

## 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:5

***17But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, 18because we wanted to come to you – I, Paul, again and again – but Satan hindered us. 19For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? 20For you are our glory and joy.***

***3:1Therefore, when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, 2and we sent Timothy our brother and God’s coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in the faith, 3that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. 4For 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. 5For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.***

The book of First Thessalonians gives us such striking glimpses into the heart of Paul as a pastor and Christ-follower. This man - he gave so much of himself. His love was overwhelmingly selfless and his dedication to the spread of the gospel was unstoppable. Yet, in this passage he addresses the very subject of being *hindered*. Merriam Webster defines *hinder* as *to delay, impede, or prevent action*.<sup>1</sup> Odds are, we all can resoundingly admit to having experienced a hindrance or two – or 10. How does Paul respond to it? Does he see it as justification to move on to something else? Let’s explore the text.

Paul doesn’t beat around the bush when it comes to expressing how the abrupt removal from Thessalonica weighed on him. He states they were *torn away* from the believers there. Interestingly enough, the Greek word for torn here is *apōrphanizō*. If you look closely, within it you can see the English word, *orphan*. Stott claims that commentators suggest that the use of this word is another example of Paul’s love for mixing metaphors. The word paints a picture not just of a child separated from a parent but more importantly here perhaps, of a parent deprived of his child.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Hinder. In Merriam-Webster’s collegiate dictionary. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hindered>

<sup>2</sup> Stott, John R. W. *The Message of Thessalonians: The Gospel & the End of Time*. Edited by Motyer, J.A. (OT) and Stott, John R.W. (NT), 1991. Inter-Varsity Press. The Bible Speaks Today Series.

<sup>3</sup> Martin, Michael D. *1, 2 Thessalonians*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen, B&H Publishing Group, 1995. The New

Some of us don't need a metaphor to imagine that sort of pain – we've experienced the heart-wrenching, life-altering reality of it. Before you decide it is unfair of Paul to make such a heavy comparison remember that Paul was a single man with no biological children. The people he shared the gospel with he also shared himself with – they became like children to him and he like their father. Look no further than to our many brothers and sisters who have answered the call of adoption to see the immense capability of the human heart to love far beyond the lines of a shared DNA.

Gripping the heart even more fiercely than the tearing away was the *force* behind it. Goodbyes are hard enough but a forced separation beyond our control interrupts our lives with a grinding halt. Except for the fact that life hasn't paused for anyone else - just us - and we are left trying to make sense of how to go on without someone we dearly loved.

Beloved, if this hits home would you allow these words below from our text to point you towards a promise we ultimately have in Christ?

Fill in the blank according to 1 Thessalonians 2:17 ESV.

*Since we were torn away from you, brothers, \_\_\_\_\_ a \_\_\_\_\_*  
\_\_\_\_\_.

Even though Paul wasn't physically with the believers in Thessalonica his heart was with them (v17) – and he seemed to have believed the separation wasn't for long. Although Paul was probably not speaking eschatologically here, one might argue that with the eager anticipation he and the Thessalonians had for the return of Christ, ever so near to his mind would be the reality that if they were not reunited in this world, they would be in the Kingdom to come. Fellow sojourner, although the days seem to drag by this is just *for a short time* (See James 4:14, 2 Peter 3:8-9). May the ache in our hearts thrust us into Kingdom expectancy and the holes left from unbearable loss be filled with the foresight of the glorious reunion that awaits us.

**Eschatology:**  
the doctrine of  
last things –  
end times.

### ***Satan hindered us.***

1 Thessalonians 2:18 may stir up many questions in our mind. Questions are all over Scripture. Questions God asks of man and vice versa. There's no greater place to take our questions than to the Omniscient One. We may not always get answers but we will get God (James 4:8).

*Again and again* Paul claimed to have wanted to return to Thessalonica but he was prevented. How often do we feel we are headed in the exact

direction God has called us but as soon as we hit a bump on the road we begin to question if we got it right. In the trenches of opposition we often muse, *this couldn't be the route God has for me*. The Lord knows if anyone had reason to look at his circumstances and use them to justify being on the wrong path, it would have been Paul. The man was constantly enduring hardship while spreading the gospel (2 Corinthians 11:24-28). Over and over Paul seems to do quite the opposite of recoiling. Despite opposition, persecution and affliction he just kept on going with boldness in his God (1 Thess. 2:2).

