

1 Thessalonians 3:6-13

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- [0 : 00] 1 Thessalonians 3, verses 6 through 13. For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith.
- Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.
- This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated. Thanks, Kevin.
- Our caricature of Paul looks something like this.
- Battle-tested. Road-worthy. A man among men. Never suffering a loss of morale.
- [1 : 44] Able to soldier on. Strong. Without needs. Certainly without a need for self-disclosure.
- Cards close to his vest. Doctrinally driven. And able to deal with dissonance almost as if it is water off a duck's back.
- Which is why chapter 2 verses 17 to 3.13 in this letter is so astounding.
- Perhaps the most fascinating parts in all the Pauline corpus. The level of self-disclosure borders on an embarrassment.
- The effusive display of emotion is beyond what you'd want to hear from your own parents in a public setting at any time.
- [2 : 59] I remember a few months ago when Lisa and I were reading through the letter in the early morning hours.
- And when we finished this section, 2.17 to 3.13, she looked up and said, He sounds as if he's not getting enough sleep. And I thought that was a perfect depiction of Paul.
- A psychologist on strictly human terms would have a field day with Paul in this part of the letter. Has he just gone off his meds?
- Or has he just gone back onto his meds? We don't know, but the emotional swings are enormous and out of place for anything else we read in all of Paul's work.
- And so, we meet Paul today not according to our caricature, but according to the man as he really was.
- [4 : 07] Battle scarred. Soldiering on. With low morale. And according to 3.6-10, in need of comfort.
- Amazing. Paul. The founder of the Christian church as we know it and as it has become.
- And you might say, for good reason. For good reason, he has wrung himself out.
- Think back for a moment to the two or three months that precede the words that he has written for us here. Think back to that second missionary journey and his movement into Philippi and his imprisonment.

Think back to the way that he was reviled and run out of town in Thessalonica under the cover of darkness in fear of his own life.

[5 : 24] Think back to his arrival in Berea who, although they were more noble than the ones in Thessalonica, nevertheless, chasing at his heels were those who were on him.

And he ran again and boarded a boat and off to Athens and there alone. And on into Corinth where in 1 Corinthians we actually read that his presence among them was in the midst of much trembling and fear.

He's been on the run. He's wrung out. Perhaps we should then just strictly think of these verses as the language of a man who needs a few days away.

I mean, look at the effusive prose. Take a look. In your Bibles, 1 Thessalonians 2, 17-3, 13. It is astounding.

2, 17. He is writing according to what he calls great desire to see you face to face. Now this is a people he only knew for a couple of months.

[6 : 45] And the term great desire which we saw last week meant, in a sense, in almost every other context in the Bible, the phrase of lust. So it's almost this uncontrollable, insatiable appetite to be with you.

By the way, I've known you for six to eight weeks. It seems disproportionate. Think back to what he says later, just following 2, 17.

For what is our hope or joy or crown? Is it not you? Here's a man who, when he arrives at the gates of heaven, has these individuals in his mind whom he has known for such a short time.

Look at chapter 3, verse 1. When we could bear it no longer. I can't bear it anymore. Not knowing how you're doing.

The only other thing you could possibly liken this kind of effusive prose to is someone in springtime in the season of puppy love where they're in love for the first time and they haven't seen their beloved for all of 36 hours or minutes.

[8 : 02] When we could bear it no longer. He repeats it again in chapter 3, verse 6. When we could bear it no longer. As we long to see you.

Chapter 3, verse 9. You cannot believe the thanksgiving I have to God with all the joy that we feel for your sake. Chapter 3, and then in verse 10.

He moves on with this desire most earnestly to see you face to face. This is one of the most enlightening depictions of Paul.

What accounts for it? Well, last week we saw that he had this implanted purpose to describe for them the depth of the affection that he had for them.

2.17-20 And the depth of his affection for them was validated in 3.1-5 by the reasons for which he sent Timothy to them.

[9 : 20] You want to know what I think about you? He pours this evocative language of affection and he validates it by the sending of Timothy to them.

