

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13 – A Thrilling Report!

I. Review

- A. 1-2 Thessalonians were, after Galatians, the first canonical letters of Paul (written appr. 50 AD) and, therefore, are among the earliest books in the New Testament. Paul founded the Thessalonian church during his second missionary journey (see Acts 17:1-4).
- B. 1 Thess 1:1-10 – Paul thanks God for the faith, hope, and love, of the Thessalonians, making them examples to all the churches in Macedonia (Northern Greece).
- C. 1 Thess 2:1-16 – Paul clarifies his pure motives and praises God that they recognized the Word of God.

II. 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13 – Paul’s Apostolic Defense

But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face,¹⁸ because we wanted to come to you--I, Paul, again and again--but Satan hindered us.¹⁹ For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.

3:1 Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone,² and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith,³ that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.⁴ For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.⁵ For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

⁶ But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you--⁷ for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith.⁸ For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord.⁹ For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God,¹⁰ as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you,¹² and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you,¹³ so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (1 Thess 2:16-3:13)

1. What is the emotional tone of this passage? Do we have the same attitude toward those with whom we are united in Christ? According to Scripture, seeing Christians live faithfully to God should be one major-league source of joy for us (e.g., Rom 16:19; 2 Cor 6:4; Phil 1:4-5, 2:2, 4:1; 1 Thess 2:20; 2 Tim 1:3; Philem 7; Heb 13:17; 1 John 1:4; 2 John 4, 12; 3 John 3-4)

"I have no greater joy than to hear that my children are walking in the truth." (3 John 1:3-4)

2. To what does Paul attribute his prolonged absence from the Thessalonians? Do we think this way? Should we?

"Whenever the ungodly cause us trouble, they are fighting under the banner of Satan, and are his instruments for harassing us." - Calvin, Thessalonians

"For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." (Gen 3:15)

"The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." (Rom 16:20)

3. If salvation is by grace, why is Paul rejoicing that the fruits of his ministry (i.e., the Thessalonians) will be his "crown of boasting" on the Last Day? Do you see your calling(s) (whatever it/they are) similarly? (See also, Matt 25:21-23; 1 Cor 3:10-15; 2 Cor 5:10; James 2:24; Heb 6:10, 13:21; Rev 22:12)

"...to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. 17 In Christ Jesus, then, I have reason to be proud of my work for God." (Rom 15:16-17)

4. Assuming that 1 Thess 3:1-4 refers to Paul's afflictions, not the Thessalonians, which of the following does he mean? Which of the following can the Christian expect in this life? Do you?!

Biblical Forms of Suffering

- Satanic (e.g., Job)
- Just suffering (e.g., Ananias and Saphira)
- Disciplinary/Educational (Heb 12)
- Empathetic suffering (e.g., w/ family member)
- Innocent Suffering (e.g., blind man and Jesus)
- Eternal Suffering (divine judgment)
- Substitutionary Suffering (the heart of the Gospel)
- Suffering as Disciples (e.g., Christian persecution)

"...strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God." (Act 14:21)

5. What is Paul's plea in his spontaneous benediction? Is this a priority for you in your sanctification? What is the motivation given by Paul? How does this verse prove that heaven is temporary?

"A benediction] is a special type of prayer of blessing offered by God's authorized representative, in which the representative asks God to bless his people." - Dr. Robert Cara, Thessalonians, 94.

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. (1 Thess 2:13)