As earnest as his intentions were to get to the Thessalonians, Paul's plans were thwarted. We are not told exactly *how* Paul was hindered from seeing the Thessalonians but *are* told by whom – Satan. Interestingly enough, elsewhere in Scripture Paul is known for suggesting the Holy Spirit was responsible for stopping an avenue for ministry (Acts 16:6). This might raise the question, *how did Paul know who was closing the door on him?*

Our adversary may scheme and plot with power strong enough to hinder at times but God still maintains ultimate authority. *Elsewhere Paul wrote of Satan as the tempter (1 Cor. 7:5), who by deception or any other means (2 Cor. 11:14; 12:7) seeks to oppose and defeat the work of Christ (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 Cor. 2:11). The work of the man of lawlessness will be according to the power of Satan (2 Thess. 2:9), but ultimately both will be defeated by God (Rom. 16:20; 2 Thess. 2:8).*<sup>3</sup> As for the possibilities offered on how Satan hindered the plans, illness or opposition in Thessalonica are both suggested, but we don't have enough information to make an accurate conclusion. *What Paul did communicate clearly is that it was not lack of desire or lack of love that prevented his return to Thessalonica, and apparently that was what the church needed to hear.*<sup>4</sup> Still, instead of allowing the impasse to be cause for walking away from the Thessalonians, Paul is led to a different solution (1 Thess. 3:1).

Let's reconnect the dots from Acts 17 to our place here in Thessalonians. As Paul was sent out from Berea his escort took him to Athens (Acts 17:15). It is while Paul is in Athens that he decides he *can bear it no longer* and decides the best plan is to send Timothy on to Thessalonica instead (1 Thess. 3:1-2). The back and forth usage of the plural pronoun, "*we*" and the singular "*I*" make it difficult to pinpoint if Paul was really going to be left alone or if Silas was remaining with him. However, *if his long-time companion Silas had still been in Athens, there would have been little deprivation in Paul's not having Timothy with him. He would not be "alone" in the real sense of the word unless Silas too was away.*<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Martin, Michael D. *1, 2 Thessalonians*. Edited by E. Ray Clendenen, B&H Publishing Group, 1995. The New American Commentary.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Thomas, R. L. (1981). [1 Thessalonians](#). In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon* (Vol. 11, p. 263). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

To claim to follow Jesus but desire to do so in isolation is contrary to our calling in Christ – for we are a people called to *go*. However, we may from time to time find ourselves in seasons where we are left to minister alone. Maybe Paul’s statement, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, informs us of his willingness to be left *alone* so we may be reminded that sometimes we have to walk a different way than we once had before so God can accomplish something more.

### ***Destined for this.***

In addition to exhorting and encouraging the Thessalonian believers, Paul seems to have another concern for Timothy to check in on – *that no one be moved by these afflictions* (1 Thess. 3:3). *“Trials,” more specifically “afflictions” or “tribulations” are the stiffest test of faith. Such is the lot of Christ’s followers (e.g., John 16:33).<sup>6</sup>* As Paul penned these words to the believers he esteemed and loved dearly, would it be difficult to imagine the angst he could have felt as the ink stained the paper? Who wants to be the bearer of hard news, especially when it is hard news for someone you love?

*“Hey guys, I’m sorry to be the one to tell you this but the affliction you’ve experienced thus far isn’t the end but only the beginning... this affliction thing, is just part of following Jesus... I guess you could say, well, it is your destiny.”*

If Paul carried any angst as he wrote, you can bet an overwhelming feeling of camaraderie came directly behind it. It wasn’t just *you were destined for this...* it was ***we*** *are destined for this*. The same man who wrote those words out of concern for the Thessalonians would be right alongside them in the same fight of faith.

If the Thessalonians were made aware to expect affliction it would hopefully guard them in seasons of temptation where the enemy could attempt to lure them away (2 Cor 11:3).

The Thessalonians were Paul’s hope and joy (1 Thess 2:19) and he longed to stand on the Day of Judgment before the Lord (1 Cor 3:13-14) rejoicing in their steadfast faith in Christ.

(Paul taught that *through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God* (Acts 14:22).

See also Romans 8:17; Phil 1:29; 2 Tim 3:12).

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas, R. L. (1981). [1 Thessalonians](#). In F. E. Gaebelin (Ed.), *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Ephesians through Philemon* (Vol. 11, p. 264). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.