

CHAPTER 3

INTRODUCTION TO 1 THESSALONIANS 3

In this chapter the apostle expresses his great love to the Thessalonians, by sending Timothy to them, to establish and comfort them; and declares his satisfaction with the things he brought of them, and concludes the chapter with fervent prayers for them: such was his affection for them, that he chose rather to be left alone at Athens, and send Timothy to them, though so very dear and useful to him, as his characters show, to the end that they might be established and comforted, (^{<STRB>}1 Thessalonians 3:2) and not be shaken with the afflictions the apostles met with, seeing these were no other than what God had appointed them to; and besides, they had been apprized of them before hand by the apostle, (^{<STRB>}1 Thessalonians 3:3,4) but however, lest Satan should get an advantage of them, the apostle could not be easy without sending to know how things stood with them, (^{<STRB>}1 Thessalonians 3:5) next he proceeds to give an account of the success of this mission, and the satisfaction it gave him and his fellow ministers to hear of their faith and charity, their remembrance of them, and desire to see them, (^{<STRB>}1 Thessalonians 3:6) which comforted them under their afflictions, made them lively and cheerful, filled them with joy and thankfulness, and put them upon praying to God to see their face, and perfect what was lacking in their faith, (^{<STRB>}1 Thessalonians 3:7-10) and then follow the petitions themselves, which are made both to God the Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, that their way might be directed to them, that they might increase and abound in love to one another, and to all men, as they did to them, and that God would establish them in holiness in his sight, at the coming of Christ, (^{<STRB>}1 Thessalonians 3:11-13).

Ver 1. *Wherefore when we could no longer forbear*, etc.] Or “bear”, as the word properly signifies; or “bear that”, as the Ethiopic version reads; that is, “that desire”, as the Arabic version renders it; that ardent and longing desire of seeing them again, expressed in the latter part of the preceding chapter; which was as fire in their bones, and was retained with great pain and uneasiness; but now they could hold it no longer, and like Jeremiah, (^{<STRB>}Jeremiah 20:9) were weary with forbearing, and could not stay; or it

was like a burden, which they stood up under as long as they could, even Paul, Silas, and Timothy, but now it became insupportable:

we thought it good to be left at Athens alone: that is, Paul and Silas, or Paul only, speaking of himself in the plural number; for he seems to have been alone at Athens, at least at last; he considering everything, thought it most fit and advisable when at Athens, where he waited for Silas and Timothy, having ordered them to come thither to him from Berea, (^{<4174>}Acts 17:14,15) either to send orders to Berea for Timothy to go from thence to Thessalonica, to know the state of affairs there, and Silas elsewhere; or if they came to him to Athens, of which Luke gives no account, he immediately dispatched Timothy to Thessalonica, and Silas to some other part of Macedonia, for from thence they came to him at Corinth, (^{<4185>}Acts 18:5) such was his desire of knowing how things were at Thessalonica, that he chose rather to be left alone at Athens, disputing with the unbelieving Jews, and Heathen philosophers of the Epicurean and Stoic sects, sustaining all their scoffs and jeers alone; and was content to be without his useful companions, Silas and Timothy, who might have been assisting to him at Athens, in hope of hearing of his dear friends at Thessalonica.

Ver. 2. *And sent Timotheus our brother,* etc.] In a spiritual relation, having the same heavenly Father, and belonging to the same Jerusalem, which is free, and the mother of us all; of the same household and in the same relation to Christ, the firstborn among many brethren; or their brother in the ministry, who was employed in the same business, and did the same work they did; or he is so called, on account of that strict and intimate friendship which subsisted between them, by virtue of which they stuck as close as brethren, or closer to one another than brethren usually do:

and minister of God; of his making, and not man's; of his calling and sending, and of his blessing and succeeding; and who was a minister of the things of God, of the mysteries of God, of the truths of his Gospel; and who ministered according to the ability God gave him, and was faithful to him:

and our fellow labourer in the Gospel of Christ; he was a labourer, and not a loiterer in the Lord's vineyard; one that laboured in the word and doctrine, that studied to show himself a workman, that gave himself wholly to meditation, reading, exhortation, and doctrine, and preached the word in season and out of season and was a fellow labourer with him who laboured more abundantly than any of the apostles; and not in the law, but in the

