




  
*Sunday School Lesson*  
**1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13**  
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**Concern for Friends**



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This third study on 1 Thessalonians picks up his warm feelings toward Thessalonica that Paul had stressed in 2:1-12, after the somewhat different emphasis in 2:13-16. This time, however, the time line is not on recounting the initial ministry, but on the subsequent period after he had been forced to hastily leave Thessalonica. In this section, we see more of the pastoral concern of the apostle for the people he had won to faith in Christ.

**I. Context**

Much of the background material from the previous study in 2:1-16 also applies to this study, and thus will be summarized here. For the details, you should check [this earlier study](#) at Cranfordville.com.

**a. Historical**

Regarding the **external history** of 1 Thessalonians, a summation of the previous study highlights the following. Paul spent several weeks establishing the Christian community in the Greek city of Thessalonica in the Roman province of Macedonia most likely sometime during AD 49 - 50. This ministry during the second missionary journey is described briefly in [Acts 17:1-9](#). The apostle was assisted by his associates Silas and Timothy; there may have been more individuals as a part of the traveling group of missionaries but these are the names we cannot be certain of. The so-called "we-section" of Acts, which begins in [16:11](#), has traditionally been understood as suggesting that Luke joined the group at Philippi. When Paul left the city of Philippi for Thessalonica he left behind a Christian community largely comprised of women as its core leaders and meeting in the home of a prominent business woman named Lydia; and he left behind a ministry that had been characterized by chaotic turbulence with the Roman authorities including a period of time in jail ([Acts 16:11-40](#)).

The time spent in Thessalonica wasn't less chaotic, but the source of the opposition was different.

Because no Jewish synagogue existed in Philippi, he wasn't opposed by his fellow Jews. But in Thessalonica the leadership of the synagogue quickly became adamant in their opposition to these Christian missionaries, Paul in particular. This was evidently provoked by the conversion of numerous prominent Gentiles, including some women, who had been worshiping at the synagogue as God-fearers. They used "gunboat style" politically motivated distortion against Paul and the newly emerging Christian community in their charges against the missionaries before the Roman authorities. A Jason who had provided a home for the missionaries during their stay there, as well as a meeting place for the believing community, caught the brunt of the opposition when Paul and Silas couldn't be found for arrest.

Paul, Silas and Timothy were forced to hurriedly leave the town and were escorted by other believers several miles to the southwest to Berea. This place proved more receptive and a believing community quickly emerged with many prominent men and women being converted ([Acts 17:10-15](#)). But the opposition Jewish leadership in Thessalonica showed up to create a furor against Paul. This forced the

apostle to hastily leave in order to save his life. Believers escorted Paul to Athens for his safety.

In this ancient Greek city Paul preached the gospel but without the success at Thessalonica (#15 on map) and Berea (#16 on map) ([Acts 17:16-34](#)). Paul spent time in part waiting for Timothy and Silas to arrive in Athens, since they had stayed behind at Berea when Paul had left there. How long Paul stayed in Athens (#17 on map) is not clear. Luke's time marker to signal the apostle's move from Athens to Corinth (#18 on map) is the simple "after this" (μετὰ ταῦτα) in [Acts 18:1](#). Most likely Paul spent several



months in the city before moving on to Corinth. But in Corinth he spent the next year and a half establishing the believing community there ([Acts 18:1-17](#)). The early phase of this ministry focused on preaching the gospel in the Jewish synagogue. But with the usual opposition by the synagogue leadership, Paul shifted his focus to the Gentiles and "set up shop" next door to the synagogue in the home of a God-fearer named Titius Justus who had converted to Christianity.

During this eighteen month ministry Jewish opposition led to charges being brought before the Roman authorities, in particular the proconsul Gallio (Jan. 25, 51 to Jan. 25, 52). Gallio not only dismissed the charges but had the synagogue spokesman Sosthenes publicly flogged for wasting his time with irrelevant legal charges. It's not clear from Luke's account at what point this incident happened during Paul's long stay in Corinth. The importance of the incident is that it allows for a precise dating link to our time calculation and thus provides a window into approximation dating of the events before and after.

This overview builds off Luke's summary of the events. The challenge comes when trying to plug some of the historical references in our passage into this chronological structure. The "Timothy Section," [3:1-10](#), in our study will pose the heart of the challenge. We will treat this in the internal history below.

The **internal history** of [2:17-3:13](#) will mostly fo-

cus on the movements of Timothy between Thessalonica and where Paul is, either in Athens or in Corinth. In [Acts](#), Timothy and Silas are linked together. In [Acts 17:14](#), they remain behind in Berea as Paul leaves for Athens. In [Acts 17:16](#), Paul waits for them in Athens. But they rejoin the apostle while he is in Corinth ([Acts 18:5](#)). This is Luke's sketching out of the movements of these two associates of Paul. But in [1 Thess. 3:1-2](#), Paul says that Timothy was sent from Athens to Thessalonica to check on things in the church at Thessalonica. Then sometime later, Timothy returned to where Paul was with good news about the condition of

the Thessalonian church ([3:6](#)). The text doesn't indicate whether Paul was in Athens or in Corinth when Timothy rejoined Paul. Also, Silas is not mentioned by Paul in all of this, leaving us in the dark concerning his whereabouts.

A couple of reactions to this challenge will typically be found in commentaries etc.

First, many contemporary Pauline scholars simply fall back on a basic guideline of modern scientific studies of history that distinguishes between primary and secondary sources. In this case, the primary source would be Paul's account since his is describing his own activities. [Acts](#) would be viewed as a secondary source since it is coming from a "third party" source. Where tension exists between the two sources, the primary source takes precedence over the secondary source. Thus Luke's depiction in [Acts](#) would be discounted as inaccurate, and thus discarded as being of little or no use.

But, in the second place, many are not willing to see this primary/secondary guideline as so applicable here, along with the possibility of harmonizing the two differing accounts into a plausible scenario. In this approach, the presumption would emerge that after Paul arrived at Athens, Timothy joined him there briefly. Paul's deep concern to learn how the Thessalonians were doing prompted Timothy to be sent back to Thessalonica. Sometime after that, he returned back to Paul who now is in Corinth. The vari-



able in this perspective is Silas. Whether Silas stayed in Thessalonica / Bereoa while Timothy traveled to Athens, or he went with Timothy to Athens and then went back to Macedonia with him is unclear. The alternative is that Silas remained in Macedonia until both he and Timothy went south to Achaia after Paul had moved on from Athens to Corinth. The latter is more appealing to me personally, and would help explain the progress that the churches in Thessalonica and Bereoa were making during this time. All of this traveling back and forth took place over a period of several months, perhaps upwards of a year. Logistically, during such a period of time, these two trips by Timothy between Macedonia and Achaia would have been easy to make by ship during the first century.

Extending the time line beyond 1 Thessalonians becomes more subjective. This particularly at the point of how the first letter was sent to Thessalonica, how news of the developing issues in the church got back to Paul in Corinth, and then who carried the second letter back to Thessalonica. If Timothy and/or Silas were involved -- as one might suspect -- then more traveling between Achaia and Macedonia took place with a minimum of two more trips during a period of time not extending beyond two years at the most, and most likely less than two years.

One advantage of this second view is that it supports the strongly held view of Luke as a good historian. It recognizes the very summary nature of Luke's presentation of the history of early Christianity, and rejects the modern insistence on a "six o'clock news" kind of reporting of events. The vulnerability of this approach is the necessity of developing a hypothetical scenario of the sequence of events. Yet, the first view requires a much less grounded scenario in trying to construct a broader picture of Paul's ministry during this period without input from Acts.

This second approach will be the foundation of our exegesis of this passage. Note the above chart on the assumed sequence of events.

