

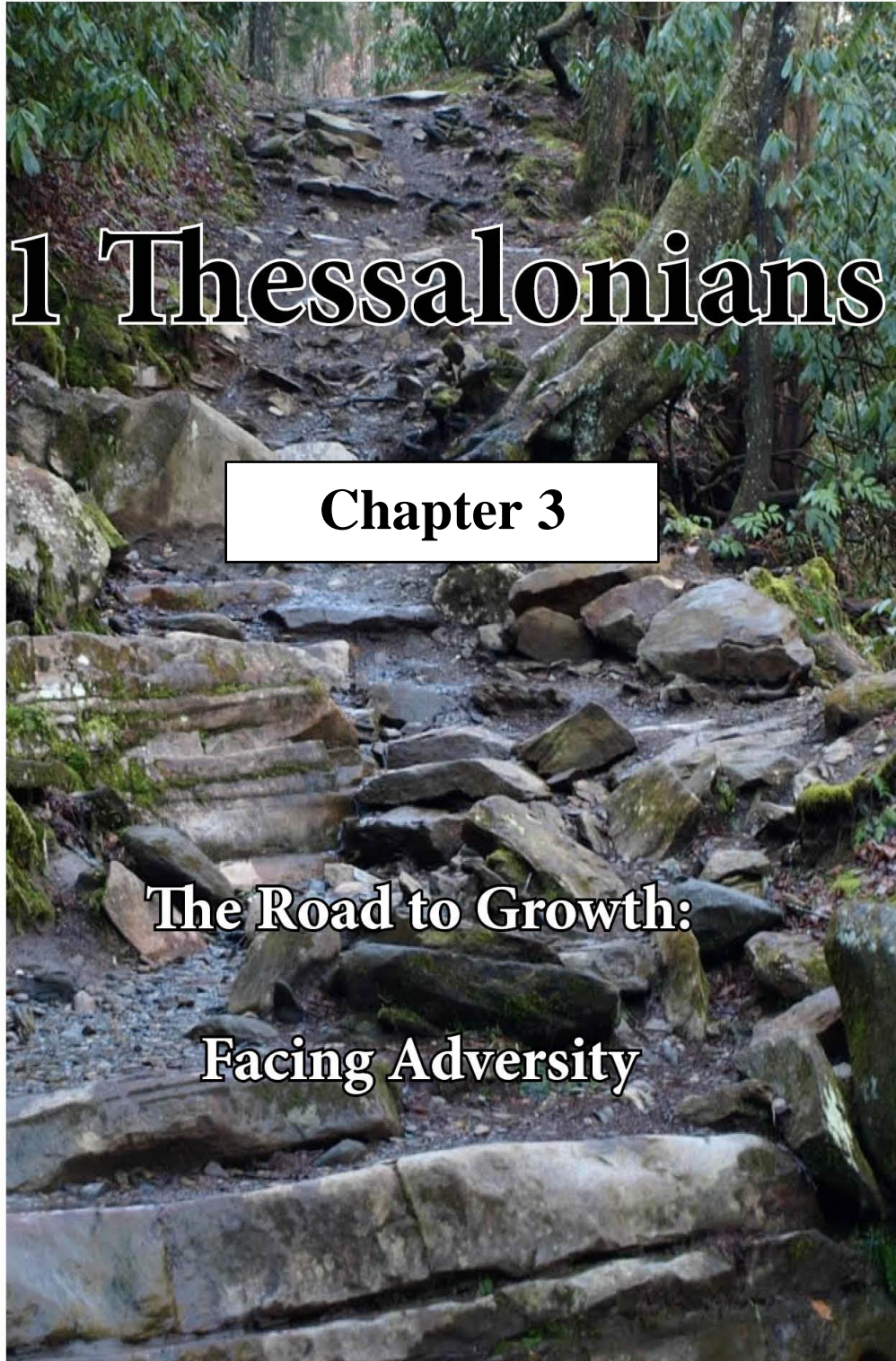
Journeys With God

1 Thessalonians

Chapter 3

The Road to Growth:

Facing Adversity



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

1 Thessalonians 3:1 - Family Ties

Therefore, no longer enduring *it*, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone,

Truth to Learn

Christians are all part of the same loving family.

Behind the Words

The words “enduring *it*” are translated from the Greek verb *stegō*. This word literally means “to cover.” It can mean “to conceal” or “to cover *with silence*,” that is, “to forbear” or “to endure.”

“We thought it good” is the translation of the verb *eudokeō*, which is made up of *eu*, meaning “good” or “well” and *dokeō*, meaning “to think.” Thus, this word means “to think good of.”

