

# The Christian Arsenal

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## 1 THESSALONIANS 3:6-13

What we've seen in our study so far of **1 Thessalonians** is two sides of Paul. Paul had a very **tough** side. Paul was **beaten and imprisoned** and **stoned** and **left for dead**...some even believe he was stoned to death and brought back to life. Paul was **scoffed at** and **sneered at**...

Paul suffered all sorts of **physical and verbal abuse**...all for preaching the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ...

But he remained tough. He remained **steadfast** and **determined** and **committed** and **dedicated** and **nothing deterred Paul in his ministry of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ**.

And Paul had a **tender** side as well. Paul felt a tenderness and a love for all the believers he had won to Jesus. Paul didn't just win folks to Jesus and then forget about them...Paul continued to think about them and love them and long to see them. **We've seen that the last several weeks, and we see it again this week.**

We know that Paul had sent Timothy to Thessalonica to see how the new believers were doing. Satan probably whispered in Paul's ear that his work among the Thessalonians was in vain. He does this a lot, you know. Remember when John the Baptist, after preaching about the Lord Jesus and even baptizing the Lord Jesus, sent word asking if indeed Jesus was the Christ or should they look for another?

**We know that Satan had been working overtime to keep Paul in turmoil about these new believers because we saw in last week's lesson that he had hindered him from going there and seeing for himself how they were doing.**

So, Paul stayed alone in Athens and sent Timothy to Thessalonica, and this is where our lesson picks up today...

### **1 Thessalonians 3:6-8...**

The phrase, "***But now that Timothy has come to us from you...***" literally means "***But when Timothy just came from you to us...***"

The meaning here in the Greek is that Timothy has just arrived and Paul sat right down and wrote this letter. The Phillips translation says it this way, "Timothy has just come straight from you to us..."

The idea is that Paul was so excited about hearing the good news that their faith was strong and their love was strong and also that they were anxious to see Paul, that he didn't waste any time writing them. *Paul felt an urgency to write.*

Paul is so happy these folks haven't faltered in their faith...and they very well could have. These folks were suffering for their Christianity.

Look back up at **2:14...**

**One of the reasons the early Christians suffered was that they would not remain anonymous when their friends and family members were arrested and punished for being Christians. They openly confessed to being Christians. They brought trouble on themselves by standing up for Christ and identifying with God's people.**

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*Hebrews 10:32-34...(Williams translation)*

“...you must continue to remember those earlier days when first you received the light and then endured so great a struggle with persecution, *partly* by being exposed as a public spectacle to insults and violent sufferings, and *partly* by showing yourselves ready to share with *others* who were living in this condition. For you showed sympathy with those who were in prison and cheerfully submitted to the violent seizure of your property, for you knew that you had in yourselves and in heaven one that was lasting.”

These folks identified with each other! Today, we have to **beg** folks to identify with a church. We have to invite folks **over and over** to be a part of our Sunday school and church, don't we?

The folks the writer of Hebrews wrote to were joined together in a common purpose and the believers in Thessalonica were, too. Paul calls them his “brethren”, because they were in God's family through the blood of Jesus and they stood firm together in His name and for His cause.

You and I haven't known persecution like the first century Christians knew persecution. You and I have never had to make the decisions these folks in the New Testament church made, have we?

But, we don't know what the future holds for us, do we? This persecution may come to us. How I pray we would be found as Timothy found the Thessalonians... **“standing firm in the Lord.”**

It's sad to admit, but I believe we see a great contrast to this in our day. I mean, I believe the church of the New Testament was strong because they were **not** afraid to speak up for their faith and I believe the church of our day is weak because we **are** afraid.

Let me ask you...Do folks ever come to you and want to know why you believe as you do? Do they ever ask you questions about the Bible? Do they ever ask you questions about the Lord Jesus? How do you answer them?

Let me ask you something else...  
What would happen if persecution came to our country?  
Would you and I be willing to be counted as Christians?

For example, if the enemy of the Gospel of the Lord Jesus (and we know so much clearer today than we did three weeks ago that indeed there are enemies of the Gospel of the Lord, don't we?)...but if the enemy of the Gospel came for George and put him in prison for his faith, would Fred step forward and say, “I'm a Christian, too”? And if they put George and Fred in prison, would Bill and Robert and Virgil and all of us come forward and identify with the Lord Jesus Christ, even knowing we would be put in prison, as well?

**I've often wondered about this. Just how courageous would I be in those circumstances? I don't know. My prayer is that God would just flood me with His grace, so that I would not shrink back in the face of physical persecution or imprisonment.**

And let me just say this before we leave this subject. Just as Paul called the Thessalonians “brethren”...so are we. We are family. And as family, we should be there for one another. When we see a hurting member or when one of our class needs a **word of comfort** or a **word of encouragement** or even **some financial help**...what do we do? If we don't minister in the “little

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things”, I don’t believe we’ll minister in the “big things”, like identifying ourselves with each other if persecution **does** come to us, do you?

Well, Paul said he was comforted by their firm stand and he said also **“we really live”** (NAS) and (NIV). The Phillips translation says **“this gives us a breath of life.”**

See, this was Paul’s real purpose in life. Paul told the Philippians that **“for me to live is Christ”** and now he says that to really live is to see the faithfulness of the Thessalonian Christians.