#### **b. Literary**

The **literary genre** of 2:17-3:13. In the broad picture, the passage falls into the Body section of Paul's letter. This section of ancient letters was the

most fluid section in terms of varieties of literary forms that could be used to communicate the desired message to the designated readers. Paul exhibits great creativity in the [wide range of materials](#) that can be found in the Body section of the letters in the Pauline corpus of the New Testament.

One of the detectable literary forms that doesn't surface all that much is what in modern terms would be labeled autobiographical material. Percentage wise it comprises a rather small amount of the material in the Body sections. But most of our passage

falls in that sub-genre category: 2:13-3:10. This is consistent with most of the first major section of the [Body of 1 Thessalonians: 2:1-3:13](#). Autobiographical material leads up to

the climatic point of the prayer-wish in 3:11-13. Then the body section turns into paraenesis (moral and spiritual admonition) from 4:1 through the end at 5:22. Unlike much of the ancient Greco-Roman autobiographical material which tended to be self-glorifying in its content, Paul spends very little effort lifting himself up. Rather he concentrates on reflecting back on either the initial ministry at Thessalonica (2:1-16) and/or the subsequent events related to the church (2:17-3:10) while he was at Athens and then at Corinth. The human focus in this material is upon Paul's pride in how the Thessalonian believers both received the gospel initially and how they have been steadfast in their commitment to Christ subsequently. The life-changing power of the gospel is the other point of emphasis. Thus we sense the humility of the apostle throughout this material.

Some commentators will talk about the genre of 2:17-3:10 as an "apostolic *παρουσία*" literary form. To me this seems rather contrived and artificial in order to create an exotic label for a much simpler term, autobiographical. The entire letter, along with all Paul's letters, were intended to be a substitute presence of the apostle with his readers. Circumstances prevented his traveling to his readers, and thus the letter was the next-best thing. "Apostolic Presence" as a sub-form for smaller sections inside the letter has tones of an old hen settling down over the nest in order to hatch the eggs, but in this case a "settling down" intended to control, if not smother, the freedom of the readers to follow the leadership of the Holy Spirit in their spiritual walk.

#### **Sequence of Events in 50-52 AD**

1. **Paul goes from Bereoa to Athens.**
2. **Timothy goes to Athens, while Silas remains in Macedonia (Bereoa / Thessalonica)**
3. **Timothy returns to Macedonia from Athens**
4. **Timothy and Silas join Paul in Corinth**



The definition of genre -- in my opinion -- requires more precise, consistently repetitive patterns than is found here along with supposed parallels in Rom. 15:14-33; 1 Cor. 4:14-21; Phil. 2:19-24; Philm. 21f. Epistolary form critical approaches have made substantial contributions to the study of New Testament letters, but they at times fall prey to “finding a form under every rock.”

The other sub-genre that stands out with great clarity is the prayer-wish in [3:11-13](#). This prayer has tones of formal liturgical prayer like one finds in the Old Testament and other ancient Jewish literature. G.L. Greene (*Pillar New Testament Commentary*) provides a helpful analysis of the literary form of this kind of prayer:

Paul concludes the first section of the body of the letter (2.1–3.10) with a prayer (3.11–13) instead of a doxology (cf. Rom. 11.33–36; Eph. 3.20–21; Heb. 13.20–21; 1 Pet. 4.11). Jewett has suggested that this type of ending has its roots in “homiletic settings.” Normally, a preacher would conclude his homily with a prayer, and this custom was transferred to the letters.<sup>228</sup> Similarly, Wiles comments that this kind of prayer came out of a liturgical context, but he traces its origin both to the worship in Israel as presented in the OT and the practice in the synagogue.<sup>229</sup> He notes that the prayer in 3.11–13, like that in 5.23–24, carried out a number of functions. First, it summarized the central message of the letter (in this case, the return to Thessalonica and the spiritual progress of the congregation in light of the prospect of the coming of the Lord Jesus). Second, the prayer had a parenetic purpose: it is an implicit exhortation to continue in love and to remain firm. Third, the prayer was didactic in that it served as a model for the church’s own prayers. This, however, does not appear to be one of the primary purposes of the prayer in 3.11–13. Fourth, Wiles points to the liturgical purpose. After hearing the letter read in the meeting of the congregation (5.27), the church would participate in the Lord’s Supper. But again, the lack of evidence makes us wonder if this purpose is a true reflection of what happened or was expected. More to the point is Wiles’ fifth suggestion, that the prayer is what it appears to be—a prayer (cf. 5.23; 2 Thess. 3.5, 16; Rom. 15.5–6, 13)! Now Paul and his coworkers offer their prayers to God for their journey back and for the Thessalonians, while allowing the church to listen in.

One distinctive of this prayer form is the use of a Greek verb form which doesn’t exist in the English language: the optative mood verb form. In this long, single sentence in verses 11-13 three such verbs

are used to express the twofold petition to God which can be somewhat accurately expressed in English as: “may He guide our path to you...” and “may He cause you to increase and abound...” The first point that Greene makes (above quote) has particular importance and it should be noted that the AB/B’A’ chiasmic sequence is followed at an informal level of thought structure: A=Thessalonians spiritual condition; B=Paul’s longing to return; / B’=prayer to be able to return; A’ = prayer for continued spiritual growth of Thessalonians.

The **literary setting** of 2:17-3:13. In addition to the allusions to setting above (brings the autobiographical section to a climax and transitions into the paraenetical section of 4:1-5:22) the prayer helps to bracket the paraenetical material somewhat like a parenthesis with the help of the similar prayer form in 5:23-24, which transitions into the Conclusio section of the letter. Thus both prayers, 3:11-13 and 5:23-24, serve a climatic purpose as well as a transitional function in the letter.

The other literary setting issue, somewhat of a minor nature, has to do with the role of 2:13-16. As note in the previous study on [2:1-16](#), some modern commentators have problems with a perceived “anti-Semitic” tone in 2:13-16 and thus want to see this as a later interpolation, i.e., addition, to the letter in the second or third century in order to make Paul justify the growing hostility toward Jewish people in general by the beginning of the second century. The likelihood of this is extremely remote and reflects more than anything else a modern post-Holocaust Jewish-Christian Dialogue mindset seeking to reduce Christianity down to a common denominator with Judaism. Thus Paul must be stripped of any semblance of hostility to Jewish people in general. The other option is to see the initial statement “we give thanksgiving...” (v. 13) as an extension of the Proem thanksgiving in 1:2, thus making the Proem of the letter end at 2:16 rather than 1:10. This is highly unlikely as well, given the very positive tone of Paul toward the Thessalonians throughout the letter, along with a fairly typical Pauline discourse marker in 2:1 signaling a shift of topic: *αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἶδατε, ἀδελφοί* (“now you yourselves know...”).

The lesson title of the Smyth-Helwys Formations quarterly for this study, “Since Then,” following the title “Then” for the 2:1-16 study, accurately captures the literary setting as well as the historical focus of our passage.

## II. Message

The internal **literary structure** of 2:17-3:13. The exact organization of the smaller units of thought inside the passage can be understood in a variety of ways as the Summary of the [Semantic Diagram](#) explains. After wrestling with this for a considerable amount of time, I have concluded that the simplest and easiest perception is a threefold division 1) beginning with Paul's longing to return to Thessalonica (2:17-20), followed 2) by Timothy's trip in Paul's behalf (3:1-10), and concluded by the prayer-wish (3:11-13) that climaxes the first division of the Body section of the letter. Our discussion will be organized around that division of the passage.