And now today the second half of this most self-disclosed portion of Paul's material we move forward beyond his affection toward them beyond the reasons for which he sent Timothy to them and we're going to see the comfort that he received from them and the prayers that he made for them.

And when we come to the reasons that he is comforted by them you and I will understand I think why this effusive display of his heart.

Fascinating isn't it chapter 3 verses 6 through 10 that Paul was in need of comfort. the great apostle but evidently 3:6 but now that Timothy has come to us from you and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us as we long to see you for this reason brothers in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith.

Paul's comfort comfort. The nature of the comfort textually of course is through that little phrase good news verse 6 Timothy has brought him good news in the Greek it's what we would refer to as the gospel itself.

[11:12] There's only one other place in all of the New Testament where this word is used differently than describing the content of what God has done for us.

Here it's describing what the Thessalonians possessed because of Christ. He's received good news good news that everywhere else is described as the gospel itself.

What is the good news? There's two ends to it. Verse 6 First news that he had gotten about them good news of your faith and love.

Good news about them. The second aspect of this content of the good news wasn't what he had received about them but the feelings that he now knows they have for him.

It was good news to him. And again two phrases verse 6 and he reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us.

[12:24] You remember us kindly with kindness. They were affectionate toward him. You long to see us just as we long to see you.

This is the content of the good news for Paul. Their feelings toward him. But I want to center for a few minutes on the good news that he had gotten about them.

The good news of your faith and your love. The central object of the good news that gave him comfort was their faith.

what lifted Paul in a moment of personal weakness, discouragement, aloneness wasn't confined to what God would do for him or what God did for him.

It was what God was doing in them. Think about that for a moment. What comforts you today?

[13:49] We're all in need of comfort. Your life is filled with daily afflictions. Your life is filled with daily distresses. What will lift you by what are you comforted?

Paul says it's according to what God is doing in the lives of others. My comfort is established as good news as I have heard your faith.

Your faith. This word so critical to what would comfort the apostle Paul. The faith that rests in the church of the Thessalonians.

Now take a look at that word. It isn't the first time we've seen it. There's good news about their faith. 3:6 But the immediately preceding!

In context 3:5 For this reason when I could bear it no longer I sent to learn about your faith. For fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor had been in vain.

[15:09] He is concerned had been for their faith and when he receives the report of their faith he is comforted. And that word is going to come again at the end of verse 7 that they are comforted about you through your faith.

Their faith was the source of his comfort. Now he's going to go on in verse 10 to say that he is also desiring to make up something which is lacking in their faith and we'll see that in a moment.

But I want you to see that this entire text is filled with the faith of the Thessalonian church. Their faith was his comfort. That takes us all the way back then doesn't it?

To the beginning of the letter chapter 1 verse 3 where he is thanking God remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love.

Those are the two very words that have finally brought him comfort in our own chapter. Chapter 1 verse 8 he's talking about what has sounded forth from them in Macedonia and Achaia but your faith in God has gone out everywhere.

[16 : 22] chapter 2 in verse 13 we thank God constantly for this that when you receive the word of God which you heard from us you accepted it not as the word of men but what as it really is the word of God which is at work in you believers.

Your faith. Your faith. The faith of the church strengthened the pounding heart of the apostle in an hour of deep internal anguish and wondering whether or not his labor had been in vain.

And so we ask ourselves do we possess this kind of faith that in the gospel has the capacity to strengthen and comfort the lives of others?

can your faith be the content of God's comfort to your brother and sister in Christ?

