

Concerns for Your Christianity pt.3

I Thess. 3:1-13

Introduction

A letter written from a pastor to another pastor of his intentions of getting out of the ministry

"This letter comes to your attention for several reasons; and though we have not met personally, I have read some of your books and heard you on the radio several times. Let me explain my great concern, one which I have not been able to correct and one that is causing me to consider leaving the ministry. Perhaps your [your] insights, the Lord will use to give me some light.

"First of all, my position: I firmly believe that the leadership of the church should be the very best, not only in their personal spiritual lives, but also in setting the pace for people they lead. Now, I hasten to add that I am not talking about perfection or any type of super humanness, just a living, growing personal relationship with our Lord. I firmly believe that, if the leaders of the church do not present a lifestyle of commitment and dedication to their Lord and to the local body that those following won't either.

"The problem: Pastor, two-thirds of our elected officers attend only one service per week. Again, I'm not talking about being or having to be present every time the doors are opened. But I do believe that, other than unforeseen situations, illnesses, and

vacations, that the leadership of the church should make a double effort to be present at the services, if for no other reason than for the encouragement of the saints and the pastor. I find it extremely difficult to believe that proper leadership is or can be provided when the leaders do not spend enough time with their people to even know where their hurts and fears are. I go to board meetings and find that, by far, the majority of the time is spent on items that have no direct relationship to the needs and hurts of people. I believe that, because of this, our church has come to a stalemate, which is equal to going backwards instead of moving ahead.

"I have brought this to the attention of our board on several occasions—and to be honest, not even all of them are faithful in their attendance—and expressed my concern, with absolutely no results.

"Again, I'm not talking about men and women who just cannot make it, but about those who could but will not. I receive the normal replies, "My schedule's awfully busy. I'm, I'm just too tired at the end of the day." Or they don't even offer an excuse. But these very same people are not afraid to remind me often that they are the power of the church. It often happens.

"Pastor, I've come to the place where I am, if this is carried on into next year, ready to resign the pastorate. How is it possible for a pastor to direct his flock, establish the needed programs, develop spiritual leadership, if he can't even get the backing to get started? I'm open to your advice. I believe our church has great possibilities, but as long as we're lukewarm, the Lord will not bless us or use us."

That letter could've been written by thousands of different pastors, because that's so common—to take for granted the good things God's given us.

Spurgeon

He warns potential pastors about the ministry by saying, "Let no man who looks for ease of mind and seeks the quietude of life enter the ministry. If he does so, he will flee from it in disgust."

In writing to preachers
 "When a Preacher is downcast"

Our work, when earnestly undertaken, lays us open to attacks in the direction of depression. Who can bear the weight of souls without sometimes sinking to the dust? Passionate longings after men's conversion, if not fully satisfied (and when are they?), consume the soul with anxiety and disappointment.

To see the hopeful turn aside, the godly grow cold, professors abusing their privileges, and sinners waxing more bold in sin—are not these sights enough to crush us to the earth?

The kingdom comes not as we would, the reverend Name is not hallowed as we desire, and for this we must weep. How can we be otherwise than sorrowful, while men believe not our report and the divine arm is not revealed?

All mental work tends to weary and to depress, for "much study is a weariness of the flesh." But ours is more than mental work—it is heart work, the labor of our inmost soul. How often, on Lord's Day evenings, do we feel as if life were completely washed out of us! After pouring out our souls over our congregations, we feel like empty earthen pitchers which a child might break. Probably, if we were more like Paul and watched for souls at a nobler rate, we should know more of what it is to be eaten up by the zeal of the Lord's house.

It is our duty and our privilege to exhaust our lives for Jesus. We are not to be living specimens of men in fine preservation, but living sacrifices, whose lot is to be consumed. We are to spend and to be spent, not to lay ourselves up in lavender and nurse our flesh.

Such soul-travail as that of a faithful minister will bring on occasional seasons of exhaustion, when heart and flesh will fail.

