

Circling Back: 1 Thessalonians 3

Introduction: Our past study focused on the reception of Paul among the brethren along with the character of the saints in Thessalonica and Paul. We considered the power behind the word of God which was at work in all. It was a snapshot of Christianity. In this chapter, we learn how Paul became increasingly concerned about the well-being of those left in Thessalonica. He would send Timothy to them to hear how things were for those he loved.

1 Thessalonians 3:1-5: Sending Timothy

- Vs. 1-3: This is a bit perplexing when reading [Acts 17:15-16; 18:5](#)
 - Did Paul, while in Athens, send Timothy from Berea back to Thessalonica?
 - Did Timothy arrive in Athens, then back to Thessalonica, then leave from Macedonia with Silas and meet Paul in Corinth?
- Vs. 4-5: Paul was concerned that persecution could have resulted in their falling away.
 - This is because we tend to take the path of least resistance.
 - "Love believes all things", yet it isn't naive. Emotions come and go. It's easy for people to feel the excitement and make big promises concerning life changes. Everyone, for example, has experienced a failed new years resolution. Paul saw firsthand the cost of following Jesus. He knew how Satan operated. Satan, in a real sense, had used Paul as a tool at one point to persecute the church. He knew what it was like to put others under pressure. He knew what it was like to be under pressure himself. He knew what it was to lose everything for the sake of Christ . . . and it wasn't for everyone.
 - What's challenging for us is that we're not typically lured back into old lifestyles because of rejection or persecution. We typically are lured back in because of bad habits or old lifestyles. Not to say we can't feel rejected - at times we're around "old friends" or family members who have different beliefs and goals in life. But typically, we're tempted to fall back into old ways - like Peter and Barnabas did when Paul had to rebuke them both ([Galatians 2](#)).
 - People like Paul do care about others' souls.
 - Timothy was valuable to Paul, but he "gave up", if you will, Timothy to strengthen the brethren.
 - Is there someone here that you know is suffering? What impact does that have on us? What are we willing to give up to comfort them?
 - Imagine being Timothy. Would you have accepted Paul's invitation to travel to unfamiliar lands? Would you have accepted Paul's invitation if you knew what was to come? When you chose to follow Christ, did you do so with the idea that no harm would come your way? If you knew what you do now . . . would you commit to Christ again? Are we committed? What's the point of showing up if we're not committed?
 - What's implied in these passages?
 - How could it be in vain if you can't be lost? This seems to be a reasonable question.

- More applicable to this group is, how does this happen? Becoming a Christian doesn't promise smooth sailing. It doesn't mean you can no longer be tempted. It doesn't mean you don't sense any kind of fear. It doesn't mean you're no longer tempted. None of that. We can struggle with things such as boredom. We struggle with discipline. We don't challenge ourselves with things more meaningful, so we sit back and relax. We get pulled into activities that entertain.

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13: Timothy's Return

- Vs. 6-10: Paul was so refreshed when he heard about the faithfulness of the brethren.
 - When is the last time we've rejoiced with someone over their spiritual victories?
 - We need to hear about other's victories to help fuel our own battles. "If they can, then I can." If they're winning, then I'm winning. Can we rejoice with others even when we don't feel like we're winning?
 - I've been so humbled in my life through many moments, but some of the most kind and genuine ones are when a brother or sister genuinely express their appreciation when I know they're going through it.
- Vs. 11-13: Is there ever a bad time to pray? Paul . . . even in his letters he stops to give thanks to God and basically write out a little prayer.
 - We've asked this before, but when is the last time you've stopped to pray for/with someone?
 - Another repetitive question, but what was the focus of Paul's prayer?

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This is all good and true observations of the text, but I'd like to share another thought as I read through the text and thought about out during the week. Do you ever stop to think about what this was like for Timothy. He's been in a "spiritual school", if you will, with Paul for a while now. However, now Paul is sending him back to help school others. Timothy is doing business as usual, but with some changes. Paul is no longer there to tell him what to do or say. He's no longer there to protect Timothy. Timothy must stand on his own two feet. He must do his job and stay the course. Timothy now has freedom, which can be good, but also serves to be dangerous for so many in the world.

For those who are starting school, and in particular, college: this isn't all new, yet it is. Your parents aren't there to hold your hand. This is good, but it can be scary. How do you view this new responsibility? What are you excited about? What are you nervous about? What does that say? Any red flags or are you good to go. Timothy, I feel confident, did not view it as a time to be wild and appeal to his flesh. It was business as usual. However, that doesn't happen over night. Parents, you know that. It's too late at this point. You can't cram Jesus into your kid's life now in two weeks. He or she is either clear about what their goal is or not. They're either committed or their not. Young brother or sister - you've got your mind settled or you don't. Which is it? This is a wonderful opportunity for you to give back. For you to be an example to others. You're all learning together, but you have something to teach others about who are lost in the dark world ruled by Satan. This is no joke. It's no exaggeration. This is real. So, let's encourage one another, and please, if you feel like you're not prepared, you've got to let someone know so that, as Paul would say, the tempter may not tempt you and it all be in vain.