

“For We Now Live, If You Continue To Stand Firm In The Lord”: 1 Thess 3

Sunday, October 22, 2023
Covenant Church
Pastor Zack Phillips

1 Thessalonians 3

¹ Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we decided to be left alone in Athens; ² and we sent Timothy, our brother and co-worker for God in proclaiming the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you for the sake of your faith, ³ so that no one would be shaken by these persecutions. Indeed, you yourselves know that this is what we are destined for. ⁴ In fact, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer persecution; so it turned out, as you know. ⁵ For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith; I was afraid that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labor had been in vain.

⁶ But Timothy has just now come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love. He has told us also that you always remember us kindly and long to see us—just as we long to see you. ⁷ For this reason, brothers and sisters, during all our distress and persecution we have been encouraged about you through your faith. ⁸ For we now live, if you continue to stand firm in the Lord. ⁹ How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? ¹⁰ Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever 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, just as we abound in love for you. ¹³ And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

A. Introduction

Review of chapter 2: Affection-in-love

1. Array of overlapping images for himself... mother, father, orphan
...coupled with repeated familial language for them: “brothers” (5x: 1:4; 2:1, 9, 14, 17)
...and repeated language of “beloved” for them (1:4)
2. Overfull language of constancy: we **always** give thanks for **all** of you **constantly**
3. Effusive language of desire and affection:
—So deeply do we care, we share ourselves, because you have become dear to us (2:8)
—Greatly eager, to see you face-to-face, united-in-heart, orphans without you! (2:17)
—Wanted to come to you, again and again (2:18)
—You are our hope, joy, crown-of-boasting, glory, and joy! (2:19)
4. Structure: an extended (2 chapter!) “thanksgiving” for their specific gifts and story

B. Some Interesting Preliminaries

1. God's co-worker
2. "The gospel"
3. The Trinity

For one and the same grace is from the Father and the Son, as the light of the sun and the sun's radiance is one, and the sun's illumination occurs through the radiance. In this way Paul prays for the Thessalonians, "Now may God himself our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ direct our way to you." He has guarded the unity of the Father and the Son. For he did not say, "May they direct," as if a double grace were given from one and the other. Instead, he prayed, "May he direct," to show that the Father gives this grace through the Son. —Athanasius, *Oratio III contra Arianos* 11.6¹

C. Love

- Paul's actions:
 - Leaves himself alone (unsupported? in danger?) so that Timothy may come to them
 - *Did* pray "night and day" (remember: "unceasingly"!) to see them face-to-face and restore what is lacking in their faith
 - *Does* pray here
- Paul's language:
 - "Could not bear" (2x)—to not know what had happened to them
 - Calls their "faith" and "love" "good news"
 - More language of longing ("just as we long to see you") and joy ("all the joy that we feel before our God because of you")
 - Cannot thank God enough
- Paul's (staggering) claim: "For we now live, if you continue to stand firm in the Lord" (v. 8).

Romans 9:3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh.

Exodus 32:31–32 31 So Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Alas, this people has sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold. 32 But now, if you will only forgive their sin—but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written."

Question: What is one thing that God may have said to you through this sermon?

¹ Translated by and quoted in Nathan Eubank, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 126.