

Today we begin the next major section of 1 Thess., 2:17 - 3:13.

Left abruptly, and in 2:17 - 3:13, Paul focuses on bringing matters up to date, so to speak, focusing on the circumstances that led him to write the letter.

➤ Remember, Paul is writing from the perspective of having Timothy's report in hand.

➤ Staying in touch.

The section ÷ easily into 4 parts.

Somewhat detailed overview.

➤ Start to break it down.

1<sup>st</sup> part of staying in touch, 2:17-20.

➤ In these vv, Paul mainly explains why he and Silas had not been able to revisit these new believers personally, although they had longed to do so.

➤ People were important, not statistics. ☞ 2:17-20 today.

2<sup>nd</sup> part of staying in touch, 3:1-5, the sending of Timothy.

➤ Team was concerned about the Thessalonians' loyalty to Jesus so sent Timothy.

▷ We sent him to strengthen you and to encourage your loyalty. 1/9

➤ Explain.    ↻ Faith, range of mngs.

▷ Faith = Faithfulness/Loyalty.

▷ Paul's obvious concern in this context is not whether they are putting their trust in Christ for their salvation or not.

‣ Neither was his concern doctrinal, as in Gal.

▷ His obvious concern is whether these new believers were remaining faithful in their commitment to Jesus, 3:5b.

‣ I sent Timothy to learn about your loyalty, fearing that the tempter may have tempted you, and all our toil wasted.

▷ Team's concern was that these new believers had renounced their belief in Jesus due to persecution.

➤ Implication that the threat of apostasy due to persecution is real.

▷ According to the context, this seems to be especially dangerous for new believers.

‣ These were not well grounded in biblical teaching yet.

‣ So Paul and his colleagues were concerned about these new believers.

▷ This concern regarding the danger of apostasy needs to be taken seriously by all of us.

‣ We need to do all we can to help establish new believers in the faith, so they hang in there when times are tough. 2/9

➤ In addition to this implication, there is an important lesson here for us.

▷ Paul, Silas, & Timothy were concerned about these believers' sp. welfare.

➤ Not ignore it.

➤ Acted upon it.

▷ If we are concerned about a believer's sp. welfare, not keep silent, act upon it, check on them.

3<sup>rd</sup> part of staying in touch, 3:6-9.

➤ Here we have Timothy's good report about their loyalty and love.

▷ Their loyalty to Jesus remained strong.

▷ & their love for other believers remained strong as well.

And the 4<sup>th</sup> part of staying in touch, 3:10-13.

➤ Team's prayer for these believers.

➤ Break it down a little further.

▷ Vs 10, report team praying.

▷ Then in vv 11-13, actual prayer.

Again, today, 1<sup>st</sup> part of this section, 2:17-20. 3/9

<sup>17</sup> But, as for us, my dear brothers and sisters, when we were separated from you for a time, in person not in our hearts, we longed more deeply and with great affection to see you in person. <sup>18</sup> For we wanted to visit you—I, Paul, tried again and again—but Satan blocked our way. <sup>19</sup> For who is our hope, our joy, our crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus when he comes, if not you? <sup>20</sup> Yes, you are our glory and joy!

Again, here Paul mainly explains why he and Silas had not been able to revisit the audience personally, although they had longed to do so.

Vs. 17.

➤ But, as for us, my dear brothers and sisters, when we were separated from you for a time, in person not in our hearts, we longed more deeply and with great affection to see you in person.

➤ I.e., out of sight, but not out of mind.

▷ Paul, Silas, & Timothy were forced to leave Thessalonica prematurely by circumstances beyond their control.

➤ However, the missionary team never stopped thinking about these new believers.

▷ Again, people important, not statistics.

In vs. 18, attempted to return but thwarted.

➤ For we wanted to visit you—I, Paul, tried again and again—but Satan blocked our way.

▷ Focus

➤ The Grk wd for blocked is a term that comes from the military. 4/9

▷ In order to stop the advance of enemy armies, soldiers would tear up and destroy the road to hinder their passage.

