

1 Thessalonians 3
A Continuation of the Study of the Formation
Of the Church

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This is a short chapter that MacArthur entitles “The Pastor’s Heart” and we will see why he calls it such as we study it.

1Thes 3:1 “Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone;

1Thes 3:2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith,

1Thes 3:3 so that no man may be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this.”

We know what to do when we see a “therefore”, we look to see what it there for. We see that he is continuing his discussion of how he longs to have further information about the church. He even wrote at the end of what we call chapter 2 that Satan had kept him from seeing them. So even though he needed Timothy in his ministry at Athens he thought it best to send him to Thessalonica to help the members develop in their faith. Athens was only a short stop before his leaving for Corinth so he must have thought that he would be fine without Timothy during that time. Wherever Paul happened to be he remembered the congregations that he had helped establish and longed to be with them to help them in their sanctification, which involves their being strengthened and encouraged. Paul had faithfully taught them the Word of God and that teaching involved letting them know that serving Jesus Christ would result in persecutions. While we are being persecuted for Christ’s sake it is very encouraging to know that such is actually ordained and is also a reward. We have the same duty toward our family and friends as we progress through the world. Take some time now to write an email to someone with whom you have studied the Bible and let them know that you are still thinking of them and relishing that time together.

1Thes 3:4 “For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.

1Thes 3:5 For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor should be in vain.”

These first five verses relate to Paul’s thought processes before Timothy returned to him when he was in Corinth. Jesus told us that we would all suffer for our devotion to Him. There have always been people ready to persecute Christians for their actions as children of God.

Mark 13:9 “But be on your guard; for they will deliver you to the courts, and you will be flogged in the synagogues, and you will stand before governors and kings for My sake, as a testimony to them.”

John 15:20 “Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A slave is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

John 15:21 “But all these things they will do to you for My name's sake, because they do not know the One who sent Me.”

Paul then reminds us in his great writings to the Roman church that such afflictions shall not separate us if we are indeed true children of God.

Rom 8:35 “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”

We should place our fear only on God:

Matt 10:28 “And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.”

1Thes 3:6 “But 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,

1Thes 3:7 for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith;

1Thes 3:8 for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord.”

What an interesting statement in that last verse! We shall really live if you stand firm in the Lord. Paul is showing that his true meaning in this world is only to serve Jesus and to see the results of the work of God in the lives of those to whom He has taken him for the work of preaching and teaching. Our true rewards are stored in heaven and when we see that the people to whom we have witnessed are truly staying firm in the faith even under really hard circumstances. Paul and the others are comforted in their sufferings when they hear that the new Christians are standing firm and even reaching out to others for Jesus. I have a little bit of that comforting when I hear that someone whom I taught in a Sunday class but have not seen in a long time is still serving the Lord. I can only peep at the comfort Paul must have felt at hearing about the Thessalonian Christians.

1Thes 3:9 “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,

1Thes 3:10 as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?”

Paul is just overwhelmed with joy at the news Timothy brought about the actions of these new Christians that he asked a rhetorical question as to how to thank and praise God for

His work in these new children of God. As any pastor knows, his work is never done in the disciplining of the people to whom he is called. Nobody, even Paul, reaches complete sanctification here so the work in bringing the people along is never done. Who was involved in disciplining Paul? I assume that, as an apostle, he continued to be taught by God in a very personal way.

1Thes 3:11 “Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you;

1Thes 3:12 and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you;

1Thes 3:13 so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.”

The majority of the prayers recorded for us in the New Testament are by Paul and here is one that we can ask be prayed for us also.

We need to have teachers brought to us so that we may all further develop as His children.

We all need to increase and abound in love for each other Christian and for all people as we follow the model of Paul and the other Apostles.

All of us need to be established unblamable in holiness when we stand before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all of His saints. This last bit will have two tracks of success. One will be our constant increase in our sanctification as we totally give our lives to God and the other will be after we die and the righteousness of Jesus is imputed to our account in our glorified body. It helps us here today to think about our glorified body and how we will be transformed into conformity with Jesus.

1John 3:2 “Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is.”

Phil 3:20 “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ;

Phil 3:21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.”

What a rest we can also have now in knowing that God will transform us into conformity with Jesus so that we may stand blameless before the holy God.

References

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- 2.) "The Expositor's Bible Commentary Volume 11", Edited by Frank E. Gaebelien, 1978.
- 3.) "World Biblical Commentary, 45, 1 & 2 Thessalonians", F. F. Bruce, Nelson Reference & Electronic, 1982.