



1 Thessalonians

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For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. 1 Thessalonians 3:4

Paul begins this verse with "For." In this, he is confirming why "no one should be shaken by these afflictions" from the previous verse. He told them also that as a body "we are appointed to this." This is the context of the word "For." From there, he adds in "...in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation." As always, Paul could not write this to the church there unless it was true.

If they were never told this, they would read the letter, look at each one another in surprise, and comment, "He's been in the funny juice." But the words themselves bear witness to the fact that Paul and his associates had warned those in Thessalonica of what lay ahead. When the tribulation came, it became a confirming note to them that what they were experiencing was meant to be. In fact, Paul goes on to say, "...just as it happened, and you know."

No prophecy was needed for this. He had been a persecutor of the church, and he had been persecuted after coming to Christ. As he evangelized, persecution faithfully followed after him, trying to despoil his efforts. Each new convert was a person who was set for tribulation. The warning was given because it was an expected and customary part of this new faith. The devil wants it destroyed, and so he uses all means possible to have it ended. Attacking new converts is one expected, and surely effective, way of this coming about.

The book of Acts shows this persecution, and the epistles warn us of it even to this day. But there is a way of standing firm against it given in the epistles as well. If we read and study the word, we will be able to stand against these things firmly and without wavering in our faith.

Life application: A believer who is not persecuted in some way for their faith is no threat to the devil's influence. In other words, they are probably ineffective Christians who accepted Christ

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and then do nothing for Him. The more we are willing to step out and proclaim Christ, the more we will be the brunt of jokes, the target of attacks, and the focus of the devil's attention. Let's give that sorry fellow a black eye for his efforts.

For this reason, when I could no longer endure it, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter had tempted you, and our labor might be in vain. 1 Thessalonians 3:5

The words "For this cause" are speaking specifically about being "shaken by these afflictions" which Paul mentioned in verse 3. He had told them such things would arise, and he knew that they had arisen. But just because someone is warned of something, it doesn't mean that they will bear up under what was warned against. He was concerned, and his concern is reflected in the next words, "when I could no longer endure it."

One can just imagine Paul, fidgeting about and mumbling in his state of anxiety (be anxious for nothing, Paul!) at what may have happened to his beloved congregation. He and his associates had been driven out by the foes of the gospel, and he wondered if the congregation had seen this and lost hope. This is what he means by saying, "lest by some means the tempter had tempted you."

There could have been a false gospel introduced to counter the true gospel he had presented. There could have been false teachers who had more eloquent oratory skills who had come to steal them away. There could have been doubts leading to distrust of the message they heard. The tempter has an entire arsenal of weapons at his disposal which are intended to destroy the faith, and to pull true believers away from what they had originally received.

The term "tempter" is given in this verse to show that his nature is not just one of tempting, but that this is his constant manner of behavior. He tempts and he continues to tempt. With this constant attack, Paul was concerned for the people of the church. Could they bear up? Had they borne up? He needed to know whether they had, or if (as he says) "our labor might be in vain."

All the effort, the love of his Lord and of the people he ministered to, the knowledge he had imparted – all of it – was possibly washed away by the tide of the tempter's flood. If there was a chance of this, he needed to have his associates go back and correct the situation, if possible. Their faith was too precious to be lost, even at the expense of his own loneliness.

Life application: How concerned are we for those who are susceptible to being drawn away from the faith they once professed. The Bible does say that they will not lose their salvation, but it does note that they can lose their joy, and also their rewards as well. Further, those with whom they come in contact will never be evangelized if they have fallen away from their own

faith. There are serious repercussions in allowing someone to be neglected in their young faith.

But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you— 1 Thessalonians 3:6

Paul's words of this verse are as if a spring of cool water has broken forth in the midst of a dry desert which he had been walking upon. There had almost been anxiety over the state of those at Thessalonica, and that troubled state had ended. This is first felt in the words, "But now that Timothy has come to us from you." His words of the previous verses highlight the stress that was felt –

- no longer endure it
- shaken by these afflictions
- suffer tribulation
- no longer endure it (again)
- lest by some means the tempter had tempted you
- our labor might be in vain

Each of these built up a feeling which became determining factors in Paul's sending Timothy to them to ascertain how they fared. Upon the return of Timothy came relief. He had "brought us the good news of your faith and love." In this, "faith" is to be noted as a confidence in God, and in His gospel message concerning Jesus Christ, which gave them the ability to remain strong and fixed on the gospel, despite what had occurred with Paul, and despite his absence from them.

The "love" is certainly speaking of their love of Christ first and foremost. But it must also include their love of one another which was able to strengthen them in pursuit of Christ. And it must finally be referring to a love directed to Paul and his associates as well. This is evidenced by the next words, "and that you always have good remembrance of us."

The report is from Timothy, and so he conveyed to them what he heard and saw. Therefore, "a good remembrance" goes deeper than just, "We sure miss Paul and the rest of you guys." Although this is certainly the case, it must be inclusive of holding to the doctrine which Paul instructed them concerning Christ. Those precepts which had been given were being adhered to as if they were the instructions of God, because this is what they are. In being observant to what was communicated to them, they were demonstrating a good remembrance of them.

Finally Paul notes that those in Thessalonica were “greatly desiring to see us, as we also *to see you.*” There was no animosity in them because Paul and his associates had left and gone on with mission work elsewhere. They remembered the persecution, and they knew that his departure was not a shunning of them, but a reasonable choice to make. They were led to Christ through their ministry, and they had a strong bond of attachment to them, just as Paul and his associates did toward the church there in Thessalonica.

Life application: It can be very tough on a pastor to have those he ministers to suddenly turn on him over some minor point of disagreement. He spends his time counseling, preparing sermons, putting up with many issues of grief which arise, etc. And yet, when such a time of disagreement arises, congregants will often get up in a huff and go off to another church. If the pastor cares about his flock, he cares about losing them as well. He will carry the memory of those he served all his life, hopefully with good memories, not sad ones.