Kateleipō is the word translated “to be left.” It is composed of *kata*, meaning “down” but used here as an intensifier and *leipō*, meaning “to leave” or “to forsake.” Thus, *kateleipō* means “to utterly leave behind.”

“Alone” is translated from *monos*, which means “without others” or “alone.”

Meaning Explained

In chapter two of this letter to the Christians in Thessalonica, Paul spent considerable time and effort defending what appears to be accusations leveled against him and his companions. One of those accusations was that Paul had abandoned the Thessalonian church and that he had made no attempts to return there.

You may recall in our discussion of verse seventeen that we alluded to the fact that Paul had to be secretly ushered out of town as a result of the turmoil that was caused by people who had come from Philippi. Paul has already explained that he had repeatedly planned on returning to Thessalonica but that he had been hindered by Satan.

He has used fatherly and motherly metaphors to explain to these dear Christian brothers and sisters the anguish he had experienced as a result of his separation from them. He even referred to such separation as being like that of an orphan deprived of his or her father and mother. Therefore, because he had been prevented from returning to Thessalonica, Paul tells his beloved friends there what he did instead.

He tells them here that he endured the pain of separation as long as he could. This is a very revealing comment from the Apostle. After all, we know from his letter to the church in Philippi, written some ten or twelve years after this letter, that Paul learned to be content with whatever God provided for him. He told the Philippians:

Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am *in*: (**Philippians 4:11**)

Now he tells the Thessalonians that he was not content; he could no longer endure the separation from them and the lack of news about them. Therefore, he tells them that his plan is to be left alone at Athens and (as we learn in the next verse) to send Timothy to them.

Application

One of the wonderful aspects of the Christian life is that we get to make friends with people from all walks of life, who share our love for the Lord. And, since we are all children of our Heavenly Father, they often become as dear as true brothers and sisters. Are you involved enough in your church to make close friends like this? If not, you're missing out on a rich blessing.

1 Thessalonians 3:2 - Growth and Service

and sent Timothy, our brother and minister and fellow laborer of God in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage *you* concerning your faith,

Truth to Learn

Christians are called both to grow in faith and to serve God through faith.

Behind the Words

The verb “sent” is from *pempō*, which means “to send.” The emphasis of this verb is on the point of departure, rather than the destination.

“Minister” is translated from *diakonos* (from which we get our English word “deacon”). This word is probably derived from *diakō*, meaning “to run an errand.” Therefore, *diakonos* refers to “a helper” or “an assistant.”

The words “fellow laborer” are from the Greek word *sunergos*, which is made up of *sun*, meaning “with” or “together with” and *ergon*, meaning “work” or “labor.” Thus, *sunergos* refers to “someone who labors together with someone else.”

Stēridzō is the word translated “establish.” It is based on the word *histēmi*, meaning “to stand” or “to set in place.” *Stēridzō* means “to set firmly in place” or “to firmly establish.”

“Encourage” is from the Greek verb *parakaleō*. This word is made up of *para*, meaning “to the side of” and *kaleō*, meaning “to call.” Thus, *parakaleō* literally means “to call alongside.” It is a picture of a coach or mentor who comes alongside an athlete to give advice, to comfort, to challenge, and to encourage.

Meaning Explained

We learned in yesterday’s verse that Paul endured his separation from the saints in Thessalonica as long as he could. Since he had been prevented from returning there himself, he sent Timothy to them. He refers to Timothy as a “brother” in the faith and as “an assistant.” Notice, however, that Paul does not refer to Timothy as “his” assistant, but as God’s assistant. Paul recognizes that he is not working for himself, but for God. He also recognizes that everything that he has, in terms of all things necessary for him to accomplish his task, are supplied by God. Therefore, even the people who work alongside him and assist him are not working for Paul, but for the One who calls each one of us to our ministry. He refers to Timothy as “God’s fellow laborer” because he is God’s worker who works “with” not “for” Paul.

In today’s verse Paul explains what Timothy’s assigned task is. It is two-fold: to ensure that the believers in Thessalonica are firmly grounded in the faith, and to be a coach for them. It was Timothy’s job to instruct and challenge these Christians to become more Christ-like as they grow in their faith. However, it was also his responsibility to encourage and comfort them through the growing pains and difficult times of their Christian walk.

It’s also important to note that Paul’s concern for the young Christians in Thessalonica did not focus on health, wealth, ease of life, or even self-esteem. Instead, he focused on the spiritual quality of their lives.

Application

We see two aspects of the Christian life in this verse, growing and serving. Any Christian who is not doing both of these is not being obedient to his or her Lord and Master. When you stand before Him will you be ashamed about what you haven't done or rewarded for what you have done?

1 Thessalonians 3:3 - Suffering From God

that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed unto this.

Truth to Learn

Some of our suffering is because God has determined it.

