**Lesson 4**

1 Thessalonians 3

BACKING UP A BIT

***1 Thessalonians 2:17-19***

*But we, brethren, having been taken away (orphaned) from you for a short while—in person, not in spirit—were all the more eager (more superabundantly endeavored) with great desire (longing) to see your face.****18****For we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, more than once—and yet Satan (through people opposed to Paul) hindered us.****19****For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?* ***20****For you are our glory and joy.*

*First comes our commitment to the Word of God. In 1 Thessalonians 2, Paul refers to his message three times as ‘the gospel of God’ (2, 8, 9) and twice as ‘the word of God’[[1]](#footnote-1)*

*Secondly, there is our commitment to the people of God. We have seen that Paul expressed his deep love and care for the Thessalonians by likening himself to their mother and father. He felt and acted towards them as if they were his own children, which indeed they were, since he had introduced them to Christ.[[2]](#footnote-2)*

**Verses 1-2**

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

1. **Therefore, because of this eager longing to see you (yet knowing the risk it would bring to you if we returned), we decided to stay in Athens and send Timothy.**

*The purpose of Timothy’s having come thus turns out to be twofold: first, for the sake of their faith, so that they not be shaken by the inevitable afflictions; and second, for Paul’s own sake, lest the Tempter in testing them had won the day and Paul’s labor thus be empty. Fee*

1. **Paul calls Timothy “our” brother, referring to those with Paul and of the Thessalonians.**
   1. Paul calls Timothy God’s fellow worker. Yes, Paul saw Timothy as his fellow worker, but here he calls him GOD’S fellow worker. Stunning. We are working WITH God.

*But what Paul almost certainly intended is what one finds in the TNIV, that Timothy, who ultimately belongs to God, is being commended first of all as Paul’s and Silas’s own “brother,” and further as their co-worker “in the gospel of Christ.” At the same time he is God’s person in all this missionary activity. Fee*

*So we sent Timothy, whose fellowship would have meant much to Paul, for he is our brother and God’s fellow-worker in spreading the gospel of Christ [[3]](#footnote-3)*

*So ‘in order to remove the objectionable character which the bold designation synergos tou theou (“God’s fellow-worker”) appeared to have’, some copyists deleted the words ‘of God’, while others replaced ‘fellow-worker’ with ‘servant’[[4]](#footnote-4)*

* 1. What work were God and Timothy doing?
     + They were sharing the gospel of Christ. Keep in mind there is one gospel. They were sharing the gospel of the grace of God, the gospel of peace, God’s gospel, Christ’s gospel, the gospel of Jesus, our gospel, my gospel, the gospel of the kingdom.
  2. Timothy was also commissioned to strengthen and encourage them as to their faith. What would this look like? The most likely answer is through teaching truth, but also to reassure them that Paul and those with him were well even though they were being persecuted.

*This latter phrase thus brings us to the real object of Paul’s concern. It was, and is, all about “your faith,” a note that will be struck no fewer than five times in the present passage (vv. 2, 5, 6, 7, 10). Fee*

*Paul had three reasons for sending Timothy on this mission to Thessalonica. The first was to strengthen and encourage you in your faith (2b). The verb to strengthen (stērixai) was an almost technical term for the consolidation and building up of new converts. Timothy was to do more than establish the Thessalonians in their faith; he was also to encourage, comfort or cheer them (parakalēo). [[5]](#footnote-5)*

**Verse 3**

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

1. **The Thessalonians were concerned about the afflictions Paul was experiencing. He doesn’t want them to be disturbed (be moved) by them.** He reminds them that persecutions are the destiny of those who desire to share the gospel. He might say, “I know you guys are worried about me because you’ve heard about our troubles, but please understand this is to be expected.

*Paul’s second concern was that no-one would be unsettled by these trials (3a). To ‘unsettle’ is sainō, which was used at first of dogs wagging their tail, and so came to mean to ‘flatter’, ‘fawn upon’ and therefore ‘deceive’ (BAGD). Paul was worried that the Thessalonians’ sufferings might lead them astray from Christ.[[6]](#footnote-6)*

*At issue in the passage is Paul’s use of the verb the TNIV has translated “unsettled.” Its “literal” meaning, going back as far as Homer, had to do with dogs’ wagging their tails. Hence a number of interpreters (but not translators) have understood it as referring to the beguiling deceptions of their opponents, who were flattering them in order to gain their favor and thus turn their backs on Christ. Fee*

