



BE AFRAID FOR THE RIGHT REASONS

Week #13; Sept. 6, 2026, 11AM

Taught at: Ridgeview Classical Schools
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SUMMARY: This week, we begin to study **1 Thessalonians Ch. 3**, and Paul shares in the opening verses that he was afraid. Throughout God's Word, we are instructed to not be afraid or fearful, but Paul says that's how he felt. Paul loved this body of believers greatly, and he was afraid that persecution might shake their faith, thereby rendering his ministry among them to perhaps have been in vain. This lesson shows we need to be sensitive to believers who are facing trials. They need encouragement and strengthening so they don't abandon their faith.

Review:

- Last time, we wrapped up **Ch. 2 of 1 Thessalonians**, and we examined the issue of **'Paul's Great Longing'** in the closing four verses of that chapter.
- We had a simple outline to help us uncover the main points of **vss. 17-20**:
- **First, there was 'Paul's Separation'**- Paul was separated from these new believers physically, but he was not apart from them emotionally, spiritually, or mentally.
 - He had an intense longing to be with them in proper fellowship. Separation should not diminish our love for one another.
- **Second, there was Paul's 'Motivation'** - By faith, and by his trust in the Word of God, Paul envisioned himself and his friends in the presence of Jesus Christ - - in glory!
 - Paul always took the long view of things. While he physically lived in the **present**, he controlled his actions and attitudes by the **future**.
- **Then third, there was Paul's 'Elation'** - Paul kept up an attitude which was cheerful and glad. It was a happiness that had nothing to do with how the world defines that.
 - Paul's happiness was a true 'joy' based upon the unchanging promises and immutable character of God.

NOTE: Today we transition into **Ch. 3 of 1 Thessalonians**, and I want to read the first **five** verses of that new chapter (**READ**).

I've called this lesson, **"Be Afraid for the Right Reasons."** There are lots of things in life that give us fear and anxiety that really should not. In this lesson today, we will see Paul's cause for genuine fear and concern, and we'll see why we should feel the same way as he did....

A. Background of this situation –

1. Recall, Paul had been forced to leave Thessalonica after he'd been with these new believers a short time, and that was because of persecution (**Cf. Acts Ch. 17**).

2. He was not – however – concerned about his own safety. He deeply wanted to return to these new believers, but Satanic opposition prevented him.
3. We don't know specifics about that opposition aside from some very strong resistance to the Gospel and to the truth of Scripture. It's the same thing today.
4. As time passed, Paul became increasingly concerned about what might be happening to this young church in Thessalonica.
5. That's why he finally sent Timothy back to check things out, *"to establish and exhort you concerning your faith"* (**Cf. vs. 2**).
6. Paul wasn't merely curious about how these new believers were doing. He was afraid for them – and he admits this in **vs. 5**.
7. He was desperate to know whether their new faith had survived the trials and persecutions he knew they were facing.

NOTE: Let's work our way through these verses, then I want to settle down and focus on the closing parts of this passage. We'll loosely see how Paul's concern became a greater worry, and then it turned into real fear. We'll learn some personal applications from the things around this process.

B. (I'll begin with) Paul could not ignore his concern –

1. Paul couldn't be with them, and he knew they were suffering.

- He was aware of Satan's attacks and oppositions in his own life, and so he was naturally concerned for these new believers too.
- In the past few months, I've become more aware of the tactics of the devil. He often works a two-pronged approach. This is very true in relationships as one example.
 - He weakens and discourages one side of the equation. At the same time, he causes the other side to become resentful and bitter.
 - The point is this – one facet of Satan's attacks is often related to another facet of his attacks somewhere else. His tactics are seldom from one angle only.
 - Paul KNEW **he** was facing Satan's opposition, and so he was concerned there was another side to this. He was concerned for these believers.