Behind the Words

“No one” is translated from *mēdeis*. This word is made up of *mē*, which is a conditional negative particle meaning “not,” *de*, meaning “but” or “and,” and *heis*, the numeral “one.” Thus, this word literally means “and not one” or “no one.”

The words “should be shaken” are from the verb *sainō*, meaning “to move back and forth as a dog wags its tail.” Figuratively, this word means “to move back and forth in the mind,” that is, “to be mentally agitated.”

“Afflictions” is from the Greek word *thlipsis*, which is based on the verb *thilbō*, meaning “to squeeze” or “to crush.” Thus, *thlipsis* refers to “pressure, stress, trouble, or affliction.”

The word translated “appointed” is *keimai*, which literally means “to lie down” or “to set in place.” So, we could paraphrase this as, “that we were put in place for this purpose.”

Meaning Explained

In the previous verse Paul told the Thessalonians that he had sent Timothy to them, since he was hindered from going there himself. And, he says that he sent Timothy with the expressed purpose of helping them to become firmly established and grounded in their faith. Since Paul had spent such a short time in Thessalonica, he had not been able to instruct them completely in the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith. Knowing how critical good doctrine is to a sound Christian faith and a victorious Christian life, Paul wanted to ensure that the Thessalonians began their faith walk on firm footing.

The other reason that Paul had sent Timothy was to comfort and encourage them. In today’s verse we get a hint of why Paul wanted the Thessalonians to be grounded and comforted. It was because of “these afflictions.” Now the question we have to ask ourselves is, “What afflictions is Paul talking about?” Some people may mistakenly think he’s talking about the persecution the Thessalonian Christians are going through at the hands of their countrymen. However, based on the rules of grammar and the context of surrounding verses, it is apparent that Paul is talking about the affliction that he and his companions were suffering in being hindered from returning themselves.

Paul now makes an interesting statement. He says that the Thessalonians were fully aware that these afflictions had been laid out for them. What does he mean by that? From the book of Acts we learn that at the time of Paul’s (Saul’s) conversion, the Lord told Ananias this about Paul:

For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake. (Acts 9:16)

The obvious conclusion, therefore, is that Jesus Himself determined ahead of time that Paul was going to suffer in his ministry for God.

Application

I've heard a number of Christians say, "Why is God allowing this to happen to me? I'm being faithful. I'm following His leading. I'm being obedient." The reason for these afflictions (some of them at least) is not because of rebellious sinfulness, but because God determined ahead of time that they would happen. Why? So that we will get stronger and so He will get all the glory for everything we do in His name.

1 Thessalonians 3:4 - Faithfully Suffering Servants

For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, and so it came to pass, as you know.

Truth to Learn

Effective ministers of God will suffer opposition and trouble.

Behind the Words

The words “we told ... before” are translated from the verb *prolegō*, which is made up of *pro*, meaning “before in time or position” and *lego*, meaning “to relate in words” or “to say.” Therefore, *prolegō* means “to say something ahead of time,” that is, “to foretell.” It is expressed here in the imperfect tense which indicates past continuous or repeated action. It could be translated as “we began telling you,” “we were telling you,” or “we used to tell you.”

“We were” is from the verb *imi*, the verb of “being,” meaning “to exist.” It, too, is expressed in the imperfect tense, indicating past continual action.

The words “we would” are from the verb *mellō*, meaning “about to be.” It is expressed in the present tense and indicative mood, so it could be translated as “we are about to.”

Thilbō is the Greek verb translated “suffer tribulation.” It is closely related to the word *thlipsis*, which we saw in the previous verse, meaning “pressure, stress, trouble, or affliction.” *Thilbō* means “to afflict” or “to cause to suffer tribulation.” It is expressed in the passive voice, indicating action happening to the subject.

Meaning Explained

Paul had sent Timothy to the Thessalonians to strengthen and encourage them in the face of the afflictions that Paul and his companions have been suffering. Paul was shown years before that he would suffer as a result of his ministry for God. Now that he is undergoing such tribulation, it appears it was causing the Thessalonians to be shaken in their faith. They must have thought that Paul and his companions had lost God’s blessing on their ministry because He allowed such things to happen.

In defense of the fact that he was still doing God’s work, with God’s blessing, Paul now tells his fellow Christians that he had forewarned them about it. He says, “Even when we were with you, we repeatedly told you ahead of time that these things would happen.” He knew that opposition, stress, troubles, and suffering are all part of an effective ministry. Notice that according to John’s gospel, Jesus even told His disciples,

... In the world you will have tribulation; but have courage, I have overcome the world.
(John 16:33b)

Paul knew that the forces of evil are powerful and will do anything to oppose God’s ministers and discourage them. He also told the Philippians that suffering was part of serving:

For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, (Philippians 1:29)

Application

Are you working hard to serve God faithfully? Does it seem that God has deserted you because you are facing opposition and anguish as a result? Don't despair! God has not taken His blessing from you. He may not take you out of the storm, but he will give you peace and courage in the midst of it. God is faithful!