*Moreover, Paul’s specifying that he is concerned about “these trials,” although such things had happened to them while he was among them, suggests that it is their ongoing hardships that he now has in view — hardships that he would now know more about with the return of Timothy. Fee*

**Verse 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.

1. **Paul had told them these troubles would come, and it happened just as he said.**

*The rest of the sentence spells out the reasons for his concern, which comes in two parts. First, the same Satan who thwarted Paul’s return to Thessalonica (2:18) would be at work among them as “the great Tester.” Fee*

*He seldom in fact attributes human fallenness to the work of Satan; on the other hand, he is quite ready to see Satan at work in the kind of persecution that would thwart the furtherance of the gospel. Fee*

*It is very interesting to learn that a regular topic of Paul’s instruction to converts was the inevitability of suffering. But Jesus had plainly taught it. So Paul taught it too. ‘We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God’, he said.[[7]](#footnote-7)*

**Verse 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.

1. **Paul was anxious to hear about how the Thessalonians were doing.**
   1. He wanted to find out about their faith.
   2. He wanted to make sure His labor among them was not in vain.
   3. What if Timothy reported that their work there had “been in vain”? (This didn’t happen, but it was obviously a possibility, or Paul would not have been concerned about it.) What did he mean?

In 1 Corinthians 15:2, Paul described a faith that does not continue to follow Christ as a faith that is “vain.” “Vain” means “not yielding the desired outcome; fruitless” (American Heritage Dictionary). Satan was using persecution to try to snatch away the Word that was sown in the hearts of the Thessalonians. The outcome that Paul was believing for was full Christian maturity. Anything else would not have been considered a success by Paul. His preaching would have been in vain.-Andrew Wommack's Living Commentary.

***1 Corinthians 15:1-2***

*Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.*

On a Personal Note: In our ministry of Studies in Grace and faith we have sown the word of God, the gospel of the grace of God for five years. If we were somehow forced out of town by the powers that be, it would break our hearts to later hear that those we taught were returning to “another” gospel instead of standing firm in their faith. We would not only grieve over the situation, but feel that “our labor had been in vain”. On the other hand if we heard that those we taught were standing firm, our hearts would rejoice (see v 8).

**Verse 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,

1. **Good news! The Thessalonians were doing well. How was this evidenced?**
   1. Their faith in Jesus and love for each other was evident.

*1 John 3:23*

*This is His commandment, that we BELIEVE in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and LOVE one another, just as He commanded us.*

* 1. They still had kind thoughts toward Paul and those who worked with him. After Paul left, there were those who sought to defame Paul. The Thessalonians had not been moved by these troublemakers.
  2. Not only did they still think kindly (good remembrance) of Paul, but they longed to see him as much as he longed to see them.

*…and has brought good news (literally, ‘evangelized’, the only time the word is used in the New Testament when it does not refer to the gospel) about your faith and love (6a), ‘the sum total of godliness’.[[8]](#footnote-8)*

*His concern throughout has had to do with whether the persecution and slander might have caused their faith to be shaken and their love to have diminished. Fee*

**Verse 7**

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

1. **Paul and his companions were in distress and being afflicted for the sake of the gospel.** When they heard the good news from Timothy about the Thessalonians’ faith and love, they were all comforted. Their labor had not been in vain (it had not been nullified).

*This last phrase in particular reminds us that their “faith” in this passage is not about their way of entry into Christian life, but of the way they live out that faith in very practical, everyday circumstances, thus their “faithfulness.” Fee*

**Verse 8**

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

1. **When the gospel has been sown, the one who has shared it has given his/her life to those who received it.** There is no greater joy than knowing that the seed that was planted has grown and that the people are standing firm in Jesus, not turning back to pagan gods due to persecution or returning to the former covenant.

*Paul here exhibits none of the aloofness that has often characterized what has come to be called “Christian ministry,” which seems too often to fall short of the apostolic kind. Fee*

**Verses 9-10**

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, 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?

1. **& 10** **Again Paul expresses his joy to them. He was rejoicing before God for them.** 
   1. They were constantly praying for them while rejoicing about them, deeply desiring that they could return to them and finish the work they’d begun. Since they had been with them, there was much more they wanted to teach them. He has just complimented them for their faith, so it is more likely here referring to what they still needed to know about the gospel which would bolster their faith even more.

