

# Stretched

## 1 Thessalonians 3:5

### Dr. Paul Cannings

#### A. Three Strands are Better than Two (v. 5a):

1. “For this reason” – ‘To strengthen them in their faith so that no one would be disturbed by these afflictions’ – these afflictions seem to be what the believers of Thessalonians were experiencing (2:14-15).
2. Much tribulation (1:6) – Amid much grievous affliction, distress, and tremendous pressure due to the burden of the spirit, which led to deep anguish.
3. Afflictions (vs. 3) – These believers sincerely loved their founder. They were concerned about the distress he was experiencing from the pressures of ministry plus the oppression that was placed upon him by his oppressors. These afflictions were like the pressing of grapes in a wine press.
  - a) Was used to pressing the grapes in winemaking till they burst asunder, and so metaphorically came to mean great trouble.
4. Tribulation – They had problems at home, in the community, and with the Jews.
5. Tribulation – Their troubles made them mature like the people they mimicked (2:13-14).
6. Endure it no longer – Paul could not bear up under the pressure of the unknown. He knew these believers were going through a lot (1:6). Because of how faithful they proved to be after accepting the Gospel (1:3-8), Paul was concerned that because of the extreme circumstances, they may return to paganism (1:9).

a) Paul twice uses the uncommon verb *stegō*, which originally referred to keeping water out of a vessel, such as with a watertight house or a boat that doesn't leak. The image that the apostle paints, therefore, is of his deep affection for the Thessalonians that he can no longer contain within himself and prevent from leaking out.<sup>[1]</sup>

7. I sent Timothy – Paul was so concerned that he told Timothy to drop everything and learn what was taking place with these believers. Paul loved these believers dearly (2:7-8).

a) Paul's own lot had not been happy, even while he awaited news from Macedonia. Persecution at Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea was followed by loneliness and indifferent response at Athens (3:1; Acts 17:32-34).

b) Timothy was sent to strengthen and encourage the Thessalonians (3:1–5). Paul had left Silas and Timothy at Berea to complete the work there (Acts 17:13–15) and had traveled on to Athens (Acts 17:16) by sea, where his associates later rejoined him. After several attempts to return to Thessalonica, he decided to go alone to Athens and sent Timothy (and probably Silas, Acts 18:5) to strengthen and encourage the believers. The Thessalonian believers were destined to suffer (3:3–4). But suffering at the hands of hostile people radically differs from suffering God's wrath (5:9).

8. To find out – Paul directed Timothy to get a complete intellectual understanding of all that was taking place among these believers.

a) Behind Timothy's mission was Paul's deep-seated concern that the Thessalonians, either as a group or in significant numbers, might abandon the new beliefs and values that they had accepted at their conversion. Undoubtedly, this is the sort of anxiety he refers to in 2 Cor. 11:28 as being constantly with him.<sup>[2]</sup>

b) Timothy brought good news back to Paul (3:6–10). After Paul had traveled on to Corinth (Acts 18:1), he was joined by Silas and Timothy who brought an encouraging report from Thessalonica (Acts 18:5). Paul was so thankful for their continued progress in the faith that words could barely express his joy (3:9). The expression "fill

up anything that may still be missing” (3:10) was used for repairing a fishing net (Matt. 4:21). Paul wanted to build up the believers’ faith so that they would not be deficient in any way.<sup>[3]</sup>

## **B. Faith Holds Us (v. 5b):**

1. About your faith – Paul was doing a temperature check on whether these believers, whom he described as having a sincere ‘work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope,’ may because of extreme circumstances that were emotional, mental, and spiritual no longer have an intense trust and complete confidence in Christ any longer. He was concerned that their deep conviction in Christ and full surrender to Him may have cooled off.

a) “What is lacking” in their faith (3:10) may be adequate hope (3:6; cf. 1:3; 5:8), which Paul seeks to supply in 4:13–5:11.<sup>[4]</sup>

2. About your faith – Paul wanted to make sure that these believers' full surrender to God remains steadfast, especially since their confident, intense trust in God was an example to many (1:7).

3. About your faith – These believers proved to have a sincere faith because their faith deepened rather under pressure (3:6-10).

4. Fear – Paul is very concerned that because of their severe afflictions at any time, they may turn away from being as fervent as they were, especially since Paul had several individuals turn away from the faith (2 Timothy 4:9, 14). Even Timothy struggled under much pressure (2 Timothy 1:6-9).