2. That's why he finally sent Timothy back to Thessalonica.

- He wanted Timothy *"to establish and exhort you concerning your faith"* (**Cf. vs. 2**).
- Paul was unable to ignore his graduating concern. It became real worry, and it's not hard to see this in this text.
 - Paul was desperate to know whether their faith had survived the storm of trials and persecutions they were facing.
 - He was worried their faith might collapse – it might lose its vigor, dry up, and shrivel away.
 - It got to the point where Paul says in **vs. 1**, *"when I could stand it (or bear it) no longer...."* That's when he had to make a tough decision.

- He was in Athens and he and Silas would need to stay there - - but these new believers were in Thessalonica, and texts, email, and cell phones were not available.
- The solution? Send Timothy back. Timothy was the right choice. Paul says of him in **vs. 2** that Timothy was *“Our brother, and God’s co-worker in the gospel of Christ.”*
- Timothy’s mission in going back to Thessalonica was two-fold:
 - To strengthen them, and...
 - To encourage them.

3. Paul's worry was not that the Thessalonians would experience trials and suffering - - his worry was those challenges would destroy their new faith.

- There is a selflessness we see in his service here. You see, Paul was experiencing many trials and sufferings of his own. He had plenty on his plate.
- But his **personal welfare** was secondary to him. He was much more concerned about the **spiritual welfare** of these new Thessalonian believers.
- This shows the heart of a TRUE Shepherd. Paul had the right focus; he was consumed by deep concern for the spiritual welfare of his sheep.
- Again, we see this in **vs. 1** where he says, *“when I could bear it no longer.”* In **vs. 2**, he wanted to *“establish and exhort”* them.
- It’s not hard for us to see that Paul’s concerns and fears were ultimately a measure of his genuine love.
- A couple of months ago – we were in a section of this study in **1 Thessalonians** that I called **‘The Marks of a True Ministry.’** We learned a TRUE ministry is not measured by institutional, financial, and cultural parameters.
- We learned God’s Word often measures a true ministry by its opposition, suffering, trials, and all sorts of attacks and misperceptions by people who really “don’t know that they don’t know.”
- Here, we see another “mark of a true ministry.” It’s seen in Paul’s heart. He genuinely loves these new believers, he puts their concerns above his, and he is consumed with passion and anxiety for their spiritual welfare.
- That is not something that is born out of a business plan or a fund-raiser. It is not a bullet point on a job description. That is a quality that is born out of a sincere calling to serve Christ and to serve others.

C. So, let’s now unpack what Paul was afraid of.

NOTE: Again, the title of this lesson is **‘Be Afraid for the Right Reasons.’** Let’s dive more deeply into Paul’s state of mind and heart. Paul had 3 things he was afraid of.

1. FIRST, that trials and persecution would result in them abandoning their faith.

- Here, again, is the point I mentioned before. Paul’s fear was all about the spiritual condition and perseverance of these new Thessalonian believers.
- This gets back to the subtitle of this entire series in **1 & 2 Thessalonians**. That subtitle is **‘Faithful Endurance in One Direction.’**

- It's very likely that we've all known people who professed to be in the faith, but that was before their problems and challenges came up.
- When life threw them some curveballs, when they encountered spiritual attacks, when they had to confront their OWN need to grow and change, or when they began to face doubts and afflictions - - that's when they drifted away from a solid foundation in God's Word.
- That's when they left good fellowship, that's when they blamed others, that's when they justified leaving the discomforts of convicting teaching for the comforts of cultural teaching, and that's when they drifted into a 'spiritual crisis.'
- I've seen this repeatedly in my many years of being around the church and around various ministries. A **new** faith or a **shallow** faith struggles to *'faithfully endure in one direction.'*
- I believe that many people in these **new** and **shallow** camps have not properly considered Paul's words in **vs. 4** here: *"we kept telling you that we would be persecuted."*
- It's a basic point of Scripture that true faith will result in true suffering. In **2 Tim. 3:12** it says, *"all those who desire to live Godly will suffer persecution."*
- **John 16:33** tells us that *"in this world we will have tribulation,"* and **1 Peter 4:12** instructs us to *"not be surprised at the fiery trial that has come upon you, as though something strange were happening to you."*
- The hard truth about the committed Christian life is it is HARD! That's just the way it is - - and for many (most?) people, that's too high of a bar for them.
- Our world tells us to insure ourselves against calamity, it tells us to have 'cushions' in life, it encourages us to pursue comfort, and it persuades us that 'we are owed' ease, serenity, and convenience.
- But none of those things are consistent with a relationship with Jesus Christ that *"faithfully endures in one direction"* - - a relationship that experiences the trials and attacks of Satan who wishes to discourage us, distract us, and destroy us.