### a. Longing for the Thessalonians, 2:17-20

#### Greek NT

<sup>2.17</sup> Ἡμεῖς δέ, ἀδελφοί, ἀπορφανισθέντες ἀφ' ὑμῶν πρὸς καιρὸν ὥρας, προσώπῳ οὐ καρδίᾳ, περισσοτέρως ἐσπουδάσαμεν τὸ πρόσωπον ὑμῶν ἰδεῖν ἐν πολλῇ ἐπιθυμίᾳ. <sup>2.18</sup> διότι ἠθελήσαμεν ἐλθεῖν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, ἐγὼ μὲν Παῦλος καὶ ἄπαξ καὶ δῖς, καὶ ἐνέκοψεν ἡμᾶς ὁ Σατανᾶς. <sup>2.19</sup> τίς γὰρ ἡμῶν ἐλπὶς ἢ χαρὰ ἢ στέφανος καυχήσεως - ἢ οὐχὶ καὶ ὑμεῖς - ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ παρουσίᾳ; <sup>2.20</sup> ὑμεῖς γάρ ἐστε ἡ δόξα ἡμῶν καὶ ἡ χαρά.

#### Notes:

Paul begins by asserting his longing to visit the Thessalonians. I say "his", but he casts it in the first person plural "we." What does "we" mean? The letter is sent in 1:1 by Paul, Timothy, and Silas. But the chronological setting of 2:17-20 comes from the time when Paul was in Athens. From our Internal History section earlier, Silas was most likely still in Thessalonica / Berea while Timothy had made his way to Athens where Paul and Luke were. So the "we" in this instance includes at least Paul, Timothy and Luke -- and perhaps some additional unnamed missionaries who may have been a part of the traveling group, although such is not certain.

In an insertion Paul speaks of "have been taken away from you for a short while" (ἀπορφανισθέντες ἀφ' ὑμῶν πρὸς καιρὸν ὥρας). The separation of the apostle from the Thessalonians is characterized in the word picture used by the NRSV: "we were made orphans." It pictures children being torn away from

#### NASB

2.17 But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while -- in person, not in spirit-- were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. 18 For we wanted to come to you -- I, Paul, more than once-- and yet Satan hindered us. 19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy.

#### NRSV

2.17 As for us, brothers and sisters, when, for a short time, we were made orphans by being separated from you — in person, not in heart — we longed with great eagerness to see you face to face. 18 For we wanted to come to you — certainly I, Paul, wanted to again and again — but Satan blocked our way. 19 For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? 20 Yes, you are our glory and joy!

#### NLT

2.17 Dear brothers and sisters, after we were separated from you for a little while (though our hearts never left you), we tried very hard to come back because of our intense longing to see you again. 18 We wanted very much to come, and I, Paul, tried again and again, but Satan prevented us. 19 After all, what gives us hope and joy, and what is our proud reward and crown? It is you! Yes, you will bring us much joy as we stand together before our Lord Jesus when he comes back again. 20 For you are our pride and joy.

parents in violent action. The picture graphically portrays the forced exit from Thessalonica by the missionary group by the Jewish synagogue leadership that Luke describes in [Acts 17:1-10](#) with the departure described in verse 10: "That very night the believers sent Paul and Silas off to Berea." These missionaries didn't arbitrarily decide to leave the newly found congregation. The time marker used here in English translation suggests that this separation was assumed to be going to last only "a short time" when they left Thessalonica. Very quickly the missionaries began making efforts to return to the congregation. The nature of these efforts had the tone of caring for the believers there, probably intensified by the hostile climate in which the church was having to function. Thus, Paul's separation from them was

a physical one, but not a spiritual one, since they were “in his heart.” Verses 18-20 contain a series of statements affirming this repeated effort to return to Thessalonica.

It was based upon (1) upon the missionaries deep desire to come to the Thessalonians (v. 18a); (2) more precisely Paul had himself made several efforts to return to Thessalonica but was prevented from doing so by Satan (v. 18b); (3) these efforts grew out of Paul’s view of them as his hope, joy and crown of boasting (v. 19) and secondly out of them being his glory and joy (v. 20).

**Christian missions is nurturing new converts, as much as making them in the first place. A “scalp hunting” approach to missions is condemned by the example of these early missionaries here.**

Paul’s repeated efforts to return to Thessalonica having been blocked by Satan is an allusion to the opposition to the synagogue leadership there, which not only forced the missionaries to leave the city, but also forced a hurried escape by Paul from Berea when this leadership came to Berea and created problems there (cf. [Acts 17:1-15](#)). This is characterized with military language, as G.L. Greene (*Pillar New Testament Commentary*) notes:

So great was their effort that only Satanic opposition could explain why they did not return! *Stopped* is a term that comes from the military. In order to stop the advance of enemy armies, soldiers would tear up and destroy the road to hinder their passage.<sup>155</sup> Warfare imagery is embedded in the metaphor, Satan himself being their adversary. The battle was over the souls of the Thessalonian believers whom Satan tempted to commit the sin of apostasy (3.5 and comments; 1 Pet. 5.8). One of his tactics was to bar the way so the apostles could not return to the church. In spite of the opposition, they did manage to send Timothy back (3.1), and the church itself continued on in faith and love (3.5, 6). Sometime later Paul was able to return to Macedonia and Thessalonica (Acts 19.21–22; 20.1–6; 1 Cor. 16.5; 2 Cor. 1.16; 2.13; 7.5; 1 Tim. 1.3). God responded to their fervent prayers (1 Thess. 3.10–11). In this spiritual warfare, Satan is hardly an omnipotent adversary. But he is a real adversary.

The high esteem for the Thessalonian believers is then expressed in verses 19-20. P. Ellingworth and Eugene Nida (*Translator’s Handbook*) provides a helpful explanation from the view of a Bible translator:

Verse 19 consists of a rhetorical question within a rhetorical question, literally: “For who is our hope and joy and crown of boasting (is it not also you?) before our Lord Jesus at his coming?” Paul is dictating, and his feelings are running high. Underneath the questions, he is giving the reason for his desire to see the Thessalonian Christians again. *Our hope*, as the parallel with *our joy* shows, means “a reason for hope” or “a source of hope,” not “an object of hope” or “something for which we hope.” The “crown” Paul mentions is not a sign of kingship, but of victory, as in an athletic competition. In removing the metaphor, *TEV* makes this clear by using the words *of our victory* (cf. *FrCL* and *GeCL*). The word translated *reason for boasting* means the basis for being justly proud (cf. Romans 4.2; *TEV* “something to boast about”; *TNT* “evidence of proud achievement”), as distinct from the act of speaking boastfully (cf. Romans 3.27).

In rendering *our hope* and *our joy*, it is important to indicate clearly the implied causative relation. The Thessalonians were the ones who caused Paul and his colleagues to hope and to have joy. In some languages an equivalent translation may be “you are the ones who caused us to have hope, and you are the ones who caused us to be joyful.” Similarly, *our reason for boasting* is a causative relation, for example, “you are the ones who have caused us to boast.” But “boast” must be carefully translated, since it can easily imply a wrong kind of verbal self-praise. An appropriate equivalent in some languages may be “you were the ones who caused us to speak so confidently about our victory.”

The translation of *our victory* is often difficult, since any term which seems to suggest victory implies fighting and war. This is obviously not what Paul means. It may be even more difficult to suggest victory in some kind of competition or game, since this might introduce unacceptable connotations such as of gambling. It may be necessary to shift this figure of speech to the concept of success, for example, “you are the ones who caused us to speak so confidently about our success,” or “...about what we have accomplished.”

The second rhetorical question, like the first, became an emphatic statement in the third edition of *TEV*: *you, no less than others!* This was a great improvement on the earlier editions, which had “you, and no one else!” - a statement which was not only emphatic, but also apparently exclusive. Paul’s “also,” omitted by most modern as well as traditional translations, is given its full value in *GeCL*’s “you certainly belong to those who are our hope and our joy.” The church at Thessalonica was not the only one of which Paul was proud.

