

A Study of 1 Thessalonians



The Apostle Paul has to commend the Thessalonians for their faith and to assure them of his great love for them. It was not enough to just “tell” them he cared for them, it was necessary to send someone to Thessalonica to meet with the church. In 1 Thessalonians 3, we read about the ministry of Timothy who carried greetings, instructions, and exhortations to the church.

Purpose of Timothy’s Visit (3:1-5)

In chapter two we read about Paul’s constant prayers and love for the Thessalonian Christians and the suffering they were enduring. It is easy to understand how Paul was uneasy about how the Christians were faring. The concern Paul felt is described in 3:1 when he says, “when we could bear it no longer.” Paul needed to know what was happening in Thessalonica.

Paul wanted to travel to Thessalonica, but had to remain in the relative safety of Athens because of the danger he would face Thessalonica. So, Paul sent Timothy, his son in the faith.¹ Paul describes Timothy as “our brother” and “God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ.”

Timothy’s absence meant that Paul would be alone in Athens, a condition that would bring loneliness and extra work. Though Paul did not look forward to being alone, he was more concerned for the young Christians in Thessalonica than for himself.

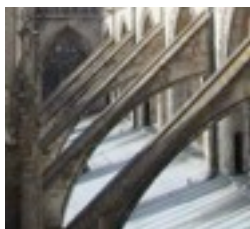
1. Why did Paul describe Timothy to the Thessalonians as he did?

2. What was the purpose of Timothy’s visit according to verses 2 and 3?

Reconstruction of Paul’s Timeline

1. Acts 17:10 Paul and Silas leave the danger of Thessalonica and move on to Berea.
2. Acts 17:10-15 Danger follows them to Berea where Paul is forced to depart for Athens while Timothy and Silas remain.
3. Acts 17:15 Paul calls for Timothy and Silas to join him in Athens.
4. Timothy is sent back to Thessalonica from Athens
5. Silas returned to Macedonia (implied in Acts)
6. Acts 18:1 Paul travels to Corinth (It is likely from here that he wrote 1 Thessalonians)
7. Acts 18:5 Timothy and Silas rejoin Paul in Corinth with Timothy bring news from the Thessalonians.

¹ 1 Timothy 1:2



The word translated as “establish” in the ESV means to “strengthen” or “build up.” The idea is that of a buttress or support to hold the building upright against outward pressure. Timothy was to help buttress the faith of the Thessalonians against the pressure brought upon them by their persecutors. It was Paul’s desire that they not be “moved” by their afflictions.

3. Define the meaning of “exhort.”

4. Describe how afflictions can “move” a person away from the gospel.

The danger that is posed by afflictions is so great that Paul reminds the Thessalonian Christians that they were “destined” for this and that he had told them when he was present with them that afflictions were coming. Not only did Paul tell them that suffering would arrive, but he “kept telling” them indicating this was an oft repeated message. Previously the afflictions were in the future, but now they were present.

Paul needed to know about the spiritual welfare of these brothers and sisters so he sent Timothy to learn about their faith. His concern was that they would somehow be moved from the gospel and his work among them would be lost.

5. Who was ultimately behind the persecution of the Christians?

6. How is Satan described and what does he do?

7. The Thessalonian Christians had been warned that affliction was coming. Is this a message the modern church needs to hear? Why or why not.

The Encouraging Report of Timothy (3:6-10)

In verse 6, Paul begins to describe the great news that Timothy had brought back from Thessalonica. The report was that the church was filled with faith and love for the gospel and that they missed Paul as much as he missed them.

Paul found this report to be a great comfort. He describes his own situation as one of “distress” and “affliction.” Paul may have been facing some particular persecution or he may be referring to his care for the churches.²

8. How does a report from a faithful Christian or congregation bring comfort?

² 2 Corinthians 11:28

9. How does Paul describe the boost that Timothy's encouraging report brought to him in verse 8?

In verses 9 and 10 Paul begins with a rhetorical question to express his inability to adequately convey the profound joy and thanksgiving he felt to hear of the faith of the Thessalonian Christians. The news of the faith of his brothers and sisters leads him to thank God for what he has heard and to petition God for more opportunities to teach and equip the young believers.

In previous sections of 1 Thessalonians, Paul's prayers have been thanksgiving for the past faith of the young Christians. Now in verse 10, he looks forward and prays continuously for an ability to personally visit the church to encourage and teach them. His departure from Thessalonica had been premature and even though the church was doing well, there was more that Paul wanted to share with them to help them reach greater maturity.

10. List what you would expect to see in "a faith that is not lacking."

11. How can an evangelist or elder identify those areas that are lacking in the life of a Christian?

Paul's Prayer for the Thessalonian Church (3:11-13)

The first item in Paul's prayer in verses 11-13 is that he might return to them. The word translated as "direct" means to make a way straight or to remove any obstacles in the way. Paul knew that it was Satan who had kept him from Thessalonica³ and now he petitions God the Father and the Lord Jesus to open a way for him to travel to Thessalonica.



The second item for prayer was that the Lord would increase the love the Christians have for each other and for the lost. This is the same love that Paul had for them. Paul uses two words translated as "increase" and "abound" which have similar meaning to stress his prayer is that their love for one another and the lost would be ever increasing and abounding.

12. What is the origin of the great love for which Paul prayed in verse 12?

The great and abounding love the brothers and sisters exhibited will allow them to be "established." The idea is that they will be settled, strong, and faithful which will enable them to live holy and blameless hearts before God. It is Paul's prayer that these believers will stand in judgment holy and blameless before the Lord.

³ 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18.

Because God cleanses the sinner from his sin when he accepts God's grace by faith at baptism he can stand justified before the Lord. God sees the Christian cleansed of his sin. Because a Christian loves God, his desire is to stand before the Father as a faithful servant, who has worked for the Creator who made him, and the Saviour who died for him. Every Christian should strongly desire to live a life that is holy and blameless in every thought and action.

So chapter three closes like every chapter in 1 Thessalonians with a reference to the Second Coming.⁴ Though we will learn more about the Second Coming in chapters 4 and 5, here we see that when Jesus returns he will come with "all his saints."⁵



13.What is needed to stand holy and blameless before the Lord at his Second Coming?

Christians share a deep and abiding love because of their relationship to Christ and one another. Because Christians share this relationship it is right and proper to care about the spiritual welfare of one another. This is especially true of a Christian teacher who loves the church and wants them to grow in love and faithfulness.

Paul's love for the Thessalonian Christians, and his inability to visit them face to face, led him to send Timothy to discover how the church was progressing. These young Christians had great opposition against them and Paul was concerned they might be discouraged in their affliction and the tempter would be victorious.

The news brought by Timothy was positive. The church was growing in love toward one another and those who were lost. Paul responds with tremendous thanksgiving to God and prays that they might continue to grow and that they would be blameless in holiness at judgment.

⁴ We know that Paul wrote a letter without chapters and verses, but these divisions show sections in a reoccurring theme. Christ is coming again!

⁵ The Greek phrase is *ton hagion autou* which is literally "his holy ones." This could include the angels as well as Christians who have died.