

## Message #8

## I Thessalonians 3:8-13

Here is the thing that is so impressive about this Thessalonian letter, which I do not find in any other letter Paul writes. **The first three chapters are basically devoted to Paul telling the people how thankful he is to God for this church.**

Now the truth is Paul thanks God for God's people in almost every letter he writes, including the one he wrote to the very confused Corinthian church (I Cor. 1:4). But in no other letter does Paul emphasize this point for three straight chapters. When we carefully analyze this letter it is very apparent that **the thing that made this Thessalonians church so special is that the people of this church loved the Word of God.**

This is what made Paul so thankful for this group of people. He had never seen anything quite like this Thessalonian church. These were thinking people and **their whole focus was go to church to "receive" the Word of God (1:6; 2:13). When they went to church they viewed it as going to hear from God and not man.** This was a great church.

However, even when that is your focus, there is still a threat of Satan sneaking in and disrupting the faith of the people and that is what Paul was concerned about. He was very concerned that the Thessalonians would maintain their focus on the Word and when Timothy brought them a good report, they were comforted learning about the fact that they were solid and stable in their faith (I Thess. 3:6-7).

What Paul says in these verses is this:

**WE REJOICE BECAUSE WE HAVE LEARNED THAT YOU ARE STANDING FIRM IN YOUR FAITH AND DEVOTION TO THE WORD OF GOD AND WE ARE SPECIFICALLY PRAYING TO GOD THAT WE WILL BE ABLE TO RETURN TO TEACH YOU MORE AS WE LOOK FORWARD TO THE RAPTURE OF THE CHURCH.**

Now we may make the assumption that if the Thessalonians were not cemented in their faith or devoted to the Word of God, this would not be Paul's message to them. He never said anything like this to the Corinthians. In fact, he said he could not teach them meaty things. But this was not the case with the Thessalonians. He wanted to get back there to teach. There are three simple truths Paul communicates to this impressive church:

**TRUTH #1 – Your stand causes us to continually live. 3:8**

Paul lived for this kind of church. This was the kind of church an apostle lived for. It loved the Word of God and the doctrines of God. This was an apostle's dream come true church.

Now the “if” clause is what is called in Greek a 3<sup>rd</sup> class conditional clause, which is the clause of probability. The particular emphasis of this clause “always has to do with the future” (Dana & Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*, p. 290).

So what Paul means by this statement is that we may continually live out our days with a focus on the future knowing that you are standing firm in the Lord. These Thessalonians were solid in their faith and Paul did not fear what the future would bring. He loved this church and was excited about this church.

He knew that this church was zeroed in on the Word of God. I understand Paul to be saying this is one church that I really can live my life knowing that they stand for the Word of God.

**TRUTH #2** – Your stand causes us to rejoice . **3:9**

This is so important to see. No matter what the circumstances Paul was in, he could rejoice knowing that people to whom he ministered loved the Word and were stable in their faith.

Not only did the church have a positive effect on the way Paul and his team lived, but also on their emotional well-being. This church caused Paul and his apostolic team to rejoice.

The emphasis of this verse is that this church made Paul so happy that he continually thanked God and was joyful before God on their account.

When you are a believer and you are going through difficult things, one thing that will bring you joy is knowing your life has made a difference in the life of someone else. That is the way it was for Paul. Knowing that these people believed the truth, lived the truth and stood for the truth was something that truly ministered to him.

**TRUTH #3** – Your stand causes us to pray . **3:10-13**

It is one thing to carefully teach a church, but it is another to pray for the church and the church needs both. The church needs leaders praying for it. Paul and his leadership team regularly prayed for this Thessalonian church.

Now in **verse 10** we learn that this apostolic team was so excited about this Thessalonian church that they prayed “night and day.” Now it isn’t that they just prayed, but they “earnestly prayed.”

Now there are a couple of things we want to draw to your attention about this:

There are many different Greek words that may be translated into English by the word “prayer.” This particular word “prayer” (δεομενοι) is one that specifically emphasizes praying with a sense of need. Now the adverb “earnestly” (υπερεκπερισσου) is one that means to pray in a super abundant way. This is prayer that is exceedingly above the norm (G. Abbott Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 458).