Gospel, even in the Gospel of Christ, of which he is the sum and substance, author and preacher. The Vulgate Latin and Ethiopic versions leave out these words, and so do Beza's ancient copy and the Alexandrian manuscript, "and our fellow labourers", reading the latter part of the clause in connection with the former thus, "a minister of God in the Gospel of Christ", as the former of these versions, "in the doctrine of Christ", as the latter. These characters are given of Timothy, partly to show what honour was done the Thessalonians, in sending such a messenger to them; and partly that they might receive him with the greater respect, and treat him according to his character, office, and dignity; and chiefly to observe to them the apostle's great affection for them, in parting with so dear and useful a minister for their good and advantage, as follows:

to establish you; which though the work of God, it is usually done by the ministry of the word; and then is the end of the Gospel ministration answered to the churches, when they are established by it; for notwithstanding the saints are in a stable condition, as in the arms of love, and in the hands of Christ, and in the covenant of grace, and upon the rock of ages, and in a state of regeneration, justification, and adoption, from whence they can never fall totally and finally; yet they are often very unstable in their hearts and frames, in the exercise of grace, and discharge of duty, and in their adherence to the cause and interest, Gospel and ordinances of Christ, through the prevalence of corruption, the temptations of Satan, and the reproaches and persecutions of men: and these Thessalonians were young converts, and just planted together as a church; and at their first setting out, sustained a considerable shock of afflictions, which made the apostle concerned for their establishment in the faith which they had received:

and to comfort you concerning your faith. This is another end of the Gospel ministry, to comfort afflicted minds, and distressed consciences; it is the will of God that his people should be spoke comfortably to; the doctrines of the Gospel are calculated for that purpose, and the ministers of it should be Barnabases, sons of consolation. These saints might be in some doubt about the grace of faith, whether it was right or not, or about the doctrine of faith they had received; and therefore Timothy is sent to comfort them under their afflictions, which might have created these doubts, and to remove them, by showing them that their faith was like precious faith with the apostles; and that the doctrine of faith they embraced was the faith once delivered to the saints, and was the true faith

of Christ: the words will bear to be rendered, “to exhort you concerning your faith”, as the Vulgate Latin version renders them; that is, to exhort you to continue in the faith, to stand fast in it, in the exercise of the grace of faith, and in the doctrine of faith, and in the profession of both. The Syriac version renders it, “to ask”, or inquire of you concerning your faith, being willing to know how it stood, since they left them, as in (¹Thessalonians 3:5).

Ver. 3. *That no man should be moved by these afflictions*, etc.] Which the apostle endured for the sake of preaching the Gospel among them, and which he feared might be a means of troubling their minds, of shaking their faith, and moving them from the hope of the Gospel; for though none of these things moved him, who was an old soldier of Christ, and used to hardness, and an apostle of Christ; yet these were young converts, and not used to such things, and therefore might be staggered at them, and be offended, as stony ground hearers are; and though the apostle hoped better things of them, yet was he concerned for them, that no one among them might be unhinged by them, or succumb under them:

for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto; by the immutable decree of God: afflictions, as to their nature, measure, and duration, are appointed for the people of God, and they are appointed for them; this is the case of all who will live godly in Christ Jesus, and especially of Gospel ministers; of which these saints had been apprized by the apostle, and therefore was nothing new, unheard of, and unexpected, or to be looked upon as a strange thing; and seeing this was the appointment of heaven, and the will of God, they should be patiently endured, and quietly submitted to.

