



More Expressions of Affection - Encouragement from Them

1 Thessalonians 3:6-9

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1. Timothy's Report (verse 6)

2. Paul's Response (verses 7-9)

This past week in Men's Equippers, I gave the men the assignment to pick five key passages that we need to hold to in our establishment of a church here. I appreciate what one man shared. He said that 2 Timothy 4 was a key passage, in which the exhortation comes to "preach the word, be ready in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction." He said, "Pastors need to preach, when they feel like it and when they don't feel like it. Pastors need to preach, when the congregation feels like it and when the congregation doesn't feel like it."

I was again reminded that my job as a pastor to you all is not to tell you stories, not to keep you entertained by nice little thoughts, not to stand in this place and merely waste our time away with platitudes. My job is to preach to you the Word of God. I am to hold up the Bible and proclaim to you, "This is the very Word of God!" My job is to expound it and explain it and exposit it and apply it to you.

The Bible is the Word of God. Why would we be interested in anything else?

That is my desire tonight. To open up to you the scriptures and make them clear and plain, for it is by the truth of God that we grow in a knowledge of God and grow in a love for God. As we have been doing in recent months, I would invite you to take your copies of the word of God and open them to 1 Thessalonians, chapter 3. As you are turning there, let me remind you once more of the context of Paul's penning this letter.

Paul was in Corinth, but he wanted to be in Thessalonica. He wanted to be in Thessalonica to encourage the believers there who professed a faith in Christ under his ministry only a few months prior. He wanted to see how they were doing, but Thessalonica was a several days journey (~150 miles) away. He wanted to see how their faith was doing and strengthen it in any way he could. But he simply couldn't get there, so he sent his beloved Timothy, who just came back with the good news of how the Thessalonians were actually doing.

In order to catch the context, allow me to begin reading tonight in Chapter 2, verse 17. As we read, simply notice, if you will, Paul's great heart of compassion for these people in Thessalonica. Notice how much affection he had for them.

1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:10

(17) But we, brethren, having been bereft of 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 thwarted 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. (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 man may 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 should 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, (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?

Over the years, Yvonne and I have had the opportunity to minister to many people, (as I am sure that many of you have). And in the course of our ministry to these people, as we have poured out our hearts to them, we have seen people respond differently. Some have seen our lives and heard our message and continued to live as they have always lived, as if we never really made an impact on their lives. Scripture identifies these people as the lukewarm. They are church goers and pew fillers, which we commend, but their heart for Christ is not apparent.

- other have expressed interest in the cause of the gospel of Christ, and while with us, have been somewhat diligent in pursuing God. But as life took us apart from each other, they have become lukewarm in their attitude toward Jesus Christ. (i.e. scripture describes these people as

the Withering Plant)

- but some have been with us and have grown in their love for God and His word and have continued on to this day. (i.e. scripture identifies these as the fruit-bearing plant).

And as I am sure that many of you can attest, when you have an opportunity to witness God working in the lives of individuals (as in this last group I mentioned), your joy will be made full.

You will be able to completely rejoice in God for all that He does in and through these people.

This is what I call, "The Joy of the Ministry."

Personally, this is the thing that keeps me going in the ministry.

I can honestly say that of all the things in the world, from which men seek pleasure, there is none to compare with watching God move in the hearts of people to have a love for Himself.

I believe that the reason for this is because you get to see a glimpse of the working of Almighty God and it invigorates you. It gives you a joy and a delight beyond all comparison.

I can tell you that of all the Christmas cards that we receive, the most encouraging are from these who are doing well in the Lord - especially those with whom we have had a great impact in their lives.

Indeed, that is the joy of the ministry.

And tonight, we are going to have an opportunity to look at the genuine response of Paul to hearing of his converts walking in the truth.

2 John 4 - "I was very glad to find [some] of your children walking in truth, just as we have received commandment [to do] from the Father."

3 John 3:4 - "I was very glad when brethren came and bore witness to your truth, [that is,] how you are walking in truth. (:4) I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth."

This is a joy that all of us should feel.

It simply isn't for pastors.

It is for all who are godly in Christ Jesus - who desire to see lives changed and advancing in knowledge and grace.

This message should be applicable to us all.

We are going to get a glimpse into an aspect of Christian living that ought to give us great joy.

At one point in this passage, Paul describes his joy as so great that it is indescribable.

Look at 3:9 - "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?"

"What thanks can we render to God?" We cannot even describe the thanks that God is due, because of what he has accomplished in the life of the Thessalonians.