So what Paul is saying here is because we are so thankful for this church, we pray day and night way beyond what we pray for most churches. There are four prayer requests that Paul makes:

**Prayer Request #1** - Paul prayed continually that he could physically and personally get back to see these people again. **3:10b**

Now I want to speak about this from a minister's perspective. You don't pray this kind of prayer for a church that has been filled with a bunch of spiritual duds. You don't continually ask God to permit you to go back to a church of people who don't even seem to care about the Word of God.

There are some ministries that are, as Dr. Swindoll said, a joy to see in your rearview mirror as you drive out of town heading to another ministry. But that was not true concerning this Thessalonian church. Paul wanted to see them again.

Travel at this time was not easy and when Paul says we are praying night and day that we get to come back to this church, it is obvious that this church was very special to Paul. He sensed something in this church that he did not sense in all places.

**Prayer Request #2** - Paul prayed continually that he could return to help fill up their faith. **3:10c**

What Paul means by this is we want to come back so that we can teach you more so that it will fill up what is lacking in your faith.

Dr. John Walvoord (*I & II Thessalonians*, p. 51) gives a good illustration of what Paul means here. He says a home may be viewed as being fully equipped and filled up when it has everything in it that a home should have. A typical home has furniture, curtains, rugs and everything else it needs. It is fully supplied and equipped. That is precisely what Paul was praying for. He was praying that he could get back to Thessalonica so that they could be fully supplied and equipped in their faith.

Now don't miss this point. **Paul believed that preaching and teaching God's Word filled up a person's faith.** Preaching and teaching God's Word caused people to develop in their faith. You cannot find one instance where Paul went to some church to put on some weekend retreat seminar to give people some emotional boost. He seriously taught God's Word.

Dr. Warren Wiersbe said that II Timothy 3:16 gives four profitability reasons for teaching God's Word: **doctrine** will tell us what is right; **reproof** will tell us what is not right; **correction** will tell us how to get right and **instruction** will tell us how to stay right (*Be Ready*, p. 71). Every church needs careful teaching of God's Word.

**Paul was chomping at the bits to get back to this church so he could teach it more, so they could become even more grounded and stabilized in their faith.** These people loved the Scriptures.

Can you imagine that? Think about this. You have the key apostle for the Grace Age; an apostle who has had personal meetings with Jesus Christ, telling you he is not only praying for you, he is specifically praying that he will be able to get back to you to teach you more. This apostle so appreciates this church that he is praying for it night and day far more than he would even pray for most churches.

**Prayer Request #3** - Paul prayed that God the Father and God the Son would direct them back to the Thessalonians. **3:11**

Notice the theology of this prayer. First, he identifies God as God the Father, who Himself can answer this prayer. Then he equates Jesus as being our Lord, or our God in also being able to answer this prayer. The conjunction “and” which connects God the Father with the Lord Jesus, is a coordinating conjunction which means God the Father and Jesus Christ are co-equal in Deity.

Paul typically approached God the Father through Jesus Christ and he requested that God would direct their way back to Thessalonica to teach the people. Paul is asking God to direct and guide him back to the very city that had run him out in order to teach the people more truth.

The verb “direct” means Paul is praying that God will guide him back or send him straight back to Thessalonica (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 241). The aorist tense of the verb indicates this is a very pointed or punctiliar prayer. The thing that is odd about this verb “direct” is that it is in an optative mood in Greek, which is a very rare mood. The optative mood is only used 67 times in the entire New Testament. But when we understand it here, it is powerful.

The optative mood is used to describe an emphatic wish that is, in the mind of the person praying, obtainable (Daniel Wallace, *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics*, p. 482). Sometimes when people are having a birthday party, someone will bring out a birthday cake with lit candles and the people will say “make a wish” and blow out the candles. Usually the person will think up some wish and blow out the candles. That is not the optative mood. The optative mood would be something you emphatically wish for with a focus on it being obtainable.

