

# Appointed to Affliction

1 Thessalonians: 3

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## 1 Thessalonians 3:1-13 – (NIV)

*So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. <sup>2</sup>We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith, <sup>3</sup>so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>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 had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain. <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith. <sup>8</sup>For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord. <sup>9</sup>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? <sup>10</sup>Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith. <sup>11</sup>Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. <sup>12</sup>May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. <sup>13</sup>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.*

### v1-2 – What did Paul do since he could not visit Thessalonica himself?

*Sent Timothy... to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith:* In the previous chapter Paul explained how much he wanted to be with the Thessalonians during their time of trial (1 Thessalonians 2:17-18). However, since Paul could not be with the Thessalonians himself, he did the next best thing. He sent his trusted companion and fellow worker **Timothy** to them.

- For the sake of the Thessalonians, Paul was willing to **be left in Athens alone**. It cost him something to send Timothy to the Thessalonians, and he thought it was **good** to pay that cost.

**What does it mean that Timothy was a minister of God?** *Minister* is not an official title and does not connote an ordained minister in the modern sense of the term. The word rather designates one who renders a service of some kind to another. It speaks of the servant in relationship to his work, stressing his activity of serving.

- Originally the word denoted the service of a table waiter, and from that it came to signify lowly service of any kind. It was often used by the early Christians to give expression to the service that they habitually were to render to both God and to man.
- Where a word like 'slave,' which is often used of Christians, puts the emphasis on the personal relation, this word draws attention to the act of service being rendered.

### Why did Paul send Timothy to the Thessalonians?

Paul wanted Timothy to do two things — to **establish and encourage** the Thessalonians. Both are necessary but *establishing* comes first. *Encouragement* can really only come after we are *established* in the right direction; otherwise, we are only *encouraged* in the wrong course.

### v3 – Why did the Thessalonians need encouragement?

*That no one should be shaken by these afflictions:* As the Thessalonians were established and encouraged, they would not **be shaken by these afflictions**. Timothy's ministry would help them to endure their present hardship.

### Why might afflictions cause a believer to be shaken in their faith?

Without a good understanding of the truth concerning the place of suffering in the life of the believer, we are in great danger of being **shaken** in our faith.

### Why shouldn't afflictions shake us from faith?

Paul wanted the Thessalonians to know that their time of present suffering was in God's control. These were afflictions they were *appointed to* (*destined*, NIV). As part of the normal Christian life, believers have an appointment with affliction.

### What is the value of afflictions?

Some believe that Christians shouldn't suffer affliction and that God wants to teach us *only* by His Word, and not through trial or tribulation.

- It is true that there is a great deal of suffering we could be spared by simply obeying God's Word, and God wants to spare us that suffering.
- Nevertheless, suffering was good enough to teach Jesus (Hebrews 2:10 and 5:8), therefore it is good enough to teach us.
- God does teach the believer perseverance, obedience, how to comfort others, and deeper fellowship with Jesus in trials.

### Is persecution the only kind of affliction a Christian should experience?

The truth is that there are two ancient Greek words used to translate the concept of suffering, and neither of them is used exclusively in regard to persecution.

- *Thilipsis* was used for such things as physical pain, emotional hardships, and suffering under temptation.
- *Pasko* was used for such things as physical sufferings unrelated to persecution, suffering under temptation, and hardships in a general sense.

### Does suffering affliction mean God is angry with the believer?

The truth is that affliction means that God loves us enough to give the *best* when we may only desire what is *easy*. The symbol of Christianity is the cross, not a feather bed. Affliction is just part of following Jesus; therefore, Paul recognized that Christians are **appointed** to **affliction**.

### v4 – What had Paul taught the Thessalonians when he was with them?

When Paul was with the Thessalonians (just a few months before writing this letter) he warned them they **would suffer tribulation**.

- Though he was only with them a few weeks, he taught them about the place of suffering in the Christian life.

### What role does affliction have in establishing a believer?

In Jesus' parable of the soils (Matthew 13:1-23), He described the way that some fall away when tribulation arises because of the Word — Jesus said *when* tribulation arises, and not *if* tribulation comes. The Christian's faith will be tested.

- Paul knew this, and as a good pastor, he warned the Thessalonians.

### v5 – Why else did Paul send Timothy to the Thessalonians?

Paul could barely **endure** the thought that the faith of the Thessalonians might crumble under this season of affliction, so he sent Timothy to both check on them and to help them.

### How might the tempter have taken advantage of the Thessalonians' afflictions?

Paul recognized that the tempter — that is, Satan — wanted to exploit this season of suffering. As in the case of Job, Satan wanted to tempt the Thessalonians to give up on God.

### How could Paul's labor have been in vain?

If the Thessalonians did waver in their faith, Paul would consider his work among them to have been **in vain**.

- In the parable of the soils (Matthew 13:1-23) Jesus described the seed that withered under the heat of trials. If the Thessalonians withered, Paul's hard work as a farmer among them would have born no harvest.