Heb 13:17

¹⁷ Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

Let them do this with joy - That is, lead with **joy!** Just try to do this in your own strength! You can't naturally! You can (only) supernaturally! **Joy** is an integral component of the fruit of the Spirit filled leader's life (**Leaders, are you allowing Him to control you?**) ([Eph 5:18-note](#) [Gal 5:16-note](#); , [Gal 5:17-note](#), [Gal 5:22-note](#)), clearly necessitating the leader's continual dependence on the Spirit (cp [Gal 5:25-note](#) where **live** and **walk** are both **present tense** = continuous action ~ continual dependence) and God's grace to function effectively in his role. For the leaders to lead with joy indicates that the sheep are willingly submitting to their leaders.

W E Vine writes...

that is, that they may hereafter render their account with joy, and not lamenting (**present** participle of **stenazo**), joy because of obedience to their admonitions and the

spiritual progress of these whom they have guided.
 (Vine, W. Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville:
 Thomas Nelson or Logos)

Grief (4727) (**stenazo [word study]** from **stenos** = narrow, contracted - figuratively as when one is squeezed or pressed by circumstances) is a poignantly picturesque word which literally describes an internal squeezing and denotes a feeling of sorrow which is internal. **Stenazo** means to express grief by inarticulate or semi-articulate sounds. The idea is to bemoan or lament over (Lxx of [Nah 3:7](#) for "grieve"). A **groan** is an audible expression of anguish due to physical, emotional, or spiritual pain (Lxx of [Is 21:2](#) where the prophet "groans" because of the harsh vision God has revealed to him). **Stenazo** has a slightly different nuance in [Jas 5:9](#) **Mounce** stating that here it means "to give vent to querulous or censorious feelings."

Stenazo refers to the utterances of a person who is caught in a dreadful situation and has no immediate prospect of deliverance (**As a leader this aspect of stenazo may "hit too close to home"!**). **Stenazo** is used by Luke in its noun form, **stenagmos**, to describe the desperate utterances of the Israelites during their oppressive bondage in Egypt...

'I HAVE CERTAINLY SEEN THE OPPRESSION OF MY PEOPLE IN EGYPT, AND HAVE HEARD THEIR **GROANS (stenagmos)**, AND I HAVE COME DOWN TO DELIVER THEM; COME NOW, AND I WILL SEND YOU TO EGYPT.' ([Acts 7:34](#) cp [Ex 2:24, 25](#)) (**Note: Stenagmos** is also used in [Ro 8:26-note](#) of Spirit's prayers expressed to God inarticulately)

This would be unprofitable - Refers to the leader's having to grieve or lament over the readers (for their disobedience).

Unprofitable (255) (**alusiteles** from **a** = without + **lusiteles** = paying for expenses, profitable) is that which does not pay, that which is unprofitable.

Vine feels that...

To render an account with grief because of the lack of obedient response to their ministry would mean eternal loss for those who had thus failed to submit to them and follow them. That is the meaning of “unprofitable for you.” (Vine, W. *Collected writings of W. E. Vine*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson or Logos)

Steven Cole adds that...

You should obey godly leaders because if you cause them grief, you cause yourself grief.

Spiritual children, like our natural children, can be the source of immense **joy** or of immense **grief** (which, literally, is “groaning”). Every pastor has had frequent occasion both for joy and for groaning over people in the flock. The apostle Paul told the Thessalonians, ([1Th 3:9-note](#)),

“For what thanks can we render to God for you in return for all the joy with which we rejoice before our God on your account?” (See also, [1Th 2:19](#), [20-note](#))

The apostle John wrote ([3John 1:4](#)),

“I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.”

Phil 2:16

¹⁶ holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain.

Phil 4:1

Therefore, my beloved and longed-for brethren, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, beloved.

I Thess 2:19

¹⁹ For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.

But Paul agonized over the Galatians' defection from the truth ([Ga 1:6](#); [4:19](#)). He wrote to the Corinthians "out of much affliction and anguish of heart ... with many tears" ([2Co 2:4](#); see also, [Php 4:19-note](#)). Paul was not concerned about his own welfare or reputation, but about their welfare and God's glory. If you cause your pastors to groan, it's because they know that your disobedience will damage both you and the name of Christ.

GETTING RID OF THE PASTOR - A Christian leader told about some church members who came to him for advice. They wanted to know of a way to get rid of their pastor. Sensing that they were not being fair, he gave them these suggestions:

Look your pastor straight in the eye while he is preaching and say "Amen!" once in a while. He'll preach himself to death.