Ver. 4. *For, verily, when we were with you*, etc.] In presence, in person, as they then were in heart and affection; when they were first among them, and preached the Gospel to them:

we told you before; before it came to pass;

that we should suffer tribulation: which they might say by virtue of Christ's prediction to all his disciples, that they should have tribulation in the world; and upon its being the common case of God's people, and the usual way through which they enter the kingdom; and the Apostle Paul might foretell this, upon the discovery that was made to him how many things he should suffer for the sake of Christ, and which therefore he always, and in every

place expected; and he might have a particular revelation of the disturbance and opposition he was to meet with at Thessalonica:

even as it came to pass, and ye know; referring to the tumult and uproar in (~~417B~~ Acts 17:5-10), and which should be considered so far from being a discouragement, that it was a great confirmation of the truth of their mission and ministry; nor could it be so surprising to them as it might have been had they had no previous taste of it.

Ver. 5. *For this cause, when I could no longer forbear*, etc.] Or “bear” the above vehement desire of seeing them, or of hearing from them. Here the apostle speaks in the singular number, and seems to intimate, as if what was said before of the like kind is to be understood singly of him; for these words are a repetition and summary of the foregoing, with some diversity:

I sent to know your faith; how it stood, whether it was staggering through these afflictions, or firm; whether it was weak or strong, what was wanting in it; and whether it grew and increased. The Arabic version adds, “and charity”; for of this, as well as of faith, Timothy brought an account, as appears from the following verse.

Lest by some means the tempter; Satan, so called from his common and constant employ in tempting men to sin; (see ~~404B~~ Matthew 4:3)

have tempted you with success, and got an advantage over them, improving these afflictions to such a purpose as to move them from the hope of the Gospel, and relinquish the profession of it; for otherwise there was no question to be made but he had tempted them, or solicited them to it; for none of the saints are free from his temptations; the apostle himself was not, nor indeed our Lord Jesus Christ: but the apostle's fears were, lest he should so have tempted them as to have gained upon them, and have persuaded them to have turned their backs upon the Gospel, and not expose their name and credit, and hazard the toss of worldly substance, and even life itself, for the sake of it.

And our labour be in vain: in preaching the Gospel among them; not with respect to God, to whom the word never returns void and empty; nor with regard to the apostles, whose judgment was with the Lord, and their work with their God, who will of his own grace reward them; but with respect to the Thessalonians, to whom, should Satan gain his point, it would be of no use and service, for which the concern was. The Ethiopic version reads, “and your labour be in vain”: in receiving the apostles, embracing and

professing the Gospel, and suffering for it; (see ~~ROM~~ Galatians 3:4) but the common reading is best, and agrees with what the apostle elsewhere says, (~~ROM~~ Galatians 4:11 Phi 2:16).

Ver. 6. *But now when Timotheus came from you unto us*, etc.] At Corinth, as appears from (~~ACTS~~ Acts 18:5) which shows that this epistle was not written from Athens, as the subscription to it asserts, but from Corinth; for as soon as ever Timothy came from Thessalonica, to the apostle at Corinth, and made the report to him, he immediately sent them this epistle which is here suggested: “but, now”, etc. just now; “lately”, as the Syriac version renders it, a very little while ago, Timothy was just come:

and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity; of their faith, the grace of faith, that it was of the right kind; as far as could be judged, it was the faith of God's elect, like precious faith with theirs; an unfeigned one, strong and lively, operative and growing: or of the doctrine of faith, as received and embraced by them; as that they were greatly led, and had much light into it, and had, for the time, made considerable proficiency in it; that they held it fast, and stood fast in it, and contended for it, notwithstanding all the afflictions, reproaches, and persecutions which they either saw in the apostles, or endured themselves for the sake of it; and likewise of the profession of both the grace and doctrine of faith, which they held fast, and without wavering, and that in a pure conscience, which was good news indeed. Timothy also brought an account of their “charity”, or love, which faith works by; these two graces are always found together; they are wrought in the soul by one, and the same hand, and at the same time; where the one is, the other is; and as the one flourishes and increases, so does the other. And by this grace is meant love to God, to Christ, to his truths, ordinances, ways, and worship, and to one another, and even to all men; and which was without dissimulation, in sincerity, in deed, and in truth, and was constant and fervent: and this was not the whole of the report, for it follows,