In rendering *no less than others*, one might be



tempted to introduce a negative comparison, for example, “you do not surpass others in this,” but that would produce the wrong emphasis. The focus here is upon the Thessalonians’ being fully equal to all others in causing Paul’s hope and joy. Therefore an equivalent may be an emphatic statement such as “you are completely equal to others in this,” or “no one surpasses you in this.” This statement may very well be placed at the end of verse 19 so as to refer to all the various aspects of what the Thessalonians contributed to Paul’s hope, joy, and confidence. Such an arrangement would also provide a good transition to verse 20.

How are these verses connected to us today? Several links come to mind. For one thing, we see the compassionate heart of Paul and his fellow missionaries for a newly formed community of believers. If left alone, they would have remained in Thessalonica much longer in order to get the congregation more stable and grounded in their Christian faith. This was their deep desire. At a primary level this stands as a model for modern missionaries. They must care deeply for the converts established in their preaching tours into new regions where Christianity is not present. From our perspective we would naturally assume this to be true. Yet over the past four decades of interacting with numerous missionaries in different parts of the world, I have heard stories of some missionaries who are more interested in reporting high numbers of “conversions” than in nurturing a new group of Christians. Sometimes when church groups go out to these mission fields for short term projects this same attitude surfaces as well. The example in our text stands as a condemnation of such approaches.

Additionally, this challenges every pastor and staff person to be a caring, nourishing oriented spiritual leaders. Making converts is certainly a part of both missionary work and pastoral work, but it stands as the beginning of a lengthy process, not as the sum total.

Another possible link can be seen in the “separation” of the missionaries from the congregation. It was forced and came so quickly that it left the congregation vulnerable to the hostile forces opposing the Christian faith. Paul’s concern was that he had left these believers without adequate help to resist this hostility. In fact, he had personally made several efforts to return even in the face of this hostility which

would have then been focused on him and would have endangered his life had he have returned. What we see here is a spiritual leader putting the needs of his congregation above his personal needs. We are all challenged by this example both as spiritual leaders and as believers as we reach out to fellow Christians in ministry.

Third, in the more theological oriented last two verses, we see an important perspective on the long term impact of leading people to Christ and nourishing them in their faith. They become a joy and crown,

as well as a hope. This comes to fruition at the second coming of Christ. This should not be taken as Paul seeing the Thessalonians as “scalps” that would bring him

greater standing before Christ in final judgment. To see these verses in such a manner is not only incorrect but insulting. Rather, Paul had the mindset that a teacher has when she sees a student grow up and do well in life, knowing that she contributed in some small way to that kid’s success in life. Or, the mindset of a high school athletic coach who sees one of his kids eventually become a star professional player. No arrogance is here by the teacher or the coach. Rather, just a humble sense of deep satisfaction out of the realization that you may have made a difference in fulfilling your calling from God. That was certainly the anticipation of Paul, Silas, Timothy and Luke regarding these Thessalonians. They confidently expected to be in the stadium on God’s “super bowl” day at the second coming of Christ.

Finally, something can be learned about how God overrides circumstances to accomplish His will. Timothy and Silas were left behind at Berea and eventually made their way back to Thessalonica. As well will see, Timothy was able later to return there from Athens to help these believers. Sometime later on the third missionary journey Paul would be able to return to the church. In spite of being able to spend a very short period of time with these new believers, God kept the church going and growing. The positive tone of the entire letter is a witness to how wonderfully God over rode the limitations of the missionaries’ ability to help the congregation at the beginning. Through this we are reminded again that our God can do things that seem humanly impossible, or at best, improbable.

**Paul, Silas, Timothy, and Luke wanted deeply to be able to nourish the Thessalonian believers in their newly found faith in Christ.**

## b. Timothy's trip to Thessalonica, 3:1-10

### Greek NT

<sup>3.1</sup> Διὸ μηκέτι στέγοντες εὐδοκήσαμεν καταλειφθῆναι ἐν Ἀθήναις μόνοι <sup>3.2</sup> καὶ ἐπέμψαμεν Τιμόθεον, τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἡμῶν καὶ συνεργὸν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἰς τὸ στηρίξαι ὑμᾶς καιπαρακαλέσαι ὑπὲρ τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν <sup>3.3</sup> τὸ μηδένα σαίνεισθαι ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσιν ταύταις. αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἶδατε ὅτι εἰς τοῦτο κείμεθα <sup>3.4</sup> καὶ γὰρ ὅτε πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἦμεν, προελέγομεν ὑμῖν ὅτι μέλλομεν θλίβεσθαι, καθὼς καὶ ἐγένετο καὶ οἶδατε. <sup>3.5</sup> διὰ τοῦτο κάγω μηκέτι στέγων ἔπεμψα εἰς τὸ γνῶναι τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν, μή πως ἐπέειρασεν ὑμᾶς ὁ πειράζων καὶ εἰς κενὸν γένηται ὁ κόπος ἡμῶν.

<sup>3.6</sup> Ἄρτι δὲ ἐλθόντος Τιμοθέου πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἀφ' ὑμῶν καὶ εὐαγγελισσαμένου ἡμῖν τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν ἀγάπην ὑμῶν καὶ ὅτι ἔχετε μνησίαν ἡμῶν ἀγαθὴν πάντοτε, ἐπιποθοῦντες ἡμᾶς ἰδεῖν καθάπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς ὑμᾶς, <sup>3.7</sup> διὰ τοῦτο παρεκλήθημεν, ἀδελφοί, ἐφ' ὑμῖν ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ ἀνάγκῃ καὶ θλίψει ἡμῶν διὰ τῆς ὑμῶν πίστεως, <sup>3.8</sup> ὅτι νῦν ζῶμεν ἐὰν ὑμεῖς στήκετε ἐν κυρίῳ. <sup>3.9</sup> τίνα γὰρ εὐχαριστίαν δυνάμεθα τῷ θεῷ ἀνταποδοῦναι περὶ ὑμῶν ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ χαρᾷ ἣ χαίρομεν δι' ὑμᾶς ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν, <sup>3.10</sup> νυκτὸς

### NASB

3.1 Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, 2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, 3 so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. 4 For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know. 5 For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain.

6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, 7 for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; 8 for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord. 9 For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account,

### NRSV

3.1 Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we decided to be left alone in Athens; 2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and co-worker for God in proclaiming the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you for the sake of your faith, 3 so that no one would be shaken by these persecutions. Indeed, you yourselves know that this is what we are destined for. 4 In fact, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer persecution; so it turned out, as you know. 5 For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith; I was afraid that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labor had been in vain.

6 But Timothy has just now come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love. He has told us also that you always remember us kindly and long to see us — just as we long to see you. 7 For this reason, brothers and sisters, during all our distress and persecution we have been encouraged about you through your faith. 8 For we now live, if you continue to stand firm in the Lord. 9 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because

### NLT

3.1 Finally, when we could stand it no longer, we decided that I should stay alone in Athens, 2 and we sent Timothy to visit you. He is our co-worker for God and our brother in proclaiming the Good News of Christ. We sent him to strengthen you, to encourage you in your faith, 3 and to keep you from becoming disturbed by the troubles you were going through. But, of course, you know that such troubles are going to happen to us Christians. 4 Even while we were with you, we warned you that troubles would soon come — and they did, as you well know. 5 That is why, when I could bear it no longer, I sent Timothy to find out whether your faith was still strong. I was afraid that the Tempter had gotten the best of you and that all our work had been useless.