The minister who had more influence upon my life than anyone else in my life certainly other than my own father was Kent Hughes. There was a moment early in his church planting years this goes back into the 70s most of you were still a couple decades from entering the world where he came to his own dark night of the soul and he looked at his wife Barbara and said I don't think I have the faith to go on and she looked at him all I don't know how tall she is all four foot eleven of her five foot three of her and she looked at him this man who was forever strong always capable weakened and she says will you hold on to my faith and he walked forward what a great testimony your faith the source of

[18 : 37] God's comfort for his children who are laboring in distress look at the nature of their faith chapter one and verse nine this faith that had gone out into all the region for they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you and how you here it is turned to God from idols that's one two to serve the living and true God three and to wait for his son from heaven whom he raised from the dead that's what faith looks like do you possess a an experiential knowledge of being a man a woman or a child who can say to another I have turned from my idols I have turned from the things which

I always sought satisfaction in and yet never satisfied my soul whether it's the applause of others and their approval whether it's the pleasures of life whether it's having the notoriety of done something of substance all idols in and of themselves have you turned from your complete satisfaction and have you have you grabbed hold of God through Christ as the only one that satisfies you if you have you have a component that will lift others in time of need are you serving that's the verb not only is their faith described by turning to God from idols but they are now serving the living and true

God your service a comfort to the faith of those who go elsewhere it was now a few years ago that I was decades now I must be getting old there was a man by the name of Rob Newmayer who came to vibrant faith in Christ and I hadn't seen him in a few years because we moved to Chicago and I went back on a particular week and into the church where he had become a Christian through just dialogue on the issues of faith and there he was in the outer foyer behind the tape ministry desk serving a comfort to my soul because here was a man who I saw birthed into the Christian faith not in touch with over a long period of time and upon entering the doors service and comfort given may that be so here in this very transient and transitional congregation those of you who are planted here for any time longer than six months will be people who will see others come and go and then return those of you who are here for a year and three years and five years or ten fifteen you live your life here you will see people walk back in through that door after four or five years of absence you'll be surprised by their attendance you'll greet them with a hug and for the life of you try to remember their name and they'll walk back out and don't be surprised if they have been comforted by your continued service think of that when you're teaching children think of that when you volunteer for the nursery think of that when you intentionally stand at the back of the auditorium to greet people coming in think of that when you labor in

God's word think of that when you go to bed in prayer for this congregation think not only of your turning but think of your serving for in your serving you are comforting the rest who are under duress at a time in their life hey you're not serving you're robbing the church of comfort thank God so many serve not only that but they were waiting waiting waiting eagerly for the return of Christ think of the K.

Ryan family today may the Lord have mercy upon that home as they have faithfully labored in love and now lost their own in need of comfort which is another way of saying in need of the body because the caricature we have of Paul as a self-made man without the need of comfort is just that a caricature he says I'm comforted by your faith and that for me begins to open the door to this otherwise strange portion of

[25 : 15] God's word Paul's comfort their faith verse 8 he actually says for now we live if you are standing fast in the Lord look I'll keep going if you're going if you're standing I'm standing if you're walking I'm walking what a great thing in fact he moves from being a man who's isolated from being a man who has deep affection but not sure how to convey it from being a man who's effusive in the sense of I wish I could do what you need I wish I wish!

I wish! I wish! He moves from all of that and it finally clears and he just elevates into thanksgiving verse 9 what thanksgiving can we return to God for you for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God see the only way you have that kind of effusive!

connection to someone that you've known for a few months is if they're your child in the faith if you intersected their life at a time when God was at work uniquely you're not going to feel that way about anybody else this is family you feel that way about family parents go to bed at night what keeps them up the well-being of their children what keeps them up worries about their children what enables!

them to sleep the welfare of their children Paul slept this night because of their faith chapter 3 verses 6 to 10 Paul's comfort their faith chapter 3 11 to 13 Paul's request he now moves into prayers for them and he actually begins to hint at it what his request will be for them in verse 10 he says that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith now it's important that you understand he's not saying that their faith was in some way deficient but that it was as of yet incomplete their faith was firm they were walking with the Lord the word that they received!

they continued to be at work in them but he wanted to give them more so it's not a deficient faith it's just a desire for an excelling growing expanding faith and so therefore Paul's request verse 11 now may our God and Father himself our Lord Jesus Christ and he has three petitions first may he direct our way to you verse 11 verse 12 second petition may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all as we do for you third petition verse 13 so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints let me put his request this way now three things that I may come to you that your love may abound among you and that holiness would be established in you that's

[29 : 03] Paul's request for the congregation desire to be with you that your love would increase and abound among you that you would be established in holiness in you at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ let me just take a couple of words on the second two of those because we've talked much over the last two weeks about his desire to come to them I love this verse 12 this request that love abound among you I mean he doesn't just say in verse 12 let me tell you what I'm praying for that you guys will love each other no!