*Paul was saying that the joy he received from Timothy’s report about the Thessalonians standing strong in their faith was beyond his ability to express. The New International Version translates this verse as “How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?”  
Andrew Wommack's Living Commentary.*

*Complete/‘Supply’ is katartizō, meaning to restore, equip, or complete. It was used in various contexts, for example of a fisherman repairing his nets, a surgeon setting bones, and a politician reconciling factions. The deficiencies Paul detected in their faith will have been ‘gaps’ (jb, footnote) both in their doctrinal and in their ethical understanding. He longed to see them complete, whole, mature Christians. [[9]](#footnote-9)*

**Verse 11**

Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you;

1. **Paul and his fellow workers wanted to go back to Thessalonica.** If it were up to him, he’d already be there, but Satan had hindered him. So, he is praying that their God and Father would Himself along with Jesus their Lord, direct their way back. It would take a divine miracle to return.

*But a couple of centuries before Paul, Yahweh’s sacred name was no longer spoken aloud, apparently so that no one would take it “in vain” and thus break the third commandment. So in the oral reading of the Hebrew text, Adonai (“Lord”) came to be substituted for Yahweh. This in turn was taken up in the Septuagint, where kyrios (“Lord”) was consistently substituted for Yahweh, thus translating the oral substitution for the written word. So the oral Shema now took the form, “Hear, Israel, kyrios your theos, kyrios is one.” What Paul himself did with this most sacred tradition — and well before writing this letter — is remarkable indeed. He is now praying to the one theos as “our God and Father” and to the one kyrios as “Jesus,” whom he had earlier identified as “God’s Son” (1:10). Fee*

*First, Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you (11). It is an amazing bracketing on a level of equality, as in 1:1, of God the Father and Jesus the Lord, and this time it is the more remarkable because the double subject (Father and Son) is followed by a singular verb (kateuthynai). [[10]](#footnote-10)*

*Paul’s prayer was answered, although only (so far as we know) about five years later when he visited Macedonia twice towards the end of his third missionary journey.[[11]](#footnote-11)*

**Verse 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;

1. **Paul complimented them on their faith and love, but He now prays that the Lord will cause them to both increase and overflow in their love for each other, and even for those who were not yet in the faith…as intensely as he loved them.** 
   1. This is not feelings of love only, but practical expressions of love.
   2. Increase, From G4119; to *do*, *make* or *be* *more*, that is, *increase* (transitively or intransitively); by extension to *superabound:* - abound, abundant, make to increase, have over.
   3. The Lord will cause the superabounding of love for one another.

**Verse 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.

1. **Isn’t that amazing? Through faith in Jesus and love for each other God would establish their hearts.** Their hearts would be without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints. Faith and love are not usually associated with holiness in sermons, but there can be no doubt that Paul viewed these not only as good qualities but also as agents of holiness before God.

*Holiness is a by product of love, not the means by which love is received.  
Andrew Wommack's Living Commentary.*

*Holiness isn’t something that God does. It is His very nature. It’s who and what He is. All the moral laws revealed in Scripture are just reflections of who God was before Scripture was ever written. Likewise, our holiness is a product of who we are and not what we do.-Andrew Wommack's Living Commentary.*

*But to get there he prays for the strengthening of their hearts, another Jewish expression. The heart needs strengthening since, as the “center and source of the whole inner life, with its thinking, feeling, and volition” (BDAG 1 b), it is the source of all purposeful conduct. Fee*

*Timothy, therefore, could help to strengthen them and encourage them in their ongoing “faith-fulness.” But only the Lord himself can strengthen them in their inner being for the two ways necessary for them to be prepared for his coming: “blameless” with regard to their outward, visible conduct toward each other and the world; and “in holiness” with regard to their relationship with God and Christ. Fee*

*Now his concern is for Christ to strengthen them in holiness in preparation for their being in God’s presence at Christ’s coming. Fee*

*Paul prays: May he strengthen (stērizai again, as in 3:2) your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones[[12]](#footnote-12)*

*But the rest of the prayer seems to be appropriate for all times and seasons, both for pastors regarding the Lord’s people under their care and for parents with their children. Fee*

*Establish: to set fast, that is, (literally) to turn resolutely in a certain direction, or (figuratively) to confirm: - fix, (e-) stablish, stedfastly set, strengthen. Strongs*

*He causes us to increase and abound in love so that He may establish our hearts without blame before Him.*

*Jude 1:24* ***24****Now to Him Who is able to keep you without stumbling or slipping or falling, and to present [you] unblemished (blameless and faultless) before the presence of His glory in triumphant joy and exultation [with unspeakable, ecstatic delight]—*

1. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (p. 68). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (p. 69). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (p. 64). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (p. 64). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (pp. 64–65). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (p. 65). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (p. 65). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (pp. 65–66). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (p. 66). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (p. 67). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (p. 67). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (p. 67). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)