6 Now Timothy has just returned, bringing the good news that your faith and love are as strong as ever. He reports that you remember our visit with joy and that you want to see us just as much as we want to see you. 7 So we have been greatly comforted, dear brothers and sisters, in all of our own crushing troubles and suffering, because you



καὶ ἡμέρας  
ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ  
δεόμενοι εἰς τὸ ἰδεῖν ὑμῶν  
τὸ πρόσωπον καὶ  
καταρτίσαι τὰ  
ὑστερήματα τῆς πίστεως  
ὑμῶν;

10 as we night and day  
keep praying most ear-  
nestly that we may see  
your face, and may com-  
plete what is lacking in  
your faith?

of you? 10 Night and day  
we pray most earnestly  
that we may see you  
face to face and restore  
whatever is lacking in  
your faith.

have remained strong in  
your faith. 8 It gives us  
new life, knowing you re-  
main strong in the Lord.  
9 How we thank God for  
you! Because of you we  
have great joy in the  
presence of God. 10  
Night and day we pray  
earnestly for you, asking  
God to let us see you  
again to fill up anything  
that may still be missing  
in your faith.

#### Notes:

In this section Timothy becomes the central character, and the pericope revolves around him being sent to Thessalonica from Athens (vv. 1-5) and his return from there to Paul in Corinth (vv. 6-10). The chronological issues here have already been discussed in the [Internal History](#) section. We will assume the correctness of our conclusions there as the historical foundation for our exegesis of these verses.

The first leg, the sending of Timothy, in verses 1-5 is built around the first two verses -- Paul's decision and Timothy's recommendation. Verses 3-5 form a series of three justifying statements supporting the decision to send Timothy. See both the [Block Diagram](#) and the [Semantic Diagram](#) in the larger internet version of this study for details in the Greek text. Verse five somewhat comes full circle to repeat the heart of verse one: "when we could bear it no longer...we sent Timothy" (μηκέτι στέγοντες ...ἐπέμψαμεν Τιμόθεον); "when I could bear it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith" (κἀγὼ μηκέτι στέγων ἔπεμψα εἰς τὸ γνῶναι τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν).

Paul begins with a "therefore" (διὸ) linking 3:1-10 back to 2:17-20 with the sending of Timothy as a logical outcome of his inability to return to Thessalonica himself. Paul came to the conclusion -- probably together with Luke and Timothy -- that someone needed to return to Thessalonica. Many commentators assume the "we" includes Silas, but Acts argues against this. See [Internal History](#) for details. This came after a period of struggle (μηκέτι στέγοντες) in which the group was wrestling with what the appropriate action should be. The conclusion was reached to send [Timothy](#) back to Thessalonica. That meant leaving the missionary group "short handed" (καταλειφθῆναι; lit. "deficient") in Athens. Timothy is identified as a "brother and fellow worker in the Gospel of Christ" thus affirming his high credentials to represent the apostolic gospel in his help for the believers. His mission was "to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith" (εἰς τὸ στηρίξαι ὑμᾶς και παρακαλέσαι ὑπὲρ τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν). This was to have the intended impact: "so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions" (τὸ μηδένα σαίνεσθαι ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσιν ταύταις). The reference to 'afflictions,' i.e., persecution, can refer to either Paul's while in Thessalonica, or more likely a general designation including both the missionaries and the Thessalonian believers. Persecution for one's religious commitment should not have been unexpected as Paul declares in verses 3-4, since they were inevitable and Paul had already warned the Thessalonians to expect them. An additional purpose for Timothy's mission is stated in verse 5: "to find out about your faith." This was prompted by Paul's anxiety over "fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain." Satan is seen in two roles in these verses: 1) the one who blocks the path of God's servants (2:18c); and the tempter who can wreck the commitment of believers (3:5).

How long Timothy was in Thessalonica is impossible to determine with certainty. Combining the relatively short stay of Paul in Athens and the eighteen month stay in Corinth could mean that his trip covered a period of several months.

With Paul's anxiety to learn what was going on in Thessalonica, one would assume that Timothy didn't stay there an extended period of time.

Verses 6-10 describe Timothy's return to Paul. This is probably to be associated with the [Acts 18:5](#) reference "When Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia..." If correct, then Timothy and Silas meet Paul in Corinth. Otherwise, Timothy rushes back to meet Paul in Athens, but this is unlikely.

The lengthy single sentence covering verses 6-8 is built off the core expression in v. 7a: "we have been encouraged" (παρεκλήθημεν). Everything else points to this central affirmation. The time marker is Timothy's arrival from Thessalonica. This was accomplished by his (literally) "gospelizing" (εὐαγγελισαμένου) the faith and love of the Thessalonians to Paul, along with their remem-

branch of Paul's love for them. Additionally, Timothy brought good news of the Thessalonians' longing to see Paul, just as he did them. This report of Timothy (stated in a lengthy Genitive Absolute Greek construction) became the foundation (διὰ τοῦτο) for the encouragement given to those missionaries in Corinth.

The encouragement was based on the Thessalonians (ἐφ' ὑμῖν; instrumental of cause). It came during Paul's struggles and afflictions (ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ ἀνάγκῃ καὶ θλίψει ἡμῶν; locative of time). The channel of encouragement was the Thessalonians' faith (διὰ τῆς ὑμῶν πίστεως). The encouragement also was grounded in renewed life for the apostle assuming the steadfastness of the Thessalonians (ὅτι νῦν ζῶμεν ἐὰν ὑμεῖς στήκετε ἐν κυρίῳ). All of this together clearly demonstrates how significant these folks at Thessalonica had become to Paul and the others. Timothy's good report brought elation to the nth degree for the missionaries in Corinth. After Paul's disappointing experience in Athens, this was even greater good news.

Verses 9 and 10 also comprise a single, lengthy sentence built around a core rhetorical question: "How can we thank God enough for you?" (τίνα γὰρ εὐχαριστίαν δυνάμεθα τῷ θεῷ ἀνταποδοῦναι περὶ ὑμῶν). This was in regard to the great joy that brought rejoicing before God because of the Thessalonians. This overwhelming sense of thanksgiving led to constant, earnest petitioning of God to grant "that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith" (εἰς τὸ ἰδεῖν ὑμῶν τὸ πρόσωπον καὶ καταρτίσαι τὰ ὑστερήματα τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν).

The second objective should not be taken to imply that the faith of the Thessalonians was deficient in some manner. This view would run in conflict with several positive affirmations about the maturity of their faith: 1:3, 8; 3:6. Rather, Paul's statement simply implies that any area that needs deep-

ening he feels that he can help them do that. One side note: the faith of the Thessalonians is not to be understood as a commitment to a particular religious belief system. Rather, faith is personal commitment to Christ. Through that commitment gradually comes understanding of what it means, but at its core is always the personal entrustment of one's life to Christ in a vital, intimate relationship with the resurrected Lord.

The connection of these verses to us? Sometimes God needs to work through others rather than us in order to accomplish His work. Timothy fulfilled a mission that Paul was not able to do at that moment. Paul could have become frustrated with a cry to God, Why won't You let me go to Thessalonica? Rather, there developed a common understanding that Timothy was the one who needed to fulfill this particular mission. Paul affirmed Timothy in this with the highest credentials to the Thessalonians. He realized that the ministry to the church was a common enterprise shared by the missionary team of himself, Timothy, Silas and Luke. This challenges us today to forego the tendency to be "the star player." God needs a team, rather than a star.

Timothy's courage in making this trip into hostile territory should not be overlooked. There were risks and dangers for him to return to a place where so much opposition to the gospel had developed.

The good news that Timothy brought back created so much excitement and joy. Do we get that excited when good things happen at a sister church in our town? I hope so.

Excitement should lead to thanksgiving to God. Ultimately God is the source of everything good that happened at Thessalonica. Paul recognized this and expressed it. So should we.