Pat him on the back and tell him his good points. He'll work himself to death.

Rededicate your life to Christ and ask your minister for a job to do. He'll die of heart failure.

Get the church to pray for him. Soon he'll become so effective that a larger church will take him off your hands.

Review

I.BE STRONG

II.BE STEADFAST

III.BE SURE

IV.BE SOOTHING
V.BE SATURATED
VI.BE SPECTACULAR
VII.BE SANCTIFIED
Lesson

I.BE STRONG
II.BE STEADFAST
III.BE SURE

IV.BE SOOTHING

⁶ But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also *to see you*—⁷ therefore, brethren, in all our affliction and distress we were comforted concerning you by your faith. ⁸ For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.

Timothy has come to us from you - Paul had been alone at Athens ([1Th 3:1-note](#)) where he had issued a "command for Silas and Timothy to come to him as soon as possible" ([Acts 17:15](#)). He had subsequently moved on to Corinth ([Acts 18:1](#)) by the time Timothy returned with the good news ([Acts 18:5](#)).

The return of Timothy with his report formed the immediate occasion for the writing of this letter and is one of the ways exemplary follow up was carried out by Paul.

The **good news** was refreshing to Paul's spirit which is just the effect Solomon stated should occur writing that...

Like cold water to a weary soul, so is good news from a distant land. ([Proverbs 25:25](#))

The good report of Timothy that the Thessalonians had not failed under testing but were standing firm in their faith convinced Paul that their conversion was genuine and they were God's **elect**, a truth he was then able to write with assurance in this letter... knowing (absolute beyond of a shadow a doubt knowledge), brethren beloved by God, His **choice** ("**election**") of you (see **note** [1Thessalonians 1:4](#))

Your faith and love - John Calvin writes that...

In these two words (faith and love) he states concisely the sum total of godliness. All who aim at this double mark are beyond the danger of error for the whole of their life. (Calvin adds that) All pastors are reminded by this of the kind of relationship which ought to exist between them and the church. When things go well with the Church, they are to count themselves happy, even though in other respects they are surrounded by much distress. On the other hand, however, if they see the building which they have constructed falling down, they are to die of grief and sorrow, even though in other respects there is good success and prosperity.

Always think kindly of us - Literally he says they "always have a good remembrance of us", the **present tense** signifying this was the Thessalonian saints' continuing heart attitude toward the missionaries. How encouraging for Paul to know that the Thessalonians looking back on his visit with such fond memories. Have you ever written someone to let them know you are thinking kindly of them?

Swete comments

Loving remembrance of former teachers is a Christian duty, and, in connection with faith and love, a fair evidence of Christian character.

Think (memory)(3417)(**mneia**) means a recalling to mind or memory and thus a recollection or remembrance. It means to recall information from memory, but without necessarily the implication that persons have actually forgotten.

The writer of Hebrews instructed the saints to...

Remember (present imperative = continually) those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith. ([He 13:7-note](#))

Comment: The saints in Thessalonica heeded both of these commands admirably and to the glory of God.

Paul was always thankful to be remembered by the saints, writing to the Corinthians...

Now I praise you because you remember me in everything, and hold firmly to the traditions (oral teachings - there were no "Bible" for most believers at this time), just as I delivered them to you. ([1Corinthians 11:2](#))

Longing (1971) (**epipotheo [word study]** from **epi** = an intensifier, **epi** = upon marks direction of the desire + **potheo** = to yearn) means to have a strong desire for something, with implication of need. It mean to long for, have great affection for, yearn for someone or something, desire earnestly, long for greatly, intensely crave possession.

Our distress and affliction - Hiebert notes that...

The two nouns, "**distress**" (*anagke*) and "**persecution**," (*thlipsis*) are linked together under one article, thus forming two aspects of the whole difficult situation in which they find themselves. The former denotes a necessity or compulsion that forces itself upon one, while the latter indicates the crushing pressure to which one is being subjected. Both terms refer to the difficult external circumstances confronting the missionaries.

distress

Barclay writes that **anagke**...

literally means the necessities of life. Certain burdens a man may escape, but others are inescapable. There are certain things which a man must bear. The greatest of these are sorrow, for only the life which has never known love will never know that, and death which is the lot of every man. The triumphant endurance enables a man to face all that is involved in being a man. (Barclay, W: *The Daily Study Bible Series*. The Westminster Press or Logos)

We were comforted - The **we** unites Silvanus with Paul in this experience of comfort. Timothy in bringing the report would likewise share this feeling of comfort, but he had been experiencing all during his journey back Corinth.