2. And just to be clear – it's not always trials and challenges of the typical sort that cause many to be drawn away from their faith.

- Sometimes it is challenges of another sort. Sometimes it's the trials of encountering the things and changes we don't want to face.
- This is why it is just as often – and maybe MORE frequently – that it's the straightforward truth of God's Word which causes folks to leave the narrow path and get on the broad one instead.
- Many of those who followed Jesus during His earthly ministry found His teachings hard to hear and accept, and so they stopped following Him (**Cf. John 6:60-71**).
- After hearing a provocative or important truth from God's Word, many folks today will choose to react the wrong way just as others did in the past.

- They find truth offensive to their choices, and since they don't respect God's divinely inspired Word as they ought to, they stop following Jesus - - or they seek other places where things are taught that will not confront and challenge them so much.
- **This is a MASSIVE problem in 'the church' today.** Folks want their ears tickled. They want milk instead of meat. This is endemic in our times today.

NOTE: So, Paul is not out of line here. He knows he's dealing with the human condition. He knows the way we are all wired and what we are vulnerable to. That's why he warned them that they would experience 'suffering.'

It's why he was afraid that the challenges of 'faithful endurance' would be too much, too intense - - and these new believers would abandon what was most important to them.

3. Here's the SECOND thing Paul was afraid of. He was afraid that Satan, or "the tempter," had successfully tempted them. We see this in vs. 5.

- Paul understood that Satan uses persecution, discouragement, fear, and hardship - of ALL sorts - to undermine and erode a believer's faith.
- Satan is called "the tempter" for good reason:
 - **He tempted Eve** to eat the forbidden fruit, suggesting to her that God was keeping something from her that "was good."
 - Eve started focusing on what she didn't have rather than what she DID have.
 - **He tempted Jesus.** Satan tried to give the Lord all the kingdoms of the world - everything! - without having to endure the cross.
 - He also gave Jesus an opportunity to "show off" His divine nature, and to publicly prove that He was the Son of God.
 - **He tempts us.** This happens in many ways. He masquerades as an angel of light (**Cf. 2 Cor. 11:14**), trying to make evil appear good, and trying to make deceit appear as truth.
 - Satan tempts our guilt, our weaknesses, our ego, and our desire to conform to the world. The Bible is clear that he deceives, distracts, and destroys many.
- And so - naturally - Paul was afraid. He knew trials create opportunities for Satan to work his 'temptation strategies.'
- Paul wasn't concerned so much that the Thessalonians would suffer physically.
- Paul was **much** more concerned that their suffering might cause them to: doubt God, abandon their commitment to faith, become discouraged, or turn away from Christ.

4. (AND) THE THIRD THING PAUL WAS AFRAID OF was that his ministry among these new believers might ultimately prove fruitless.

- Don't read into this point something that the text is not intending to say. Paul was not looking to pat himself on the back here with what he'd done with them.
- He wasn't concerned about his own legacy. This wasn't about him at all. Paul was very afraid for THEM!
- (Another thing): Paul was not concerned here that the Gospel itself was not sufficiently powerful. He already **knew** it was. We learned that in the first few lessons of this series.
- Rather, Paul was concerned that the Thessalonians' faith might not endure under pressure, making he and his companions' work appear fruitless.
- What we need to see here is Paul's fear was ultimately a measure of his love. He wasn't afraid that the Thessalonians wouldn't have an easy life; he was afraid that their hardship would cause them to stop following Christ.
- His love for them showed in that he had their GREATEST concerns at heart. He wanted for them what they MOST needed - - even if they did not recognize that for themselves.
- This gets back to a point I made earlier. Paul was a true shepherd. He didn't care about personal posterity, and he didn't care about institutional matters.
- He cared most about the evidence of their spiritual growth and endurance. Faithful shepherds care deeply about how believers respond to the tests of their faith.
- True spiritual leadership isn't merely concerned with the things that people know - - but they are concerned much more with whether people are standing firm when life gets difficult.

