

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13 Answers Destined for Affliction

******What did Paul try to do over and over, again and again (2:17-20)?** Paul attempted over and over to go back to Thessalonica. He eagerly desired to see the Thessalonians face to face, 2:17. He wrote in 2:18 that he wanted to come to them “again and again”.

1. Review: In what sense had they been torn away from the Thessalonians (2:17)? See Acts 17:1-10. The missionaries had been forced to leave town during the night due to rioting and false accusations made against them to the government.

Word Study: “torn away” (2:1) is from *aporphanizo*; *apo* means “away from” (as in Apollo or apologize) and *orphanos* is the basis of our word orphan. Earlier Paul said he had been like a mother to them, then like a father, and now he says he was orphaned from them (this word was also used of parents bereft of their children; Best, p. 124). This suggests distress at an involuntary separation (*ESV Study Bible*, p. 2307). Theirs was a violent parting.

2. Why did Paul add that their parting was for “a short time” (2:17)? This may suggest hope that a reunion was imminent. On the other hand it may refer to the time between their departure and Timothy’s return visit (with Timothy representing all three missionaries). Scripture does not record whether Paul made it back to Thessalonica or not (Best, p. 127). It does say he returned to Macedonia, so presumably he did.

3. What did Paul mean when he wrote they had been torn away in person but not in heart (2:17)? This was his way of expression affection toward them. Though absent physically, they were still very much in his heart.

Why might Paul have been so strong in expressing his concern for them? Probably the persecutors said, “Those missionaries don’t care about you – they fled the scene! They have no genuine concern for you. They misled you. Return to us and we won’t speak of this anymore.”

4. Even though Paul had endeavored eagerly return (2:17), what hindered him (2:18)? According to 2:18, Satan hindered them. Exactly how Satan had hindered them was not stated. Paul merely gave the meta-history (Best, p. 126).

What can we learn about Satan from 2:17? Satan is active in the world and exerts powerful influence over the affairs of men (Hendriksen, p. 126).

Perspective: Satan can do nothing except what God allows him to do. He is on a leash. He is hobbled. It was Satan who hindered Paul, but only because God allowed him the freedom to do so. Some greater purpose of God was served in allowing Satan to hinder Paul (perhaps it was to move Paul to pen the letter to the Thessalonians).

Example: God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but He still has decreed that they die (Ez 18:23, 32, 33:11). God probably took no pleasure in allowing Satan to hinder Paul, yet it was God’s decreed will that it happen.

5. What is the purpose (or point) of the two questions in 2:19? The point seems to be that the Second Coming of Jesus would prove the truthfulness of Paul's claim that the Thessalonian church was Paul's glory and joy and crown. He had nothing to hide before Jesus.

Note: "Coming" (2:19) is from *parousia*.

Application: Paul was concerned about other people and their relationship to the Lord. Maybe sometimes we have our value systems all wrong. *What is your glory and joy? Your home? Flower bed? Garden? New Car? Gun collection? How does the object of your delight compare with the object of Paul's delight?*

******When the missionaries could bear it no longer, what did they do (3:1-5)?** We they could bear it no longer, they sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on them. Timothy had a two-fold mission: to encourage them (3:2) and to bring back reassurance to Paul (3:5).

6. How does 3:1 indicate that sending Timothy to Thessalonica was a sacrificial act? *Compare Acts 17:10-15, 18:1, 5.* After being torn away from Thessalonica (2:17), the missionaries went to Berea. After a short time in Berea, Paul was forced by the rioting to leave by sea and sail on to Athens alone (leaving Silvanus and Timothy behind in Berea). This must have been hard on Paul, tempting him to feel lonely and discouraged. Thought the particulars are unclear, Silvanus and Timothy finally did arrive in Athens. Timothy was soon sent back to Thessalonica. Sending Timothy back to Thessalonica meant Paul and Silvanus were left alone at Athens (3:1). Silvanus also left Athens, meeting up with Timothy later and reuniting with Paul in Corinth.

How was Timothy described in 3:2? Timothy was Paul's spiritual brother and God's coworker. We are all to relate to each other as spiritual brothers and sisters in the church family. Like Timothy, we also are to serve as God's coworkers.

7. What are the implications of the fact that God has coworkers (3:1)? **Joke:** Timothy was a co-worker, not a cow-orker! Coworker is from *sunergos*; *sun* means with (seen in symphony and sympathy) and *ergos* means work (the measure of a unit of energy is thus called the erg). The NAS translates this as God's "fellow worker". In China today, probably due to Watchman Nee's influence, ministers leaders are often called coworkers (not preachers, not pastors, not ministers). The amazing fact is that God has graciously included us in His work of seeing people brought to salvation and established in the faith.

Based 3:1-3, why was Timothy sent to Thessalonica? It was in order to establish and exhort them in their faith so that no one was moved by the affliction to which they were being subjected.

Perseverance of the Saints: Once the Holy Spirit regenerates a person He keeps working in that person's life to make him persevere in the faith. ("Once saved always saved" is the truncated version of this truth). However, it is important to note that the Holy Spirit does not do His work alone. He also uses other believers working in concert together to encourage each other. Thus, Paul sent Timothy back to work with the Spirit to establish and exhort them in their faith. Timothy was God's

coworker. This is one reason we meet together in community as a body of believers each week: to be coworkers with God in exhorting each other in the faith.

Based on 3:3-4, why did Paul suspect that the Thessalonians might need their faith strengthened and encouraged (3:2)? Paul knew they were suffering persecution and were being pressured to revert to Judaism.

8. What can we learn about affliction from 3:3-4? See *John 16:33, Philipians 1:29-30, 2 Timothy 3:12, 1 Peter 4:12-14*. According to 3:3, we are “destined” for affliction. It is part of God’s sovereign plan. Normality is persecution, Acts 14:22 (Best, p 135).