Parakaleo (3870) (**parakaleo** from **para** = side of + **kaléo** = call) means literally to call one alongside to help or give aid and conveys an intense feeling and strong desire. Because a person can be called alongside for many purposes, the word has a wide range of meanings including to entreat, appeal to, summon, comfort, exhort, or encourage. Later **parakaleo** came to mean exhorting, admonishing, encouraging, call to one's side, call to one's aid. Our English word "encourage" means "with heart." To comfort or encourage in a sense is to give them new heart. Shallow sympathy makes people feel worse but genuine spiritual encouragement makes them feel better and brings out the best in people.

Comforted about you through your faith - Paul regularly derived personal encouragement from hearing about the authentic faith and walk of other believers (and don't we all?)

Romans 1:12 (note) that is, that I may be **encouraged** together with you while among you, each of us by the other's **faith**, both yours and mine.

2Cor 7:4 Great is my confidence in you, great is my boasting on your behalf; I am filled with **comfort**. I am **overflowing with joy in all our affliction**. (cp note **1Thessalonians 1:6**)

Philemon 1:7 For I have come to have **much joy and comfort in your love**, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother.

Application: How do you feel when you receive news of a brother or sister standing fast in their faith? stumbling in their faith? You are either encouraged or discouraged, respectively. And if you are

going through distress and affliction yourself, such news can have either a positive or negative impact on your walk! Our Christian walk is seen and/or heard about by other believers, to whom we can be either a source of encouragement or discouragement - which effect characterizes your walk beloved of God?

Live (2198)(zao) means to enjoy real life or have true life and worthy of the name Christian. The **present tense** speaks of Paul's desire that this be a continual experience. He really lives in comparison with his feelings of dread at not knowing how they were doing as the tempter was tempting them in the context of their appointed afflictions.

Vine has an interesting note on **now we really live** explaining that it means to...

enjoy life; a vivid rhetorical description of the contrast between his state of apprehension when he was in ignorance of their welfare, and the comfort and ease of mind produced by Timothy's good news. (Vine, W. Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville: Thomas Nelson or Logos)

Barnes adds that...

The same thing here affirmed is true of all faithful ministers of the gospel. They feel that they have something that may be called life, and that is worth living for, when those to whom they preach maintain a close walk with God. (Albert Barnes. Barnes NT Commentary)

EBC writes that ...

Paul had been given a new lease on life. To know they continued "standing firm in the Lord," unmoved by affliction and unshaken by his detractors, was enough to stimulate Paul to renewed activity. (Gaebelein, F, Editor:

Expositor's Bible Commentary 6-Volume New Testament. Zondervan Publishing)

Hiebert explains it this way noting that...

Before there had been a dead weight of apprehension; they felt lifeless and had no enthusiasm. But **now** in consequence of the news Timothy brought, **we live** feel like we truly live, not just exist. The **present tense** indicates that this is not just a momentary reaction but an abiding inspiration.

Spurgeon wrote that...

Never is the servant of God so full of delight as when he sees that the Holy Spirit is visiting his hearers, making them to know the Lord, and confirming them in that heavenly knowledge. On the other hand, if God does not bless the word of his servants it is like death to them. To be preaching and to have no blessing makes them heavy of heart: the chariot-wheels are taken off, and they drag heavily along: they seem to have no power nor liberty.

If - (condition of the first class with **present tense, active voice, indicative mood**) is not intended to question their stability and thus the **NIV** is accurate rendering it "**since you are standing firm**". However this sentence in addition to expressing his assurance that they are standing firm but also contains a reminder that they must continue to stand firm in the future.