### v6 – What did Timothy report about his visit to Thessalonica?

When Timothy returned from his visit to the Thessalonians, he brought **good news**. The Thessalonians were doing well in **faith and love**, and Paul helped them to do even better with this letter he wrote.

### What is the importance of faith and love?

In these two words he states concisely the sum total of godliness. All who aim at this double mark are beyond the danger of error for the whole of their life.

### How might Paul have been personally encouraged by Timothy's good report?

*That you always have good remembrance of us:* Timothy also brought the good news that the Thessalonians had not believed the vicious and false rumors about Paul.

### v7-8 – Why was the timing of Timothy's good report significant to Paul?

*In all our affliction and distress we were comforted:* Paul wrote this letter from Corinth, and his coming to that city was marked by difficulty. He said of his coming to Corinth, *I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling* (1 Corinthians 2:3).

- Yet since Timothy came back with good news, Paul had a renewed strength and freshness of life (**for now we live**). It made Paul feel much better that the Thessalonians were doing well.

### v9 – What gave Paul joy?

Paul's **thanks** and **joy** overflowed because he knew that they did **stand fast in the Lord**. Some find it easy to rejoice in the *material* prosperity in the life of others, but Paul honestly rejoiced in the *spiritual* prosperity of others.

### v10 – For what was Paul earnestly praying?

Paul heard good news from Timothy, but it wasn't enough. He wanted to **see the face** of the church family in Thessalonica. Paul wanted it enough to pray **night and day... exceedingly** that God would make a way for him to see them.

### What was lacking in the faith of the Thessalonians?

Growth in love... Though the apostle repeatedly complimented them (1 Thessalonians 1:3, 1:7, 2:13, 2:19-20, and 3:6), he was also concerned to **perfect** (*complete*) **what is lacking in their faith**.

### v11 – Why did Paul want God to arrange for him to visit Thessalonica?

Paul valued the ministry others brought to them, he believed that they still needed the authoritative instruction and encouragement only the apostles could give.

### How may we benefit from apostolic influence today?

Paul and the rest have graduated to glory, but their *writings* remain. God has preserved the apostles' teaching for us in the New Testament.

### v12 – What kind of growth did Paul desire for the Thessalonians?

*And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love:* This was not a loveless church, but they still had room to grown in love, because love is an essential mark of the Christian faith.

### What is the importance of love in the life of a Christian?

Jesus spoke of the essential place love has as an identifying mark of the Christian: *By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another* (John 13:35).

- The Apostle John also emphasized this principle: *If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?* (1 John 4:20)

### Who should we love?

*Abound in love to one another and to all:* Paul looked for the Thessalonian Christians to show love **to one another and to all**. This love *begins* in the family of God, but it must go beyond. Jesus told us that our love is small and

shallow if we only love those who love us also (Matthew 5:46-47).

### What example of loving one another did Paul offer up?

Himself... Paul daringly set himself as a standard of love to be emulated. We should live such Christian lives that we could tell young Christians, "Love other people just the way that I do."

### v13 – What else did Paul pray for the Thessalonians?

Paul knew that God wanted the Thessalonians to have their **hearts** established **blameless in holiness**.

- The idea behind **holiness** is to be set apart *from* the world and *unto* God. The genuinely *holy* person is separated *away from* the domination of sin and self and the world, and they are separated *to* God.

### Why is it important that our hearts be blameless in holiness?

The heart must be made holy first. The devil wants us to develop a holy *exterior* while neglecting the *interior*, like whitewashed tombs, full of death (Matthew 23:27).

### Why did Paul remind the Thessalonians the promised return of Jesus?

Nothing can encourage us to holiness like remembering that Jesus might come today.

### Who are the *holy ones* accompanying Jesus when He returns?

This has to be all the Church Age saints living and dead who meet the Lord in the air at the rapture of the church. This also looks forward to the Lord's return to earth...

*Zechariah 14:5 – Thus the Lord my God will come, And all the saints with You.*

And there is also this:

*Jude 14 – Now Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men also, saying, "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints*

We also have this:

*Daniel 7:13 – I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven!*

There will be a lot of white-clothed people riding white horses accompanying the Lord when He returns...

*Revelation 19:14 – And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses.* (This is the church, see Rev 19:7-8)

The multitude of saints are indeed described as a cloud:

*Hebrews 12:1 – since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us*

**What are the *armies of heaven* mentioned in Revelation 19:14?**

It is not just the resurrected saints that will return with the Lord, His holy angels will accompany Him as well:

*Matthew 25:31 – When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory.*

**What applications come to mind from this passage?**

- Suffering's purpose: teaches us perseverance, obedience, how to comfort others, and deeper fellowship with Jesus in trials.
- Suffering tests our faith so that we may grow in faith.
- We will always need to grow in faith and love while mortal.
- God wants us to be holy: not worldly, but godly.