1 Thessalonians 3:5 - Faith Strengthening Trials

For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain.

Truth to Learn

Trials and temptations can be good for us.

Behind the Words

“No longer” is translated from the Greek word *mēketi*, which is made up of *mē*, a particle of negation and *eti*, meaning “still” or “yet.” This word primarily means “not anymore.”

The word translated “endure” is *stegō*, which we saw in the first verse of this chapter literally means “to cover.” It can also mean “to forbear” or “to endure.”

Mēpōs is the Greek word translated “lest by some means.” It is made up of *mē*, a particle of negation and *pōs*, meaning “somehow” or “by some means.”

The word “tempter” is based on the verb *peiradzō*, which is derived from *peira*, meaning “a test, temptation, or trial.” In the Greek this is written as *ho pairadzōn*, which literally means “the tempting one.”

“Had tempted” is from the same verb, *peiradzō*. It is expressed here in the imperfect tense, indicating past continuous or repeated action.

Meaning Explained

Earlier in this chapter Paul told the Thessalonian Christians that he could no longer endure his forced separation from them and his inability to personally return to them. As a result, he said that he stayed in Athens and sent Timothy there to ensure that they were firmly grounded in the faith and to act as a coach to help them succeed in the building of their faith.

Now he tells them another reason for his sending Timothy. He says he wanted to know for sure how strong their faith was. You may recall that the Thessalonian Christians were being persecuted by their fellow countrymen in the same manner as Paul. Paul was well aware that Christians suffering persecution will either grow stronger in their faith or weaker in their faith.

Whenever we are suffering persecution for exhibiting our faith in God, our enemy Satan knows that we are very vulnerable to temptations. The most destructive temptations we face at times like these involve thinking that God has deserted us or doesn't care about us. This is particularly true of young Christians who haven't yet learned the value of difficulties. These difficulties force us to rely on faith to get through; they make us stronger.

In **1 Thessalonians 2:18** we learned that the name Satan means “accuser” or “adversary.” We also learned that one of his actions against us is to “hinder” us from doing the work of our ministry. Now we learn that Satan also tempts us in order to weaken our faith. The more we learn about him and his methods, the better prepared we are to resist him. Keep in mind what James said:

“Consider it all joy, my brothers, when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience” (**James 1:2, 3**)

Application

Don't despair when you encounter opposition to your ministry. God allows this to strengthen you. Also, don't think that because you are tempted to sin when you are weak that God doesn't care. God loves His children and wants us to grow stronger. Remember that trials and testing can be good for us!

1 Thessalonians 3:6 - Fond Memories

And now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has 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*—

Truth to Learn

Remember those who have helped you in your faith walk.

Behind the Words

The word “**now**” is translated from the Greek adverb *arti*, meaning “now, just now, or the present time.”

“**Has come**” is from the verb *erchomai*, meaning “to come” or “to go.” It is expressed here as an aorist participle, so it could be translated as “having come.”

The words “**brought ... good news**” are from *euangelidzō*, which means “to announce good news.” It is the word from which we get our English word “evangelize.” Most often in the New Testament it is a reference to the good news of the gospel of Christ. Here, however, it refers to the good news about the firm faith of the Thessalonians.

“**Remembrance**” is translated from *mneia*, which refers to “a recollection” or “a specific memory about someone or something.”

Epipothēō is the Greek word translated “**greatly desiring**.” It is made up of *epi*, used as an intensifier and *pothēō*, meaning “to desire or yearn for something.” Thus, *epipothēō* refers to a strong yearning or a strong desire.”

Meaning Explained

Before commenting on today’s verse, let’s look at the end of yesterday’s verse. Paul expressed concern that his labor among the Thessalonians might have been empty, or in vain. Some might interpret this as his concern that they had “lost their salvation.” This cannot be, since Paul teaches elsewhere that salvation is “eternal” and secure. Remember that the Thessalonians had been undergoing persecution, which tends to have a “weeding-out” effect on those who profess faith in Christ. Those lacking genuine faith will turn back in the face of such opposition, but true believers will grow and become stronger as a result of trials.

Today’s verse gives a clue regarding when and where this letter was written. Paul says that Timothy has just returned to him. If we look at **Acts 18:5**, we see that Paul was in Corinth when Timothy and Silvanus (Silas) returned to him from Macedonia. Since it was shortly after their return that Paul was taken before the proconsul Gallio, and we know from historical documents that Gallio was proconsul between AD 51 and AD 52, this letter must have been written around AD 50 or 51.

