



1 Thessalonians

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...therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. 1 Thessalonians 3:7

What is apparent here, is that having the knowledge that the church in Thessalonica had maintained the faith was a source of great joy to Paul and his associates. To them it was so wonderful that it actually relieved them through their own times of affliction and distress.

The word "therefore" is given based on everything thus far in chapter 3. There was a sense of uncertainty in what the state of the church was. There was the sending of Timothy to establish and encourage them in their walk. There was the truth that the tempter was out to destroy the faith of believers. Each of these things weighed heavily on Paul and those with him. But upon receiving the news from Timothy concerning the positive state of the church, Paul says that even "in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you."

The heavy weight was lifted, the burden was gone, and joy of heart and soul was now felt. The gospel had prevailed in the hearts of the brethren, and their walk had not wavered. Paul says to them that they were "comforted concerning you by your faith." When faith is grounded, all else that is sound and proper will naturally follow suit.

They had kept their eyes on the Lord, their hearts tuned to His gospel, and their lives on the right and proper path. It was a welcome thing to have received this wonderful news.

Life application: How often do we hear someone say, "My son has stopped going to church," or "My wife says she just doesn't believe in the Bible anymore." People's faith is challenged, they take their eyes off the Lord, and they lose their footing on the proper path. When this happens, it is a source of great consternation for those who know the logical end of such things. When this arises, we need to be ready to provide words of empathy and compassion. And we need to also be willing, if asked, to help speak to the wayward person about turning

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back to the Lord. Always be ready, as this is a common thing. If we can be a help in such a time of need, let us not be found either unable or unwilling to help.

For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 3:8

Paul has written of his state which bordered on despondency, wondering how the Thessalonians fared, and if they had maintained their faith in the Lord, or if they had gone astray. The burden of this was so great on him and his traveling associates, that it was as if life itself was sucked out of them. One can imagine nights where the mind is consumed with distress, and where sleep flees away. In the day, there is no joy. The bird's song doesn't bring happiness, and food has no taste. This is how Paul's emotions probably were. As he said in verse 3:1, "...when we could no longer endure it."

But there is now a marked change in his tone. Timothy had returned from Thessalonica, and he had brought with him good news of their faith and love. Their faith was grounded, and their love of Paul and his company was strong. In a note of joy, which can almost be felt by the reader, he says, "For we now live." The life that had been drained from them was restored. The sleep that they had lost was now sweet. The sound of the morning bird brought delight, and the food at the table had its flavor returned. Life had sprung anew!

To show how much he wanted this condition to last, he then adds on a conditional note, "...if you stand fast in the Lord." The joy of Paul's group was conditioned upon the soundness of the faith which the churches maintained. It surely wasn't just those in Thessalonica, but each church that they had ministered to. Paul's words to the Galatians show a man beside himself because of their sudden turning from the truth to the lies of the Judaizers. He did not want this in Thessalonica, and he rejoiced that it was not the case, but his life would be drained once again if they took a turn onto Apostasy Avenue or down Heresy Highway.

Life application: When congregants turn away from sound doctrine, or when those who proclaim false messages are on the attack, it is surely a source of great consternation. Be sure to pray for those who hold to sound doctrine, and be sure to hold fast to the truths of Scripture. Don't let Satan get a foothold in your life, but rather stand fast on the grace of Jesus Christ the Lord.

For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, 1 Thessalonians 3:9

Paul had just said "For now we live." This verse is given in response to that, and that response is, "For what thanks can we render to God for you[?]" It is not an affirmation, but a question. It

is similar to the words of the 116th Psalm which first asks the question, and then provides an answer -

“What shall I render to the Lord

For all His benefits toward me?

¹³ I will take up the cup of salvation,

And call upon the name of the Lord.

¹⁴ I will pay my vows to the Lord

Now in the presence of all His people.” Psalm 116:12-14

After asking this, and still a part of the question itself, he then begins to fill in what the blessings they have received are in conjunction with “For now we live.” He says, “...for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake.” Paul and his associates were literally filled with joy, and they went about rejoicing for the sake of those in Thessalonica. They had been found to have held fast to the truth and had not deviated from the gospel. In this, the church would live on, passing the word on to others just as it has been passed on to them. This gave Paul and his companions such great joy that they rejoiced, as it says, “before our God.”

