

8. 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13

Paul ended the second chapter by announcing the church at Thessalonica was their hope, their joy and their crown in 1 Thess 2:18-20:

19 For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? 20 Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

From this grand pronouncement, he begins chapter three saying that they could stand it no longer and so sent Timothy to see about them.

Paul Sends to Find Out about Their Faith

1 Thess 3:1-3

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

Paul was willing to be left alone so that Timothy might go to see about their faith, knowing that they were beset by trials and persecutions. Timothy was described as “our brother and God’s fellow worker in spreading the Gospel of Christ.” Timothy’s mission was to strengthen and encourage them so that the trials would not unsettle them. Evidently they all understood that such trials were unavoidably coming.

1Thess 3:4-5

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. 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.

Paul, while with them, had kept warning of the persecution to come. One might say that Paul was a “nervous wreck” waiting to find out what had happened. His real concern was that the tempter might have tempted and nullified the work for the Lord. The only other use of “tempter” for Satan was when he came to tempt the Lord in the wilderness in Matt 4:1-3:

1 Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. 2 After fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. 3 The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread."

In 1 Thess 2:18, Paul has called the devil by name—Satan—saying that Satan had stopped them. The discussion of Satan and his work will gain momentum during the course of these two letters to the Thessalonians.

Timothy Reports Back to Paul

I Thess 3:6-10

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. 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. 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.

With Timothy's return, Paul received good news concerning their faith and love. The memories and the longing to see each other were mutual feelings flowing between Paul and Thessalonians. Their faith encouraged Paul, who now knew that they were standing in the Lord. They were constantly in Paul's prayers that he see them again and supply whatever was lacking.

1 Thess 3:11-13

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

Paul's prayer concludes asking God to make possible his return to them, to make their love increase and overflow, and to strengthen their hearts that they may be blameless and holy in the presence of God when Jesus comes with his holy ones. These holy ones are explained in 2 Thess 1:6-8:

6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.