
Words of Truth

I Thessalonians 3:4-5

By: Brian A. Yeager

“For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know. For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain” (I Thessalonians 3:4-5). Paul, Silvanus, and Timotheus were concerned that the saints in Thessalonica would be moved by the sufferings they (Paul, Silvanus, and Timotheus) were facing (I Thessalonians 3:3).

Knowing that brethren are suffering or are going to suffer rightfully impacts the faithful (John 11:33, Romans 12:15, and I Corinthians 12:26). Consider this text: *“And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy. And as we tarried there many days, there came down from Judaea a certain prophet, named Agabus. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done”* (Acts 21:8-14).

Both letters to the saints in Thessalonica are accredited to Paul, Silvanus, and Timotheus (I Thessalonians 1:1 and II Thessalonians 1:1). However, the language in verse five singles out Paul in this portion of this letter. Paul wrote, *“when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith...”* We know from what we have seen earlier in this chapter that Timothy was sent to know the state of the saints in Thessalonica (I Thessalonians 3:2). Paul would have been the one to send him (cf. Acts 19:21-22 and I Corinthians 4:17). Prior to this, it is most often the language of “we” (I Thessalonians 1:2; 1:5; 1:8-9; 2:2; 2:4-11; 2:13; 2:17; 3:1; 3:3-4). After this verse both letters will continue with “we” (I Thessalonians 3:6-10; 3:12; 4:1-2; 4:6; 4:10-11; 4:15; 5:12; 5:14 and II Thessalonians 1:3-4; 1:11; 2:1; 2:13; 3:2; 3:4; 3:6-12). Having said that, we will see the occasional “I” in these letters (I Thessalonians 4:9; 4:13; 5:1, 5:23; 5:27 and II Thessalonians 2:5; 3:17). So, we can deduce from this that there was a main penmen of these two letters. Paul was, as moved by the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians

2:1-13), the main penman of the letters to the saints in Thessalonica (I Thessalonians 2:18 and II Thessalonians 3:17). So, we can say Paul wrote these two epistles. However, we can also say all three wrote these letters because that is stated too.

Paul sent Timothy to know the faith of the saints in Thessalonica. The Greek word that is translated “faith” in this verse is “πίστις” (Strong’s # 4102). That word appears over two hundred times in the New Testament. Strong’s definition of that term is: “Persuasion, that is, credence; moral conviction (of religious truth, or the truthfulness of God or a religious teacher), especially reliance upon Christ for salvation; abstractly constancy in such profession; by extension the system of religious (Gospel) truth itself: - assurance, belief, believe, faith, fidelity.” Here is a question for us to consider. How would Timothy be able to know their faith? Well, faith is visible when one inspects the actions and fruit of another person (Matthew 7:15-20 and James 2:14-26). We can see this clearly when you study through the history of people of faith (Hebrews 11:1-40).

When we see Paul’s concern that “the tempter” would tempt them, we do not have to wonder who Paul was talking about. Notice: *“Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread”* (Matthew 4:1-3). If the definite article “the” was not present, this would be a more obscure passage. For, temptation [being tested; proved; examined], did not just come through Satan (Matthew 16:1, Matthew 19:3, Matthew 22:15-22, Luke 11:16, John 8:1-6, Acts 15:1-10, II Corinthians 13:5, Hebrews 3:9, etc.). Each of the passages I just cited have the same Greek word [πειράζω] (Strong’s # 3985) that is translated “tempter” AND “tempted” in I Thessalonians 3:5.

Had the saints in Thessalonica fallen away, the work of Paul, Silvanus, and Timotheus would have felt to them to have been in vain. As an evangelist I understand that feeling all too well. When faithful men pour all of their being into teaching lost souls and that person obeys the Gospel only to later turn from the faith, it feels like a huge waste of time. The Galatians for example were soon removed from the Gospel of Christ unto a perverted message (Galatians 1:1-7). In that letter, Paul wrote: *“But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage? Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years. I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain”* (Galatians 4:9-11). To the saints in Philippi, Paul wrote: *“Do all things without murmurings and disputings: That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain”* (Philippians 2:14-16). If we fail, God of course is hurt (Genesis 6:5-6). However, so are those that taught us. Remember that! Don’t make the work done to help you spiritually seem to be in vain.