Now, in the context of 1 Thessalonians, his thanks has everything to do with the report that he heard from Timothy.

Our outline tonight will be very simple -- 2 points.

1. Timothy's report

2. Paul's response.

1. Timothy's report

(do something with a report for kids)

As we begin to examine the text, may I remind you once more that verse 6 is in some ways, the key verse to understanding all of this epistle - not so much due to its theological emphasis, but due to its historical importance. For it puts in context why and when Paul wrote this letter.

He says, "But now."

Better yet, would be "right now!"

"Right now Timothy has come to us from you." - "Right now" I have put pen to paper to write to you.

As I have told you in the past, the return of Timothy from Thessalonica is recorded by Luke in Acts 18:5.

You will remember that Timothy came with Silas from Macedonia, the region in which Thessalonica was located.

It was when they returned that Paul began devoting himself completely to the ministry of the word, presumably because Timothy and Silas worked enough to financially support all three missionaries (Paul, Timothy, and Silas).

But when they returned, Paul's VERY next task was write this most encouraging epistle to the Thessalonians.

Paul said that upon Timothy's return, he gave a good report of what God had continued to do among the Thessalonians. In fact, this was such good news, that Paul chose to use the word which in almost every other place in the Bible is used to describe the saving "gospel" of Jesus Christ. Timothy, "proclaimed the good news to us!" He "proclaimed the gospel to us."

By using this strong word, Paul merely expresses the impact that hearing of the faith and love of the Thessalonians had upon him. The Thessalonians were continuing in their faith. They were exhibiting great love toward one another and were not turned aside by all of the false accusations leveled against Paul and his companions.

Paul describes himself as being like a prisoner on death row, who is ready to die. But then, he receives a report that the president has pardoned him. And now he is a free man.

So Paul received a message, which gave him great freedom!

He viewed the news from the Thessalonians like he viewed the gospel of Jesus Christ. Though we deserve to die, we receive a message of deliverance - the good news that another man died in our place.

In Timothy's report, there were three items of significance. Surely Timothy told Paul more than what verse 6 includes, but when Paul sought to summarize Timothy's report, he did so using 3 items:

1. Faith
2. Love
3. Affection

(On notes, place a large clipboard, with a "Thessalonian Report" on it with 1., 2., & 3., for the children)

Notice what Paul says (:6) "Timothy 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."

First of all, Paul described this encouraging report as reporting of their ...

1. Faith

We have seen how Paul describes their faith - 1:9 - "How you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God (:10) and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, [that is] Jesus, who delivers us from the wrath to come."

They had an authentic faith.

They had a persevering faith.

They were "assured of the things hoped for and had a conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

They had heard the message of Christ crucified and had clung to it, never to let go.

John Piper describes the process of coming to faith like this ...

"Once we had no delight in God, and Christ was just a vague historical figure. What we enjoyed was food and friendships and productivity and investments and vacations and hobbies and games and reading and shopping and sex and sports and art and TV and travel ... but not God. He was an idea - even a good one - and a topic for discussion; but he was not a treasure of delight.

"Then something miraculous happened. It was like the opening of the eyes of the blind during the golden dawn. First the stunned silence before the unspeakable beauty of holiness. Then a shock and terror that we had actually loved the darkness. Then the settling stillness of joy that is the soul's end. The quest is over. We would give anything if we might be granted to live in the presence of this glory forever and ever.

"And then, faith--the confidence that Christ has made a way for me, a sinner, to live in his glorious fellowship forever, the confidence that if I come to God through Christ, he will give me the desire of my heart to share his holiness and behold his glory." (p. 53 - Desiring God).

Does this ring true to you?

Have you experienced the transforming power of the gospel of Christ?

Long my imprisoned spirit lay

Fast bound in sin and nature's night;

Thine eye diffused a quick'ning ray,

I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;

My chains fell off, my heart was free;

I rose, went forth and followed Thee.

Has God given you the desires to pursue Him?

Is it the "desire of your heart to share God's holiness and behold his glory?"

Or are you still pursuing the world?

2 Thess. 2:13 - "But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth."

Mebane experience. God is a real joy to the people.

But, not only did they have a faith, they also had a ...

2. Love

In our study of this epistle, we have seen of their faith (in chapter 1), but we will see of their love (in chapter 4).

Paul will begin in chapter 4 with some exhortations concerning their love for one another.

4:9 - Paul will tell them, "As to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you; for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; (:10) for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia."