▷ Warfare imagery is embedded in the metaphor, Satan himself being our adversary.

▷ This term vividly illustrates the fact that we are engaged in spiritual warfare.

➤ Eph. 6:12 (NIV), For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms [unseen world around us].

➤ My . . . , our fight is not against human enemies, but against powerful and evil supernatural enemies.

▷ Though unbelievers and this evil world may appear to be the chief enemies of God and His church, Paul indicates that our fight is not really against them.

▷ Rather, it is against the evil spiritual forces who control unbelievers and this evil world.

➤ Note, the 4 terms that Paul uses in vs 12 for demons are most likely synonyms.

▷ So why does Paul line up these four terms rather than just simply say, ~ we fight against demons?

▷ For emphasis.

➤ He wants to wake us up to the fact that this present age is an age of darkness and evil, controlled by powerful, evil forces, who are intent on bringing about our downfall.

We need to understand & cement the following into our heads.

- Satan actively works to keep people from accepting Christ.
- He actively works to hinder the gospel.
- Satan will bring in false teaching to lead believers astray.
- He even disguises himself as an angel of light.
- Satan will also attempt to hurt the community of believers through inciting persecution against us.

▷ Peter refers to satanic-inspired persecution in **1 Pet. 5:8-9 (CSB)**.

➤ **(CSB)** Be sober-minded, be alert. Your adversary the devil is prowling around like a roaring lion, looking for anyone he can devour. Resist him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world.

Paul says, For we wanted to visit you—I, Paul, tried again and again—but Satan blocked our way.

- Paul's statement makes clear that Satan does have the power to hinder and frustrate the work of Christ's servants.
- He is the great adversary who constantly opposes the work of God and disrupts God's people and their service.
- But we must set this in the much larger context of Scripture.

▷ Not cosmic dualism. **6/9**

▷ Satan is not omnipotent, omnipresent, or omniscient.

▷ He is able to work only with God's permission & w/in the limits God sets.

› The case of Job.

→ Permission & boundaries.

› The case of the disciples.

→ Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift all of you as wheat.

▶ Behind Pau's statement that Satan blocked them, lies God's permission.

▷ Satan may be allowed to tear up and destroy the road to block our progress.

▷ But we can be assured that our omnipotent, omnipresent, & omniscient God ultimately allows it for our sp. welfare.

› Rom. 8:28, And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

› E.g., Paul.

→ 2 Cor. 12:7-10

This 1<sup>st</sup> part of this new section closes with vv 19-20. 7/9

▷<sup>19</sup> For who is our hope, our joy, our crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus when he comes, if not you? <sup>20</sup> Yes, you are our glory and joy!

▷ Grk wd translated as "for" indicates that Paul's statement here is supporting evidence.

‣ It gives the Thessalonians just cause to believe his claim that the team desired to see them.

‣ After all, they might have construed his absence as evidence to the contrary.

‣ So he drove the point home.

▷ Paul pictures himself, Silas, & Timothy as appearing before Christ on the day of judgment

‣ And they will be bringing with them this church as the proof that the team had been faithful in their calling as missionaries.

‣ The church would be like a crown symbolizing their effective missionary work, and therefore its continuing existence was vital.

‣ Equally, the team's converts were the source of their joy for their own sake.

‣ Just as a teacher may take a genuine pleasure in the success of a pupil.

→ But not merely because the pupil has had a share in ensuring that success, but above all because of what it means to the pupil.

▷ As we consider this, here's a lesson for us as we close this a.m.

‣ The ultimate reward for Paul's ministry was not money, prestige, or fame. 8/9



>The ultimate reward for Paul's ministry was new believers, whose lives had been changed by God through the preaching of the gospel.

>When Paul got to heaven, he wasn't going to be proud of the buildings he built or the cars he drove.

>Ministry is about people, loving & working with people.

>Ministry is not about making a name for ourselves, building buildings or any material stuff.

>Paul was looking forward to introducing the Thessalonians to Jesus when they got to heaven.

>No matter what ministry God has given to us, our highest reward and greatest joy should be those who come to believe in Christ and are growing in him. 9/9