

1 Thessalonians 3:6-10

PREFACE

In his letter back to the church in Thessalonica, Paul, in Chapter Three, has been writing an account of the decisions he made after leaving their city. How when he arrived in Athens, rather than keep Timothy with him he sent him back to Thessalonica “to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith,” and to find out, through Timothy, how their faith was holding up. Beginning in v6 Paul then speaks of the encouragement *he* has received from the report Timothy brought back with him.

In our last session we discussed the word so prominent in this chapter: five times in Chapter Three Paul uses the word faith (*pistis*)—six times referring to their faith if one includes “if you stand firm in the Lord” (v8). In this session, as promised, we will examine the passage itself.

A SHEPHERD’S HEART

Reading through this passage a number of times, I got to thinking about the relationship Paul had with these churches. More than just an evangelist, or “church-starter,” Paul was to all these churches a pastor in absentia; even though many miles from them, he did everything he could to counsel them, make decisions for them in important matters (Corinth), and support and encourage their faith—that is, to shepherd them. Then I got to thinking, again, about how concerned he was for the spiritual well-being of the church in Thessalonica, expressed in v5.

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:5.

Then I asked, Why? I had a hunch about the reason, so I did a quick survey of all Paul’s letters to churches. Here is what I discovered:

Church	On-site Leaders
Rome	Priscilla & Aquila, Andronicus & Junias, Urbanus, Tryphaena & Tryphosa, Persis
Corinth	Stephanas, plus
Ephesus	Tychicus
Philippi	Epaphroditus, plus overseers & deacons (v1:1)
Colossae	Epaphras, Nympha
Thessalonica?	no individuals named, but note 1 Thessalonians 5: 12-13a But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.
Galatia	the only other church where no leaders are mentioned—and look at all the troubles they were having: <i>(I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel. Galatians 1:6)</i>

So while the evidence seems to be that there *were* indeed local leaders in Thessalonica, since they were unnamed, the impression is that perhaps they, too, (along with the congregation) were new and inexperienced. This may explain Paul's strident concern in v5:

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 would be in vain.

**Sidebar:** If “the tempter” can be at work in the life of an individual Christian (and we know he is), he can be just as active in the work of the collective body of Christians (and we know he is). Thus, even as we assist *each other* in our walk, we must never discount the importance of a shepherd and his fellow overseers in guarding the integrity of the flock—the church.

v6

### Read 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10.

One can *hear* the joy—and relief—in Paul's words as he relates to the Thessalonians how he received the news from Timothy.

*But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news...* After all that time in the dark over their spiritual condition, Paul was overjoyed to hear the “good news” from Timothy—and instead of a more common word, he uses a more exalted one—the same word he would for evangelize, or preach the gospel.

**good news** = *euangelizo* = from <G2095> (eu) and <G32> (aggelos); to **announce good news** (“evangelize”) **especially the gospel** :- declare, bring (declare, show) glad (good) tidings, preach (the gospel); **this is the only place where Paul uses this *not* in reference to the gospel of Christ.**

The context and the words Paul uses reveal that this was immediate. The picture is one of Timothy rushing in, informing Paul that everything was good with the Thessalonians, and Paul immediately penning this letter.

*...of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us,* What was this “good news”? That their faith was solid, and—how *personal* this is!—that they still loved the men who had ministered to them [**not brotherly love, but *agape***], and had good memories of them. [**Better: kindly remembrances (Vincent)**]

*Chrysostom:* So great a good does he consider their confirmation to be. And thus he, the bringer of glad tidings, himself receives the glad tidings of the Divine work, the fruit of his gospel.

This is not unique to Paul; how sweet these words must be to the ears of *any* shepherd.

### Read 3 John 2-4.

*longing to see us just as we also long to see you,*  
This affection was mutual.

*for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith;*

Faith in Christ Jesus does not just bind us together in a philosophical sense; the faith that binds us together in and through Christ has tangible, practical application.

The “distress and affliction” Paul refers to would include [\[all from Acts 16-18\]](#)

- beating and imprisonment in Philippi (Acts 16:22-24)
- forced to leave Thessalonica (Acts 17:5-10)
- forced to leave Berea (Acts 17:13-14)
- alone and lonely in Athens (Acts 17:16-33)
- goes alone to Corinth (Acts 18:1)

Beyond these and more—which would be extraordinary in our time and place, the United States—Paul suffered from the same “distress and affliction” experienced by any good shepherd: a deep concern for the sheep in his flock—and for Paul this meant believers scattered across many lands. They were always in his prayers, and thus the concern was handed up to the Lord. But he was also human, and this letter alone gives evidence that he also suffered a fleshly worry over the plight and spiritual health of all those he had left behind in the many churches.

**Sidebar:** Just imagine how this concern—and yes, even worry and fear—was compounded for Paul. The average pastor of the average-sized church today has enough on his plate, as he shepherds and ministers to the members of his flock. But for Paul this was multiplied many times over; we know from his letters that he prayed over individuals, by name, in all the churches that had been formed in his travels. From my earliest years I recall the many evangelists that visited the First Baptist Temple in Marshalltown, then others that visited churches I attended elsewhere as an adult. Even though they may have been earnest and sincere while in our midst, and may have later prayed for the church as a whole, I can’t imagine that years later they were still praying over and concerned about the faith of many *individuals* in those many churches. But we know from his letters that Paul was.

