

5—1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5—Holy Affections for Immovable Faith

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I. Introduction

A. Verse 5 ends with—our labor might be in vain.

1. Let's imagine you have worked really hard to train up your children in the Lord's ways only to watch them disobey years of labor and love to follow some YouTube or TikTok influencer?
2. Or, you send them off to college (that you are paying for) only to see them easily persuaded by a professor to abandon the faith that you labored to instruct them in.
3. This example hits close to home for all of us. We've seen this happen. The years and years of love and sacrifice for your kids only to see them swept away by someone who they do not know and has zero love for them.

B. In our text today, all the suffering Paul, Silas, and Timothy endured on the way to Thessalonica and while they were there is in jeopardy. They have made the gospel known to them and some have responded in repentance and faith. They have trained them in the ways of the Lord only to find out that satan is tempting them through afflictions of their own people that might cause them to give up on Christ.

1. We see that there are some very important things at risk. We see possible solutions and very real obstacles. Finally we see the remedy and hopefully next week will see the outcome of their actions.

II. Main Point

A. God pursues his church through his apostles (people) to establish their faith and make it immovable by afflictions from the enemy.

III. Outline

- A. Holy Affections (Loving Desires)
- B. Motives to Boast in (A Right Reason)
- C. Affections take Action (Acting on a Solution)
- D. Equip and Encourage (The Remedy)

IV. Exposition

A. As we begin, there's an obvious expression of great desire for the members of the church that is a very important part of their perseverance in the faith. We will do almost anything for the ones we love. Let's see if we can ignite or reignite or continue such holy affections for our church by seeing the great desire Paul, Silas, and Timothy had for the members of the church in Thessalonica.

1. Look with me at verses 17 and 18. There was more work to be done among these new believers, but there was a mob that ran Paul, Silas and Timothy out of town. They were establishing a church before they were torn away from these
 - a) I want you to see the repetition of these deep desires for the people of God.
 - (1) Torn away from you (an imagine a child being taken from his or her parents). Endeavored more eagerly. Great desire to see you. Verse 18—we wanted to come to you. But satan hindered us.
 - (a) We have this saying—I love you but I don't like you. Is that biblically sound?
 - (b) It seems clear to me that what the church needs to persevere in faith is holy affections for each other not I love but do not like you.
 - b) I conclude that Paul, Silas, and Timothy have holy affections for the church in Thessalonica.
 - (1) The suffering we briefly discussed at the end of last week's message, informs us of the context from which they are expressing these deep desires.
 - (a) In 2:14—You suffered the same things from your own countrymen as the churches in Judea did from the Jews.
 - (2) If you recall, we went back to Acts 14 to see how this church began. As you know, Paul, Silas left Philippi after being wrongfully imprisoned but moved on to Thessalonica to preach the gospel.
 - (a) Several heard the gospel and responded in repentance and faith but “the Jews stirred up the Gentiles and poisoned their minds against the brothers” (Acts 14:2).