Paul told them that they were taught BY GOD how to love one another!

And I would contend that every Christian, in some sense, is taught by God how to love, merely because every Christian is an object of the Father's love. And having been the object of God's love, we are taught what love is like.

If you think about what God has taught you in His love for you, you have been taught much.

God loved us by demonstrating "His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5:8).

You demonstrate the extent the extent of your love when you love what is unlovable. Christ loved us when we were sinners - Romans 5 goes on to describe how Christ loved us when we were enemies with Him - haters of God, insolent, arrogant and boastful.

To understand and see your sin is to understand and see God's love.

"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a WRETCH like me." (A wretch - a miserable and profoundly unhappy person, a base, despicable, or vile person).

When you see how great your wickedness, is, you see ...

- how great and amazing the grace is,

- and thus, how great and amazing the love is.

And that is what it means to be taught by God to love.

This is what the apostle John wrote - "We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren." (1 John 3:16).

Love was the mark of the believers in Thessalonica.

We saw this in chapter 1.

1:3 - "constantly bearing in mind your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope."

We see it in 2 Thessalonians

2 Thess. 1:3 - "We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater."

In commenting on these two words, John Calvin wrote, "in these two words [Paul] comprehends briefly the entire sum of true piety. "

Faith to God.

Love to Others.

(2 Thess. 1:3 - above - makes this especially clear - the objects).

Calvin continued on by saying, "this form of expression should be the more carefully observed by us in proportion to the frequency with which it is made use of by Paul." (Calvin).

So I did a little research and I found that the uniting of faith and love as a characteristic of "true piety" is a constant theme.

These words are used to describe the church in Ephesus, Colossae, Thessalonica.

Paul described Philemon as a man who was characterized by these two virtues.

Many other places were churches exhorted to pursue faith and love: Corinth, the churches of Galatia, the churches under Timothy's care

Though these two words together don't represent all of Christianity, yet they present an excellent summary of Christianity.

At this point, let me ask you all.

How would you like Rock Valley Bible Church to be described?

One of the things that we are currently doing in Men's Equippers is looking at what the church is.

We are looking at what the church does.

We are looking at the things that we need to stand upon.

Practically, we are looking to see how this manifests itself.

We are looking at how we would like to describe our church.

What are the things that we do.

What is the scriptural support for it all?

What are the things we are known for?

Perhaps, it might be good for us to look no further than this passage right here before us.

Paul described the church in Thessalonica as a church which had faith and love.

May God be gracious to us and raise up a church that would be described in much the same way: "Rock Valley Bible Church? Yeah, I know about them, they have a tremendous faith in God, which is unwavering. They have a great love for others, which is unstoppable!"

This will be God given.

May the Lord be gracious and have others look at our church at describe it as a church of faith and love.

Not only did Paul describe the Thessalonians as having a faith and a love, he also described them as having an Affection...

1. Faith
2. Love
3. Affection

3:6 - "you always think kindly of us, longing to see us just as we also long to see you."

A more literal translation is found in the King James version (NKJV, KJV, MKJV - you take your pick). Literally, Paul writes, "You have a good remembrance of us."

See, this is the thing that caused Paul to think about the well-being of the Thessalonians:

"What comes into their mind when they think about our time with them?"

"Perhaps they have listened to our critics and have bought into the lie that we were scoundrels, who were in it only for ourselves."

"Perhaps they have been persuaded that our words weren't true."

"Perhaps they would rather never see us again, because of all of the trouble we have caused them."

But, Paul's fears were relieved, when he heard that they had "a good remembrance of us." (:6).

Their remembrance of Paul wasn't a bad one, it was a good one.

In fact, not only was it a good memory of Paul, but they also expressed how much they would like to see him again - "longing to see us, just as we also long to see you." - epipoqew - "Earnest desire and passion."

At another time, Paul wanted to see the church in Rome, as he prayed (1:10), "always making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. (1:11) For I long to see you."

Paul longed for the encouragement that occurs whenever believers get together (1:12) "that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mind."

And may I remind you, once again, that this is the entire thrust of this section in Paul's epistle: He was expressing his affection toward the Thessalonians.

1. Eager to be with them (2:17-20)
2. Efforts to strengthen them (3:1-5)
3. Encouragement from them (3:6-9)
4. Prayer for them (3:9-13)

Paul was most thankful for their returned affection, because it was indicative that they really had embraced his message, which really was his major concern.

I am sure that in Paul's mind, in one sense, he wasn't really concerned of how the Thessalonians thought of him.