Upon his return, Timothy reported to Paul the wonderful news that not only has the Thessalonian persecution not driven people from the church, it seems to have solidified their faith. We also learn that they remembered Paul and his companions with good thoughts. This is particularly significant given the accusation that had been made against Paul.

Application

For those of you who have been Christians for a long time, do you remember the people who were significant in your conversion and early grounding in the faith? How often have you given thanks to God for their faithfulness and dedication?

1 Thessalonians 3:7 - Focusing On Others

because of this, brothers, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.

Truth to Learn

Paul was concerned about how his own persecution was affecting the faith of others.

Behind the Words

“Because of this” is from the Greek words *dia touto*. The word *dia* denotes the channel of action, that is, “on account of” or “by means of.” *Touto* means “this.” Therefore, *dia touto* literally translates as “on account of this” or “because of this.”

“Brothers” is the translation of *adelphos*, which is made up of *a*, indicating unity and *delphus*, which refers to the womb. Therefore, literally this word means “someone having the same birth origin.” Since all Christians are “born of the Spirit,” we are all brothers and sisters in the Lord.

The word “affliction” is translated from *thlipsis*, which we saw back in verse three. It means “pressure, stress, trouble, or affliction.”

The word translated “distress” is *anagkē*, which can refer to “necessity” or to “an oppositional compelling force.”

“We were comforted” is from the Greek verb *parakaleō*, which we saw back in verse two where it was translated as “encourage.” It is a picture of someone being called alongside to challenge and encourage. In this verse it could be translated as “comforted” or “encouraged.”

Pistis is the Greek word translated “faith.” It is based on the verb *peithō*, meaning “to persuade” or “to win over by persuasive discussion.” *Pistis* refers to the state of having been firmly convinced of a truth.

Meaning Explained

As we have mentioned before, word order is very important in Greek. The thought or idea expressed first is the most important. In today’s verse, the Greek word order says, “because of this, we were comforted, brothers, concerning you ...” You may recall from verses one and five that Paul wanted to know about how the Thessalonians were doing, but he had not heard any word from them. He knew that he and his co-workers had only spent a brief time with these young Christians and he was concerned that the persecution that they were facing might have weakened their faith. So, Paul had sent Timothy to Thessalonica to strengthen and encourage them and to see how strong their faith was.

But it was not just the persecution of the Thessalonians that Paul was uncomfortable about. Paul was concerned that the persecution and affliction that he and his companions were suffering might be affecting the faith of his brothers and sisters in Thessalonica. This may be only a subtle distinction, but it demonstrates something significant about the Apostle. He was not focusing on himself and his own circumstances, but on how his circumstances might be affecting others.

Application

Part of human nature is to look-out for ourselves, to do all we can to ensure that we are safe and comfortable. Pure and undefiled faith in God, however, means trusting God and being concerned about the safety and wellbeing of others. What are you putting your trust in and whose wellbeing are you most concerned about?

1 Thessalonians 3:8 - Stand Firm!

For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.

Truth to Learn

Christians must learn to stand firm in the midst of battle.

Behind the Words

The word translated “now” is *nun*, meaning “the present time.”

“Live” is from the Greek verb *dzaō*, meaning “to live” or “to have life.” By implication, it means “to live and prosper,” “to be blessed,” or “feel satisfied.”

There are three classes of conditional clauses (if clauses) expressed in New Testament Greek. The first class condition assumes the “if statement” to be true. The “if” is sometimes expressed as “since” in a first class conditional statement. The second class condition assumes the “if statement” to be false. The third class condition is a true conditional statement, making no assumption about the “if statement.” “If you stand fast” is expressed here as a third class conditional clause.

“Stand fast” is translated from the Greek verb *stēkō*, meaning “to stand.” Figuratively, it means “to stand firm in the faith.” It is a picture of an army that refuses to retreat even though it is being attacked by the enemy.

Meaning Explained

After some length of time, the Apostle Paul had not heard word about how the Christians in Thessalonica were doing in their walk with the Lord. Finally, he sent Timothy there to help them get further grounding in the basics of Christianity and to coach them in their walk. In the previous two verses we learned that Timothy had returned, bringing good news about the welfare and spiritual growth of the Thessalonians. This news was a great comfort to Paul, who had been concerned that the persecution that he and his fellow workers had been experiencing might have weakened the faith of his spiritual children.

Now, having learned that their faith remained solid, Paul expresses a further word of encouragement and challenge to them. The encouragement is that Paul and his helpers feel good about the news they heard. The expression, “now we live” does not mean that life and death depend on the condition of the Thessalonian Christians; rather, it means that the quality of their sense of living is improved. This is similar to an expression that we use when we feel particularly good. We say, “I feel really alive today.” It means that we have a really good sense of well-being as a result of good circumstances.