- (b) “When an attempt was made by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat them and to stone them, they learned of it and fled” (Acts 14:5,6).
 - (c) This “fled” here corresponds to verse 17—we were torn from you.
- (3) So, that’s the scene we are dealing with. They preached. They responded. Over those three weeks or so in Thessalonica, they taught them—discipled them to observe all that Jesus commanded.
 - (a) Skip down to 3:4 where some insight to the content of their teaching was.
 - i) We were telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as came to pass, and just as you know.
- 2. So, they have literally been “orphaned” from the church there in Thessalonica but they want very badly to see them face to face.
 - a) Paul is describing this event as though they had been kidnapped from them. The imagery of tearing them away is striking.
 - b) I’m not sure you get the sense from this that they are saying things like Brad Paisley sang, “Me and Jesus got our own thing going here.”
 - (1) How can we respond like Paul with holy affections for each member of this church?
 - (a) We have people who no longer gather with us face to face.
 - (b) And look, we were not torn away from each other. This was willingly. Persecution is not the reason we never see some of our people.
 - (c) I hope to kindle in us a holy affection for each other. And as we will see, a holy affection that takes actions is needed, not just prayer.
 - (d) We need to pursue each other and love them back into the gathering. If not, there’s further action to be taken.
- 3. As I stated in the main point, these holy affections originate in Christ himself for his church.
 - a) He is pursuing and keeping his sheep by expressing his holy affections through the holy affections of the apostles.
 - b) Indeed, they are shepherding the flock under the instructions of the Great Shepherd—Jesus himself.
 - c) Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Why would Christ only love us in the cross and not love us the second mile—or better yet, to the end?
 - d) Why is it so important to be face to face? How is that a solution to the problem? Why can’t they just go to them?
 - e) How is it that Paul and Silas and Timothy care so much about the church?
- B. Well the answers to those questions are seen in what follows. One way to kindle that desire in us is to see the reason why. Paul’s motive should be our motive too. That motive is this—the church in Thessalonica is their crown of boasting. Let’s try to understand what this means.
 - 1. First, let’s get the flow of Paul’s argument—We wanted to come to you but Satan hindered us. For who is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you?
 - a) These holy affections are grounded in the fact that they are their crown of boasting before Jesus at his return.
 - (1) Let’s not miss the fact that God loved his people before the foundation of the world and his holy affections for us are rooted in his own glory!
 - (2) Let me start with an illustration: Rodney Garner is the defensive line coach for the Tennessee Vols. He has coached a lot guys into the NFL over the years. They are his crown of boasting. He has hope in continuing to coach the way he does because he has lots of evidence that his coaching works. Those former players often come visit him and they are his joy when new DL recruits consider coming to Tennessee. He might say to a recruit, “If your goal is to go to league, I’ve done that for a lot of guys and continue to do so.”
 - (3) If I were a soldier who had fought for the freedoms of this country, my crown of boasting would be those families who are having those big get-togethers on Memorial Day. I would drive by and see them enjoying each other and think—I fought for that. They would be my joy.

- b) The same is true for Paul, Silas and Timothy in a far more significant way. Those in Thessalonica were their crown of boasting.
 - (1) They have hope in sharing the gospel even when it nearly cost them their own lives because they have seen the transforming power of the gospel.
 - (2) They have had front row seats to see them turn from idols to God.
 - (3) They have watched these new believers receive the word in much affliction with joy.
 - (4) They have been with them as they risk their lives to get Paul and his friends out safely.
 - (5) They have witnessed their steadfast endurance under trial even after they were torn away from them.
 - (a) Does that make sense? They press on in the mission of God because God is saving people and he used them to do it.
 - (b) Paul does what he does “so that he might present the church to Christ in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish” (Ephesians 5:27).
 - (c) I want to present you before God this way. I want you to be my crown of boasting.
 - (d) I want to fight for your faith to endure to the end and walk you to the finish line.
 - c) To say it differently—you and I are to live our lives in such a way that we want the Lamb to receive the reward of his sufferings.
 - d) You do not want his death to appear meaningless.
 - e) Can I soak you in the words of Christ from the letters to the seven churches of Asia?
 - (1) Listen and be encouraged to get after it for his glory.
 - (a) (Revelation 2:2 ESV) “I know your works, your toil and your patient endurance”
 - (b) (Revelation 2:5 ESV) “Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first.”
 - (c) (Revelation 2:19 ESV) “‘I know your works, your love and faith and service and patient endurance, and that your latter works exceed the first.’”
 - (d) (Revelation 2:23 ESV) “And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.”
 - (e) (Revelation 2:26 ESV) “The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations”
 - (f) (Revelation 3:8 ESV) “‘I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut.’”
 - (g) (Revelation 3:15 ESV) “‘I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot!’”
 - (2) Hear Christ call us to these worthy labors for his name and for his glory.
 - (a) Indeed, they are for him but we will greatly benefit from the fruit that he did through us.
 - (b) Should I labor as a pastor for my own crown of glory? Peter says I should—(1 Peter 5:2-4 ESV) “² shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; ³ not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.”
 - (3) Hear me out—I don’t and you don’t do these things to gain God’s favor.
 - (a) You and I do them because he has show us favor.
 - (b) We do this so that others might experience his saving grace and to continue in it.
 - (c) Oh dear church, be motivated to work hard for his glory and your crown.
 - (d) Your crown of glory is Christ’s glory!
- C. Now that we’ve heard of Paul’s holy affections for the church and we saw what his motive was, let’s now see how those holy affections and a right motive move them to take action.
1. So, let’s not miss the connection between holy affections and the fact that the church in Thessalonica is their glory and joy—verse 1—Therefore...we sent Timothy.
 - a) Because they really want to come to them and because they really are their crown of boasting, therefore we are going to do whatever it takes to make sure the enemy doesn’t tear you away from the gospel.

