

“Established in Holiness”
1 Thessalonians 3:12-13
(Preached at Trinity, September 8, 2019)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Timothy had brought the good news that the church in Thessalonica was pressing on despite the daily opposition they were facing because of their commitment to Christ.
1 Thessalonians 3:6 NAS - "Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love"
2. Although Paul was overjoyed that they were standing firm in their faith, he knew there was still much they were lacking. His great desire was to come to them personally so that he might impart to them the doctrines of the faith.
3. Consistent with the life of Paul, he committed it to prayer.
He was overwhelmed as he prayed because God had already granted great blessings upon his ministry, yet Paul desired to see these dear Christians face to face, so he prayed earnestly and continually that God would provide for his return to return to Thessalonica to continue his teaching among these brethren so that their faith would be matured and strengthened. Paul was a careful shepherd of souls and an able teacher of God's Word.
4. Now, as we come to the concluding verses of **Chapter 3** we find Paul's great expectation that followed his prayer. **Verse 11** reiterates Paul's great desire for a personal trip back to Thessalonica. And then in **Verses 12-13** we find Paul's motivation for making the trip.
Paul's purpose was to see them established.
5. The focus of these final two verses of **Chapter 3** rests upon God's work of grace in the life of the believer. The Thessalonian Christians were pressing on because of God's grace in them.
 - A. Paul stresses God's work in these verses
"may the Lord cause you to increase and abound . . ."
"so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness"
He also expressed this clearly in Philippians 1
Philippians 1:6 NAU - "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus."
 - B. Paul knew that our life in Christ was God's work, but he also understood God's means of grace through the teaching of His Word. Paul greatly desired to come to them personally and teach them.
6. As I pointed out last week, Paul made the connection between love and the establishing of their hearts in holiness
1 Thessalonians 3:13 NAU - "so that He may establish your hearts"

- A. The word heart often serves as a metaphor for the human emotion. But here it means more. Leon Morris states:
*“Hearts, is being used as a comprehensive term for the whole of our inner states, thoughts, feelings and will. It stands for the whole personality. Paul is saying that our whole personality is established on a firm foundation only when there is a basis of abundant love.”*¹
- B. The grammar indicates purpose
1. The purpose of Paul’s prayer is so that they might grow and abound in love
 2. The purpose of their abounding in love is so that they might be established in holiness
- I. Our spiritual growth flows forth from love
1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 NAU - ² and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you; ¹³ so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints."
- A. Christianity is a religion of the heart
1. The nature of the Gospel is Christ has captivated our hearts
 He loves us and enables us to return the love back to Him.
 - a. Jesus told His disciples, “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me” (John 14:21)
 - a. The Holy Spirit fills our hearts with passion towards Christ and from this passion we strive for obedience.
 - b. Philip Ryken – “Jesus promised that his Spirit would be the power of obedience for a life of Christlike love.”²
 “There is a clear connection between keeping the commands of Christ and showing affection to Christ, between loving and obeying Jesus. One of the best ways for us to show our love for Jesus is simply to do what he says.”³
 2. Our love for Christ is then directed towards our brothers and sisters in Christ. In Christ we learn to abound in love for one another.
- B. Love affects everything else in the Christian life. It is the fuel of holiness
1. We always give our greatest energy towards those things we love.
 - a. The lost man is earnestly pursuing the things he loves – and they are all earthly.
 - b. The Christian is earnestly pursuing the things he loves – and they are primarily spiritual, things that point to Christ.
 The Christian loves Jesus and seeks those things that honor Him.
 2. Love causes us to live in obedience to Christ. Love causes us to worship Christ in holy reverence.
 3. Love also causes us to look upon others with patience and forbearance. It enables us to look beyond the faults of others.

¹ Leon Morris, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 13:76–77.

² Philip Ryken, *Loving Jesus More*, (Wheaton, Crossway, 2014), Page 76.

³ *Ibid.*, Page 77

4. Love causes us to humble ourselves and serve others. It enables us to put the needs of others before our own.
5. Love causes us to look upon the lost with pity and grace.

II. Paul prayed that their hearts would be established without blame in holiness

A. “Without blame” or “blameless”

1. From the word ἄμειπτος – faultless, without guilt
2. By the word “blameless” Paul is not pretending that the Christian will attain a state of sinless perfection. He is simply reminding us of the conduct of the Godly life. It means above reproach.
3. It is the life Paul and his companions lived before the Thessalonians—a consistent behavior that was upright and blameless
1 Thessalonians 2:10 NAU - "You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers;"
4. It is the life God has called us to live.
1 Peter 1:14-16 NAU - "As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts *which were yours* in your ignorance, ¹⁵ but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all *your* behavior; ¹⁶ because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am Holy."
5. Love brings us look beyond ourselves and consider the effect our actions have upon others. Our lives impact others, either for bad or worse.
 - a. Our lives can cause the lost to look towards Christ or away from Christ.
Philippians 2:14-15 NAU - "Do all things without grumbling or disputing; ¹⁵ so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world,"
 - b. Our lives can encourage the brethren or discourage the brethren. Paul was careful to live blamelessly before others. He was able to encourage them, “Follow my example.”