Paul’s challenge to them is that he and his co-workers will continue to feel good as long as these new Christians continue to stand firm in their faith. Paul knows that all Christians are engaged in a battle against our own sin nature and against the forces of evil. The Christian life is not an easy one, especially when the enemy is on the attack. When that happens, however, we need to stand firm against our attackers so as not to let them get the upper hand. As God’s soldiers and ambassadors, we are not to run from the battles, but to “stand fast,” using the whole armor of God (**Ephesians 6:11-17**) to battle effectively.

Application

One of the problems we face when we are under attack for our Christian witness is that we feel alone and deserted. Be encouraged, my friend, for God will never leave you nor forsake you. Also remember that your brothers and sisters in Christ are experiencing the same challenges. We must stand firm and support one another at times like this.

1 Thessalonians 3:9 - Thanks To God

For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God,

Truth to Learn

It's important to give thanks to God for His fruit.

Behind the Words

“Thanks” is from the Greek word *eucharistia*, which is composed of *eu*, meaning “good” or “well” and a form of *charidzomai*, meaning “to grant” or “to give.” Its basic meaning is “gratitude” or “giving of thanks.”

The word translated “render” is *antapodidōmi*. This is a double compound word made up of *anti*, meaning “against” or “in turn,” *apo*, meaning “from,” and *didōmi*, meaning “to give.” The meaning of *antapodidōmi* is “to give back in return for something received,” or “to repay.”

Both the words “joy” and “rejoice” are based on the word *chairō*, meaning “to rejoice” or “to express gladness.”

“Before” is translated from the Greek preposition *emprosthen*. This word is made up of *en*, meaning “in” or “in a place” and *prosthen*, meaning “facing toward something.” Therefore, *emprosthen* could be translated as “in the presence of” or “before.”

Meaning Explained

The Apostle Paul was not just a great evangelist and teacher of Christian doctrine, he was also a mighty prayer warrior. Not only did Paul pray constantly (**Colossians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:11, 2:13; 2 Timothy 1:3**) for every Christian he came in contact with, he prayed especially for those to whom he ministered (**2 Corinthians 13:7, 9; Colossians 1:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:11**). Also note how often he thanked God for the fruit of his ministry (**Romans 1:8; 1 Corinthians 1:4, 14, 14:18; Philippians 1:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:2, 2:13, 3:9; 2 Thessalonians 1:3; 2 Timothy 1:3; Philemon 1:4**).

In today's verse we see that his prayers of thankfulness were a kind of payback to God for what had been accomplished in his ministry. He did not take credit for the result of his tireless labor; he recognized that God was the source of all his success. He also recognized that he could never repay God with enough thanks for what God had accomplished through him.

It's interesting to note that Paul also gave God the credit for the joy he felt in seeing the work of his ministry bearing fruit. And that joy was not for what God had done to or for him, it was for what God had done for others. Remember that Paul has frequently mentioned the persecution and anguish that he and others had experienced as a result of his ministry. Nonetheless, he was thankful and filled with joy.

Application

We need to get the focus of our ministry off of ourselves and onto God and those to whom we minister. The next time you are praying with a group of Christians, especially when you are with your ministry team, take note of how much time people spend in thanksgiving versus how much

time is spent asking for things. We owe it to God to give Him thanks for the work He has accomplished. Remember, in ministry we are His ambassadors and His servants. Also remember that it is the power of God and the work of the Holy Spirit that produces fruit, not our brilliant planning and hard work. Give thanks to God for every seed that produces fruit. We owe it to Him!

1 Thessalonians 3:10 - Improve Your Prayer Life

night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and complete what is lacking in your faith?

Truth to Learn

All Christians should work on improving their prayer lives. We need to thank God more and pray more for others.

Behind the Words

“Praying” is translated from *deomai*, meaning “to ask, plead, or beg.” Between this word and *huperekperissou*, Paul could hardly have used a stronger or more extreme expression of how often and how much he pleaded with God regarding his desire to see the Thessalonians in person.

The word “exceedingly” is from the Greek word *ekperissou*. This is a compound word made up of *ek*, meaning “out of” but used here as an intensifier, and *perissoteros*, meaning “excessively.” This word means “exceeding all bounds” or “more than excessively.” And - this word is preceded by *huper*, meaning “above.” So Paul is saying that he prayed “more than exceedingly.”

Katartidzō is the Greek verb translated “complete.” It means “to put a thing in its appropriate condition,” that is “to bring something to completeness or perfection.” It is used in **Matthew 4:21** of fishermen mending (putting back to completeness and full usefulness) their nets.