### c. Prayer of Petition, 3:11-13

#### Greek NT

<sup>3.11</sup> Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ ἡμῶν καὶ ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς κατευθῦναι τὴν ὁδὸν ἡμῶν πρὸς ὑμᾶς· <sup>3.12</sup> ὑμᾶς δὲ ὁ κύριος πλεονάσαι καὶ περισσεύσαι τῇ ἀγάπῃ εἰς ἀλλήλους καὶ εἰς πάντα καθάπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς, <sup>3.13</sup> εἰς τὸ στηρίξαι ὑμῶν τὰς

#### NASB

11 Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; 12 and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; 13 so that He may establish your hearts without

#### NRSV

11 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. 12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. 13 And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness

#### NLT

11 May God himself, our Father, and our Lord Jesus make it possible for us to come to you very soon. 12 And may the Lord make your love grow and overflow to each other and to everyone else, just as our love overflows toward you. 13 As a result, Christ will

καρδίας ἀμέμπτους ἐν  
ἀγιωσύνη ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ  
θεοῦ καὶ πατρός ἡμῶν ἐν  
τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου  
ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ μετὰ πάντων  
τῶν ἁγίων αὐτοῦ, ἀμήν.

blame in holiness before  
our God and Father at the  
coming of our Lord Jesus  
with all His saints.

that you may be blame-  
less before our God and  
Father at the coming of  
our Lord Jesus with all his  
saints.

make your hearts strong,  
blameless, and holy  
when you stand before  
God our Father on that  
day when our Lord Jesus  
comes with all those who  
belong to him.

#### Notes:

The distinctive literary form of these verses has already been discussed under **Literary Genre** on page four of this study. This discussion will form the basis of our exegesis of these three verses.

In addition to the literary setting role of this prayer, C.A. Wanamaker (*New International Greek Testament Commentary*) calls attention to an addition in-sight this prayer provides:

But quite apart from the functional role it plays in the letter, the wish-prayer in vv. 11–13 offers us a further window into Paul’s personal prayer life, in which intercessory prayer played a vital role (see also 5:23f.; 2 Thes. 2:1f.; 3:5, 16; Rom. 15:5f., 13, 33; 1 Cor. 1:8f.; Phil. 4:19).

Two essential petitions in this very formalized prayer are present, along with a highly liturgical recognition of God at the beginning of the prayer. See the [Block Diagram](#) for a clear presentation of this in the Greek text.

The prayer builds off the allusion to thanksgiving to God in verses 9-10, and stands as the natural expression of what Paul did in expressing both thanksgiving and petition especially (see *δεόμενοι* in verse 9).

In typical reference to both the Father and Jesus as deity, the prayer is addressed to “our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus” (Αὐτὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ ἡμῶν καὶ ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς). This has both echoes of the Jewish prayer tradition with the formal reference to the Father, and distinctly Christian perspective with the reference to Christ on an equal status. Paul in particular is inclined in the expansion elements in both the [Praescriptio and Proem](#) sections of his letters to use this dual reference.

The first petition is that God may guide the path of the missionaries to Thessalonica. Up to this point only Timothy -- and possibly Silas -- had been allowed to return to Thessalonica. The apostle who longed to return had not be so allowed. But his prayer to God was for permission to go back there. It would be several years before God would grant this request, but eventually Paul did go back to Thessalonica on the third missionary journey.

The second, two-pronged request is that the Lord “cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you.” Brotherly love is a major emphasis in the New Testament. Paul stresses it as well. But such love is not geographical, in the sense of being limited to people close by and well known. It is to reach out to others in distant places as well.

The growth of such love has the objective “so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.” The NRSV is incorrect in rendering this as an additional petition, which it isn’t in the Greek text. Rather it stands as a purpose infinitive phrase. The eschatological goal that was first introduced in the last statement of the Proem in 1:10 once again resurfaces. The prayer requests God’s blessings on the Thessalonians with the long range target of preparing them to face Almighty God in final judgment at the return of Christ at the end of time. Old Testament temple sacrificial language is used to characterize the desired status of believers who will appear before God for judgment: “without blame in holiness.”

The connection? What kind of praying do we do? Do it have this level of depth and passion before God? Is it focused on the spiritual needs of others like this prayer? Can we pray with this level of eloquence? Are we willing to draw upon the prayer heritage of others before us in order to shape our praying?

As most commentators observe, one of the objectives of Paul’s inclusion of this written prayer in the letter is to serve as a model for the readers to learn from. Our challenge is to learn from how Paul prayed and to measure up to his level of praying.



**Greek NT**

<sup>2.17</sup> Ἡμεῖς δέ, ἀδελφοί, ἀπορφανισθέντες ἀφ' ὑμῶν πρὸς καιρὸν ὥρας, προσώπω οὐ καρδία, περισσοτέρως ἐσπουδάσαμεν τὸ πρόσωπον ὑμῶν ἰδεῖν ἐν πολλῇ ἐπιθυμίᾳ. <sup>2.18</sup> διότι ἠθελήσαμεν ἔλθειν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, ἐγὼ μὲν Παῦλος καὶ ἄπαξ καὶ δῖς, καὶ ἐνέκοψεν ἡμᾶς ὁ Σατανᾶς. <sup>2.19</sup> τίς γὰρ ἡμῶν ἐλπὶς ἢ χαρὰ ἢ στέφανος καυχήσεως - ἢ οὐχὶ καὶ ὑμεῖς - ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ παρουσίᾳ; <sup>2.20</sup> ὑμεῖς γὰρ ἐστε ἡ δόξα ἡμῶν καὶ ἡ χαρὰ.

<sup>3.1</sup> Διὸ μηκέτι στέγοντες εὐδοκήσαμεν καταλειφθῆναι ἐν Ἀθήναις μόνοι. <sup>3.2</sup> καὶ ἐπέμψαμεν Τιμόθεον, τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἡμῶν καὶ συνεργὸν τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ, εἰς τὸ στηρίξαι ὑμᾶς καιπαρακαλέσαι ὑπὲρ τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν. <sup>3.3</sup> τὸ μηδένα σαίνεσθαι ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσιν ταύταις. αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἶδατε ὅτι εἰς τοῦτο κείμεθα. <sup>3.4</sup> καὶ γὰρ ὅτε πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἦμεν, προελέγομεν ὑμῖν ὅτι μέλλομεν θλίβεσθαι, καθὼς καὶ ἐγένετο καὶ οἶδατε. <sup>3.5</sup> διὰ τοῦτο κἀγὼ μηκέτι στέγων ἔπεμψα εἰς τὸ γνῶναι τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν, μή πως ἐπέειρασεν ὑμᾶς ὁ πειράζων καὶ εἰς κενὸν γένηται ὁ κόπος ἡμῶν.

<sup>3.6</sup> Ἄρτι δὲ ἐλθόντος Τιμοθέου πρὸς ἡμᾶς ἀφ' ὑμῶν καὶ εὐαγγελισαμένου ἡμῖν τὴν πίστιν καὶ τὴν

**NASB**

2.17 But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short while -- in person, not in spirit-- were all the more eager with great desire to see your face. 18 For we wanted to come to you -- I, Paul, more than once-- and yet Satan hindered us. 19 For who is our hope or joy or crown of exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy.

3.1 Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone, 2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's fellow worker in the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you as to your faith, 3 so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we have been destined for this. 4 For indeed when we were with you, we kept telling you in advance that we were going to suffer affliction; and so it came to pass, as you know. 5 For this reason, when I could endure it no longer, I also sent to find out about your faith, for fear that the tempter might have tempted you, and our labor would be in vain.

6 But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us

**NRSV**

2.17 As for us, brothers and sisters, when, for a short time, we were made orphans by being separated from you — in person, not in heart — we longed with great eagerness to see you face to face. 18 For we wanted to come to you — certainly I, Paul, wanted to again and again — but Satan blocked our way. 19 For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? 20 Yes, you are our glory and joy!

3.1 Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we decided to be left alone in Athens; 2 and we sent Timothy, our brother and co-worker for God in proclaiming the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you for the sake of your faith, 3 so that no one would be shaken by these persecutions. Indeed, you yourselves know that this is what we are destined for. 4 In fact, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer persecution; so it turned out, as you know. 5 For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith; I was afraid that somehow the tempter had tempted you and that our labor had been in vain.

