

## Message #7

## I Thessalonians 3:1-7

On Tuesday morning, at 7:15 A.M., I received an amazing phone call from Andre Chifoco from Angola, which is located in the southwest corner of Africa. Andre called to say that he intends one day to come to the United States and come to Texas Corners Bible Church because the internet ministry has changed his life. I asked him how he found our web site. He said a friend of his had sent him the entire Isaiah series. He said from there he went to our web site and started listening to the doctrines and the book studies. It was thrilling to listen to him talk. Think about that, this church in Kalamazoo, Michigan, has been used by God to influence a man in Africa. You who support this ministry share in all of that. There is nothing as eternally thrilling than to know that our grasp of God's Word and God's grace has made a difference in the life of someone else. That is the way it was for Paul.

In the mind of Paul, there was no church quite like the Thessalonian church. They had come to faith in Jesus Christ and they loved the Word of God. These were thinking people, which is why Paul was able to "reason" with them and "explain" things and present "evidences" in his instructive "proclamation" (Acts 17:2-4). The Thessalonian church loved God's Word.

There is no question that when a church is focused on carefully understanding the Word of God, Satan will attack. He will come at that church in a variety of ways and from a variety of angles. He definitely tried to attack this Thessalonian church.

In the two letters to the Thessalonians, Paul presented at least three ways Satan attacks:

- 1) Satan attacks by hindering Paul (I Thess. 2:18).
- 2) Satan attacks by tempting the people (**I Thess. 3:5**).
- 3) Satan attacks by deceiving the world (II Thess. 2:10).

It is quite apparent as chapter two ends that Paul wanted the Thessalonians to know that he had wanted to come back to Thessalonica, but Satan had hindered him (2:18). He loved these people and he loved this church. This church loved the Word of God and he longed to get back to this church, but Satan had prevented him from doing that. Satan had cut into Paul's plans.

Now one of the ways that Satan actually hindered Paul was by raising up a group of hostile religious Jews to chase Paul out of Thessalonica and follow him down to Berea and chase him out of there. Satan tried to make life miserable for Paul, tracking him everywhere he went.

The Thessalonians had literally seen this and actually had to help Paul and Silas escape during the night (Acts 17:10). Paul was very concerned that this satanic attack could affect the spiritual progress of the Thessalonians.

This apparently caused Paul to sense that this kind of attack could have a negative impact on the Thessalonians. It could cause them to move away from their focus. Paul was so concerned about this that you will notice in **3:5** that he felt he needed to send Timothy there to see what was happening to their faith. He realized that Satan, who he calls "the tempter" here, was at work.

Now the word “tempter” (πειραζω) is one that may be used in a good way by God and in a bad way by Satan. When it is used by God, it refers to God permitting certain things to come to the life of a believer in order to test and prove their faithfulness. When it is used in the context of satanic things it refers to temptation or afflictions that are designed to ensnare or trap the believer (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 351).

Now here is the beauty of this word. **What Satan tempts the believer to do may be used by God to prove the faithfulness of the believer.** The very thing Satan is doing ends up displaying the glory of God when the believer does not fall for the trap or temptation.

**WHEN A CHURCH IS FOCUSED ON THE WORD OF GOD AND GRACE OF GOD, SATAN WILL ATTACK AND TRY TO MOVE PEOPLE AWAY FROM THAT FOCUS; BUT WHEN BELIEVERS STAY FAITHFUL TO TRUE DOCTRINE IT WILL LEAD TO GREAT REJOICING AND BLESSING.**

Paul was very concerned that Satan was demolishing this church. In this portion of Scripture he expresses how concerned he actually was. There are six communication points:

**COMMUNICATION POINT #1** – Paul was so concerned for the Thessalonians that he felt he needed to know what was happening by the time he reached Athens. **3:1**

Now to understand this, we must go back to Acts 17 and follow Paul’s travel route. Paul and Silas had to leave Thessalonica at night because people wanted to kill him (Acts 17:10). They went down to Berea and people were responding, but those hateful Jews of Thessalonica tracked them to Berea and started stirring up people against them (Acts 17:13). Paul was smuggled out of Berea alone and transported to Athens (17:15). Silas and Timothy stayed behind in Berea and were to join Paul when they completed their work (Acts 17:14-15). They apparently did and then Paul sent them back north again. Paul was alone.