The word “lacking” is translated from *husterema*, which is based on the verb *hystereō*, meaning “to lack” or “to fall behind.” The basic meaning of *husterema* is “that which is lacking or missing.”

Meaning Explained

We noted in yesterday’s verse that the Apostle Paul was a prayer warrior, praying incessantly for all Christians, especially for those to whom he ministered. Here we get another sense of how often he prayed. He says that he prayed “night and day.” To Paul, prayer was such a necessity in the Christian life that he did it at all times. He didn’t simply “throw a prayer God’s direction” when he first got up in the morning. He didn’t just give God thanks when he sat down to eat. He didn’t just think of others and pray for them when he was about to lay his head down at night. Paul prayed to God throughout the entire day.

Paul was so incessant in his prayers that he says here that he prayed more than abundantly. This superabundance included how much he prayed, how long he prayed, and how earnestly he prayed. Oh, that we all would pray like Paul!

We get a picture of the Apostle to the Gentiles communicating with and communing with God whenever he was not actively engaged in any other activity. In fact, he was probably talking with God even *while* engaged in other activities. To him it was sort of like breathing. No matter what he was or wasn’t doing, Paul was praying.

But notice that even the prayers of Paul were not always answered in the affirmative. One of his frequent prayer requests was that he might be able to be in the presence of the Thessalonian Christians, to see their faces. As far as we know, this never happened throughout the remainder

of Paul's life. And this was not a selfish prayer; he wanted to see them so that he could continue their Christian education, to personally instruct them in the maturing of their faith.

Application

If you are like me, you feel woefully inadequate in your prayer life compared to Paul. But this is not cause to give up and quit trying. It should inspire each of us to redouble our efforts to pray more frequently and consistently. Give thanks and praise to our God continually and let Him use you for His glory.

1 Thessalonians 3:11 - Our Constant Guide

Now may our God and Father Himself, and Jesus our Lord, direct our way unto you.

Truth to Learn

God is involved in the details of the life of every Christian.

Behind the Words

The word “now” is from the particle *de*, which can be used to indicate a continuance of a thought (and, also, namely, now) or a contrasting of, or a transition between, two thoughts (but, on the other hand). In today’s verse it is continuing a thought.

“Himself” is translated from *autos*, which is used for emphasis to set the subject apart from everyone else.

The word translated “direct” is from the Greek verb *kateuthunō*. This is a compound word made up of *kata*, meaning “down” but used here as an intensifier and *euthunō*, which means “to straighten or flatten,” and by implication “to guide or direct.” Thus, *kateuthunō* means “to guide someone directly toward a specific goal.” The verb is expressed here in the singular, not the plural.

Hodos is the word translated “way.” It refers to “a pathway, a road, or a street.” Metaphorically, it refers to a journey or a course toward something.

Meaning Explained

In this chapter of his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul has been explaining why he sent Timothy to minister personally to the Christians in Thessalonica. He has previously expressed his own strong affection for them and his desire to personally be with them. Not having heard from them in a while, he was concerned that their faith may have waivered in the face of the opposition and tribulation that not only the Thessalonians, but also Paul and his companions had been experiencing.

However, having received a report from Timothy that the Thessalonian believers had remained strong in their faith and love, he repeats his desire to personally return to them. In the previous two verses we learned of Paul’s strong and persistent prayer life. We even noted that to Paul prayer had become something that he didn’t have to consciously remind himself to do. To him, praying was just as natural and automatic as breathing. In today’s verse we see an example of this. In the midst of his telling about his incessant prayers for the Thessalonians, Paul expresses his own prayer to God.

For this Apostle to the Gentiles, teaching and prayer were so intertwined that we can even learn about his doctrinal beliefs from the content of this prayer. He expresses this prayer to “our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus.” Even though he expresses his prayer to two of the three persons of the Godhead (plural subject), he uses the singular form of the verb *kateuthunō* (to direct or guide). In this we see that Paul considers these two persons of the Godhead as one being. We also see here that Paul believed that God was intimately involved in his everyday life.

Application

Some Christians today do not believe, or do not realize, that God is involved in the details of their everyday lives. They may believe that He is involved in the affairs of mankind as a whole, but not in their own personal lives. Throughout the Bible we see God's direct involvement in individuals who recognize His sovereignty. Let Him in, my friend, and He will guide your footsteps each and every day.

1 Thessalonians 3:12 - Growing, Overflowing Love

And may the Lord make you to increase and abound in love unto one another and unto all, just as we *do* unto you,

Truth to Learn

All Christians need to grow in our love for others.