In his life, he had been hated by many people.
He had been mistreated by many.
He had been ridiculed.

You remember the passage:

(4:8) "afflicted in every way, but not crushed;
perplexed, but not despairing

(4:9) "persecuted, but not forsaken;
struck down, but not destroyed."

(4:10) "always carrying about in the body the dying of Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh."

But, in another sense, Paul WAS concerned of how the Thessalonians thought of him. Because their reception of him was indicative of their reception of his message!

See, when people like the message, they are gracious to the message giver.

But when people don't like the message, they don't like the message giver - Even when the message giver has no relation to the message.
"Don't kill the messenger."

But Paul was thankful, because they still thought kindly of him, which means that they still thought kindly of Paul's message.

And this is precisely what he makes clear in the next several verses....

We have seen Timothy's report, but now, we focus our attention on Paul's Response.

1. Timothy's Report

(faith, love, affection)

2. Paul's Response

(comfort, life, rejoicing, prayer)

Let's look first at verse 7: "for this reason, brethren, in all our distress and affliction we were comforted about you through your faith."

1. Comfort

Paul's first response was one of "comfort."

"We were comforted about you"

Perhaps this might be translated, "encouraged about you."

Notice, however, what comforted him: "through your faith."

Notice that it wasn't, "we were comforted about you, because you thought that we were really good guys."

Notice that it wasn't, "we were comforted about you, because you liked us, and didn't hate us."

No, the encouragement of Paul came because of the faith of others.

I read a verse for you earlier, which I would like to read again, because of its parallelism. Romans 1:10-12:

Paul prayed (1:10), "always making request, if perhaps now at last by the will of God I may succeed in coming to you. (1:11) For I long to see you."

Paul longed for the encouragement that occurs whenever believers get together (1:12) "that I may be encouraged together with you while among you, each of us by the other's faith, both yours and mine."

This is how the Christian faith works.

One person's faith encourages another person's faith.

Yesterday, in Men's Equippers, John Iversen pointed out that here was the great apostle Paul saying that he was going to be encouraged by another's faith.

This, actually, is why we need each other.

We need to constantly stimulate one another.

That is why we need to gather, to "stimulate one another to love and good deeds" (Heb. 10:24).

Our faith is real, but its object is unseen, and easily forgotten.

In the midst of the physical things we need to deal with here on earth, we can easily forget of the things spiritual.

We need constant reminders of the realities of heaven.

Isn't that what faith is? "The assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1).

So Paul was encouraged about their faith.

But it was more than a mere, "Oh great! They are doing well!"

It was something that revived them.
It was something that gave them relief.
Paul was in need of receiving relief. He was in need refreshment.

See, the text says (3:7), "in all our distress and affliction we were comforted."

Distress and tribulation (these words are really synonyms) - the force and pressure from others who are resisting their cause.
Listen, news of the spiritual well-being of others helped Paul in his difficulty.
Though things were difficult, Paul's medicinal comfort came from hearing that the faith of others was continuing on.

And may I say to you all, that if comfort in difficulty comes from hearing good news about another's faith, isn't it also true that we should be greatly encouraged, and energized in the work, when we hear of the faith of others?
Won't our doing well in Rockford encourage the church in DeKalb?

Mark my words.

I'm not a prophet, but I would venture to note that when the day comes when ...
... we have Sunday morning services in Rockford ...
... and many of you don't come to Kishwaukee Bible Church in the morning any more ...
... when Kishwaukee Bible Church loses attendance numbers from Rockford people no longer coming ...
those seats will be quickly taken.
Why?
Because people are greatly encouraged when spiritual progress is being made.
When people hear about what God is doing here in Rockford, they will want to be around either church.

I know that it was true for Grace Church of the Valley when they finally started.
They took some 20 families from Grace Church of DuPage.
But within a very few months, in attendance from the sending church, there was little effect.

But so great was Paul's comfort in his distress that he described it as "life-giving."

Paul's response was one of ...

1. Comfort
2. Life

Look at verse 8 - "for now we live, if you stand firm in the Lord."
The New American Standard adds the word, "for now we [REALLY] live, if you stand firm in the Lord."

Perhaps Paul is going back to his allusion to this "gospel" he heard from the Timothy. That good news that gives life.

The imagery he uses here is that of dead, lifeless and dispirited man, who was given life when he heard that the Thessalonians were doing well.

The distress and affliction which we was suffering under was a kind of death, from which he was raised when he heard of their continued faith and steadfastness.