He says that the Lord would make you increase and abound in love he just heaps them up he wants their love to be increasing and abounding what a great request think of it in regard to our own context here what a wonderful request for the church in Hyde Park that we wouldn't just love each other that we would have a love that is increasing don't tend your love and it will diminish don't tend your garden and weeds do grow do nothing your love will subside so love may your love increase may it abound almost like a clear this place out put the youth group in here on a

Saturday night I know the building is not ours but I could when I was a kid I could almost imagine bounding from pew to pew may that kind of thing be happening among you may there be an abounding leaping over of pews to another with acts of love what would that look like Matt thank you so much for that wonderful God given desire to say the men of this congregation need to meet for breakfast on Friday at 7 because it's impossible for love to abound if relationship isn't even known I hope every man is there I hope 50 men are there may it increase and abound

David Jackman was here just a couple weeks ago from London he went to all four of our congregations he preached on the west side he preached here he preached downtown he preached on the north side I sat down with him privately at the end of all of it I said give me your impressions of our church you've seen it all I don't get to see it all you see it all one of the things he talked about early was the way in which they are received when entering the congregation now it wasn't negative but it was interesting that when someone asks you their impression of the congregation just what's it like to be in our church the first thing he talked about was the manner in which he was received that's abounding love we lived in London for six months and attended

St. Helens and the mark of that congregation upon my life was fundamentally this that even though they knew we were there for six months they got to know us coming coming through coming through abounding love what a great thing to be marked as a church with this kind of expansive love now I'd say more about it but he'll say more about it in chapter four nine and in five eight to eleven and we'll let him put it to work there finally and I close with this his third request is that they would be established their hearts blameless in holiness before our God and father at the coming of our

[34 : 04] Lord Jesus with all his saints in other words his request is that holiness would be established in them now the word established we saw earlier in chapter three verse two when he sent Timothy to them it was for the purpose of establishing them or confirming them and now he's still saying that that is what he wants to do and he wants to confirm them or establish them in holiness for holiness is that to which we were called now I'm not going to trace this out either this last phrase because you'll notice in the text he is now going to turn in the letter to unfolding how he does that there's no sense in me doing it today but realize this that he means by that further establishing you in holiness because he's going to move in chapter 4 verse 3 to talk about the will of

God which is their holiness and he's going to talk in verse 4 about how that is affected in regard to how one treats their body and in verse 7 how we treat the whole family so he's going to answer this question I'm not going to do it today but today know that is his petition that they would be holy and went holy at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ what great symmetry I love this the way it ends the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ when you go home tonight and read this again this idea of people coming to the church of the Thessalonians is quite astounding and it's got this beautiful symmetry to it because he talked earlier about his concern during a time when he could not come to them and now he's gone on to a time when he was comforted when Timothy came to him from them and now he wants to come to them so that he can establish them by the time

Christ comes for them it's beautiful the work of the pastor to establish the congregation in holiness at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and so we close over these last two weeks one of the most fascinating movements in the Pauline corpus and we see the man for who he really is regardless of what we think about him he had a depth of affection toward them that could not be communicated with anything less than the evocative language of being torn from them his affection for them is demonstrated in the reasons for which he sent Timothy to them upon

Timothy's return we have now seen the comfort that comes from them and therefore his request that he makes to God for them may we together as family possess a faith that is capable of comforting many for many no all are in need of comfort our heavenly father we thank you for this word and we pray that our minds would get it properly situated that as we each one of us walk through the distress and the afflictions of life we would come to see the source of our comfort mediated to us through the faith of those who live and walk among us and therefore oh lord help us to turn to serve to wait to receive to love like children bounding over pews to demonstrate commitments of expression and tenderness to others in Jesus name amen to to to to to