

Lesson 5

1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

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II. Paul's Personal Reflections [1:2-3:13]

D. Concerns for the Church [2:17-3:13]

2. Timothy's Visit to Thessalonica [3:1-5]

v. 1

¹ *So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens.*

1. From Thessalonica, Paul went to Berea and from Berea went on to Athens; Silas and Timothy join him at Athens [Acts 17:10-15]. Due to challenging circumstances preventing Paul from personally coming to Thessalonica, he sent Timothy to Thessalonica. Paul went on to Corinth from Athens [Acts 18:1].

Vv. 2-3

² *We sent Timothy, who is our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, ³ so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. You know quite well that we were destined for them.*

1. Paul description of young Timothy ["*brother and God's fellow worker*"] reveals the godly character of young Timothy.
2. Timothy's mission was (1) "*to strengthen*" and (2) "*encourage*" the believers at Thessalonica. In other words, by physically going there, Timothy was to help them stand firm in their faith. Since they were going through many trials [2:14], Paul wanted to make sure they would not be unsettled as result of these experiences. The word "*unsettled*" was used to describe a dog wagging its tail; in context, Paul wanted to be sure that the Thessalonians would not going back and forth in their walk as a result of these persecutions.

v. 4

⁴ *In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know.*

1. Paul's teachings were characterized by constant reminders to the people about the reality of suffering "*we were destined for them...we kept telling you that we would be persecuted.*"

Philippians 1:29 "*For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him*"

2 Timothy 3:12 "*In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*"

2. Not only Paul, but other New Testament writers also remind us about the inevitability of trials.

Matthew 5:11 "*Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me.*"

John 16:33 "*In this world you will have trouble...*"

James 1:2 "*Consider it pure joy, whenever you face trials of many kinds*"

1 Peter 4:12 "*Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you.*"

3. Trials are an integral part of the Christian life. Going through trials is not an indication of God's displeasure as some wrongly conclude. God uses trials to build our faith and character, not to destroy it.

Romans 5:3-4 “³ ...we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope.”

Hebrews 12:10-13 “¹⁰ Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. ¹² Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. ¹³ “Make level paths for your feet,” so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.”

v. 5

⁵ For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter might have tempted you and our efforts might have been useless.

1. Paul was concerned about the believers' response to suffering. He knew that if Satan cannot succeed in preventing people from accepting the gospel, he would try to shake their on-going walk with the Lord. He refers to Satan as “*the tempter*” a reference to the tempting of Adam/Eve and the Lord Jesus himself.
2. It is good to remember a few truths that Scriptures teach concerning what Satan and his demons can and cannot do to the true Christian.

- a. A true Christian cannot be demon-possessed. A Christian is one that is indwelt by the Holy Spirit [Rom 8:9]. Thus is impossible for Satan or his demons to overpower the Holy Spirit and control a Christian from the inside.

1 John 4:4 “*You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you [i.e. the Holy Spirit] is greater than the one [i.e. Satan] who is in the world.*”

- b. A true Christian will constantly face attacks from Satan and his demons. If it were not so, the repeated warnings about the need to resist their attacks would be meaningless. In order to handle these attacks, we need to follow what Scripture says with regards to this issue.

Ephesians 6:11 “*Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.*”

James 4:7 “⁷ *Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*”

1 Peter 5:8-9 “⁸ *Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. ⁹ Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.*”

- c. Even when attacked by Satan and his demons, we need to remember that Satan can operate only within the boundaries set by God. In other words, Satan is not completely in control of our lives—God is. Experiences of Job and Peter give clear evidences of this truth.

Job 1:12 “*The LORD said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.” Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD.*”

Job 2:6 “*The LORD said to Satan, “... he is in your hands; but you must spare his life.*”

Luke 22:31-32 “³¹ “*Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. ³² But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers.*””

The wonderful truth that God is the One who is in total control and not Satan should bring great comfort to the child of God even in the midst of great trials.

3. It is also evident from the New Testament epistles that the apostles gave much attention to grounding new believers in the faith. They did not want their efforts for the gospel to be in vain.

Acts 14:21-22 ²¹ *They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, ²² strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said.”*

Acts 15:41 *“He went through Syria and Cilicia strengthening the churches” [Paul’s second missionary journey]*

This reminds all of us the need for strengthening new converts.

3. Timothy’s Encouraging Report [3:6-10]

v. 6

⁶ *But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you.*

1. Timothy’s return from Thessalonica gave Paul a clear picture of the spiritual condition of the Thessalonians. He gave Paul “good news” [the same word used to refer to the gospel] concerning their faith and love toward the Lord and also their “pleasant memories” and longing to see Paul and company.
2. Such a response naturally caused Paul to reiterate his longing to see them also.

vv. 7-8

⁷ *Therefore, brothers, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. ⁸ For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord.*

1. The faithful Christian conduct of the Thessalonians encouraged Paul and company in their trials. It is always good to remember that our walk can serve as an encouragement or discouragement to others.
2. For Paul, nothing encouraged him more than fellow-Christians standing firm in the Lord. He knew that God would be glorified when his children walk obediently and that God’s name would also be put to shame when those claiming to be his children walk contrary to the teachings of Scripture.
3. Thus, it is necessary for us as individual Christians to be a cause for God’s name to be glorified rather than for it to be put to shame. And that in turn will help other believers to be joyful concerning us.

vv. 9-10

⁹ *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? ¹⁰ Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.*

1. Paul’s humility is seen in the fact that he gives credit [thanks] to God and not to his efforts for the faith of the Thessalonians. While Paul always recognized human responsibility, he was always careful to mention that in the ultimate sense, God alone gets the entire credit for anything good that comes from the life of a Christian.

Philippians 2:12-13 ¹² *Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.”*

Ephesians 2:10 *“For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do”*

2. Though the report concerning the faith of the Thessalonians was very encouraging, Paul continued to *“pray most earnestly”* to see them. Why? In order to *“supply what was lacking”* in their faith. While Paul recognizes that as new believers in Christ, they were progressing well, he also was aware that there was much more for them to learn in their walk with Christ. Paul addressed some of those issues in chapters 4 and 5.
3. Paul’s constant prayer for fellow-believers once again reminds us of how his private prayer life looked like. This should serve as an encouragement for our own intercessory prayer life.

4. Paul’s Prayer to Visit Them [3:11-13]

v. 11

¹¹ *Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you.*

1. While Paul expressed his personal desire to visit the Thessalonians, he also makes it clear that unless God would pave the way, it will not happen. So, he states that he is relying on God to make his visit to them possible by removing the obstacles [including Satan’s attacks]. His understanding of God’s absolute sovereignty over all affairs of life is to be modeled by all believers.
2. Paul’s appeal to God the Father and the Lord Jesus in the same breath clearly shows the fact that Jesus as the Son of God held an equal status with God [the second person of the Trinity].

vv. 12-13

¹² *May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.* ¹³ *May he strengthen 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.*

1. Even though Paul had already praised the Thessalonians for their love, he continues to pray for an increase in this area. Every Christian ought to remember that love is a Christian attribute that should always be overflowing from within every Christian’s heart.
2. He concludes his prayer by asking God to strengthen the believers so that they would be blameless and holy when Christ returns with his holy ones. Holy ones are a reference to dead Christians that would accompany Christ with resurrected bodies when Christ comes to take the living Christians to heaven. This event known as the Rapture will be addressed in 4:13-18.

Every Christian ought to pursue holiness in the light of their seeing the Lord Jesus face to face one day.

Hebrews 12:14 *“Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”*