

Study 4: 1st Thessalonians Chapter 3

Introduction

Paul, had been escorted from Berea whilst Silas and Timothy remained there for a while. They then joined him in Athens. They were anxious for news from Thessalonica, and so Timothy was sent back to Thessalonica with news from Paul, and to gain news from the Thessalonians.

Body of the Study

Getting news from Thessalonica

Labour in vain

News from Timothy

Paul's prayer for them

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *Imagine you are Timothy, having been sent to Thessalonica to comfort and encourage the brethren who are suffering under persecution. What are you going to do, and what are you going to tell them? How might you bring the same encouragement to some of your friends now who are feeling discouraged, or under pressure because of their faith?*
- *Who was the focus of Paul's prayer in 1:3:11-13? How does this fit into the context of the things that Paul was going through at the time (1 Cor 2:1-5)?*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapter 4 in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 4: Chapter 3

Introduction

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Body of the Study

Getting news from Thessalonica

Silas was most likely sent back to Berea, (or perhaps to Philippi), and so Paul was left alone again in Athens. Paul describes his concern for the Thessalonians “...when we could no longer endure it...” (1:3:1) which has the tone of agony and suffering. Despite the problems (and largely unsuccessful work) that Paul was going through in Athens, he was deeply concerned about the state of the Thessalonians. He would rather be alone for a while (which certainly would have been a few weeks at least), and to know about the brethren than to remain “comforted” by Timothy and Silas but be burned up by concern.

In the description “we”, Paul may be speaking for himself using the *Royal We*: “We are not amused”, meaning the King does not find it amusing. Alternately, he may be speaking for himself and Silas.

Whilst the KJV and NKJV have “...establish you...” the NIV has “...to strengthen and encourage you...” (1:3:2). One of the purposes of the miraculous gifts was to *establish brethren in the faith* (Rom 1:11). However, as Timothy was not an apostle, he could not have had the power to pass on the gifts. The context therefore must be that of strengthening, encouraging, and supporting the brethren. This gives some insight into the situation at Thessalonica, where the brethren are feeling *discouraged and weak* due to their circumstances of suffering persecution. Paul emphasises this some more “...that no one should be shaken by these afflictions...” (1:3:3 NKJV).

The suffering and affliction that Paul received was neither a new nor an unexpected thing. Almost everywhere Paul went, he was persecuted, and this was exactly what Jesus told Ananias about him at his conversion “...For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name’s sake...” (Acts 9:16 NKJV). He reinforces his expectation to the Thessalonians “...we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know...” (1:3:4 NKJV). In fact whilst the role of an apostle may be one that was looked upon with honour, yet it was not one that the holders coveted – because of the things that go with it. Paul describes this in 1 Cor 4:9-13 *as men condemned to death, beaten, homeless, reviled, persecuted, defamed*. He says to the Thessalonians “...for you yourselves know that we were appointed to this...” (1:3:3 NKJV).

Paul is assuring the Thessalonians that the things that happened to him were not the fault of the Thessalonians. Remember, that one of them (Jason) had been hauled before the authorities because they could not find Paul (Acts 17:7), so persecution was flowing onto them as well. Paul knew that they too must be suffering, as was anxious to know how they were doing, and also to ensure that they received the support and encouragement that they needed “...For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith...” (1:3:5 NKJV).

Labour in vain

Paul makes an interesting comment at the end of verse 5 “...lest...our labour was useless...”. He has already addressed them as “...brethren who were elected of God...” (1:1:4), and now he tells them that if they fall because of Satan (the tempter), that the things that he had done amongst them would have been of no effect. Paul here very clearly shows that it is possible for a person

who has been saved and added to the Lord's church to be torn away from God by Satan. He clearly and succinctly counters the doctrine of "once saved – always saved" as taught by many religious people.

News from Timothy

Paul writes very soon after Timothy's arrival with "...*the good news of your faith and love...*" (1:3:6). Paul and Silas had no been forgotten by the Thessalonians who "...*always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you...*" (1:3:6 NKJV). Paul got his wish to return to Thessalonica about three five later (Acts 20:1-2), and then another ten years after that (1 Tim 1:3).

The news from Thessalonica was good, and despite Paul's current circumstances "...*in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith...*" (1:3:7 NKJV). He tells us something here about his feelings whilst in Corinth, just as he wrote to the Corinthians "...*I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling...*" (1 Cor 2:3 NIV). Whilst he was not at peace due to his circumstances, the news from Thessalonica eased his burden considerably.

Paul *pats them on the back* with praise when he says "...*For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. 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...*" (1:3:8-9 NIV).

Paul says that he "...*prays exceedingly, night and day...*" (1:3:10) for them. He does not give up, and it is not just something that he does *during working hours*. Paul was working during the day at his trade (Acts 18:3), and would have spent much of the night teaching and in prayer. His desire was to see them physically so that he might "...*perfect what is lacking in your faith...*" (1:3:10 NKJV) which is probably a reference to the giving of the spiritual gifts, as well as the opportunity to teach them some more.

Paul's prayer for them

Here we have the first of many such prayers that are found in the Thessalonian letters (1:3:11; 1:5:23; 2:1:11; 2:2:16; 2:3:5). Paul's prayer is that:

- God would direct Paul's way to them (ie make it possible for Paul to visit them),
- That their love for each other would increase and abound,
- That their hearts would be blameless in holiness.

Paul closes with another comment regarding the second coming, that the Thessalonians would be found blameless "...*at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints...*" (1:3:13 NKJV). He is building assurances towards the problem (or rather, the perception) that the Thessalonians have concerning the Second Coming. Many of them believed that it was imminent, but what would happen to those who died beforehand? With his comments here, Paul assures them that the important thing is to make sure that we are blameless and holy before God, and then we will be ready for the Lord when He comes.