and that ye have a remembrance of us always they bore in memory the persons of the apostles; and when they made mention of their names, it was with the greatest respect and reverence; nor were they forgetful hearers of the word, but remembered with great affection and pleasure the truths, the doctrines, and exhortations they delivered to them, so as to put them in practice, and longed for another visit from them, to have their memories refreshed by them:

desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you, they had an equal desire to see their spiritual fathers, as they had to see their spiritual children. Now such a report as this concerning their steady faith in Christ, their fervent love to one another, and their affectionate regard to the ministers of the word, was a sort of a Gospel, as the word used signifies; or it was good news and glad tidings to the apostle, and those that were with him.

Ver. 7. *Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over, you*, etc.] Or “in you”, as the Vulgate Latin version; or “from you”, as the Arabic; or “by you”, as the Syriac; or “for you”, as the Ethiopic; that is, on account of them, either by what they had heard was in them, or had heard from them. This gave abundant consolation

in all our affliction and distress: which they met with at Corinth, where the apostle laboured with his own hands, and ministered to his own, and the necessities of others, and was greatly opposed, reproached, and persecuted; (see ^{<418B>}Acts 18:3,6,9,10,12), but the news of the good estate and condition the Thessalonians were in, was a great relief and comfort to him, particularly their faith:

by your faith: by the report of it, that it grew exceedingly, and that they walked in the truth; (see ^{<618B>}1 John 5:4). The Alexandrian copy reads, “in all your distress and affliction, and by your faith.”

Ver. 8. *For now we live*, etc.] Before they were dead men, lifeless, disconsolate, dispirited, carrying about with them the dying of the Lord Jesus, and death working in them, and they, as it were, under the sentence of that, being killed all the day long for Christ's sake; but now, upon this news, in the midst of all their sore trials and troubles, their spirits revived, and they became alive and cheerful; (see ^{<492B>}Psalms 22:26 ^{<258B>}Isaiah 55:3), it was like life from the dead unto them:

if ye stand fast in the Lord: or “our Lord”, as the Syriac and Ethiopic versions read; that is, “in the faith of the Lord”, as the Arabic version renders it: they were in the Lord secretly by electing grace, and openly by regenerating grace, and they abode in him; and by persevering grace, they were rooted and built up in Christ, and established in the faith of him, of his person, office, and grace; they were steady in the exercise of grace upon him, and stood fast in the liberty wherewith he had made them free, and continued steadfastly in the doctrines and ordinances of the Gospel; for the “if” here is not expressive of doubting, but of reasoning, “seeing ye stand

fast in the Lord”; of which they were assured by Timothy: and this gave them fresh spirit and life amidst the deaths in which they often were.

Ver. 9. *For what thanks can we render to God again or you,* etc.] They had given thanks to God for them before, for their faith, love, and patience; (see ^{<SOME>}1 Thessalonians 1:2,3) and now having received a further account of them, they looked upon themselves bound to give fresh thanks to God for them, for the increase of their faith and love, and for their perseverance, as they did; (see ^{<SOME>}2 Thessalonians 1:3 2:13) since these are gifts of God's grace; but they knew not where to begin, what to render, and when to end: the phrase is much like that in (^{<B62>}Psalm 116:12) “what shall I render unto the Lord”, etc.

for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God: the joy they had was all joy, perfect and complete in its kind; (see ^{<SOME>}James 1:2) and it was not for themselves, on their own account, because of any worldly interest or advantage they had therein, but for the sake of these Thessalonians, whose spiritual welfare they rejoiced at: nor was their joy of a carnal nature, but spiritual; it was a joy in the Holy Ghost, and which was hearty and sincere: it was “before God our” God, their covenant God and Father; it was in his sight and presence, who sees and knows all things, all actions, and the principles of them. Though this last clause, “before our God”, is in the Syriac version, placed at the beginning of the next verse, according to which, it refers, not to thanks or joy before God, but to prayer before him.