6 But Timothy has

**NLT**

2.17 Dear brothers and sisters, after we were separated from you for a little while (though our hearts never left you), we tried very hard to come back because of our intense longing to see you again. 18 We wanted very much to come, and I, Paul, tried again and again, but Satan prevented us. 19 After all, what gives us hope and joy, and what is our proud reward and crown? It is you! Yes, you will bring us much joy as we stand together before our Lord Jesus when he comes back again. 20 For you are our pride and joy.

3.1 Finally, when we could stand it no longer, we decided that I should stay alone in Athens, 2 and we sent Timothy to visit you. He is our co-worker for God and our brother in proclaiming the Good News of Christ. We sent him to strengthen you, to encourage you in your faith, 3 and to keep you from becoming disturbed by the troubles you were going through. But, of course, you know that such troubles are going to happen to us Christians. 4 Even while we were with you, we warned you that troubles would soon come — and they did, as you well know. 5 That is why, when I could bear it no longer, I sent Timothy to find out whether your faith

ἀγάπην ὑμῶν καὶ ὅτι ἔχετε μνησίαν ἡμῶν ἀγαθὴν πάντοτε, ἐπιποθοῦντες ἡμᾶς ἰδεῖν καθάπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς ὑμᾶς, <sup>3.7</sup>διὰ τοῦτο παρεκλήθημεν, ἀδελφοί, ἐφ' ὑμῖν ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ ἀνάγκῃ καὶ θλίψει ἡμῶν διὰ τῆς ὑμῶν πίστεως, <sup>3.8</sup>ὅτι νῦν ζῶμεν ἐὰν ὑμεῖς στήκετε ἐν κυρίῳ. <sup>3.9</sup>τίνα γὰρ εὐχαριστίαν δυνάμεθα τῷ θεῷ ἀνταποδοῦναι περὶ ὑμῶν ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ χαρᾷ ἣ χαίρομεν δι' ὑμᾶς ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν, <sup>3.10</sup>νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ δεόμενοι εἰς τὸ ἰδεῖν ὑμῶν τὸ πρόσωπον καὶ καταρτίσαι τὰ ὑστερήματα τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν;

<sup>3.11</sup>Αὐτὸς δὲ ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ ἡμῶν καὶ ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς κατευθύνει τὴν ὁδὸν ἡμῶν πρὸς ὑμᾶς. <sup>3.12</sup>ὑμᾶς δὲ ὁ κύριος πλεονάσαι καὶ περισσεύσαι τῇ ἀγάπῃ εἰς ἀλλήλους καὶ εἰς πάντας καθάπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς, <sup>3.13</sup>εἰς τὸ στηρίξαι ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας ἀμέμπτους ἐν ἀγιωσύνῃ ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων αὐτοῦ, ἀμήν.

good news of your faith and love, and that you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you, 7 for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith; 8 for now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord. 9 For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account, 10 as we night and day keep praying most earnestly that we may see your face, and may complete what is lacking in your faith?

11 Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; 12 and may the Lord “ 13 so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

just now come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love. He has told us also that you always remember us kindly and long to see us — just as we long to see you. 7 For this reason, brothers and sisters, during all our distress and persecution we have been encouraged about you through your faith. 8 For we now live, if you continue to stand firm in the Lord. 9 How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? 10 Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

11 Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. 12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. 13 And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

was still strong. I was afraid that the Tempter had gotten the best of you and that all our work had been useless.

6 Now Timothy has just returned, bringing the good news that your faith and love are as strong as ever. He reports that you remember our visit with joy and that you want to see us just as much as we want to see you. 7 So we have been greatly comforted, dear brothers and sisters, in all of our own crushing troubles and suffering, because you have remained strong in your faith. 8 It gives us new life, knowing you remain strong in the Lord. 9 How we thank God for you! Because of you we have great joy in the presence of God. 10 Night and day we pray earnestly for you, asking God to let us see you again to fill up anything that may still be missing in your faith.

11 May God himself, our Father, and our Lord Jesus make it possible for us to come to you very soon. 12 And may the Lord make your love grow and overflow to each other and to everyone else, just as our love overflows toward you. 13 As a result, Christ will make your hearts strong, blameless, and holy when you stand before God our Father on that day when our Lord Jesus comes with all those who belong to him.

## Block Diagram

- 2.17 δὲ  
1 Ἡμεῖς... ἐσπούδάσαμεν  
ἀδελφοί, τὸ πρόσωπον ὑμῶν ἰδεῖν  
ἐν πολλῇ ἐπιθυμίᾳ.  
ἀπορφανισθέντες  
ἀφ' ὑμῶν  
πρὸς καιρὸν ὥρας,  
προσώπῳ  
οὐ καρδίᾳ,  
ἐρισσοτέρως
- 2.18 διότι  
2 ἠθελήσαμεν ἔλθεῖν  
πρὸς ὑμᾶς,  
3 μὲν  
ἐγὼ Παῦλος (ἐσπούδασεν ἔλθεῖν)  
(πρὸς ὑμᾶς)  
καὶ ἅπαξ καὶ δῖς,  
4 καὶ  
ἐνέκοψεν ἡμᾶς ὁ Σατανᾶς.
- 2.19 γὰρ  
5 τίς (ἔσται) ἡμῶν ἐλπίς ἢ χαρὰ ἢ στέφανος καυχήσεως  
- ἢ οὐχὶ καὶ ὑμεῖς -  
ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ  
ἐν τῇ αὐτοῦ παρουσίᾳ;
- 2.20 γὰρ  
6 ὑμεῖς ἐστε ἡ δόξα ἡμῶν καὶ ἡ χαρά.
- 3.1 Διὸ  
7 μηκέτι στέγοντες  
εὐδοκήσαμεν καταλειφθῆναι  
ἐν Ἀθήναις  
μόνοι  
3.2 καὶ  
8 ἐπέμψαμεν Τιμόθεον,  
τὸν ἀδελφὸν ἡμῶν  
καὶ  
συνεργὸν τοῦ θεοῦ  
ἐν τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ τοῦ Χριστοῦ,  
εἰς τὸ στηρίξαι ὑμᾶς  
καὶ  
παρακαλέσαι  
ὑπὲρ τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν  
3.3 τὸ μηδένα σαίγεσθαι  
ἐν ταῖς θλίψεσιν ταύταις.  
9 γὰρ  
αὐτοὶ οἴδατε  
ὅτι εἰς τοῦτο κείμεθα·

Antecedent goes back to 2:11-16 afflictions



3.4 γὰρ  
καὶ  
ὅτε πρὸς ὑμᾶς ἤμεν,

10 προελέγομεν ὑμῖν

ὅτι μέλλομεν θλίβεσθαι,  
καθὼς καὶ ἐγένετο  
καὶ οἴδατε.

3.5 διὰ τοῦτο  
μηκέτι στέγων

11 *κἀγὼ... ἔπεμψα*

εἰς τὸ γνῶναι τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν,  
μὴ πως ἐπείρασεν ὑμᾶς ὁ πειράζων  
καὶ  
εἰς κενὸν γένηται ὁ κόπος ἡμῶν.

3.6 δὲ

Ἄρτι  
ἐλθόντος Τιμοθέου  
πρὸς ἡμᾶς  
ἀφ' ὑμῶν  
καὶ  
εὐαγγελισαμένου ἡμῖν τὴν πίστιν  
καὶ  
τὴν ἀγάπην ὑμῶν  
καὶ  
ὅτι ἔχετε μνησίαν ἡμῶν ἀγαθὴν πάντοτε,  
ἐπιποθοῦντες ἡμᾶς ἰδεῖν  
καθάπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς ὑμᾶς,

3.7 διὰ τοῦτο

12 *παρεκλήθημεν,*

ἀδελφοί,  
ἐφ' ὑμῖν  
ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ ἀνάγκῃ καὶ θλίψει ἡμῶν  
διὰ τῆς ὑμῶν πίστεως,

3.8 ὅτι νῦν ζῶμεν

ἐὰν ὑμεῖς στήκετε  
ἐν κυρίῳ.