To Paul, serving Jesus didn’t mean just sitting around and **thinking** about Jesus. Living for Christ meant **preaching the Gospel** and **reaching out** and **teaching** and **discipling** and **servicing** those whom God had entrusted to Him.

And it wasn’t inconsistent for Paul to say his purpose in life is to live for Jesus Christ and at the same time to live for faithful fellowship among believers in the church of Jesus Christ.

See, if we live for Jesus, we will also live for one another.

Jesus said, **“By this shall all men know you are My disciples...”**  
**... “if you” WHAT? “have love for one another...”**

We are serving Christ and living for Christ when we allow Christ to touch another life through us!

The whole purpose of the church is God reaching out to a hurting world through us. I don’t know why God did it that way! Why did God choose **people** to show forth His Gospel to people?

Why didn’t He write a sign across the sky so all men could just read it? Why didn’t God send angels to the four corners of the earth to be His messengers? He **will** send an angel forth when the church is gone, but for now,  
**We** are His feet...  
**We** are His hands...  
**We** are His voice...  
**We** are called by Him to show forth His love...

I don’t know why God has chosen to use you and me...but He did and since He did, our purpose in life ought to be to serve Jesus as He uses us to reach out to others.

Our love for Christ is seen in our love for His church...  
Our love for Christ is seen in our love for the lost.

Paul said, “You are my reason for living and I can bear anything as long as I know you are standing firm in Him.”

My husband and I were discussing this week how Paul might feel toward the church in America. Think about it...what have you seen on TV since the attack on September 11? You’ve seen folks from the **news media**. You’ve seen folks from the **world of politics**. You’ve see **“experts” from every field**. You’ve seen **movie stars** and **rock stars** and **TV stars** and every other kind of star you can think of. But, have you heard from the church? NOT MUCH! And I wonder if Paul would say, **“My, how firm the church of America is standing in this time of crisis.”**

We saw Billy Graham speak and he mentioned Jesus, but of the **prayers** offered at the National Cathedral a couple of weeks ago, only the president’s pastor from Texas **boldly** offered his

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prayer in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Prayers offered in any name except Jesus aren't prayers...they are merely words, aren't they?

This is our opportunity, and I fear we just might not rise to the occasion!

Well, let's see more of Paul's tender side. And as we look at the rest of this chapter, let's see some things in Paul's life that we can put into our own lives...

**Verses 9-13...**

First of all, we see that Paul's attitude was joyful in gratitude.

Paul was so grateful for these people,

So grateful that God had allowed him to bring the Gospel to them...

So grateful they had believed in that Gospel...

So grateful they were standing firm even in the face of persecution...

Everywhere Paul went, he met with rejection. Some rejected him **passively**...they just turned and walked away.

Some rejected him **verbally**. They insulted him and made fun of him and His Savior.

Some rejected him **violently**. They stoned him and beat him or threw him in prison.

But, everywhere Paul went, there were **some** who accepted his message. Maybe it was a few women on the riverside. Maybe it was a few men in a synagogue.

**(By the way, missionaries are always asking for prayer that the men of their country will get saved.**

**We saw this in Russia...churches filled with women and few men. We see this from Andy...asking us to pray that the men of that Zulu culture would come to Christ. Somehow, men often equate the need for a Savior with weakness.)**

Everywhere Paul went, there were some who listened to what he said, and the Holy Spirit got hold of their hearts and they received Christ as Savior and Lord of their life. That's why Paul could say he **"was all things to all men, that I may by all means save some."**

Paul was in the **"save some"** business. We're not in the **"save all"** business. God wants us to witness to all we can, but if everyone we witness to doesn't come to Jesus, we don't need to get frustrated. We just need to be joyfully grateful for the ones who do!

And secondly, Paul was earnest in his praying for these folks...

**Verse 10...**

Paul said he prayed **"night and day"** ...continually...fervently!

How many of you have ever had such a burden on your heart that you prayed about it night and day? You went to bed every night with a prayer on your lips for that burden and you awoke each morning with a prayer on your lips. Does anybody know what I'm talking about?

Usually those prayer burdens that command most of our time and energy in prayer are burdens that have to do with our own family, aren't they? But, I believe God is teaching us here that we need to be just as concerned about our brothers and sisters in Christ.

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First, Paul said, *“I’m earnestly praying that I might see you again, that I might complete what is lacking in your faith.”*

These folks were standing firm, but they were **still** new converts. Paul had only been able to stay with them a short time before he was run out of Thessalonica. He had only been able to teach them for a short while, and they were still “babes in Christ.” Paul knew they still needed teaching and discipling. Paul knew the Christian life is a life of maturing one step at a time... *“precept upon precept...line upon line, here a little and there a little.”*

And that’s true for us as well. Reading the Bible isn’t a requirement for our salvation, but it is essential for our sanctification. Reading the Bible is evidence that you know the Lord and you want to know Him better and better.

When we were born again, we weren’t born full grown spiritually, were we? NO! God began a work of maturity and sanctification that will go on until we die!