- b) They have already expressed this solution of coming to see them face to face. They had been torn from them. Afflictions were pounding this new church on their absence. The risk of losing them was very possible.
 - c) The parable of the sower isn't a hypothetical story.
 - (1) Satan somehow takes the word away.
 - (2) Others who received the word are drawn away by the pleasures of this world.
 - (3) While pleasures are dangerous, so is pain because some walk away because of persecution on account of the word.
 - (4) The seed that falls on good soil produces fruit!
 - (5) Paul, Silas, and Timothy do not want their sowing and suffering to have been in vain.
 - (6) To say this differently—the risk of losing their glory and joy to the enemy's afflictions were more than they could bear.
2. Notice how verses 1-5 are framed by these two bookends—verse 1—when we could bear it no longer—verse 2—we sent Timothy. Verse 5—when I could bear it no longer—I sent to learn about your faith.
- a) Their deep desire for these new believers and the possibility of satan destroying the work God had done through them, pushed them to action. There are many more who need to hear the gospel but they do not want to lose those who have put their trust in Christ.
 - (1) We've already heard Paul say that satan hindered them from coming.
 - (a) The way he hindered them had something to do with being left alone in Athens.
 - i) I don't know what that means. However, for Paul and Silas to hold off sending Timothy UNTIL they could bear it no longer seems pretty serious.
 - (1) They trusted the Lord but they were not going to test the Lord by being foolish in a dangerous city like Athens like verse 1 suggests.
 - ii) But that's not all that concerned them. Notice there in verse 5 what drove Paul personally to send Timothy.
 - (1) He was fearful that the tempter had tempted them and their labor might be in vain.
 - (2) I think I could make a strong case that this fear was meant for evil but God meant it for good—to send Timothy.
 - b) How does satan hinder you?
 - (1) Maybe he has deluded your affections for the church—I love them but I really don't like them. Or you think that you and Jesus have a good thing going by yourself.
 - (2) Maybe the enemy has secretly convinced you that it's wrong to have a motive like Paul to present this church in splendor before Christ as your crown of boasting.
 - (a) Some of our lack of joy may be from not doing this joyful work for each other.
 - (3) Maybe you think prayer is enough and further action like going to someone face to face is not needed.
 - (4) Maybe you have opened the door for the enemy by living in hidden sin.
 - (a) You know, Judas opened that door by taking a little money out of the offering plate.
 - (5) Maybe you do not see a solution. Maybe you do not see any problems. Maybe you do not think the souls of our members are in any danger. They are good to go no matter what they do. Maybe you do not think that our labor could be in vain.
 - (6) A church that thinks wrongly about these things, acts wrongly. They are hindered. The enemy has us right where he wants us.
 - (7) He likes a church with no expectations or wrong expectations. No accountability. No submission to each other. No genuine affections for each other. He likes very much the idea of loving them but not liking them enough to pursue them.
 - (a) Will you follow me as I lead us to have biblical expectations, accountability, submission to your leader and each other, and encouraging us to love and like each other?
3. Holy affections for the church is only natural for born again Christians. In fact, it is an outpouring of God's own affection for his church. Our affections are rooted in his affections for us. He cares for us deeply and we are the means by which he carries out his loving desire for us to continue in the faith.
- a) And like Israel when they were in slavery in Egypt—(Galatians 4:3-5 ESV) ³In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. ⁴But

when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law,
5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.”