So whatever Paul is wishing for and praying for, he does believe this is obtainable. Now carefully observe **verse 11**.

Paul is very focused here. He is hoping and wishing and praying that both God the Father and God the Son will direct him back to Thessalonica. He not only wants God the Son involved in this action, he wants God the Father, Himself, specifically involved in this action.

Now there is a lot of mystery as to the governmental relationship between God the Father and God the Son. They are two distinct Deity Persons with distinct Godhead responsibilities. What Paul is specifically requesting here is that both God the Father and God the Son would personally involve themselves in the matter of directing Paul back to Thessalonica.

That is how special this church was to Paul. He does not pray this way for every church, but he does for the Thessalonians.

By the way, it does appear as though God did answer this prayer about five years later (Acts 20:1-3), when God led him back to Macedonia where he seriously taught God's Word.

**Prayer Request #4** - Paul prayed that the Lord would develop the Thessalonians in their love. **3:12**

Now again what is so critical to see is that in order for us to increase and grow, God must permit it. God must grant it. Paul prayed that the Lord would permit the Thessalonians to increase and grow specifically in their love.

Now Paul is very specific to point out he is not talking about just any kind of love. He is not talking about abounding in erotic love (ερος), family love (στοργη), friendship love (φιλια) or brotherly love (φιλαδελφος). He is talking about abounding in "the love" (τη αγαπη) which is the God-kind of love. This is the kind of love that seeks to communicate the Word of God and do the will of God in obeying the Word of God in any circumstance or situation. This love is a love that loves God and His Word and seeks to apply that to every situation

There are two phases of growth for which Paul prayed:

**(Phase #1)** - Paul prayed that the Thessalonians would abound in love for each other. **3:12a**

The pronoun "another" means another of the same kind. Paul prayed that these believers would demonstrate a God-type love toward each other within the church. Paul prayed that this kind of love would be manifest in their relationships with each other. It is a hard thing to love each other biblically in the church. It is a hard thing for people to get along in the church and function as one body. In fact, without the Lord's help we cannot do it.

**(Phase #2)** - Paul prayed that the Thessalonians would abound in love for all kinds of men. **3:12b**

Paul qualifies the kind of love the church was to have by saying that they are to love "just as we also loved you." The Greek is emphatic. So the obligation that the church has to all kinds of people is to demonstrate the same apostolic love which has been demonstrated by the apostles.

What was that love? It was a passion to communicate the truth of God to all kinds of people. The apostles went from place to place communicating the truth about the grace of God, even when it got them in trouble. They taught the truth and they lived the truth. They put up with a lot of hardship and trouble so all kinds of people in all kinds of places could learn the Word of God.

Paul prayed that this kind of love would be manifest with all kinds of men. The specific focus would be to tell all kinds of men about the love of God and the grace of God in that God gave His Son to die for them that whoever believes in Him will not perish. But this is also the kind of love that says if you do not believe, you will be condemned.

Don't miss this point. Loving all kinds of men the way the apostles did means that you tell them the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26-27). In other words, if you love people the way the apostles did, you will warn them of hell and warn them about the wrath of God.

The more we are growing in our faith, the more we will be concerned that people know the truth. In fact, this will be a very important point when we are raptured.

Now the "so that" of **verse 13** introduces the purpose or the result of having this kind of love, which is an unblameable heart and a holy heart. God wants us clean and holy in our relationship with each other. There will be a day of accountability. There will be a time when what was in our hearts will be clearly known and seen and that time will be when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to rapture us. When Jesus Christ comes to rapture us, what is really in our hearts will become a critical issue.

Now carefully observe what is said here—Jesus Christ will come get all of His saints and will make a presentation before God the Father. So Christ is going to come get His bride and take that bride home to meet His Father. This is why it is so important that we stay focused on the Word of God and apostolic instruction. This is what cleans us up. This is what affects our hearts. This is what affects our lives.

Now I want you to think about this fact. This letter is one of the earliest letters Paul wrote and one of the things that stimulated him and believers to have hearts right with God was the thought of the Rapture of the Church. Biblical prophecy is purifying.