B. The Christian life is one of ever-increasing holiness

1. Holiness defines us. In the Greek there are many derivatives of the word for holy, all beginning with the root ἅγι-
 - a. The word for holiness is ἁγιωσύνη
The word for saint is ἅγιος
 - b. Jesus prayed for His disciples using the word - ἁγιαζῶ
John 17:17 NAU - "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."
 - c. Our lives are characterized by holiness.
Hebrews 12:14 NAU - "Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord."
ἁγιασμός - holiness
2. Holiness refers to separation. We have been separated from this world of sin and corruption. It also carries the idea of consecration – being set apart for God’s use.

3. Too often we think of holiness only in terms of morality. As we'll see in **Chapter 4** it does have a moral dimension, but it is far more accurate to think of it in terms of separation.
 - a. You can be moral and not holy. Paul was moral before his conversion. He described himself as blameless:

Philippians 3:4-6 NAU - "although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: ⁵ circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless."
 - b. Holiness should be seen as our life before God, a life set apart for God. It is a life wholly dedicated to God. The Bible describes it as a life wholly devoted to God.
We read of Solomon:

1 Kings 11:4 NAU - "when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father *had been*."
 - c. A life wholly devoted to God will seek to obey His Law because His Law reflects His holy character. In this sense it has a moral dimension.

III. Paul prayed that they would be found complete at the coming of Jesus Christ

- A. The New Testament maintains a constant view towards the Parousia.
 1. Parousia (**παρουσία**) is the ancient Greek word that refers to an arrival or visit

Matthew 24:27 NAU - "For just as the lightning comes from the east and flashes even to the west, so will the coming of the Son of Man be."

1 Thessalonians 2:19 NAU - "For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming?"

1 Thessalonians 3:13 NAU - "so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints."

1 Thessalonians 5:23 NAU - "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

2. The second coming is the great hope of the church. Paul tells the Thessalonian Christians to comfort one another with the hope of His coming.
1 Thessalonians 4:16-18 NAU - "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words."
 3. It reminds us that we are heading to a grand consummation. We will be perfected in holiness when we see Christ face to face. If that is the great end of our faith, should we not be pursuing holiness now—a life lived in the presence of Christ, wholly devoted to Christ.
 - a. Paul uses the same word in his second letter to the Corinthians.
2 Corinthians 7:1 NAU - "Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."
 - b. We read it again in 1John
1 John 3:2-3 NAU - "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is. ³ And everyone who has this hope *fixed* on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."
 - c. And again in 2 Peter
2 Peter 3:13-14 NAU - "But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,"
 4. This blessed hope drives us to the pursuit of holiness.
Walter Marshall wrote in his 17th Century work, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*- "The persuasion of our future enjoyment of everlasting happiness cannot tend to licentiousness, if we understand well, that perfect holiness is a necessary part of that happiness, and that though we have a title to that happiness by free justification, and adoption, yet we must go to the possession of it in a way of holiness."⁴
- B. There has been disagreement as to the meaning of the last phrase, "with all His saints"
1. Literally, it means "with all His holy ones" which is how the NIV translates it.
 This has led some to presume Paul is referring to the angels.

⁴ Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013), Page 23.

2. Paul uses this word often, almost always referring to believers, the saints. William Hendriksen – “Here the thought is that when the Lord Jesus returns, God will *bring with him* those who, throughout the ages, have lived the life of Christian separation from the world and of devotion to God.”⁵
 3. We should note that Scripture describes a single coming of Christ, not two returns as the Premillennialists believe, that Jesus comes first *for* the saints and then after seven years He comes *with* the saints.
- C. We will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.
1. The Christian will stand perfect and complete in the righteousness of Christ
 2. Our lives must display this righteousness now.
Paul is saying here that it is our outward holiness that gives us confidence as we consider the return of Christ and standing before His judgment seat. While justification is the substance of our salvation our outward holiness is the evidence. It fuels our assurance.
1 John 2:28 NAU - "Now, little children, abide in Him, so that when He appears, we may have confidence and not shrink away from Him in shame at His coming."
 3. Richard Phillips writes: “Looking forward to the coming of Christ, Paul states that only holiness can give us a confident expectation of salvation on the great day when Christ returns. This blameless and holy life does not procure our salvation, but rather proves it. Practical evidence of a changed life grants us assurance of faith now, since, as Jesus said, “the tree is known by its fruit” (Matt. 12:33). Likewise, on the day of Christ’s return, holiness will attest to the reality of the faith by which we are saved. . . The resurrection will consummate our holiness, but only if there is a holiness in us to be brought to perfection!”⁶

Conclusion:

1. The more we know of His love, the more we experience life in His presence. This is life in His fullness.
2. This must be the great desire for our church. It must be your personal desire—to live your life daily in the presence of Christ, to have your heart strengthened in separation to God.

⁵ William Hendriksen and Simon J. Kistemaker, *Exposition of I-II Thessalonians*, New Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1953–2001), 3:93.

⁶ Richard D. Phillips, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, eds. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 113.