That’s one thing that makes the Christian life so exciting! There’s always more to learn. There’s always another level that God wants to bring us to. And may I say...there are no shortcuts! I mean, it takes time and discipline and commitment to get into God’s Word each day and see what nuggets we can dig out. God doesn’t just allow them to fall into our laps, does He?

Paul earnestly prayed that these folks wouldn’t stop growing. Paul knew if a Christian stops moving forward, he will soon move backward. And the desire of Paul’s heart was that the Thessalonians would be made complete...and he earnestly, day and night prayed in that direction.

Well, not only did Paul pray that they would be **made complete**, but he also prayed that they would **abound in love**.

He prayed they would love each other, and would also reach out and love all men, just as he abounded in love for them.

You know, it’s real easy to love folks here, isn’t it? I mean, the folks here at our church are loving. We love each other. We care about each other. We rejoice with each other and we hurt with each other.

A woman’s friends from The Netherlands wondered why in the world she wanted to go to church, and after coming with her on Sunday morning, they wanted to come back on Sunday night, didn’t they? I believe part of this was the preaching and the singing, but I believe another part of it was the fact that they sensed a warmth and a love among us that is lacking in the churches over in Europe. And we can’t take credit for that! That’s the work of the Holy Spirit!!

Paul said we’re to love those **within** our church, but we’re also to love those **outside** the church. The love we have for each other ought to encourage us to love those outside our church and all around us...

**You can go from this church in any direction and you’ll find folks who don’t ever go to church. They don’t care anything about the things of God. They’re living and breathing and one day they’ll breathe their last breath and die and go to hell...**

**unless someone, out of love, goes and tells them about Jesus!**

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Paul says "I'm praying that your **faith will mature**. I'm praying that your **love will abound**. And I'm praying that your **hearts will be established unblamable in holiness**.

Again, as we said several weeks ago...this doesn't mean that no accusation will ever be brought against you. They surely were brought against Paul, weren't they? As a matter of fact, the Bible tells us Satan accuses us all the time before the Father. But, we should live holy lives so that no accusation will have enough evidence to prove to be true.

The greatest demonstration of the power of God on our lives is not if you can teach or sing or even lead folks to Jesus. The greatest evidence of the power of God on our lives is that we are growing and we are loving and that we are living lives that are holy. **In short, we must live for the truth of God's Word.**

The terrorists who flew their planes into the Pentagon and the World Trade Center and who crashed into Pennsylvania were willing to die. They died for a lie and God wants us to live for the truth. Do we have enough faith in our Truth as they had in their lie?

See, you can teach a great lesson or sing a great solo or even have the ability to win folks to Jesus and be here every time the doors are open, but if your life doesn't square with the **lessons** you teach or the **solos** you sing or the **witness** you give, or the sermons you hear, **folks will soon stop listening to you and you will bring much more shame than good to the cause of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

It's always a very disappointing thing to me to come to hear a singer or singers...no matter who they may be, and realize they're singing for their own glory, not the Lord's glory.

The Holy Spirit has His own way of letting us know that, doesn't He? How many of them have come to our own church?

Well, let me close with this...

Why did Paul earnestly pray like that?

Why should **our faith grow?**

Why should **our love abound?**

Why should **holiness be established in our lives?**

**Well, number one, because God is our Father!!**

There are ways we dishonor our earthly parents. God's Word tells us to **honor** our father and our mother, doesn't it? And we ought to be very careful not to dishonor them.

Most of us here today have buried one or both of our parents and we don't have the opportunity to go back and undo or even apologize for those things that dishonored them. Do you ever think of something you said, or didn't say that disappointed your father or mother? It hurts, doesn't it?

**Well, I'm sure we've all dishonored and disappointed our Heavenly Father as well.**

**And as much grief as we have when we remember times we dishonored or disappointed our earthly parents, it should bring us much more grief when we disappoint or dishonor our Heavenly Father.**

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God isn't "the man upstairs"!! I was watching a segment on "20/20" the other night about a set of quintuplets who were going away to college this year. Barbara Walters asked the parents how they had managed to cope with four boys and one girl who were all teenagers at the same time and were all leaving for college at the same time, and the father pointed upward and said, "Oh, we had a lot of help from 'the big guy upstairs.'"

He is **holy!** He is **sovereign**, and at the same time, God is **our Father!** He isn't **far off!** He is **close by!** **He doesn't pull away from us! He draws near to us! He invites and encourages and welcomes us into His presence!**

Paul knew this...

Twice Paul calls God our "Father"...once in **verse 11** and once in **verse 13**.

And twice in these verses, Paul tells us that Jesus is Lord.

***I can't say Jesus is Lord of my life and not do the things He says.***

***I cannot call Him "Lord" and not grow.***

***I cannot call Him "Lord" and not love.***

***I cannot call Him "Lord" and not walk in holiness.***

And Paul ends this chapter by telling us something he tells us in every chapter of **1 Thessalonians**. He tells us that Jesus is coming again...and here he tells us He is coming with His "holy ones" or His "saints." That means you and me!!

And He is! Until then, may He find us growing and loving and may our hearts be established unblamable in holiness!