Ver. 10. *Night and day praying exceedingly,* etc.] This good news, not only comforted their hearts, and revived their spirits, and filled them with joy and thankfulness, but also sent them to the throne of grace to pray without ceasing, continually, night and day, and as often as they went thither, and that with great fervency and earnestness, in a multitude of petitions; or, as the Arabic version renders it, “with prayers exceeding a multitude”; with innumerable requests:

that we might see your face: once more, and converse face to face:

and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith? in the grace of faith; for though they remembered their work of faith with pleasure, and had had good tidings of it very lately, and were thankful that it grew exceedingly as it did, yet they knew it was not perfect, there was unbelief attending them: and though it is God's work to increase faith, as well as to produce it, yet,

as the ministry of the word is the means of the first planting of it, so it also is of the increase of it. This may likewise be understood of the doctrine of faith, which though they had received in the love of it, and had made considerable progress in their knowledge of it; yet they knew but in part, and needed to be taught the way of God, and truths of the Gospel more perfectly; and the ministry of the word is for the perfecting of the saints in the knowledge of the Son of God, and of other truths; wherefore the apostle desired greatly to see them, that he might be an instrument of instructing them, more perfectly in the knowledge of divine things; and in this, and in the following epistle, he does particularly instruct them about the rise and fall of antichrist, the coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead, articles of faith in which they seemed to have been deficient: but now, though these saints had deficiencies in their faith, yet they were not what the Jews call ^{f14} *hnma yrswj m*, “such as are deficient in faith”, or want faith entirely, a phrase somewhat like this which is here used.

Ver. 11. *Now God himself, and our Father*, etc.] The Oriental versions leave out the copulative “and”, and read, “God himself, our Father” the first person in the Trinity, who is God himself, truly and properly so; and who is a God that hears prayer; and who is omnipotent, and able to do more than the saints can ask or think; and omniscient, and knows their persons and cases, and what is proper for them, and how and when to help and supply them; and he is also the God of all grace, the author and giver of it, and who is able to make it abound, and increase it, and so a very proper object of prayer: and who is likewise the Father of Christ, and of all the saints, not only by creation, in which sense he is the Father of all men, but by adopting grace; and which is mentioned to encourage freedom and boldness in prayer, which children may use with a father, and to raise an expectation of succeeding and receiving an answer; for if earthly parents hear their children, and give good things to them, how much more will not our heavenly Father give his Holy Spirit, and all other good gifts, unto his children? And this shows that the apostle prayed to God in the manner Christ directed, (^{<4119>}Matthew 6:9)

and our Lord Jesus Christ: who is equally the object of prayer with God his Father and ours; who is sometimes distinctly prayed unto, as in (^{<4175>}Acts 7:59) and often in conjunction with his Father, as in all those places in the epistles, where grace and peace are wished for from them both; (see ^{<4007>}Romans 1:7), and sometimes he is set before the Father, as in (^{<5116>}2 Thessalonians 2:16) to show the entire equality between them, and

that he is equally addressed as he, being truly and properly God, who knows all things, and is the Almighty, and whose grace is sufficient for us, and therefore rightly applied unto, as here: the petition put up to them both is, that they would

direct our way unto you: a journey is not to be taken without the will of God, without seeking to know it, without submission to it, and dependence on it; nor is there any prosperous one, but by it; (see ^{<504B>}James 4:13-15 ^{<501D>}Romans 1:10). Men may devise their own ways, but God directs their goings; especially a good man's steps are ordered by the Lord, and particularly ministers; who, as they are often directed to subjects and matter, in a very providential way, so to places, and are ordered both where and when to go; (see ^{<440B>}Acts 16:6,7,9,10). The apostle was aware, that there were obstacles in his way of coming to Thessalonica, for he had attempted it once and again, but Satan, and his emissaries, hindered; and therefore he desires that God and Christ would remove them out of the way, and make his way straight and plain, as the word signifies, that he might once more see their faces.