9. What does the word destined mean (3:3)? A destination is where you are going. We are all headed for, destined for, affliction.

Word Study: “Destined” (3:3) is from *keimai* (2749) and was originally used with reference to a corpse or a baby and means to lie (as in a horizontal position). Metaphorically it means to be set, destined, appointed (Thayer). Our course is set.

Who destined us for this affliction (3:3)? God has destined us for affliction.

Truth in Advertising: We need to realize that affliction is part of God’s plan for all of us. If we have unrealistic expectations about suffering then of course we will be disappointed, disillusioned, discouraged and perhaps even lose our faith. We will falsely conclude that God had failed us when in reality He warned us all along that suffering is part of His master plan. As Paul wrote, “we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction” (3:4).

ESV **John 16:33** In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

ESV **Philippians 1:29-30** . . . it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.

ESV **2 Timothy 3:13** . . . all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

ESV **1 Peter 4:12-16** . . . do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you . . . if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in that name.

Paul’s fear was that his labor was in vain (3:5). What would have made his labor there in vain? Had the Thessalonians reverted to Judaism or paganism due to persecution, Paul’s labor would have been in vain.

11. Based on 3:5, what sometimes happens to people who are afflicted? *See Matthew 13:20-21.* Sometimes people who appear to be believers fall away due to persecution. Sadly, there are Chinese evangelists who, after being thrown into jail and mistreated, renounced their faith.

ESV Matthew 13:20-21 As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.

ESV John 10:28-29 I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

Note: It has been quipped that the faith that fizzles before the finish had a flaw from the first. Satan is like a termite eating away at dead wood (termites don't eat living wood). Those who fall away were never truly believers in the first place.

12. Who is the tempter (3:5)? *Compare 2:18, 1 Corinthians 7:5.* The tempter is none other than Satan himself. Satan tempted Jesus in the wilderness and he tempts believers even today. He hindered Paul from returning to Thessalonica and Paul feared he had at the same time tempted the Thessalonians to fall away.

******What good news comforted Paul and Silvanus in their affliction (3:6-10)?** Timothy brought back the good news that they continued on in faith and love and had affectionate feelings toward the apostles.

13. Why would the Thessalonians not have thought kindly of Paul or not wanted to see him (3:6)? They could have blamed Paul for getting them into a situation where they were afflicted. They also could have faulted him for leaving and not coming back sooner (even though it was the Thessalonians' own idea that he leave, Acts 17:10).

Example: A young couple in a church I once served were expecting their first child. The wife went into labor and was taken to the hospital. Suddenly, the husband came running out of the delivery room crying. During the stress of child birth the wife looked at her husband and declared, "This is all your fault" and then socked him in the eye!

Why did Paul feel comfort when he got news of their faith (3:7)? Paul loved them and was genuinely concerned about them. He had a pastor's heart! (His love for these Gentiles was a fulfillment of Mark 10:29 ff).

How did Paul express how he felt about them standing fast in the Lord (3:8)? He said, "now we live".

14. What did Paul mean when he wrote, "now we live" (3:8)? It seems to be the idiomatic equivalent to "Now I can breathe again" or something like that.

15. What is the point of the question asked in 3:9-10? The point seems to be that Paul could not thank God enough for all the joy the Thessalonians had brought to him.

What prayer request did Paul express in 3:10? His prayer was that they would see each other face to face.

Based on 3:10, what did Paul intend to do when he returned to Thessalonica? He intended to supply what was lacking in their faith.

16. What might have been lacking in their faith (3:10)? Since the apostles were forced to leave town early, there were still fundamental teachings of the Christian faith that they had not covered, such as the particulars of the return of Jesus and the resurrection of the dead. Failure to disciple the church in these areas led to problems (as is evident in 2 Thessalonians).

******With what pastoral prayer did Paul conclude this part of his letter (3:11-13)?** Paul prayed they would be reunited (3:11) and that the church would abound in love (*agapao*) for one another (3:12).

17. Based on 3:12, what is an important mark of any group of Christians? See John 13:34-35. They should be abounding in increasing love for one another.

ESV **John 13:34-35** A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

What did Paul mean in 3:12 when he added they should abound in love “for all”? The primary focus of our love is to be for each other, but our love is to overflow to all men. The first love is inward and our second love is outward (Best, p. 149). We are to love our neighbor as our self. We are to love our enemies.

18. According to 3:13, in what condition did Paul want the church to be when Jesus comes? Compare 4:3-8. He wanted them to be found blameless in holiness. In particular, this refers to sexual purity.

What two ideas are linked by the “so that” in 3:13? Abounding in love is linked to blameless in holiness. The one led to the other. Paul wanted them to be abounding in love for one another (3:13) “so that” they would be blameless in holiness (3:14).

19. How does love for one another (3:12) cause one to be established in holiness (3:13)? Compare Romans 13:8-10. Loving God and others leads to the fulfillment of God’s moral law and thus results in practical holiness.

20. What can we learn about Jesus' coming from 3:13? See ahead to 4:14. One day Jesus will come, accompanied by all His saints. In Acts 1, the angels declared that Jesus would come in the same way he left (bodily). This is referred to in Hebrews 9:28 as His second appearing.

So What?

21. How should we pray for our church, based on 3:11-13?

22. What main thought did the apostles wish to convey to the Thessalonians in 2:17-3:13?

23. What values system, attitude or priority did these apostles have that we would do well to cultivate ourselves?

24. What does 2:17-3:13 teach us about the believer and suffering?

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. This is put people's minds in gear and them something to look for as the text is read. It causes focus.

• These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the ESV.

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