

1 THESSALONIANS: VERSE-BY-VERSE THROUGH PAUL'S FIRST EPISTLE
SESSION 6 | 1 THESSALONIANS 3:1-10

1 THESSALONIANS 3:1-5 | TIMOTHY SENT AS PAUL'S REPRESENTATIVE

- Verse 1 –
 - We do not know the full account of Paul and Silas (note the pronoun) sending Timothy to Thessalonica.
 - In Acts 17:15-16 both Silas and Timothy, who were with Paul in Thessalonica, then went with him to Berea, were sent to catch up with Paul who was waiting in Athens.
 - Before Silas and Timothy arrived, Paul had the Mars Hill discourse.
 - The account of Paul in Athens does not mention Timothy's arrival nor departure to Thessalonica (Acts 17:16-34). However, it does mention that they arrived in Corinth, sometime later (Acts 18:5) from Macedonia. There must have been an intervening trip to Thessalonica from Athens.
 - Background: Paul met Timothy at Derbe, in the Roman province of Asia. Timothy was raised as an uncircumcised Gentile, though the son of a Jewish woman. Paul taught the Gospel of grace in Derbe (Acts 14:20-21), and Timothy was Paul's **son in the faith** (1 Tim. 1:2). Paul himself insisted that Timothy be circumcised (Acts 16:3), indicating that Timothy was fully accepting Judaism and its covenants (for that is what circumcision signifies).
- Verse 2 –
 - Timothy was described as a **minister of God**. The Greek is διάκονος [diakonos], a servant. Recall that this is a word that always requires interpretation, whether it be *the office of a Deacon* or simply *a servant*. In this case, **minister** is a good choice. Note that Timothy is a *servant of God*, just as a governmental leader within the boundaries of Biblical government - compare Romans 13:4.
 - Timothy was also a **fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ**. What is this Gospel? Because the term is only used once, it may be dangerous to parse it out. However, it would *seem* that this would relate to the coming **day of Christ**, of which Paul would speak in 2 Thessalonians 2:2, and is a reference to the Second Coming. Timothy's job was to **establish** (i.e.: *fix firmly*) and to **comfort...concerning your faith**. The word **comfort** is παρακαλέω [parakaleo] which is to comfort, exhort, urge, prod, etc.
- Verse 3 –
 - Timothy was to **establish** and **comfort** (v. 2) so that **no man should be moved** (v. 3). The word **moved** is not a strong word (as in 2 Thess. 2:2). Rather, it is the word used when a dog would "wag" his tail. It is sometimes the "distractions" that are more dangerous than the earthquakes!
 - In this case, **these afflictions** (of the Thessalonians and of Paul - see 1 Thess 1:6, along with 3:4) are what could distract, and understandably so.
 - Paul says that **we are appointed** to these afflictions. However, the word translated **appointed** is κείμαι [keimai], which means *laid down* (the English word *cemetery* comes from this Greek word).
 - While it could be God who *laid down the afflictions*, the grammar does not require it. Young's Literal translation says, *for this we are set*. That is, it could be that Paul says,

“don’t get distracted by the afflictions we now endure, for we have taken it as the natural end of what we are doing. We are not surprised.” This interpretation fits with verse 4.

- Verse 4 -
 - It is difficult to know whether **these afflictions** (v. 3) are suffered by Paul, Silas, and Timothy, or by all of them, including the Thessalonian believers. I am inclined to be inclusive, based on the treatment of believers in Acts 17.
 - Since Paul had announced in advance **that we should suffer tribulation**, he does not want the believers to now be distracted **even as it came to pass**. However, all of us know that it is far easier to talk about future troubles than to go through present troubles. The talk of future troubles rarely causes defections. The experience of present troubles almost always does.
 - Note that **afflictions** (v. 3) and **tribulations** (v. 4) are the same Greek word, the first used in the noun form, the second in the verb form.
- Verse 5 –
 - For whatever reason, Paul changes from the plural *we* to the singular *I*. This likely has to do with the circumstances of the sending, of which we are not given full information.
 - In the light of the suffering, Paul wanted affirmation of the faith of the Thessalonians, lest **our labour be in vain**.
 - In any ministry, it is always good to evaluate the long-term results and viability.

1 THESSALONIANS 3:6-10 | TIMOTHY’S GOOD TIDINGS

- Verse 6 –
 - It is amazing what the human mind can envision during a time of absence, and it often envisions a *worst-case scenario*. Paul was relieved when Timothy returned and **brought us good tidings of your faith and charity**. It encouraged Paul greatly to find that they were *unmoved* by their troubles.
 - Translation insights:
 - The Greek word εὐαγγελίζω [euangelizo] is the same word translated *gospel* in other passages. We do well to remember that the word is not exclusive to the Gospel of God’s grace.
 - Why does the KJV use the word **charity** for the Greek ἀγάπη [agape]? The word charity originally meant “Christian love” (see the *Oxford English Dictionary*, for example). Later, in modern times, charity has been reduced to general acts of kindness.
- Verses 7-8 –
 - Paul’s comfort led him to declare that **we live, if ye stand fast** (v. 8). This is clearly a figure of speech. Paul was so dedicated to his ministry and the growth of his followers that *it was his life*.
- Verses 9-10 –
 - Paul’s heart’s desire was to see the Thessalonians. Perhaps the reason was his sudden departure, in the middle of the night. His goal was to **perfect that which is lacking in your faith**. Perhaps it is to our benefit that he never arrived, because we have the letter he wrote in lieu of a visit.