eph 4:14).

(E) Paul's prayer for them (3:11-13)

(a) Return to them (3:11)

11 Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you;  
 11 Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you;  
 11 Now may our God and Father and our Lord Jesus provide a way for us to visit you.  
 11 Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.  
 - As Paul prays here, he amplifies the thoughts he expressed in v10. He integrates his theology into his prayer life.

- Paul wanted to go back to Thessalonica, but if that was going to happen, it would have to be a God-thing

- It would have to be the work of God the Father and God the Son, the Lord Jesus if he was ever to make it back to Thessalonica
- Satan had been hindering him from returning, throwing every roadblock possible into Paul's way, so Paul simply turns that problem over to God to handle. If God wanted Paul to go back to Thessalonica, it would be His job to overcome these obstacles of Satan to make a way for Paul.

(b) Progressive sanctification (3:12)

12 and **may the Lord cause you** to increase and overflow in love for one another, and for all people, **just as we also do for you**;  
 12 and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you;

12 May the Lord greatly increase your love for each other and for all people, just as we love you.

12 And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:

- One evidence of a growing Christian is that you are growing in love for your brothers and sisters in Christ, and for people in general (Cf. John 13:34-35; Gal 6:10)

— It's sometimes difficult to get along with other Christians. But one of the greatest evidences that you are growing in Christ is your ability to get along with other Christians. Not in regards to some deep theological issue, but around minor injustices (Cf. Rom 12:18).

— *To dwell above with the saints I love, that would be much glory. To dwell below with the saints I know, that's a different story.*

- "...may the Lord cause you" - the Lord doesn't expect us to manufacture this love for other believers, and the world at large, on our own (Cf. 2 Tim 2:1)

- "...just as we also do for you" - Paul wanted the Thessalonians to be like him. What he was experiencing in terms of progressive sanctification, could be experienced by the Thessalonians, and all Christians.

— Paul never taught an elitest form of Christianity, a What I have no one else gets type of mentality. Paul himself was growing in love for other Christians, and he says that the same resources I have to do this, you have as well.

(c) Blamelessness at the Bema Seat judgment (3:13)

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.

13 so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

13 Then your hearts will be strong, blameless, and holy in the presence of God, who is our Father, when our Lord Jesus appears with all his saints.

13 To the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

- Every chapter deals with the Lord's Coming...

- "...He may establish your hearts" - this is what Paul meant when he said that he was praying night and day that he may return to them and "may complete what is lacking in your faith"

— Paul was an obstetrician to the Thessalonians because he helped them in the birthing/salvation process, but he was also their pediatrician because he wanted to ensure that they grow up healthy in their faith

— Paul here is praying for the practical/experiential sanctification, not their justification; their practical holiness, not their positional holiness

- "...at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints" - a reference to the return of Christ, to end the chapter
- "at the coming" - *parousia*, coming; a term that Paul used to describe a person's extended visit (Cf. 1 Cor 16:17; 2 Cor 10:10; Phil 2:12), not just their arrival for that visit
- Consequently, it may refer to the Rapture, the actual arrival of Christ for the church. The context determines whether it refers to the "coming" itself, or what will follow it
- Here, Paul's concern was that the Thessalonians would be ready to give a good account of themselves to the Lord, not just that they would be ready for His arrival
- "...saints" - *hagios*, holy ones; pre-Wrath view holds that this refers to angels, however Paul never used the word *hagios* with the noun "angels"
- See [Gromacki-A Response to Marvin Rosenthal's Interpretation of 1 Thess 3:13](#) for a refutation of the pre-Wrath view of this verse