This is affection.
When one's attitude toward life is powerfully rejuvenated upon hearing a favorable report of one's faith.

Paul spoke this earlier:
2:19 - "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?"

I can liken it to a parent who rejoices at the success of his or her child.
- The parent of the child who receives an honor at school is proud of the accomplishment and finds life easier to live.
- The DeKalb High School basketball team is doing very well this year (19 wins to 3 losses). One of the star player's parents works at the hospital. You can see her skip through the hallway, because of the success of her son.
- You have seen the bumper stickers on cars that say, "My son or daughter is an honor student at (such and such) high school."
- Parents rejoicing in the well being of another.

This is a similar phenomenon, but on a spiritual level.

The spiritual success of one ought to encourage the spiritual success of another.
So also for us.
We ought to sincerely rejoice at the spiritual well-being of others.

I love the way in which Paul attempts to describe his rejoicing...

Paul's response was one of ...

1. Comfort
2. Life
3. Rejoicing

Look at verse 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?"

The sense here is that Paul is saying that he cannot describe his joy.

Paul's question is obviously unanswerable.

The answer is, "Paul, you cannot give enough thanks to God."

Our joy is too great.

**This is the joy of the ministry to which I referred earlier.

A friend of mine has described to me "The Ministry Rush."

- He said it is like what Elijah experienced on Mount Carmel (as recorded in 1 Kings 18-19).

Perhaps you remember the story of how Elijah stood for God against the 450 prophets of Baal.

You remember how they created an altar to Baal and prayed that their God would send fire down to light the fire.

You remember how they called out to Baal with a loud voice.

You remember how they cut themselves in efforts to persuade Baal to light their fire.

You remember how nothing happened.

Then Elijah built an altar and doused it three times with water.

He prayed to God and "the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench." (1 Kings 18:38).

At that point, the 450 prophets of Baal were struck down and killed.

After three years of drought, he also told Ahab that it was going to rain.

So, Ahab got in his chariot and rode from Mount Carmel to Jezreel - like 30 miles.

But is says that Elijah "girded up his loins and outran Ahab to Jezreel" (1 Kings 18:46).

This is "The Ministry Rush."

And may I remind you, that this heart of Paul is nothing more than the heart of God?

Turn with me in your Bibles to Luke 15.

Luke 15 contains the parables of the 3 lost items.

1. The lost sheep.
2. The lost coin.
3. The lost son.

In all three stories, the point is that there is great joy in heaven over the sinner who repents.

1. The lost sheep - Read it (:3-7).
2. The lost coin - Read it (:8-10).
3. The lost son - Read :20-24).

When you think of the great realities of heaven and of hell, which a sinner escapes, you can embrace this also...

Spurgeon said, "the angels sing over sinners that repent, because they know what that poor sinner has escaped. You and I can never imagine all the depths of hell. ... Hell is horrible, for we may say of it, eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither has it entered into the heart of man to conceive the horrors which God has prepared for them that hate him. But the angels know better than you or I could guess. ... [the angels sing over sinners that repent, because they] know what the joys of heaven are, ... We talk about pearly gates and golden streets, and white robes, and harps of gold, and crowns of amaranth, and all that; but if an angel could speak to us of heaven, he would smile and say, 'All these fine things are but child's talk, and ye are little children, and ye cannot understand the greatness of eternal bliss, and therefore God has given you a child's horn book, and an alphabet, in which you may learn the first rough letters of what heaven is, but what it is ye do not know.'"

This is the heart of God - to rejoice in the spiritual well-being of others.

This is the heart of the angels.

This is the heart of the apostle Paul.

And I ask you tonight, is this your heart?

1. Does your heart know of the glories and joys of redemption yourself?

You will never rejoice in the spiritual prosperity of others, until you realize in your own soul of the glories of walking with Christ -- what the blood of Christ Jesus has saved you from and what His blood will do for you.

If you know nothing of this, I would exhort you, this day, to repent, and follow Jesus Christ.

2. Does your heart know of the glories and joys in the spiritual well-being of others?

This is a sign of maturity

-- when you long for others to have what you have.

-- when you desire earnestly what is best for others.

Is your joy at the spiritual prosperity of others and overflowing of thanks and praise to God?

3. If your heart knows nothing of these things, pray that God might give you such a heart!

1. Timothy's Report
2. Paul's Response to Timothy's report
1. Comfort
2. Life
3. Rejoicing
4. Prayer - Next week.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on January 6, 2002 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.