

1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians

## "Take a Stand!"

(1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 3:1-13)

**Some Context:** Paul had spoken about how the church in Thessalonica was born, as a great work of the going out of word of God in spite of severe opposition and now he wanted to discuss growth and maturity. Since Paul was their spiritual parent, he needed to guide them into maturing in the faith and his message would be a call to stand fast in the Lord. Although Paul wanted to be with them, he could not. Consequently, he identified three things that he could do to help these Christians become firmly established: (1) He Sent them a Helper (3:1-5), (2) He Wrote them a Letter (3:6-8), and (3) He Prayed for them (3:9-13).

**The Text:** Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, <sup>2</sup>and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, <sup>3</sup>that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. <sup>4</sup>For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. <sup>5</sup>For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain. <sup>6</sup>But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you— <sup>7</sup>for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. <sup>8</sup>For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. <sup>9</sup>For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, <sup>10</sup>as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith? <sup>11</sup>Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, <sup>12</sup>and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, <sup>13</sup>so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. (ESV)

**The Purposes of writing 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians:** We have already seen that Paul had at least three purposes for writing 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians:

1. Paul commended the Thessalonians for their exemplary living under persecution.
2. Paul defended his conduct in Thessalonica against criticism that had developed in his absence.
3. Paul explained his absence from them.

It was a fourth purpose of Paul's to explain why he sent Timothy to them. In this section Paul explained not only his purpose in sending Timothy, but also his joy over Timothy's report, his prayer for a future visit to see them and correct any doctrinal and/or moral deficiencies, and his prayer for their love and stability.

**He Sent them a Helper (3:1-5):** Paul was not only an evangelist he was also a Pastor. As 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 2:17-20 points to Paul's love for them and his desire to be with them, coupled with the fact that he had been prevented by spiritual forces from going, he needed to do the next best thing. Paul was willing to carry on alone at Athens and send Timothy back to help ground the Church of the Thessalonians in the faith. Not every believer is capable of helping others grow (Hebrews 5:11-14). On the other hand, Timothy was. Timothy was a Christian. Timothy was a minister (didaskolos, diakonos), a teacher, or a servant. This is the same word that we get the office of deacon from. Additionally, Timothy was a team player. He understood goals and responsibilities shared by God's men. Paul knew the adversary that the Church of the Thessalonians was up against, and he was concerned about this. Persecution is not foreign to the believer, and he has a built-in enemy, whether he wants to admit it or not. Satan is the enemy of the Christian. He is a tempter, a deceiver, and a liar, and he will stop at nothing to move every believer from a position of faith toward God ("You will be like God," was his flattery to Eve). Timothy's job was to encourage and comfort these believers as they were being attacked by spiritual and physical forces.

**He Wrote them a Letter (3:6-8):** Timothy returned to Paul and reported (1) the new believers were standing firm in spite of persecution, (2) they did not believe the lies that the enemy had told about Paul, and (3) that they held Paul in the highest esteem. Paul's response was to write them a letter and put in writing what he had been saying to them all along. Paul wrote a great deal and some of his writings did not make it into the New Testament canon. But this letter and a second written shortly afterward to the same church did. The word of God speaks of the word of God and announces its value (2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3:16-17, 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1:20-21). Article III.A CBC Constitution: We believe the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments to be the verbally inspired Word of God, the final authority for faith and life, inerrant in the original writings, infallible and God-breathed. 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians is chocked full of Biblical doctrines. Doctrine tells us what is right. Reproof tells us what is NOT right. Correction tells us how to get right. Instruction tells us how to stay right.

**He Prayed for them (3:9-13):** God's word and prayer go hand in hand. Our senses often scream out, "I pray and pray, and nothing ever changes." Calvary School of the Bible's "Growth in Christ" class teaches us to write down our prayers and watch over time to help us effectively evaluate how God works in our lives. Time is NOT an issue to God. This might be better said, "God's timing is not necessarily consistent with our timing." Paul prayed for three specific requests: (1) that the Thessalonians would mature in their faith (3:10), (2) that the Thessalonians would abound in love (3:12), and (3) that the Thessalonians would live a holy, or separated, life toward God (3:13).

**A Developing Pattern?** After the completion of our study of the first three chapters of 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians, we see a very distinct pattern start to emerge. We mentioned last week that one of the two major subjects that dominated Paul's missionary message wherever he went was that Jesus, who had died, was buried rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, would one day be coming again. We believe that this pertains to two distinct future events referred to as the Rapture and the Second Coming. While the Rapture refers to believers being "Caught Up" suddenly to meet Jesus in the air and him taking them out of the world and into heaven, the Second Coming refers to Jesus returning to the earth to save Israel from total destruction at the hands of the armies of the nations of the world. These two future events are separated from one another in time by at least seven years, with the Rapture occurring before the Great Tribulation and the Second Coming occurring at the end of this period. As we have previously stated, the believers in Thessalonica who heard Paul's message were looking each day for the return of Christ at the Rapture. With this in mind, we see that Paul has mentioned the Lord's return at the Rapture, the next event in God's eschatological program at least once in each of the first three chapters (1:10, 2:19 and 3:13). This pattern will continue and blossom throughout the remaining chapters of 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians.

**Next Week:** "How to Please Your Father (1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians 4:1-12)"