

Paul had not been able to spend as much time in Thessalonica as he would have liked since he had been forced to leave the city (Acts 17:10). As a result, he had not been able to teach them all of the things of God that he wanted before his departure. In this chapter, Paul describes his concern for them and how that he had sent Timothy to encourage them and check on their welfare.

In the end of chapter 2, Paul was expressing his desire to see the Thessalonians again and to know of their welfare despite being hindered from doing so by Satan. In this chapter he states that even though he wasn't able to go personally, he sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the believers and to encourage them.

1 Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; 2 And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith: 3 That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.

“Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone” – Paul is speaking of the time when he arrived in Athens (Acts 17:14-34). Acts 17:14-15 tells us that the Berean believers escorted Paul to Athens while Silas and Timothy remained behind. Before leaving Berea for Athens, Paul may have instructed Timothy to return to Thessalonica to check on the spiritual welfare of the believers there. Paul was willing to remain in Athens alone as he waited to hear Timothy's report of the Thessalonians.

“And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister [servant] of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ” – Timotheus (Timothy) was Paul's frequent companion in the work of the gospel. Paul describes him as not only being saved (a brother), but also as a servant of God that the Thessalonians knew had worked with Paul in spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ.

“to establish [strengthen; make stable] you, and to comfort [encourage] you concerning your faith” – It had not been too long since Paul had been forced to prematurely leave Thessalonica and so he must have been concerned for their spiritual welfare since it was possible that they might have drifted away from sincere faith in Christ. Thus he sent Timothy to strengthen them in the faith and to encourage them to remain faithful to Christ in the face of persecutions.

“That no man should be moved [to be troubled] by these afflictions [oppression; distress]” – Paul wanted Timothy to reassure the Thessalonians so that they would not become discouraged because of the persecutions they were suffering.

“for yourselves know that we are appointed [destined] thereunto” – They were not suffering because they were doing something wrong. They were suffering persecution because they were on the “front lines” of the conflict between the gospel of Christ and the world which hates the things of God. Jesus had warned the disciples that they would become the targets of the world's hatred for Him because of their association with Him (**John 15:18** “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you”).

4 For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.

Paul reminds the Thessalonians that when he and his companions were there with them, they had warned them of the fact that “we” (all Christians) would encounter “tribulation” (Greek: trouble; distress) because of the gospel. This warning had come true, as the Thessalonians well knew since they also had begun to suffer persecution for Christ's sake.

5 For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.

“For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith” – When Paul's concern for the Thessalonians reached a point where he could no longer wait, he sent Timothy to strengthen (vs. 2-3) them and bring back a report on their spiritual welfare.

“lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain” – Paul's concern was that the word of God that he and his companions had preached had not taken root in the hearts of the Thessalonians and that “the tempter” (Satan) had drawn them away from the truth. Paul wasn't concerned that they had lost their salvation but that their faith was not yet genuine. He had been forced to leave prematurely and he was afraid that the time he had spent in Thessalonica had been for nothing. Jesus taught on this type of situation in His parable of the sower (Mark 4:3-8). In his explanation of the parable (Mark 4:14-20) He spoke of Satan stealing the word from the hearts of some people (Mark 4:15), as well as other reasons that the word of God might not produce fruit.

6 But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you:

“But now when Timotheus came from you unto us” – Timothy returned from Thessalonica with a good report, which had three major points.

“and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity [agape - love]” – The faith of the Thessalonians had not wavered in Paul's absence and their love was evidence that their faith was genuine.

“and that ye have good remembrance of us always” – They also had pleasant memories of Paul and his companions. The fact that they had favorable memories/opinions of Paul and his companions implied that they had not rejected the gospel that they preached.

“desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you” – The Thessalonians had a great desire to see those who had brought them the gospel (Paul, Silas and Timothy), which was another evidence that their faith was genuine. Paul acknowledges that he and his companions also had a great desire to see the Thessalonians again.

7 Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith: 8 For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.

“Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith” – In spite of all the persecutions and distresses they were encountering, Paul and his companions found comfort in hearing that the faith of the Thessalonians was still firmly grounded in Christ.

“For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord” – The persecutions they were enduring had the potential to discourage Paul and his companions if it seemed that they were suffering in vain. However, hearing that the faith of the Thessalonians has remained steadfast in the Lord had encouraged them and breathed new life into their ministry. Paul’s expression “now we live” indicates that they were encouraged to know that the salvation of the Thessalonians was genuine and that their faith was growing. These facts made the suffering that Paul and his companions were facing worthwhile.

9 For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God; 10 Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?

“For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God” – Paul rhetorically asks how they could adequately show gratitude to God for the joy they received from the good report that Timothy brought back from Thessalonica.

“Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect [complete] that which is lacking in your faith” – As a result of the joy they received, they were praying night and day that God would allow them to revisit the Thessalonians so that they could finish teaching what they had been previously unable to teach them because they had been forced to leave the city prematurely.

11 Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. 12 And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:

“Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you” – Paul’s prayer was that God would guide them back to Thessalonica so that they can be reunited with the believers there.

“And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you” – Paul also prays that the Lord would cause their love for one another (and even for unbelievers) to grow and flourish in the same way that Paul and his teams’ love for the Thessalonians has grown.

13 To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

The end result that Paul is praying for is that the Lord would stablish [strengthen; make firm] the hearts of the Thessalonians in their faith so that when Christ returns they will be able to stand before God in holiness [moral purity] and without blame or defect.