Now we must assume at this point that Paul senses that since he is coming under serious attack out of Thessalonica, the Thessalonians could also be under attack. In fact, **verse 1** says he could no longer “endure” the suspense. So he decided to send someone back to check up on them. This was no short distance because the distance from Thessalonica to Athens is about 200 miles.

Paul is being threatened just about everywhere he goes, but he was so concerned with the Thessalonians that he was willing to go alone so he could send someone back to check up on them.

We do learn something interesting here. God does lay a burden on someone’s heart, an overwhelming sense at times that says, “I need to find out what is going on.” Satan is at work, seeking whom he may devour and sometimes God will lay an overwhelming burden on someone that you need to find out what is happening. He may lay that burden on a parent. He may lay that burden on a leader. He may lay that burden on a minister.

Not long ago, I saw an interview with a detective who was looking through cold case files and one of them jumped out at him. He said there were things that just didn't seem right and he needed to investigate to find out what the facts were. That sense led to him solving the crime.

That was Paul's burden, he had a sense something is wrong and he needed to find out what was going on in Thessalonica.

**COMMUNICATION POINT #2** – Paul was so concerned for the Thessalonians that he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica. **3:2-3**

It would appear from Acts 18:5 that Paul had sent both Silas and Timothy to check on churches. Silas apparently went back to Berea and Philippi to check on things there and Timothy went to Thessalonica. Now Timothy would not be as noticeable as Paul or Silas. Timothy was half-Gentile and half-Jew and would be somewhat inconspicuous. He could slip into Thessalonica and find out what was happening.

Now he identifies Timothy as his “brother” and “fellow-worker” in the Gospel of Christ. There is an article “the” before the noun brother, which means Paul viewed Timothy as a very special brother. Second, he identifies Timothy as a “fellow worker of the God.” **Timothy was well grounded in the grace Gospel of Jesus Christ.** He knew the doctrines pertaining to grace and this is why Paul sent Timothy to Thessalonica. Timothy was no shallow religious guy, he was a man well-grounded in truth and he was a good fit for this church.

The reason why he sent Timothy to Thessalonica was:

**Purpose #1** - To strengthen their faith. **3:2a**

The word “faith” literally in Greek is “the faith” (της πιστεως). Paul is speaking about the grace faith system as opposed to the works system of all the other religions. Remember in Thessalonica was a large contingency of Jews who were dedicated to O.T. Law and their religious rituals and traditions of men. Timothy was so cemented in his faith that he could defend the grace Gospel and Paul sent him there.

Now the word “strengthen” (στηριζω) is one that means to set something firmly in place or to make something steadfast (*Ibid.*, p. 418). Timothy was not returning to Thessalonica to show slides on all the places they had been. He was going back there to teach the truth to strengthen and firmly ground them in their faith.

Now, don't miss this. One way Satan will attack a church is to try to get its focus off of the grace of God and on religious works. Satan will try to move people away from grace to law; from freedom to legalism; from liberty to rules.

**Purpose #2** - To encourage their faith. **3:2b**

The word “encourage” means to come alongside of the people and call them and challenge them to stay focused on the grace/faith system.

**Verse 3** explains that Paul did not want these Thessalonians disturbed by the commotion that had taken place concerning him so he sent Timothy back. What was that affliction? The affliction was religious Jews who were dedicated to the O.T. Law and the traditions of men not only opposed Paul’s teaching, they tried to kill him. Paul did not want that to faze these Thessalonians. He did not want them disturbed in their faith.

Now the word “disturb” (σαίνω) is very interesting and very rare. It is only used here. It is a word that means to beguile someone through flattery (*Ibid.*, p. 400).

What I would understand this to mean is that the enemies of Paul were in Thessalonica flattering them. They were pointing out the fact that negative things had hit Paul and flattering the people trying to get them to turn away from the grace/faith system in order to get them to accept the religious works system of legalistic Judaism. They were smooth, persuasive, encouraging and flattering and it was all an attempt to move people away from God and His Word.

So Paul sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to strengthen and encourage their faith.

**COMMUNICATION POINT #3** – Paul was so concerned for the Thessalonians that he re-explains his suffering . **3:3-4**

It is obvious that one of the things the Judaizers were saying is that the negatives that hit Paul were indicators that he really wasn’t blessed by God. They were telling the Thessalonians that if he were really right with God, he would not suffer so many “afflictions.” That word “affliction” (θίλβω, θίλιψις) is one that refers to great distress and oppressive pressure (*Ibid.*, p. 207). Everywhere Paul went, he was boxed in under some pressure.

Paul never presented the idea that believing in Jesus Christ would put you on easy street. Paul never suggested that defending the grace of God would be well received in this world. In fact, Paul had told the Thessalonians that persecution and pressure is a normal part of being right with God.

We may remember that when Paul first came to faith in Christ, Jesus specifically told him that he was going to suffer for His name’s sake (Acts 9:16). Paul said in his last letter to Timothy that he suffered as a criminal because of the Word of God (II Tim. 2:9). He also taught that those who desire to live godly “in Christ” will be persecuted (II Tim. 3:12).

Sometimes it is good to remind people that faith in Jesus Christ will not always be well received in the world of religion. These Thessalonians already knew that Paul was destined to suffer.

Paul reminded the Thessalonians that when he had been there with them he told them that and kept telling them that he was going to suffer for preaching Jesus Christ and the pure grace of God.

**COMMUNICATION POINT #4** – Paul was so concerned for the Thessalonians that he could not endure the thought of what was happening to their faith. **3:5**

Paul never wanted these Thessalonians to go back into some religious works system. This is a critical matter of theology. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Satan will tempt believers to move away from “the faith” system to any form of works system. Paul wanted these Thessalonians to realize that he labored to teach them and keep them in the grace faith system and he was concerned that their labor had been in vain.

The word “labor” (κοπος) speaks of specific grace labor that beats you down, that is troublesome and fatiguing (*Ibid.*, p. 254). Defending God’s grace is not easy. It is mentally, spiritually, emotionally and even physically draining and fatiguing. You present grace and you will get beat up by a world of religious laws and works. Paul was concerned that all of the hardship he endured would end up being in vain, or empty or fruitless (*Ibid.*, p. 244).

Paul says if you go back under some works system then our whole grace teaching is pointless. It did not mean the people would not be still saved, but it meant that his whole investment of carefully teaching them the doctrines wouldn’t mean anything.

Paul felt that without his presence and teaching in Thessalonica, the religious Judaizers could be used by Satan to pull them back into some form of religious works system. If that happened, their labor in all of the teaching and instruction would have been in vain.

**COMMUNICATION POINT #5** – Paul was so concerned for the Thessalonians that he wanted them to know that Timothy’s report brought comfort to them. **3:6-7**

There are four reports that Timothy brought to Paul about the Thessalonian church:

**Report #1** - Timothy brought them good news. **3:6a**

It is interesting that the word “good news” (εὐαγγελίζω) is the word used for the good news of the Gospel (*Ibid.*, p. 184). Timothy brought good news about the church and not bad news. The good news was that they were cemented in the grace Gospel.

**Report #2** - Timothy brought them good news of their faith. **3:6b**

Again it is “the faith,” not just faith. The good news was not that the Thessalonians had some religious faith; it was that they had a specific faith. These Thessalonians stuck to the grace faith system and would not budge.

**Report #3** - Timothy brought them good news of their love. **3:6c**

This is “the love,” the kind of love that loves God and His Word and seeks to relate to people applying the Word to every situation of life. That is what this love is. It seeks to love at the highest level, which is in accordance with the true Word of God.

**Report #4** - Timothy brought them good news of their longing. **3:6d**

It was very comforting for Paul to learn that the Thessalonians always thought favorably about Paul.

**COMMUNICATION POINT #6** – Paul wanted the Thessalonians to know that the steadfastness of their faith brought him comfort in all their distress and affliction. **3:7**

Here is the thing—Paul had to put up with a lot of hostility, but when people were coming to faith in Jesus Christ and then developing in faith and not budging from the grace faith system that he was teaching, it made it all worthwhile.

Do you see what comforted Paul in his darkest hours? He knew that his teaching had made an impacting difference in the lives of people. He knew they latched on to grace doctrine and would not budge.