3.9 γάρ  
13 *τίνα εὐχαριστίαν δυνάμεθα τῷ θεῷ ἀνταποδοῦναι*  
περὶ ὑμῶν  
ἐπὶ πάσῃ τῇ χαρᾷ  
ἣ χαιρόμεν  
δι' ὑμᾶς  
/-----|  
ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν,  
3.10  
νυκτὸς καὶ ἡμέρας  
ὑπερεκπερισσοῦ  
δεόμενοι  
εἰς τὸ ἰδεῖν ὑμῶν τὸ πρόσωπον  
καὶ  
καταρτίσαι τὰ ὑστερήματα  
τῆς πίστεως ὑμῶν;  
3.11  
δὲ  
14 *Αὐτὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ πατὴρ ἡμῶν*  
καὶ  
*ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς κατευθύναι τὴν ὁδὸν ἡμῶν*  
πρὸς ὑμᾶς·  
3.12  
δὲ  
15 *ὑμᾶς ὁ κύριος πλεονάσαι*  
καὶ  
16 ----- *περισσεύσαι*  
τῇ ἀγάπῃ  
εἰς ἀλλήλους  
καὶ  
εἰς πάντα  
καθάπερ καὶ ἡμεῖς εἰς ὑμᾶς,  
3.13  
εἰς τὸ στηριξαι ὑμῶν τὰς καρδίας  
ἀμέμπτους  
ἐν ἀγιωσύνῃ  
ἔμπροσθεν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ πατρὸς ἡμῶν  
ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ  
μετὰ πάντων τῶν ἁγίων αὐτοῦ,  
ἀμήν.

## Semantic Diagram:

Paul's Desire to Visit

		δὲ - ἀδελφοί 2:17							
I	A-----	1	1	Aor	Act	Ind	1	P	ἡμεῖς
									διότι (causal) 2:18a
		i-----	2	1	Aor	Act	1	P	(ἡμεῖς)
		a--							μὲν 2:18b
			3	1	Aor	Act	1	S	ἐγὼ Παῦλος
		ii-----							καὶ 2:18c
		1--							γὰρ (causal) 2:19
		b-----	4	1	Aor	Act	3	S	Σατανᾶς
		B--							γὰρ (causal) 2:20
		a-----	5	(Fut	---	Ind	3	S)	Τίς
		2--							γὰρ (causal) 2:20
		b-----	6	Pres	---	Ind	2	P	ὑμεῖς
		Διὸ (inferential) 3:1							
		a-----	7	1	Aor	Act	1	P	(ἡμεῖς)
		1--							καὶ 3:2
		b-----	8	1	Aor	Act	1	P	(ἡμεῖς)
		A--							γὰρ (causal) 3:3
		a-----	9	Perf	Act	Ind	2	P	(ὑμεῖς) αὐτοῖ
		2--							γὰρ (causal) 3:4
		i-----	10	Impf	Act	Ind	1	P	(ἡμεῖς)
		b--							κἀγὼ -- διὰ τοῦτο 3:5-6
		ii-----	11	1	Aor	Act	1	S	κἀγὼ
		1-----	12	1	Aor	Pass	1	P	(ἡμεῖς)
		B--							γὰρ (causal) 3:9-10
		2-----	13	Pres	Dep	Ind	1	P	(ἡμεῖς)
		δὲ 3:11							
		A-----	14	1	Aor	Act	3	S	αὐτὸς ὁ θεὸς καὶ ὁ κύριος ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦς
		1-----	15	1	Aor	Act	3	S	ὁ κύριος
		B--							καὶ 3:12-13
		2-----	16	Aor	Act	Opt	3	S	(ὁ κύριος)

Timothy

Timothy sent

Timothy's return

Petitionary Prayer

### Summary of Rhetorical Structure:

Paul begins by stating that he had intensely wanted to return to Thessalonica himself, but circumstances made it impossible for him to make the trip (#1-4). This desire was based on his deep appreciation for the believing community there, expressed in a twofold justifying expression (#5-6).

When he could stand it no longer, he sent Timothy to check on them and to encourage them (#7-8). This was based upon a twofold expression of justification (#9-10), with the second reason expanded by a personal addendum (#11). The next sub-section (#12-13) recounts the encouragement that came to the missionaries in Corinth when Timothy arrived back from Thessalonica with good news about the condition of the church there. Their encouragement (#12) was grounded in their ability to return thanksgiving to God for the Thessalonian believers (#13).

The second section (#14-16) can be understood either as the second part of the previous section (#12-13) on Timothy's arrival in Corinth, or as a climax to the entire section (#1-13). The distinctive literary genre here is that of a formal doxology of praise. Conceptually it emerges out of the thanksgiving emphasis in #13. In some ways it could be understood as providing the content of Paul's thanksgiving (#13). The psychology of the passage moves from concern to seeking information and finding it to climatic praise once the concern is alleviated.

One could justify either a twofold division of the passage with the doxology linked mainly to the good news that Timothy brought back to Corinth (#1-11 & #12-16), a threefold division with the doxology as climatic of the entire passage (#1-6; 7-13; 14-16), or a fourfold division (#1-6; 7-11; 12-13; 14-16) with each section in a running flow with a staircasing assumption.



## Exegetical Outline

- I. (1-6) The missionary group seriously tried to visit the Thessalonian believers.
  - A. (1) They made a honest effort to visit the Thessalonian believers.
  - B. (2-6) Their effort to visit reflected numerous attempts and his esteem for them.
    - 1. (2-4) They were blocked by Satan in their numerous efforts to visit the Thessalonians.
      - a. (2-3) They made numerous efforts to visit them with intense desire.
        - i. (2) They really wanted to come to them
        - ii. (3) Several times Paul personally tried to come to them.
      - b. (4) Satan prevented them from succeeding in his desire.
    - 2. (5-6) Their desire to visit grew out of their high esteem for the Thessalonians
      - a. (5) They considered the Thessalonians as the fruit of their labors at the return of Christ
      - b. (6) The Thessalonians were their praise and glory
- II. (7-13) Timothy became the appointed messenger between Paul and the Thessalonians.
  - A. (7-11) Concern about persecution of the Thessalonian believers led to the sending of Timothy
    - 1. (7-8) Intense concern about the Thessalonians led to the sending of Timothy to them
      - a. (7) The missionaries determined not be abandoned in Athens.
      - b. (8) Thus the trusted servant Timothy was sent to Thessalonica
    - 2. (9-11) The basis of concern centered on how the Thessalonians would handle persecution
      - a. (9) The Thessalonians realized the certainty of persecution.
      - b. (10-11) Concern over the impact of persecution led to the sending of Timothy.
        - i. (10) The missionaries had forewarned them about persecutions
        - ii. (11) Paul sent Timothy to make sure nothing had swayed the Thessalonians.
  - B. (12-13) Thanksgiving to God resulted from Timothy's return from Thessalonica.
    - 1. (12) Timothy's return from Thessalonica brought comforting news about the church.
    - 2. (13) The enabled the giving of thanksgiving to God with joy.
- III. (14-16) An eloquent wish-prayer is made for God's blessings on the Thessalonians.
  - A. (14) Petition is made to God to open the way for the missionaries to come to Thessalonica.
  - B. (15-16) The Lord is petitioned to increase brotherly love among the Thessalonians.
    - 1. (15) The Lord is asked to cause love to increase among the Thessalonians.
    - 2. (16) The Lord is asked to cause love to abound so that spiritual maturity may deepen.