Behind the Words

Kurios is the Greek word translated “Lord.” It is derived from *kuros*, meaning “might” or “power.” Thus, *kurios* refers to “someone who has legal power or supreme authority over you.” When accompanied by the definite article (the) as it is here, it is a reference to “the Lord,” that is to God, who has supreme authority over us. He is our King, our owner, our Lord, and our Master.

The words “may ... make you increase” are translated from the Greek verb *pleonadzō*, which means “to have, or to cause to have a lot, or more than enough.” The verb is expressed here in the rare optative mood, which is used to express a wish or a desire as used in a prayer to God.

“Abound” is from the Greek verb *perisseuō*, which means “to be in excess in number or measure.” The meaning of this word is really more than just “to abound.” It means to super abound. It, too, is expressed in the optative mood, indicating a wish or a prayer request.

Meaning Explained

In the New Testament we are instructed more than thirty times either to do something or not to do something to one another. In virtually all cases it is a reference to how we are to treat our brothers and sisters in Christ. And, by far the most frequent of these is for us to love one another. (**1Thessalonians 4:9; Romans 12:10; Romand13:8; 2Thessalonians 1:3; 1Peter 1:22; 1John 3:11, 1John 3:23; 1John 4:7, 1Jn_4:11; 2John 1:5**)

Paul’s prayer request here does not just include an increase in, and abundance of, love for the brothers, he prays that Christian love might abound to all people.

In yesterday’s verse we noted that Paul expressed this prayer to the Father and the Son. There are some scholars who believe that “the Lord” expressed in this verse is a reference to the Holy Spirit. If that is the case, then this is the only prayer in the Bible addressed to the third person of the Trinity. In this case, it might be appropriate, since Paul tells us in **Romans 15:13** that it is the Holy Spirit who causes us to abound in hope, and he tells us in **Romans 15:16** that it is the Holy Spirit who sanctifies us (makes us holy, as in the next verse). Other scholars, however, point out that the instructions that we have been given in the New Testament are to pray “to the Father, through the Son, in (or by) the Spirit,” not to the Father **and** the Son **and** the Holy Spirit.

One more thing to note here: Paul has written this letter to a church undergoing severe persecution. Under such difficult circumstances, it is easy to take our eyes off those around us and focus instead on ourselves and our fears. Therefore, it is significant that he should pray for an increasing and overflowing love for the Thessalonian Christians. Do you recall what John said in his first epistle? “There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear ...” (**1 John 4:18a**)

Application

Let us all commit ourselves to exercising love for others, both within and outside the church. Doing so will make the persecutions we face easier to bear.

1 Thessalonians 3:13 - Blameless Saints

so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

Truth to Learn

God will declare all genuine Christians to be blameless.

Behind the Words

“Establish” is translated from *stēridzō*, which is a derivative of *histemi*, meaning “to stand.” *Stēridzō* means “to set firmly in place.”

The word translated “blameless” is *amemptos*, which is composed of the privative *a*, meaning “without” and a form of the verb *memphomai*, meaning “to find fault.” Thus, *amemptos* means “without fault” or “blameless.”

Hagiosunē is the Greek word translated “holiness.” It is derived from the noun *hagios*, meaning “set apart” or “holy.” Holiness means to be completely set apart from sin and its consequence.

Back in verse nine we learned that the word translated “before” is *emprosthen*, which means “in the presence of” or “before.”

The word “coming” is from *parousia*. This word is derived from *pareimi*, meaning “to be present.” *Parousia* can refer either to the presence of something or it can refer to the coming of someone into our presence.

Meaning Explained

We are in the midst of a prayer by the Apostle Paul in behalf of the Christians in Thessalonica. In yesterday’s verse he prayed that God would increase the love that these Christians have for one another and for all people. The reason Paul gives for this growing and strengthening of their love for all is “so that He may establish (make firm) their hearts [as] without fault ...”

Some people have used this as an indication that some may lose their salvation if they don’t properly show their love to others. This couldn’t be further from the truth. In the Apostle John’s first letter he said,

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (1 John 4:7, 8)

In other words, John tells us that showing love for others is the evidence of salvation, not a condition of salvation. If you are saved, you will love others. If you don’t have a genuine love for others, you are not born of God.

Now Paul tells us that God will establish us blameless “at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.” This coming of the Lord may be a reference to the rapture or to His coming at the end of the Tribulation. It is more likely, however, that it refers to both events. Either way, it is when all believers will be judicially declared to have the righteousness of Christ. In God’s eyes (since He is not bound by time) this has already occurred, but for us (who are bound by time) it will occur at His coming.

Application

Periodically, each of us needs to calibrate our own salvation. One of the signs that we are genuinely a child of God is that we have love for the brothers and for all people. That doesn't mean that we have to approve of the sinful actions of others. We are supposed to hate the sin but love the sinner. Do you regularly show love to others?