*...we were comforted about you through your faith;*

So, as we might expect, hearing the good news about the condition of their faith—and, as Paul puts it, through the very channel of their faith (*dia*) he was comforted (*parakaleo*). This was not unique with the Thessalonians; when Titus brought good news from Corinth, Paul had the same response.

#### **Read 2 Corinthians 7:4.**

[Back to 1 Thessalonians.](#)

*for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord.*

If v8 seems like an odd statement to you—as it did to me, at first—then I contend that is the result of seepage of the fallen world’s mindset into our understanding of Scripture. The world would answer this statement with *Why should the quality of one’s life be dependent on the level of faithful obedience in people so far away?*

This response ignores a fundamental spiritual truth that is utterly alien, even repulsive, to a fallen world: Christians no longer belong to themselves. As we cited in our last session,

For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:3)

**"I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me." (Galatians 2:20)**

For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. (Philippians 1:21)

So Paul's life was consumed, if you will; it was utterly handed over to Christ and his work for Christ. That was not his occupation, it was not his avocation, it was not his hobby; it was his *life*—because his life had been handed over to Christ. So in that life—his life living in Christ, and Christ living in him—if there were not results of that, if he traveled here and there and this journey, to this city and this town and nothing happened, if it seemed to be all for naught, for him it was as good as being dead.

Can you imagine what that would feel like? It is sadly true that many *do* experience that. From their perspective, it's all been for naught. If they truly are living for Christ, and obeying him and serving him, then it is *not* for naught; there are results they are not aware of, or they will not be aware of till later. So when you turn this around and say what he says here in 1 Thessalonians, "now I really *live*," he's really alive hearing how well the Thessalonians are doing, and he prays that they will continue in the faith—in their life in Christ.

Let us remain mindful of and sensitive to the pastor's heart, and the importance to him that his work is bearing fruit. Listen to how Charles Haddon Spurgeon put it in his sermon based on v8. He entitled his sermon, "The Pastor's Life Wrapped Up with His People's Steadfastness."

Again, how often have I seen fears which have crept into my soul driven away by my dear people! This is a time of fear, when all Solomon's men that keep watch about his bed had need, each one, to carry his sword drawn because of fear in the night. Yet, when I have seen God's people steadfast, my fears have fled! Yes, I have said the Lord keeps the feet of His saints. He is as a wall of fire round about His own. If it were possible, the powers of evil would deceive the very elect—but it is not possible! The saints are steadfast and each steadfast one cheers his minister and helps him to lay aside his anxieties and to rejoice in the certainty that the Gospel will triumph!

The steadfast become our life by stimulating us to greater exertion. I believe that the steadfast help the minister to a high degree of usefulness. When the man of God sees his people living to God at a high rate of piety, he speaks many things which otherwise he never would have spoken. He glories in the work of God and with no bated breath or trace of hesitation, he points to his people and cries, "See what God has done!" He exults over his converts with a holy joy. He cries, "See what they used to be and what they are now! See how life has been made to spring up in the midst of death and how the Light of God shines, where before, darkness reigned."

Here is expressed the pastor's heart—the shepherd's heart for the flock.

We must not forget that the life of a church is circular, mutually reciprocal: just as the shepherd feeds his flock, the flock feeds the shepherd. Both are important to the health of the church.

v9

Grammatically, v9 or vv9-10 (depending on your translation) is a question, but Paul is not *really* asking a question; it is just another way for him to express the joy he feels because of the Thessalonian believers.

### Read vv9-10.

**Note:** In v9 Paul has two subjects of thankfulness: the Thessalonians' fidelity, and his own joy over that fidelity.

Because of both time constraints and the way Paul has organized his thoughts here at the end of this chapter, we are going to take brief look at vv9-10 in *this* session, then return in our next to blend it into the next three verses.

Verses 9 and 10 are a practical result of v8 [just as (we will see in our next session) vv11-13 are a practical result of v10]. In v8 Paul tells them that now he really lives, and in vv9-10 he paints for them a picture of what that living looks like. It is one filled with thankfulness and joy and earnest prayer.

Note that here, just as he does in his other letters, Paul renders thanks *to God* for the Thessalonians—not to them. And consider that word “render” for a moment.

**render** = *antapodidōmi* = from <G473> (anti) and <G591> (apodidomi); to requite (good or evil) :- **recompense**, render, **repay**.

For this reason the NIV is a little too thin; it includes the “in return” of the other translations, but leaves out “render.” More than just being thankful, or giving thanks, Paul is by his thanksgiving seeking to *repay*—if only in small measure—what God has done for him in the good news from Thessalonica. He is filled with joy, and he knows that that joy is a gift from God.

And that joy makes him all the more desirous to see his brothers and sisters in person—to see them face to face, and continue teaching them, deepening their faith in Christ.