Ver. 12. *And the Lord make you to increase,* etc.] That is, the Lord the Spirit; so that the object of prayer, addressed by the apostle, is Father, Son, and Spirit, as in (^{<600B>}Revelation 1:4,5). The Alexandrian copy reads "God". The Spirit is God, equally with the Father and the Son, and so a fit object of prayer with them, which otherwise he would not be. The request is, that he would cause these saints to increase in number, as the first churches greatly did: and in the gifts of the Spirit, which he divides to men severally as he will; and in his graces, as in faith, in hope, in holiness, in humility, in knowledge, in spiritual joy and strength, an increase in all which is from him:

and abound in love one towards another; for though they were taught of God to love one another, and did do so, and the apostle had had good tidings of their love; yet it was not perfect, there was room for a further exercise of it, by serving each other by it, in things spiritual and temporal; and he had his request, for it did abound in everyone of them towards each other, (^{<500B>}2 Thessalonians 1:3)

and towards all men; the men of the world, who were without, were not members of the church, nor professors of the Christian religion, but enemies to that, and to Christ, and to them; and yet they were to love them

as men, and pray for them, and do them all the good that lay in their power:

even as we do towards you; for the love of the apostle, and those with him, abounded more and more towards these saints, and was so far from being weakened, that it was increased by their absence from them; and they were more abundantly desirous of seeing them, and were even quite impatient until they sent to them, and heard of them.

Ver. 13. *To the end he may stablish your hearts*, etc.] Which are very unstable and inconstant in their frames, and in the exercise of grace, and have need to be established in the love of God, against the fears of men, the frowns of the world, the temptations of Satan, and in, and with the doctrines of grace; (see Gill on “^{STR}1 Thessalonians 3:2”),

unblamable in holiness before God, even our Father. There is no holiness in men naturally; what is in them without the grace of God is only a show; true holiness is from the Spirit of God; and this is a stable thing in itself, and can never be removed or taken away; but the acts of it, through the prevalence of corruption, the force of Satan's temptations, and the snares of the world, are fickle and inconstant; and the saints need to be established in the discharge of duty, as well as in the exercise of grace: and whereas the apostle prays, that they might be “unblamable in holiness”, the Alexandrian copy reads, “in righteousness” so one of Stephens's; it must be observed, that no man is perfectly holy in this life; no man is without sin in himself, or lives without the commission of it; holiness in the best is imperfect; no man, as yet, is in himself sanctified wholly; there is no unblamable holiness but in Christ; and in him the saints are without spot and blemish, who is their sanctification and their righteousness; but in themselves they are full of spots and stains; yet through the grace of God their hearts may be so established with principles of holiness, and they may be so assisted in the acts of it daily, as to give no just cause of blame to men, and so to behave as to approve themselves “before God”, who sees the heart, and knows from what principles all actions flow: and this the apostle desires may be at the coming of our Lord Jesus; or unto the coming of him, as in (^{STR}1 Thessalonians 5:23) Either at death, when he comes into his garden, and gathers his lilies, and takes his to himself to be for ever with him; or at the day of judgment, when he comes to judge the quick and dead; and which coming of his is certain, and will be quickly and suddenly, and with great glory and power: and, as it is here added,

with all his saints; meaning either his holy angels, or rather the souls of his people, whom he will bring with him, and will raise their dead bodies, and reunite them to their souls, when they shall be for ever with him; and then shall they be unblamable in holiness, both in soul and body, and shall be presented by him, first to himself, and then to his Father, faultless, and without spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing. The Vulgate Latin, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions add, “Amen”; and so does Beza's ancient copy, and the Alexandrian manuscript.