- D. Now we’ve come to the solution—equipping and encouraging their faith in person.
1. In the middle of verses 1-5—between the two bookends—we have the remedy for the problem.
 2. In spite of the hinderances and difficulties, Paul and Silas send Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the church face to face.
 - a) He is sent with two tasks—to establish and to encourage.
 - b) Before we think about these two tasks, I want you to notice there in verse 2 how Timothy is described.
 - (1) Our brother and God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ.
 - (a) This is at the heart of what I’ve tried to convince you of. God is doing this work and he does it through Timothy and through us.
 - (b) The gospel ministry is Christ’s ministry. He alone did it. He alone makes this work their hope, joy and crown of boasting.
 - (c) But we participate in the work. We are called to this work.
 - (2) Also are you surprised that Paul and Silas (the more mature brothers) sends Timothy to do this highly important task?
 - (a) You might say—well no, that’s probably a long and lonely 280 mile walk from Athens to Thessalonica.
 - (b) Would you walk alone for 280 miles to make sure a group of believers would not abandon the faith?
 - (c) All three of them have been praying constantly for them but prayer wasn’t enough. Action like this was necessary. To love someone will cost you very much but it is worth it.
 3. Now let’s explain the tasks at hand for Timothy:
 - a) To establish makes a lot of sense when you see there in verse 3 that those afflictions were trying to move them.
 - (1) It’s like putting braces in a wall. Rebar in concrete. The image that might help is to build a fence to establish boundaries and to keep out the enemy.
 - (2) Obviously, these are not literal images.
 - (3) These foundations that establish are the immovable truths of the immovable God.
 - b) To encourage is not the shoring up but urging on.
 - (1) Both of these needed to be face to face but certainly this one.
 - (2) This is walking along side someone bearing the burden with them and for them.
 - (3) It’s an urging them on and telling them not to give up.
 - (a) We all need people in our lives to tell us this.
 4. I want to leave you with one final thought—holy affections for each other, right motives for each other, those affections and motives leading you to take further action, and that action taken is to keep those who believe from being moved away from Christ by afflictions.
 - a) This word in verse 3—be moved—is an unusual word. This is the only place it’s used in the Bible.
 - (1) It’s literal means is to wag—like a dog wagging its tail.
 - (2) Obviously, words have figurative meanings but we should never abandon a word’s root.
 - (3) Moved makes a lot of sense. But two other have been suggested: to be deluded or to be shaken.
 - (a) Let’s see if I can put all this together in a helpful way.
 - (b) Can you imagine how dangerous a dog would be if he was wagging his tail only to lure you in and bite your face off?
 - (c) The wagging and moving or deluded and shaken are meant to describe what these afflictions might do to their faith.
 - b) Paul, Silas and Timothy had taught the church over and over—verse 3—that we are destined for this. Verse 4—For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know.
 - (1) They rightly taught that God had destined his church to suffer this side of heaven.
 - (2) They rightly taught that the tempter would tempt them with afflictions.
 - c) So, how do we make sure no one walks away from the faith because of afflictions?

- (1) We need to see each other face to face!
 - (2) We need holy affections for each other.
 - (3) We need a right motive for our affections for each other.
 - (4) We need those holy affections to take action, not just pray.
 - (5) We need to help each other persevere in the faith by establishing and encouraging each other all the way to the finish line.
5. If you are not a Christian, does this kind of love that God calls his people to amaze you?
- a) Does this draw you into God's love?
 - b) God so love the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.
 - c) Romans 10:9-10 ESV) ⁹ if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."
 - d) Everyone, respond to Christ this morning!