

1 Thessalonians 3 • Established in the Faith

Introduction

The key word in this chapter is “establish”. Christians go through times of testing and affliction, and unless they are established in Christ they will be vulnerable to the devil’s stumbling blocks. Paul affirms in chapter 1 that this church is saved, and in chapter 2 confirms how they’ve been nurtured; but now he conveys his even greater concern to see them established in the faith so he can properly instruct them in chapter 4 as to how to continually walk in Christ. What does Paul use to establish these believers in the faith? It’s a model for our own approach to discipleship and local ministry.

¹Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, ²and we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith,

[Read v.1-2]

Q: What did Paul do “to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith”?

A: He sent them a man – specifically Timothy.

Q: What do we know about Timothy?

- He proved himself for several years in his own local church. (Acts 16:1-3)
- He did not begin his ministry by teaching or preaching, but was Paul’s “minister” to help him in the tasks of daily living and travel.
- He replaced John Mark who had turned back when the going got tough.

Point: Timothy was someone who proved through the quality of his walk that he himself was established in the faith and therefore able to assist others in establishing the same. He was actually a role model of what Paul desired for the Thessalonians.

Q: What is this a picture of? How is this a fulfillment of the Great Commission?

A: It’s a picture of discipleship. Paul wasn’t content with making converts but sent someone who could encourage the believers and establish them in their faith. It was the follow-up to the initial step of conversion.

Application: The mature saints in the church need to help the younger Christians grow in Christ by encouraging, teaching, and fellowshiping with them.

³so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. ⁴For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know.

[Read v.3-4]

Q: What had Paul given them which he’d hoped would establish their faith?

A: He gave them the Word.

Q: What is it that the Thessalonians seem to have forgotten?

A: That they’d been forewarned about impending affliction, which also implies they may have forgotten his teaching in regards to how to deal with it.

Q: What does it mean to be “disturbed” where affliction is concerned?

A: It directly corresponds to their faith in God’s Word being shaken so as to open the door to receiving false doctrine.

Point: Times of affliction have a way of reshaping our faith should we allow them to distract us from steadfastly adhering to God’s Word in spite of them.

Now when they had traveled through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where there was a synagogue of the Jews. And according to Paul’s custom, he went to them, and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and giving evidence that the Christ had to suffer and

rise again from the dead, and saying, "This Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you is the Christ." And some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, along with a large number of the God-fearing Greeks and a number of the leading women.

Acts 17:1-4

Q: When originally in Thessalonica, how did Paul minister the Word?

1. He "reasoned". This suggests debate or discussion.
2. He opened the Word. This implies that he explained its meaning.
3. He gave "evidence". He laid it out in an orderly way for everyone to see.
4. He preached. He proclaimed the Gospel

Application: *It's not enough to merely preach and declare the Word, there must also be teaching, proving, and explaining. The Greek for "giving evidence" could also be translated "the setting of a table". It conveys the responsibility of the spiritual worker to set the "food" on the table so that every saint – young or old – may reach it and be properly fed.*

[Read v.5-10]

Q: What's the third thing Paul did to establish their faith?

A: He prayed for them.

Q: How well do you support or disagree with the statement, "The two-fold ministry of the Word of God and prayer is what establishes the church"?

A: [Allow for group discussion.] If there is all teaching and preaching and no prayer, then the people will have light, but no power. If there is all prayer but little or no teaching of the Word, you have a very enthusiastic group with more heat than light.

Point: *Christ's ministry consisted of **both** the Word and prayer.*

"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat; but I have prayed for you, that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

Luke 22:31-32

Point: *Samuel's ministry consisted of **both** the Word and prayer.*

"Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by ceasing to pray for you; but I will instruct you in the good and right way.

1 Samuel 12:23

Point: *Peter's and the apostles' ministry consisted of **both** the Word and prayer.*

"But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word."

Acts 6:4

Point: *Paul's ministry consisted of **both** the Word and prayer.*

"And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

Acts 20:32

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Q: What was Paul's overwhelming concern for them? Was the priority of his prayer for their safety or happiness?

A: Paul was "praying most earnestly" that they would be made "complete" in their faith.

Point: The word "faith" is used repeatedly in this chapter. If Satan can get us to doubt God and His Word, everything else will fall as a result.

Q: Is faith something on deposit in our heart that will grow over time? Or something that is only bestowed as a spiritual gift?

A: The word "faith" can also be translated as "faithfulness". It's the quality of our obedience to God's Word, to actually putting it into practice so that we grow more and more into the image of Christ and become effective witnesses and ministers to everyone around us.

And He said, "How shall we picture the kingdom of God, or by what parable shall we present it? It is like a mustard seed, which, when sown upon the soil, though it is smaller than all the seeds that are upon the soil, yet when it is sown, it grows up and becomes larger than all the garden plants and forms large branches; so that the birds of the air can nest under its shade."

Mark 4:30-32

Application: Christians are commanded to pray for one another and for the lost. When there is a combined ministry of prayer and the Word, Satan is defeated and the church is established.

[Read v.11-13]

¹¹Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; ¹²and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; ¹³so 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.

Q: What is the final thing Paul does?

A: He reminds them of Christ's return.

Q: How might this help in times of affliction?

A: Believers could assure and encourage themselves with the promises of His coming, knowing that current circumstances are not only temporary, but completely under His control.

Q: How might this help in times of temptation?

A: Believers could keep themselves clean of sin by remembering that Christ might come this very day.

Q: How might this help if ministry and witnessing becomes wearying or burdensome?

A: Believers could find new strength and courage by looking for His return.

Application: The biblical truth of Christ's return has no greater personal application than its effect on the believer's heart and mind to embrace to an even higher degree God's Word and prayer so as to be established in the quality of their faith.

And the Lord said, "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time? Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you that he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But if that slave says in his heart, 'My master will be a long time in coming,' and begins

to beat the slaves, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk; the master of that slave will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will cut him in pieces, and assign him a place with the unbelievers. And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more.

Luke 12:42-48

Q: What did the slave say openly?

A: Nothing. What he said he said merely from his heart.

Q: Did he say Christ wasn't coming?

A: No, only that he believed He was delayed, "a long time in coming".

Q: How were the thoughts of his heart betrayed by his behavior?

A: Because he didn't love Christ's coming, he neither loved others.

Epilogue

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. If you know that He is righteous, you know that **everyone also who practices righteousness is born of Him**. See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. 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. And **everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself**, just as He is pure.

1 John 2:28-3:3

Discuss how the daily expectancy of Christ's return will help you keep your life clean, establishing your faith both individually and for the church overall.