Hiebert notes that although they are indeed at present standing firm,

the conditional form of the statement serves to remind them that they have a continued responsibility to "stand fast." The verb (*steko*) is a late formation, formed from the perfect tense of the verb *histemi*, "to stand," and carries the idea of firmness and stability. Here the **present tense** stresses that for the future they must go on standing firm, like soldiers repelling an enemy attack. **In the Lord** points out the sphere of their steadfastness. Their faith has brought them into a close vital union with "the Lord," Jesus Christ, and they must adhere steadfastly to Him. (*Ibid*)

Stand firm (4739) (***steko*** [**word study**] is corrupted from *ésteka*, **perfect tense** of *histemi* = to stand) can mean to **stand** literally ("whenever you **stand** praying..." [Mk 11:25](#)) but is used figuratively in this passage meaning to stand firm in faith and duty, to be constant, to persevere, to remain steadfast, to continue in a state.

The **present tense** expresses Paul's desire that his spiritual children continue remaining firmly committed in their Christian belief. Remember that belief always demonstrates itself to be genuine by one's conduct or lifestyle.

⁸ For now we live, if you stand fast in the Lord.

Colosians 1:21

²¹ And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled ²² in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—²³ if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard,

Hebrews 3:14

¹⁴ For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,

Hebrews 10:38

³⁸ *Now the just shall live by faith;
But if anyone draws back,
My soul has no pleasure in him.”*

³⁹ But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.

James 1:25

²⁵ But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues *in it*, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.

I John 2:19

¹⁹ They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but *they went out* that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

I John 2:24

²⁴ Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father

Stand fast

The word **steko** pictures an army that refuses to retreat even though it is being assaulted by the enemy. Standing firm as a believer is clearly an important exhortation as shown by Paul's frequent use illustrated in the following passages.

In 1Corinthians Paul later exhorted the believers to

Be on the alert, stand firm (steko) in the faith, **act** like men, **be strong**. (1Cor 16:13) (**Comment:** Note that all four verbs are present imperative calling for this to be the believer's lifestyle or continual practice.)

To the Galatian church in danger of falling into the fleshly trap of legalism Paul wrote that

It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore **keep standing firm** (steko - present imperative = as your lifestyle) and do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery. (Gal 5:1)

To the Ephesian church in the midst of intense spiritual warfare **Paul** like a good commanding officer wrote

be strong (present imperative) in the Lord, and in the strength of His might. **Put on** (aorist imperative - it's urgent, do it now!) the full armor of God, that you may be able to **stand firm** against the schemes of the devil...(and to) **take up** (aorist imperative) the full armor of God, that you may be **able to resist** in the evil day, and having done everything, to **stand firm**. **Stand firm** (aorist imperative) therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE in addition to all,

taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming missiles of the evil one. And **take** (aorist imperative) THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints. ([Ep 6:10](#), [11](#), [12](#), [13](#), [14](#), [15](#), [16](#), [17](#), [18](#)-see **notes** on spiritual warfare Ephesians 6:10; 11; 12; 13; 14; 15; 16; 17;18)

Paul used (**steko**) exhorting the Philippian saints to **conduct yourselves** (present imperative) in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ; so that whether I come and see you or remain absent, I may hear of you that you are **standing firm** (**steko**) in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel. (see **note** [Philippians 1:27](#))

Paul shows us the role of prayer in **standing firm** reminding the saints at Colossae that

Epaphras, who is one of your number, a bonds slave of Jesus Christ, sends you his greetings, always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, **that** (purpose clause -- the purpose of his intense praying) you may **stand** perfect and fully assured in all the will of God. (see **note** [Colossians 4:12](#))

Paul again reminded and commanded the saints at Thessalonica to...

stand firm (**steko** - present imperative) and **hold to** (**steko** - present imperative) the traditions (the content of instruction that has been handed down) which you were taught (not "traditions of men" but the truths taught by Paul as he received them from the Lord), whether by word of mouth or by letter from us. ([2Th 2:15](#))

V.BE SATURATED

⁹ For what thanks can we render to God for you, for all the joy with which we rejoice for your sake before our God, ¹⁰ night and day praying exceedingly that we may see your face and perfect what is lacking in your faith?

VI. BE SPECTACULAR

¹¹ Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. ¹² And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we *do* to you,

VII.BE SANCTIFIED

¹³ so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.