

# Day 60, 1 Thessalonians 3

by David Servant

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of continuing in faith and the essence of true holiness, which is loving others as given by God's ability.*

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## Description

David Servant emphasizes the importance of continuing in faith and standing firm in the Lord, as seen in Paul's concern for the young believers in Thessalonica who faced persecution. Paul's efforts to strengthen the believers and ensure their faith remained steadfast highlight the necessity of ongoing faith for salvation, contrary to the doctrine of 'once saved always saved.' The key message is that true holiness is demonstrated through love for one another, as Paul prays for the Thessalonians to abound in love and be established in holiness before God's coming.

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## Transcript

by the ability that God gives---is the preeminent thing." applicationPoints: - "Continuing in faith is necessary to gain entrance into heaven." - "Loving others, as given by God's ability, is the essence of true holiness." - "When Jesus returns, only loving others and being holy will matter." keywords: - "1 Thessalonians 3" - "Chronological context" - "Unconditional eternal security" - "Faith and salvation" - "Love and holiness" - "Persecution and faith" - "Paul's concern for the Thessalonians" - "The importance of continuing in faith" ---

I'm reminded again how helpful it is to read the epistles within the chronological context of the book of Acts. In today's chapter, Paul recounts a time period that we just read about in Acts a few days ago.

Remember that Paul and Silas may have spent no more than a month in Thessalonica before they were run out of town by jealous Jews (17:1-10). So naturally they were concerned about the young believers whom they had left behind after their premature departure. Paul had attempted to return to Thessalonica several times, but was "thwarted" by Satan (2:18). Worried that the young believers may have abandoned their faith under the fires of persecution, Paul eventually sent Timothy from Athens to Thessalonica, an event not recorded in the book of Acts. His hope was that Timothy would find believers who were holding fast, and a church not needing to be salvaged, but only strengthened and encouraged.

To Paul's great relief, Timothy returned to Athens with a good report. The young Christians in Thessalonica were holding firm in their trials, and their faith was evident by their love.

Paul obviously believed what Jesus plainly taught, that those who initially receive the gospel with joy may end up falling away when they face the "affliction and persecution [that] arises because of the word" (see Matt. 13:5-6, 20-21). Paul was concerned that his labor in Thessalonica may have been "in vain" (3:5). Clearly, he would not make such a statement if he believed in the modern doctrine of "unconditional eternal security," often referred to as "once saved always saved." There is no way that Paul's work could have been in vain if people in Thessalonica ultimately escaped hell because of his preaching. If, however, it is possible for believers to stop believing, and if continuing in faith is a requirement to gain entrance into heaven, then the possibility existed that all of Paul's labor could be for nothing.

Paul would later promise the Christians at Colossae that Jesus would present them before God "holy and blameless and beyond reproach," but only if they would "continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Col. 1:23, emphasis added). Obviously, if people are saved through faith, then those who don't have faith are not saved, even if they possessed it previously. This is why Paul wrote to the Thessalonian believers, "For now we really live, if you stand firm in the Lord" (3:8, emphasis added). Paul would not have made such a statement had he believed there were no adverse consequences for those who did not stand firm in the Lord.

I remember once hearing one of America's most famous preachers quote Jesus' promise, "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved" (Mark 16:16). Based on that promise he declared that, if one believed for any moment of time, that person was saved and eternally secure, even if he never believed again. His conclusion was based on the fact that "Jesus said, 'He who has believed' (past tense)." I wondered why he didn't keep reading Jesus' very next words in Mark 16:16: "But he who has disbelieved shall be condemned," and apply the same logic. If he had, he would have had to conclude that if anyone disbelieved for any moment of time, that person was condemned and eternally damned, even if he never disbelieved again.

Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians at the end of today's reading reveals what truly is the most important thing: "May the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people...so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus" (3:12-13). Loving others---by the ability that God gives---is the preeminent thing. That is the essence of true holiness. It will be the only thing any of us are concerned about when Jesus returns.

Incidentally, Paul's "night and day" prayers to be reunited with the Thessalonians---for their spiritual benefit---were answered, as he was able to return to Thessalonica during his third missionary journey.

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