## C. Satan, the Enemy (v. 5c):

1. Tempt — (Luke 8:14) - Because they are experiencing extreme pressures, Paul was concerned that they may become susceptible to the solicitation of satan to sin.

a) In the difficult situation the Thessalonians had faced without their spiritual mentors, they might have renounced their Christian beliefs and way of life. According to 1 Cor. 7:5, satan is the one who tempts Christians, and this is who Paul has in mind here as well (cf. 2:18). The aorist ἐπείρασεν is written from the perspective of Paul before Timothy went back to Thessalonica. His apprehension had been that his readers might already have succumbed to satan's testing of them before Timothy could return to strengthen and encourage them. If this had happened, then the missionaries' hard labors among the Thessalonians (cf. 2:9) would have proved useless or to no purpose (εἰς κενόν). <sup>[5]</sup>

b) Paul saw satan as using the persecution the Thessalonians were undergoing to lure them away from what they knew to be God's will, namely, perseverance in the midst of trials. He was concerned that satan might snatch away the seed Paul had sown before it could put down stabilizing, fructifying roots. <sup>[6]</sup>

c) Tempter shows the seductive aspect of satan's work. The devil tried to use Christ's physical difficulties to defeat Him spiritually (Mt 4:3), and he did the same to the Thessalonians. The verb has tempted is aorist indicative and shows that the tempter was already at work, while the verb be is subjunctive, casting doubt upon satan's success.

2. Tempt — The pressure of their trials may cause their confidence in God's ability to become lukewarm, allowing satan to try to prove that their love for the Lord was not sincere in the first place, thus causing them to sin. Paul knew all his schemes (2 Cor. 2:11).

- a) The tempter is identical to satan of 2:18, bent on frustrating the work of God by putting hindrances in the missionaries' path or setting traps to bring about the converts' spiritual downfall.<sup>[7]</sup>
- b) Of course, satan is behind these persecutions, the enemy of the Christian (1 Thess. 3:5). He is the tempter and seeks to ruin our faith. Note the emphasis on *faith* in this chapter (1 Thes. 3:5–7, 10). As a roaring lion, satan stalks believers, and we must resist him “steadfast in the faith” (1 Peter 5:8–9). When satan tempted Eve, he began by weakening her faith in God: “Yea, hath God said?” (Gen. 3:1) As a serpent, satan deceives (2 Cor. 11:3); as a lion, he devours (1 Peter 5:8). He will use any means to attack the Christian and weaken their faith in God.<sup>[8]</sup>
- c) He is supreme among evil spirits (see Jn. 16:11; Eph. 2:2). His activities can affect the physical (2 Cor. 12:7) and the spiritual (Mt. 13:39; Mk. 4:15; 2 Cor. 4:4). He tempted Jesus (Mt. 4:1-11), and he continues to tempt Jesus' servants (Lk. 22:3; 1 Cor. 7:5). He hinders missionary work (2:18). But he has already been defeated (Col. 2:15), and Christians need not be overwhelmed by him (Eph.6:16). His final overthrow is certain (Rev. 20:10).
3. Our labor would be in vain – All of Paul's stramineous, tiresome exertion would have served no purpose for the kingdom of God. This was a church that Paul stated (2:9-12).
4. Our labor would be in vain – satan cannot change God's kingdom plan when faith holds us even while being stretched.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Arnold, C. E. (2002). *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon*. (Vol. 3, p. 417). Zondervan.

<sup>[2]</sup> Wanamaker, Charles A.: *The Epistles to the Thessalonians : A Commentary on the Greek Text*. Grand Rapids, Mich. : W.B. Eerdmans, 1990, S. 131

<sup>[3]</sup> Hughes, Robert B. ; Laney, J. Carl ; Hughes, Robert B.: *Tyndale Concise Bible Commentary*. Wheaton, Ill. : Tyndale House Publishers, 2001 (The Tyndale Reference Library), S. 621

[4] Keener, Craig S. ; InterVarsity Press: *The IVP Bible Background Commentary : New Testament*. Downers Grove, Ill. : InterVarsity Press, 1993, S. 1 Th 3:1-9

[5] Wanamaker, C. A. (1990). *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: a commentary on the Greek text* (p. 132). W.B. Eerdmans.

[6] Constable, T. L. (1985). [1 Thessalonians](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 698). Victor Books.

[7] Bruce, F. F. (1982). *1 and 2 Thessalonians* (Vol. 45, p. 63). Word, Incorporated.

[8] Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 172). Victor Books.