

## The Church of the Servant King

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### Survey of the Bible Series – Paul’s First Letter to the Thessalonians

(SB\_1Thess\_Lsn4\_Chap3)

#### CONCERN FOR THEIR FAITH (3:1-5)

Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone; 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, 3 so that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. 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. 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 should be in vain.

Verse	Phrase	Notes
1	“...we could endure it no longer...”	This language highlights Paul’s deep-felt desire and concern for the continuance in the faith on the part of these new believers.
2	“...we sent Timothy our brother...”	<p>Paul and Silas sent most likely sent Timothy since Timothy was half-Greek and probably looked Greek, thus he would blend into the city relatively well.</p> <p>As a young man, imagine the challenges Timothy faced. Apparently, he traveled alone. He was going back to a city where he had witnessed strong opposition to Paul’s teaching and person. He wasn’t sure whether the Thessalonian believers would accept him or reject him. Where would he lodge? He had not seen the resurrected Lord as had Paul, yet he was to defend the “faith.”</p> <p>Paul uses the term “brother” in order to confer approval upon him in the eyes of the Thessalonians.</p>
3-4	<p>“...so that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.”</p> <p>“For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction...”</p>	<p>Paul wanted to “strengthen and encourage” these new believers in their faith through Timothy. He was concerned that they had been “disturbed” by the “afflictions” – “afflictions” for which believers are “destined.”</p> <p>The Greek word translated “disturbed” is <i>sainesthai</i> (Gr. <i>σαίνεσθαι</i>). This word was used of a dog wagging its tail and paints a picture of the Thessalonians waivering back and forth because of their persecutions.</p> <p>The Greek word translated “afflictions” is <i>thlipsesin</i> (Gr. <i>θλιψειςιν</i>). This word is translated elsewhere as “tribulation” and in context, it refers to the normal and expected experience for the believer (cf. Acts 14:22; Matt 5:11-12; 10:16-28; 20:22-23; 24:9-10; Jn 15:18-16:4). These “tribulations” are not to be interpreted as if God is displeased with believers, but they are to be expected as a normal part of our experience.</p> <p>The Greek word that is translated “destined” is <i>keimai</i> (Gr. <i>κειμαι</i>). This word could also be translated “appointed.”</p>

		Believers are “appointed” for tribulation and affliction as a result of their faith. Since the Fall of man, the world has been under the dominion of Satan – the ruler of this cosmos. We are in enemy territory and unbelievers (and even believers) are unwittingly deceived into opposing the redemptive efforts of God – efforts designed to deliver humans from the enemy 1 Jn 5:19-20).
5	“I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor should be in vain.”	<p>Notice that it is the status of these believer’s phase 2 faith that burdened Paul’s heart. Their eternal status as believers is not in question. Phase 1 faith is not the issue here (1:4 – “knowing brethren beloved by God, His choice of you”).</p> <p>Again, we see the high value placed upon the phase 2 faith of believers. God (through Paul) was and is concerned about whether we continue to trust God in all circumstances. Paul knows that Satan (the “tempter”) desires to destroy the phase 2 faith of believers, thus render them casualties of the spiritual battle – walking or even invalid wounded.</p>

### ENCOURAGED BY TIMOTHY (3:6-10)

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, 7 for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; 8 for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord. 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, 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?

Verse	Phrase	Notes
6	“But...Timothy...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...”	<p>Through Timothy’s visit, Paul discovered that the Thessalonians had not agreed with the argument of Paul’s accusers – those who had aligned with the “tempter’s” distortions of the Truth. The Thessalonians had pleasant memories of Paul and his team. The Thessalonians knew that Paul was genuine and knew that Paul was not in this for his own personal gain and to exploit the Thessalonians.</p> <p>Their phase 2 faith and the fact that it was being exhibited through their love for others was a tremendous source of encouragement for Paul. Nevertheless, as Paul will later note, there was room for improvement in this area (3:10, 12; 4:9-10).</p> <p>Note: The evidence of our spiritual progress or condition is found in our expressions of love for others. Jn 15:8-12; 1 Jn 4:7-12, 18-21; 5:2-3, 19-20).</p>
7-8	“...we were comforted about you through your faith...for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord.”	<p>There is a Biblical concept called “reciprocity.” Reciprocity is a term used to explain the concept that believers receive mutual benefit from the exercise of spiritual gifts. This concept of reciprocity also extends to the encouragement we receive as believers when we observe other believers living a life of faith – demonstrated faith.</p> <p>The demonstrated faith of other believers is an encouragement and source of strength to those who observe that believer’s life.</p>
10	“...may complete what is lacking in your faith?”	Paul is not referring to phase 1 faith – the faith in God’s total provision through Jesus Christ. Paul addressed these people

		<p>as believers (1:1, 4). There was no question regarding their status as believers.</p> <p>God, through Paul, is expressing desire for additional growth in phase 2 – the daily exercise of faith. God desires that unbelievers become a part of His family through phase 1 faith. He is also concerned that members of the family represent His Son to the rest of the world. Believers do this through phase 2 faith.</p> <p>This is the first explicit reference by Paul to any deficiency in their phase 2 faith. Please notice that Paul has already commended them for the demonstrations of their phase 2 faith in 1:3 – “constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father.” Timothy had returned with good news of their faith and love as Paul writes in 3:6 – “but now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love...”</p> <p>However, the deficiencies to which Paul refers were simply related to their immaturity rather than to any deviation from the Truth. Paul will address some of these deficiencies in chapters 4 and 5.</p> <p>Note: It is important to note that believers can demonstrate faith, hope and love (the fruit of the Spirit) in their lives even though they do not have as full of an understanding of Scripture as is possible. Paul commended the Thessalonians as well as corrected deficiencies.</p>
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**PRAYER FOR THE CHURCH (3:11-13)**

11 Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; 12 and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you; 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.