NOTE: I want to start wrapping up with some takeaways for you and I – some applications for WHO we are and WHERE we may find ourselves today...

1. Trials and challenges are a normal part of the faithful Christian experience.

NOTE: This is very plain in our text today.

- The onset of trials of all sorts should not surprise us (**Cf. vs. 3**)
- But trials and persecutions will not destroy a true faith. It can destabilize it for a time, but according to **James 1:1-4**, these kinds of challenges will ultimately PROVE that real faith is present.
- We cannot avoid these times and chapters of our lives. Like Paul says in **vs. 3**, *"For you yourselves know that we are destined for this."*
- Paul is saying we shouldn't interpret our suffering and trials as any sign that something has gone wrong with our faith.
- We shouldn't be shocked by the storms of life. We need to be prepared for them.

2. A mature faith is prepared for adversity before adversity comes.

NOTE: Again, this is clear in our passage today.

- Paul had warned these Thessalonian believers in advance that they would suffer.
- When the challenges came, it didn't mean God failed, or He was insufficient.
- This is not about whether we suffer challenges, temptations, setbacks, and trials - - but it's all about how we respond to those things.
- We are wisest to prepare ourselves – and each other! - for the **reality** that we will all experience suffering, rather than assuming we have a right to a trouble-free Christian life.
- And so Paul reminds them that the best time to prepare for a test of our faith is **before** that test arrives - - and the best way to do that is to become grounded, edified, and equipped in the deep doctrines of God's Word.

3. Our faith is something worth checking on – both in our own lives and in others' lives. (The question could be asked here, "What happens to our faith when following Jesus Christ becomes costly?")

NOTE: This is very evident in **vs. 5**, and we see a process here:

- Satan is "the tempter," and he's **always** seeking to disrupt the efficacy and integrity of our faith.
- He knows trials are fertile opportunities for temptation. That's when we are weak and most vulnerable. That's when Satan has his greatest opportunities.
- On one side we can choose to doubt God, abandon our faith, become discouraged, avoid the things and people which make us grow, or even turn away from Christ.
- But on the other side, **real** faith endures. It always does. It holds up, and it proves itself. Trials have a way of proving **real** faith like nothing else.

NOTE: That's why **James 1:2-4** tells us, *"Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything."*

- This 'pure joy' boils down to a conscious and rational understanding that our faith in Jesus Christ is – BY FAR – the most important thing in our lives.
- Nothing ranks as a close second. So - whatever it takes to prove that we have **the real deal**, that should be a welcome opportunity.
- This world is not our home, and we should **not** act like it is. We need to live and think as citizens of heaven, and the time to start doing that - - is NOW!
- Suffering does not mean God has abandoned us, that He has overlooked our needs, or that He doesn't care about what we're facing.
- It means He wants to test us, grow us, and make us more like Him. It means He is preparing us for our greatest rewards to come.
- It's all comes down to **"faithful endurance in one direction."** It's all about doing whatever it takes to stay the course, and to keep our focus on that "small gate and narrow road."

- Just as Paul followed up with the Thessalonians to check on their faith, so we need to do the same with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ when we see them struggling - - or we worry that they are.
- We need to be afraid for the right reasons just as Paul was also afraid.

NEXT TIME: The things we've learned today will set up **vss. 6-10 of chapter 3** beautifully. Timothy returns to Paul with the good news that these believers' faith and love have endured.



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Second, don't teach what is NOT there. Don't force a passage to mean something it really doesn't.

And – number three, if the Bible states it plainly, we should too.

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