

1 Thessalonians - Part 8

The Pastor and the Flock

1 Thessalonians 3:1-10

The Pastor's Heart

³Therefore, when we no longer could endure *it*, we thought it best to be left behind, alone at Athens, ²and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you for the benefit of your faith, ³so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. ⁴For 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. ⁵For 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.

– NASB - 1 Thessalonians 3:1-5

⁶But 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*, ⁷for this reason, brothers *and sisters*, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; ⁸for now we *really* live, if you stand firm in the Lord. ⁹For 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, ¹⁰as we keep praying most earnestly night and day that we may see your faces, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?

– NASB - 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10

1 Thessalonians 3:1a

The Pastor's Affection For His People

Therefore, when we could endure it no longer,

– NASB - 1 Thessalonians 3:1a

“Because of a rather arbitrary chapter break, this passage opens with **therefore**, which specifically links it to the closing section of the previous chapter. Because of Paul’s attitude toward the Thessalonian believers — ‘**For you are our glory and joy**’ (2:20) — **he could endure it no longer**. He could **no longer** tolerate his distance from his spiritual children and the consequent lack of knowledge of their condition. Paul’s strong affection for them resulted in intense emotional pain during this forced separation.”

John MacArthur, Thessalonians, p.76

1 Thessalonians 3:1b-2a
The Pastor's Sacrifice For His People

we thought it best to be left behind, alone at Athens, ² and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ,

– NASB - 1 Thessalonians 3:1b-2a

“Strong affection always leads to sacrifice. Love gives itself away for its object. Selfless commitment to meet others’ needs is the measure of true care for others. Paul exemplified that reality when he **thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, and ... sent Timothy** back to Thessalonica. The apostle used the pronoun **we**, but the context makes it clear that Paul referred to himself. At times in his letters, he appears to have an aversion to the pronoun “I,” as if its use was a breach of his humility.”

John MacArthur, Thessalonians, p.77

“Paul’s warm and positive appellations for Timothy demonstrate the close, trusting relationship the apostle had with his younger colleague. First, Paul called him his **brother**, which Timothy was as a fellow believer by the grace of God (1 Tim 1:2, 2 Tim 1:2; 2:1; cf. Phil 1:1). Because of experience through the rigors they had endured in ministering together (cf. Acts 16:1-3, 17:1-15, 18:5-7, 19:22; 20:4-5), they were more than just spiritual brothers. Second, Paul referred to Timothy not only in relation to himself but as **God’s fellow worker** (*sunergon tou theou*; some manuscripts prefer “minister,” *diakonos*, rather than **fellow worker**). That is a startling truth — that a man could be a fellow worker with the Holy One. He worked with God because he, as *did* Paul, faithfully proclaimed **the gospel of Christ** (cf. 1Tim 1:18, 6:12; 2 Tim 1:6-7; 4:2,5).”

John MacArthur, Thessalonians, p.77-78

Timothy



1 Thessalonians 3:2b-4

The Pastor's Compassion For His People

to strengthen and encourage you for the benefit of your faith, ³so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. ⁴For 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.

– NASB - 1 Thessalonians 3:2b-4

Timothy's Assignment

- To strengthen and encourage;
- To consult as to their spiritual welfare;
- To enhance Timothy's authority to represent Paul as a fellow-laborer;
- And to animate them to constancy such that tribulation and persecution is found to strengthen them rather than deter them.

1 Thessalonians 3:5

The Pastor's Protectiveness Toward His People

⁵For 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.

– NASB - 1 Thessalonians 3:5

Paul's Protective Concern

- Repeating that he could endure it no longer, he adds an additional reason for sending Timothy to find out about their faith,
- For fear the tempter might have tempted them, nullifying the work of the apostle thereby.
- Paul was not suggesting that they could lose their salvation when he feared that his labor would be in vain, nor did he think that God's Word would prove to be "in vain."
- He was concerned that some who had made a profession would be proven to be "false brethren," and that they would give up their professed faith because of persecution.

1 Thessalonians 3:6-8
The Pastor's Delight In His People

¶But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also *to see you*—
7therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. ¶For now we *really* live, if you stand fast in the Lord.

– NKJV - 1 Thessalonians 3:6-8

Good News!

- Timothy reports back the good news that their faith and love were strong,
- And they still had a favorable view of Paul (and his companions),
- And they too longed to see Paul.
- It may be significant that “hope” is not mentioned here,
- Perhaps they were not doing so well in the matter of “hope” as they were in the matter of “faith and love.”

The Moody Bible Commentary, p.1883

1 Thessalonians 3:9

The Pastor's Gratitude For His People

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,

– *NASB - 1 Thessalonians 3:9*

“Paul was so profoundly in debt to God in return for all the joy Timothy’s report had brought him, and he realized he had no means to express an adequate thanks. **Render ... in return** translates one word (*antapodounai*), and expresses the impossibility repaying the Lord for all the divine work that caused him to rejoice before ... God. The out-workings of God’s grace in their lives had made Paul grateful beyond expression.”

John MacArthur, Thessalonians, p.83

1 Thessalonians 3:10

The Pastor's Intercession For His People

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

– NASB - 1 Thessalonians 3:10

- Paul's praying was constant and fervent.
- Its ultimate goal was to complete whatever may be still lacking in their faith,
- And to see them faced-to-face again to do so.
- Chapters 4 and 5 provide some of this truth they were lacking.

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

A Pastoral Prayer

¹¹Now may God our Father Himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. ¹²And may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we *do* for you, ¹³so that your hearts are strengthened in holiness to be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

– *NASB - 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13*

Everything Came From God

- He prays to God to open a way for him to return to Thessalonica.
- He prays to God that He will enable them to fulfill the law of love in their daily lives.
- And he prays to God for their ultimate safety at Christ's imminent second coming.

“At this time, his mind was full of the second coming of Christ when men and women would stand before the judgement seat of God. It was his prayer that God would so preserve his people in righteousness that on that day they will not be ashamed. The only way to prepare to meet God is to live with Him every day. The shock of that last day will be ***not for those who have lived in such a way that they have become God’s friend***, but for those who meet Him as a terrifying stranger.”

William Barclay, The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians

Application

“It is told that once a servant girl became a member of a church. She was asked what Christian work she did. She said that she did not have the opportunity to do much because her duties were so constant; but, she said, ‘When I go to bed I take the morning newspaper to my bed with me; and I read the notices of the births and I pray for all the little babies; and I read the notices of marriage and I pray that those who have been married may be happy; and I read the announcements of death and I pray that the sorrowing may be comforted.’ No one can ever know what tides of grace flowed from her attic bedroom. When we can serve people in no other way; when, like Paul, we are unwillingly separated from them, there is one thing we can still do — we can pray for them.”

William Barclay, The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians