

The background image shows ancient ruins, likely the Temple of Apollo in Side, Turkey. In the foreground, there are stone walls and a path. To the right, a well-preserved section of the temple with four Corinthian columns and a pediment stands prominently. In the background, the ruins are situated on a hill overlooking a blue bay, with mountains visible in the distance under a clear sky.

Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians

CHAPTER THREE

OUTLINE OF THE LETTER

- **Chapter One**

- Greeting (1:1)
- Paul's Gratitude (1:2-4)
- Their Conversion (1:5-10)

- **Chapter Two**

- Paul's Ministry (2:1-12)
- The Thessalonians' Faith (2:13-16)
- Paul's Desire to See Them (2:17-20)

- **Chapter Three**

- Paul's Concern (3:1-5)
- Timothy's Good News (3:6-8)
- Paul's Prayer (3:9-13)

- **Chapter Four**

- Paul's Plea for Purity (4:1-8)
- A Loving & Laboring Life (4:9-12)
- Christ is Coming (4:13-5:11)

- **Chapter Five**

- Christ is Coming (4:13-5:11)
- Various Exhortations (5:12-22)
- Closing Remarks (5:23-28)

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER THREE

Paul's Concern for the Thessalonians (3:1-5)

¹ Therefore, when we could no longer endure it, we thought it good to be left in Athens alone, ² and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith,

- Paul did not let Satan's hindrances stop him from accomplishing good.
- When he "could no longer endure" not knowing their status, Paul "thought it good" to stay in Athens and send Timothy to see the Thessalonians (**1 Thess. 3:5**).
 - Paul judged that the Thessalonians' need for Timothy was greater than his own need for Timothy's companionship (**Phil. 2:3-4, 25-30; Phile. 9-13**).
 - Sending Timothy meant Paul would be "left in Athens alone," surrounded by idolatry and more opposition (**Acts 17:15-34**).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER THREE

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- Timothy is described in three ways:
 - “Our brother” (**Col. 1:1; Phile. 1**).
 - “Minister of God” (**2 Tim. 4:5**).
 - “Fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ” (**Rom. 16:21**).
- Timothy was sent to “establish” and “encourage” the Thessalonians concerning their faith (**Col. 2:6-7**).
 - The work does not end when someone obeys the gospel. This is true both for the teacher and the student (**Acts 14:21-23; Eph. 4:11-16; etc.**).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER THREE

Paul's Concern for the Thessalonians (3:1-5)

³ that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this.

- Timothy was specifically sent so “no one should be shaken by these afflictions.”
 - Paul's greatest concern was not their suffering, but what that suffering might do to their faith.
 - “Shaken” – to move, disturb, or agitate (BDAG) [**contrast with 1 Thess. 3:2**].
- “We are appointed to this” necessarily implies that suffering should be expected in following Christ (**1 Thess. 3:4; Phil. 1:29; 2 Tim. 3:12; John 15:18-20**).

“Afflictions of God's children ... are the necessary consequence of being his children”
(Lipscomb, p.38).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER THREE

Paul's Concern for the Thessalonians (3:1-5)

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

- Paul told them “before” that they “would suffer tribulation; indeed, “it happened.”
 - He did not conceal the cost of following Christ (**John 16:1-4, 33**).

“He did not withhold from them the inevitable consequences of their accepting the gospel” (Lipscomb, p.38).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER THREE

Paul's Concern for the Thessalonians (3:1-5)

⁵ 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.

- The Thessalonians' faith is the central concern of this chapter (1 Thess. 3:2, 5-7, 10).
- Satan is called "the tempter" because temptation is the core of his work (Matt. 4:3; 1 Cor. 7:5; Jms. 1:13-15.).
 - Satan used suffering to tempt the Thessalonians to abandon their faith (Luke 8:13; 1 Pet. 5:8-9).

"Persecution comes by a determined effort from Satan to win back servants he has lost" (Harkrider, p.80).
- Paul stated that it was possible that his "labor might be in vain" if Satan succeeded.
 - Paul's concern demonstrates that the possibility of apostasy is very real (Gal. 4:11; Phil. 2:16; Heb. 3:12-14; etc.).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER THREE

Timothy's Good News (3:6-8)

⁶ 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—

- Timothy brought Paul et al. “good news.”
 - The Greek word translated “good news” is normally used to describe preaching the gospel (**Luke 4:18; Acts 8:4, 12, 35; 14:7; Rom. 1:15; 1 Cor. 15:1**).
- The report contained three encouraging facts:
 - Their faith remained steadfast despite persecution (**1 Thess. 3:7-8**).
 - Their faith was accompanied by love (**1 Thess. 1:3; Phile. 5; Eph. 1:15; Col. 1:4**).

“Faith in God and love to him and to man are the very life of the Christian”
(Lipscomb, p.40).
 - They remained affectionate toward Paul et al.

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER THREE

Timothy's Good News (3:6-8)

⁷ therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith.

- Timothy was sent to encourage the Thessalonians in their faith (**1 Thess. 3:2**). Now, the report of their faith encouraged Paul.
 - “Comforted” – to instill someone with courage or cheer; comfort, encourage, cheer up (BDAG) [**the same word is used in 1 Thess. 3:2**].
- Paul received this encouragement while experiencing “distress and affliction,” likely the opposition he faced in Corinth (**Acts 18:5-10; 1 Cor. 2:3**).
 - Their continued faithfulness made Paul’s own burdens easier to bear (**2 Cor. 7:5-7, 13; 3 John 3**).
 - Faithful Christians can strengthen others simply by remaining faithful during their own trials (**Phil. 1:12-14**).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER THREE

Timothy's Good News (3:6-8)

⁸ For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.

Your strong faith in the Lord is like a breath of new life. (CEV)

It gives us new life to know that you are standing firm in the Lord. (NLT)

- Timothy's report not only comforted Paul; it renewed his strength: "Now we live."
"We might say that the report had given them 'a new lease on life,' or 'a shot in the arm' ... A revived purpose and meaning had been brought to the lives of both Paul and Silas by the report. They had been energized in spite of their own troubles" (Weaver, p.211).
- Paul's strength would stay renewed so long as the Thessalonians continued to "stand fast in the Lord" (**Phil. 4:1**).
 - The conditional "if" acknowledges their present faithfulness while reminding them that they needed to continue standing firm (**Col. 1:21-23; Heb. 3:12-14**).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER THREE

Paul's Prayer for the Thessalonians (3:9-13)

⁹ For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, ¹⁰ night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?

- Paul's question shows he could not adequately express his gratitude to God for the joy produced by their faithfulness.
 - "Render" – to give back as an equivalent; to requite, recompense (Thayer).
 - Paul felt incapable of offering thanksgiving equal to the joy God had given him through their faithfulness.

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- Paul rejoiced “before our God.” His gratitude prompted prayer “night and day” (**Rom. 1:9-10; 2 Tim. 1:3**).
- Paul's prayers contained two recurring requests:
 - “That we may see your face.”
 - “Perfect what is lacking in your faith” (**2 Pet. 3:17-18**).

“Paul was enthusiastic about their progress, but he knew they were still young in the faith ... The Thessalonians needed to grow and mature”
(Mark Mayberry, p.22).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER THREE

Paul's Prayer for the Thessalonians (3:9-13)

¹¹ Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you.

- Paul prayed that God would open a way for his return (**Rom. 1:9-10, 15:30-32**).
- When Satan blocked Paul's path (**1 Thess. 2:18**), Paul appealed to the One who could clear it.

"Their own attempts had failed, but they had confidence that God was able and that He would be willing to open up a door of opportunity for them to return" (Weaver, p.219).

- Paul submitted his plans to God's will rather than his own (**Acts 18:21; 1 Cor. 4:19, 16:7; Jas. 4:13-15**).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER THREE

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- Paul prayed that God would open a way for his return (**Rom. 1:9-10, 15:30-32**).
- This prayer was answered when Paul returned to Macedonia approximately five years later (**Acts 20:1-3**).

“We have no record that he specifically returned to ‘Thessalonica’ at a later time. It is likely, however, on his third missionary journey that as he went through ‘Macedonia,’ he would have spent some time in this provincial capital city, Acts 19:21-22; 20-13; 1 Cor. 16:5; 2 Cor. 2:13; 7:5” (Harkrider, p.81).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER THREE

Paul's Prayer for the Thessalonians (3:9-13)

¹² And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you,

- The Thessalonians were already loving (**1 Thess. 1:3, 3:6**), but they still needed to “increase and abound” in it (**Phil. 1:9-11; 2 Thess. 1:3**).

“The words mean to increase and to overflow, so together they mean to increase to overflowing fulness” (Weaver, p.223).

- Their love was to extend both “to one another” and “to all.”
 - “One another” refers to fellow Christians (**1 Thess. 4:9-10; Rom. 12:10; etc.**).
 - “All” includes unbelievers (**Matt. 5:44-48; Luke 6:32-35**).
- Paul could point to his own love for them as an example: “just as we do toward you.”

“He wished ... they might feel the same love to each other which he felt for them all” (Clarke, 547).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER THREE

Paul's Prayer for the Thessalonians (3:9-13)

¹³ so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

- Increasing / abounding love and hearts established by the Lord will lead us to becoming “blameless in holiness:”
 - Hearts affected by the Lord will produce obedience (**Psalm 51:10; Eph. 3:17; 2 Thess. 3:5; etc.**).
 - “Blameless” does not mean sinless. It describes one against whom no valid accusation can be levied (**Phil. 2:15; 1 Thess. 5:23**).
 - “Holiness” describes moral purity (**2 Cor. 7:1; 1 Pet. 1:15-16**).
 - Love does not excuse sin; biblical love produces conduct that pleases God (**John 14:15; 1 John 5:2-3**).
 - Increasing love helps unify believers in pursuing holiness (**Col. 3:12-14**).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER THREE

Paul's Prayer for the Thessalonians (3:9-13)

13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

- Christians must develop holy character now so we may stand approved “before our God and Father” when Christ returns (**2 Pet. 3:11-14**).
- There is debate as to what “with all His saints” means. The Greek word means “holy ones” (BDAG; Mounce; etc.). The phrase either refers to:
 - Holy angels accompanying Christ during His return (**Matt. 25:31; Mark 8:38; 2 Thess. 1:7**).

“It is difficult to see how He could mean all His saints since ‘all’ His saints will not come with Him. Will all Christians have died by then? According to Paul’s argument in 4:15-17 some will yet be alive on earth at His coming ... Our personal judgment is that by hagios ... Paul means angels” (Weaver, p.227-228)

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 - Redeemed Christians the world over and of every generation (**1 Thess. 4:14**).

“Saints is often explained as angels; but the meaning is the holy and glorified people of God ... Hoi hagioi is uniformly used of these in N.T. and never of angels unless joined with angeloi” (Vincent's Word Studies).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER THREE

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 - Holy angels accompanying Christ during His return (**Matt. 25:31; Mark 8:38; 2 Thess. 1:7**).
 - Redeemed Christians the world over and of every generation (**1 Thess. 4:14**).
 - Both angels and redeemed Christians (**1 Thess. 4:15-17**).

“The word includes his ‘angels,’ who will come with him ... and all the redeemed, who will then surround him” (Albert Barnes, p.37).

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 - Holy angels accompanying Christ during His return (**Matt. 25:31; Mark 8:38; 2 Thess. 1:7**).
 - Redeemed Christians the world over and of every generation (**1 Thess. 4:14**).
 - Both angels and redeemed Christians (**1 Thess. 4:15-17**).
 - Each view has merit and is biblically true. However, it is my belief that Paul specifically has all Christians in mind.