

# 1 Thessalonians

## Christian Conduct & The Lord's Return

1 Thessalonians 3:6–10

August 21, 2013

### Introduction

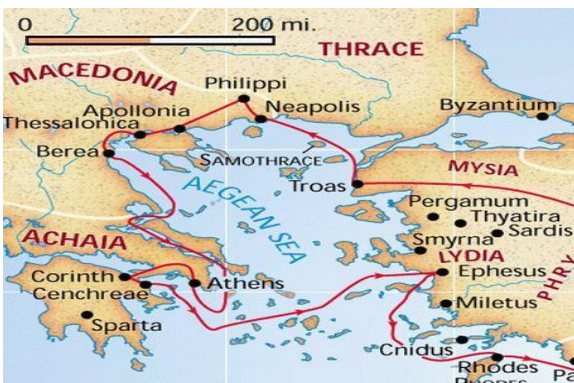
We have been examining Timothy's visit to the Thessalonians. Paul had sent him from Athens to check on the status of these dear believers. Paul's team had only been in Thessalonica for a few weeks before being run out of the city (Acts 17:1–10), and now he was concerned for their spiritual well-being.

### The Solution for Paul's Continuing Absence (3:1–10)

Paul had already expressed his desire to personally visit the Thessalonians, but Satan prevented him from carrying out his desire (2:17–18). When he could no longer bear the separation, he deemed it best to send Timothy in his stead. Following this visit, Timothy returned and reported to Paul all the things he had seen in Thessalonica.

### The Report from Timothy (3:6–10)

Verse 6 begins by simply stating that "Timothy has come to us from you." This is a summary of his travels from Thessalonica to Corinth. We know this by comparing the timing of this verse with Acts 18:5. Also, notice that this was no small afternoon hike. It was approximately 350 miles by land and would have taken the better part of a week to travel that distance. Timothy was not afraid to go out of the way for the sake of the gospel. If we take Athens as the starting point for his "detour," Timothy would have traveled over 700 miles just to visit the



Thessalonians and deliver this report! How about you? Will you go out of the way for the sake of the gospel?

Timothy's report brought glad tidings to the apostle Paul. Their faith was growing and their love was increasing! The fact that they were continuing to show love was an evidence that they were persevering in the faith. Furthermore, Timothy added that the Thessalonians still thought kindly of Paul and longed to see him. The persecutions they were enduring had not undermined the relationship between Paul and the assembly of believers. There was still a mutual love and desire to see one another among these Christians!

Paul's Response to the Report (vv. 7–10)

As expected, this good report brought much comfort and encouragement to the apostle. Notice the three effects it had on Paul...

*Paul was Comforted (vv. 7–8)*

Based on the good report, he begins his response by asserting the born-again spiritual status of these believers. "Brothers" (v. 7) is a term used to identify those who have a common parentage in God the Father. All who have been born again, whether men or women, are God's children. Timothy was sent to encourage them in their faith (v. 2) and now their faith was an encouragement to Paul. The affliction and distress that Paul was experiencing was not physical persecution since he did not experience any while at Corinth. This affliction was likely referring to his emotional turmoil and mental stress over being separated from them. The report of their faith not only relieved Paul's anxiety, but also gave him a renewed vigor for life and ministry. But notice that Paul's comfort is conditional — "if they continue..." The idea is that they *need* to continue in the faith. This raises a question about the relationship between man's responsibility to persevere and God's power to preserve the believer.

Perseverance & Preservation

When we speak of perseverance, there are two categories we need to consider:

- 1) Perseverance in the faith/gospel (Heb 3:6, 14) — this is *absolute* and allows for no exceptions! All those who are born again *will* persevere in the faith!

- 2) Perseverance in faithfulness/good works — this is the *rule* with qualified, limited exceptions. Note the exceptions:
- 1 Cor 11:30; 1 John 5:16 — There is an ultimate form of discipline, i.e. a believer who forfeits his life as a result of sin.
  - 1 Cor 3:15 — Some are saved so as by fire. This is hyperbole in light of James.
- James 2:14–26 defines the standard for us. *All* who are truly saved will persevere in good works.

So what is the relationship between perseverance and preservation? Consider 1 Peter 1:3–5. The living hope that all believers share is defined as an inheritance. This is available to all who are being kept by the power of God (*preservation*, v. 5). But the condition of being kept by God's power is faith. So how do we define this relationship?

*Perseverance in the faith produces final preservation, which is empowered by God.*

But this begs the question: how do we describe those who give evidence of a profession of faith and good works over a number of years and then come to repudiate the faith? The answer is that they were likely never saved to begin with.

*Paul was Thankful (v. 9)*

Returning to Paul's response to Timothy's report, we also observe that Paul was thankful for this news. Paul frames his remark in the form of a rhetorical question. The point he is trying to assert is that they cannot thank God enough. Paul's thanksgiving is a debt he feels toward God in return for all the joy he feels toward God. Thanksgiving is the only currency that Paul has to pay God back for answering his prayer and bringing about such joy. This all goes back to the fact that the believers were persevering in the faith in the midst of persecution.

When we pray and God hears us, that places upon us an obligation to give thanks to God for answering prayer. This entire section is a great example of the care and concern each of us should show for fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. What kind of reaction do *you* have when someone is established or falls down in the faith? Do we have a heart like Paul's? Or are we cold to the spiritual condition of others? It is indeed very *bad* news when someone has fallen into worldly ways or seems to be denying the faith!

### *Paul was Eager to Visit Them (v. 10)*

Verse 10 concludes Paul's rhetorical question that began in verse 9. In his prayers he frequently expressed his zeal for returning to visit them personally. In this verse we see two more statements that help define what a purposeful spiritual visitation includes. Notice the verbs that occur throughout chapter 3:

- 1) To *establish/strengthen* concerning your faith (v. 2)
- 2) To *encourage/comfort* concerning your faith (v. 2)
- 3) To *know* your faith (v. 5)
- 4) To *see* your face (v. 10)
- 5) To *perfect* what is lacking in your faith (v. 10)
- 6) To *establish* your hearts blameless in holiness (v. 13)

In this verse we see two more elements of visitation. The first is that it takes place in person. This may seem somewhat redundant to say, but visitation requires a physical presence. In today's culture of smart phones and e-mail, it can be tempting to relegate our Christian responsibilities to "ministry at a distance." But true Christian care and concern is best shown in person where we can see someone's face.

The other thing Paul desired to do in visiting them was to supply what was lacking in their faith. This is *not* implying that their faith somehow fell short of saving faith. It is an idiom meaning he wanted to strengthen them in their faith through instruction. So what was lacking? Apostolic instruction. The effect of this instruction would be to strengthen their personal faith.

### **Conclusion**

Paul and Timothy had gone to great lengths to continue their ministry with the Thessalonian believers. How far are we willing to go to minister for the sake of the gospel? The temporary inconveniences of this life are inconsequential in comparison with the eternal glory of heavenly reward. If you have been called by Christ's name and belong to Him, then set your affections on things above by showing a genuine heart of compassion and caring for God's children. Perseverance in faithfulness will yield great rewards!

~AWB