Their rejoicing wasn't just a rejoicing as if they had merited it – “We won converts and they are obedient to us!” Rather, it was a rejoicing before God – “The gospel which we were blessed to share has taken root, and God is glorified through it!” This is what Paul is telling them. They were elated to know that the message of Christ had taken root and would continue on.

Life application: Are you willing to rejoice with other churches that you do not attend when they bring souls to Christ. It is not an “us against them” thing which occurs in the church. It is always a “for Christ” thing which should occur. Let us be content to see any properly run church, which is grounded in the word of God and directed to the true gospel, flourish and grow.

...night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith? 1 Thessalonians 3:10

Paul's previous words were, “For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God.” Now he completes the thought, beginning with “night and day praying exceedingly.” At the end of this epistle he says, “...pray without ceasing.”

He was not one to exhort without actually living out what he urged in others. From the words, “day and night,” we see that he and his companions truly did pray without ceasing. When talking about something, they would pray. When walking along and thinking on their beloved

brethren, they would pray. When desiring to see those in Thessalonica again, they would pray. This doesn't mean they stopped and got on their knees every time they prayed, but that their words were simply inclusive of prayers uttered to God for the subject they talked about or contemplated.

For now, he continues by noting that their prayers were first, "that we may see your face." It was a true longing of Paul to return to his beloved brethren. Any evangelist or pastor who has formed a bond with those he ministered to will naturally have a desire to see that person again, and to share in fellowship with him. This was their desire as well. But it was also to "perfect what is lacking in your faith."

The words of the epistle contain doctrine intended to increase the faith of the brethren. This is certainly a part of what Paul is referring to. If he could not be there in person, then he would at least convey his thoughts in written form. Chapter 4 will fill in many of the things concerning what is lacking in their faith, chief among them being what is the state of the dead in Christ. Paul will instruct them on this, and in his instruction will come words concerning the return of Christ for His church. They are marvelous words of hope and encouragement which are intended to perfect what is lacking in the faith of the believers.

Life application: If one is lacking faith, or if their walk has gotten off track, the first and best way to get that corrected is to get into the word of God. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. From there, we can add in many other avenues of getting ourselves grounded and redirected to the proper path. But without the word of God, how will we be able to discern if the path we have chosen is the correct one or not?

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

1 Thessalonians 3:11

What seems like a straightforward and simple verse actually has wording of great interest. Paul begins this prayer of supplication with, "Now may our God and Father Himself." The petition is to God, but a note of specificity is then given by saying, "and Father Himself." Three times in this chapter, he has already referred to God, first in verse 2 and then in verse 9. However, he also referred to "the Lord" in verse 8. Now, in this verse, he makes his solemn petition to "our God and Father Himself." But then he next says, "...and our Lord Jesus Christ."

Here, there is definitely a distinction made between God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. They are two separate entities. It is something the Bible teaches, and we take it at face value. However, Paul then gives us the beginning of the substance of his prayers. May God "direct our way to you." In verse 2:18, Paul noted that Satan had hindered their travel to Thessalonica. He

is certainly showing us a contrast then between that thought and what he now desired – “As Satan had hindered us, so we now petition God to direct our way to you.”

The verb he uses is one which is found only three times in the New Testament. It is seen first in Luke 1:79. It is then seen here, and once again in 2 Thessalonians 3:5, both in the form of an optative verb; one expressing a wish or desire. The verb itself gives the sense of going straight and in the most direct route. In this, there would not be any loss of time or effort. The sincerity of Paul’s words is fully evident. He truly desires that he, and those with him, would be completely unhindered in their travel back to this beloved congregation.

However, what is most important here it that the verb translated as “direct” is singular, not plural. Therefore, it can be taken in no other way than that in Paul’s mind Jesus is equal to God the Father, they are One, and yet He is not the Father. They are separate Persons with equal authority to grant the petition. And that thought then opens up another theological truth which is seen elsewhere. Can we pray to Jesus? The answer is found right here. Paul is petitioning both God the Father and Jesus Christ equally. For full emphasis, he is petitioning them together. Words have meaning, tenses have meaning, and in this case, the number of the verb (singular) is of special importance.

Life application: This is a good verse to highlight as another of the myriad proofs found in Scripture that the Apostle Paul believed Jesus to be on equal standing with the Father, being fully God Himself. If someone who is confused about this issue is really willing to accept the word at face value, it will give them something to consider. Also, let us never feel that we are in the wrong by praying to God through Jesus and to Jesus. Paul has already set an example for us to follow.