Verse	Phrase	Notes
11	“Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct...”	Note that there is a dual subject for the one verb in this subject / verb combination. The Greek grammar, as well as this English translation, thus equates the Father and the Son as one – one in essence.
11	“...direct our way to you.”	Paul did return to the Macedonian province about five years later (Acts 19:21; 20:1; 1 Cor 16:5; 2 Cor 2:13).
12	“...may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you.”	Impersonal or agape love for man is a by-product and directly related to one’s personal love for God.  Paul uses a combination of two Greek words translated “increase” (Gr. πλεονασαι) and “abound” (Gr. περισσευσαι). When combined, <i>pleonasai</i> and <i>perissuesai</i> express a desire that the Thessalonian believers have such a well-grounded phase 2 faith that their love overflows like a container that is overfilled. Believers (male and female) who are mature in their phase 2 faith will manifest that maturity by the strength and love that pours from their souls into others lives. This overflow occurs in such as way that the mature believer is simply a channel from a power source that is endless because if the power for such overflowing resided in

		<p>the individual, any joy would be quickly fleeting. The mature believer is not empowered nor does he/she seek to be empowered by the acknowledgment or appreciation expressed by the recipient. This concept is embodied in Jesus' statement to His disciples that "out of your innermost being will flow rivers of living water" (Jn 7:38).</p> <p>Question: What motivates you to do what you do? Fear of loneliness? Approbation? A desire to be remembered? What motivates you to do what you do in your marriage? In your relations with your children? In your "worldly" pursuits? In your giving? Is what you do the result of an overflow of God's work in your life – into other's lives? Or, is what you do empowered by the flesh?</p>
13	<p>"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."</p>	<p>Unless divine love pervades our spiritual beings (i.e. our "hearts"), selfish motives prevail and we will not be without "blame" when we stand before Christ (and God) at the bema seat judgment.</p> <p>The unity of the Father and Son, just seen in v. 11, allows a joint judgeship. The <i>bema</i> of Christ (2Cor 5:10) is also the <i>bema</i> of God (Rom 14:10), because Christ in his present session is with the Father in his heavenly throne (Rev 3:21; cf. Rom 8:34; Heb 1:3; 10:12).<sup>1</sup></p> <p>There is a chronology of events in this passage that has caused some consternation among theologians. Basically, Paul's statement seems to imply that other saints will be coming with the Lord – something that doesn't occur until the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent of Christ – and at the same time, they are evaluated. Thus, the question – how do we reconcile this implication with the understanding that believers of the present age will stand at the bema seat judgment immediately after the Rapture vs. at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming (1 Thess 4:15-17 cf. Rom 14:10)?</p> <p>The answer – the scope of the <i>parousia</i> (or coming) of the Lord includes the initiation of that event as well as everything associated with that event. A broader translation of the word <i>parousia</i> is presence (1 Cor 16:17; 2 Cor 10:10; Phil 2:12). Believers of the present age are given resurrection bodies at the Rapture of the Body of Christ and translated into the presence of Christ where they are evaluated. Then, our verse indicates that they will accompany Jesus in His return at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Advent. Like the phrases "the day of the Lord" and "the last days," the <i>parousia</i> can encompass a span of events or a singular event within that span of events – depending upon context.</p> <p>If this is Christ's coming after the wrath, difficulties of a different type are encountered. Foremost among these is a disregard for the contextual emphasis on the judgment of saints. By the time of his return to earth after the wrath, this reckoning will have already taken place in heaven (i.e., <i>emprosthen tou theou kai patros hemon</i>, "in the presence of our God and Father"). It is to Christ's earlier return in the air (4:15-17) that the <i>bema</i> of God and Christ relates.</p>

<sup>1</sup> Frank E. Gaebelien, *Expositor's Commentary, New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing, 1976-1992), electronic version.

		<p>In resolving this difficulty, we must consider the scope of <i>parousia</i> as indicated in these Epistles (see Introduction, pp. 233, 234). The complexity of the term <i>parousia</i> demands that it include an extended visit as well as the arrival initiating that visit. This is provided for adequately in the rarer meaning of <i>parousia</i>, "presence" (cf. <a href="#">1Cor 16:17</a>; <a href="#">2Cor 10:10</a>; <a href="#">Philippians 2:12</a>). Included in this visit is an evaluation of the saints (cf. <a href="#">2:19</a>; <a href="#">5:23</a>), which is the aspect in view here in v. 13. This judgment cannot be completely dissociated from Christ's coming in the air (<a href="#">4:15-17</a>), because this advent marks its initiation. Yet it must be conceived of as a session in heaven in some measure separate from the arrival itself. At this juncture the degree to which Christians have attained a "blameless and holy" character will be divinely ascertained.<sup>2</sup></p> <p>As mentioned earlier (cf. <a href="#">2:19</a>), "coming" (Gr. <i>parousia</i>) is a term that Paul used to describe a person's extended visit (cf. <a href="#">1 Cor. 16:17</a>; <a href="#">2 Cor. 10:10</a>; <a href="#">Phil. 2:12</a>) as well as his or her arrival for that visit. Consequently, it may refer to the Rapture, the actual arrival of Christ for Christians, or what will follow that arrival. The context determines whether a "coming" or what will follow it is in view. 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. The saints who will join the Thessalonians before the judgment seat of Christ include all other Christians (cf. <a href="#">2 Cor. 5:10</a>; <a href="#">2 Thess. 1:10</a>).<sup>3</sup></p>
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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Constable, "Notes on 1 Thessalonians," [www.soniclight.com](http://www.soniclight.com)