

Though the Thessalonian believers were not perfect, Paul expressed confidence in them, because ultimately his confidence was in the Lord, who is faithful. Because the Lord Jesus is the Good Shepherd of true believers, we can trust Him to be faithful in caring for His sheep. Paul's encouragement to the Thessalonians suggests three reasons for his confidence.

- I. Paul could entrust the Thessalonians to the Lord, because the Lord Jesus Christ is faithful to His **intent**: He will strengthen and protect His own (3:3).
 1. The *foundation* of Paul's confidence is the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus.

Paul ascribes to the Lord Jesus the faithfulness of God which begins in the O.T. (e.g., Exodus 34:6; Lamentations 3:23) and extends into the N.T. to Jesus Himself (e.g., 2 Timothy 2:11; Revelation 1:5; 3:14; 19:11). Such examples remind us that He is faithful despite our weaknesses and sin, and even in circumstances which appear horrible.
 2. The *direction* of Paul's confidence is toward true believers, those who truly belong to Jesus.

These two letters explain how the Thessalonian believers had turned from idols to the living and true God, and demonstrated the genuineness of their faith by persevering in persecution. Even with their challenges revealed in chapters 2 and 3, Paul had confidence concerning them, because the Good Shepherd cares for His own sheep (John 10). God would complete what He had begun in them (cf. Philippians 1:6).
 3. The *substance* of Paul's confidence was that the Lord would strengthen them inwardly and protect them outwardly.

Paul had prayed for their strengthening in 2:17 and confirms here that the Lord would do it. It was needed to stand firm and to continue in their faith, love, and hope. As a prayer, it is clearly a work of God, but Paul's efforts in writing and sending Timothy (1 Thess 3:2) show that it does not exclude human effort.

Though Satan's lawlessness is already at work (2:7), though he lays his snares to entrap believers (1 Timothy 3:7; 6:9; 2 Timothy 2:26), though his intent is to steal, harm and kill the sheep (John 10:10), the Lord will protect His own. This is not a promise of an easy life, or an excuse for a lazy life (cf. 2 Peter 5:9; James 4:7). Rather it is an assurance that all which happens to true believers is part of God's ultimate good for them.
- II. Paul could entrust the Thessalonians to the Lord Jesus, because He is faithful in His **actions**: He is motivating and enabling His own to obedience (3:4).
 1. The *divine dimension*: Paul had confidence in the Lord concerning them. Cf. Philippians 1:6.
 2. The *human dimension*: Paul had confidence that they were obeying and would be obeying those things he was commanding.

Paul was confident of their present obedience (though he was absent, cf. Philippians 2:12) and their future obedience. They were convinced of Paul's authority and the rightness of his commands. (It is possible that Paul is also here anticipating the instructions he is about to give in vv. 6–15.)

This pattern of combined human and divine activity appears elsewhere such as in Philippians 2:12b–13, 1 Corinthians 15:10, and in Ephesians 3:16 with 4:1. For this reason Paul both exhorts them and prays for them.
- III. Paul could entrust the Thessalonians to the Lord Jesus, because He is faithful in His **ability**: He can direct His own to think right (3:5).
 1. By turning again to prayer, Paul shows his trust that the Lord is able to do all that is needed.
 2. Paul has two requests: that the Lord would (1) direct their hearts unto the love of God and (2) direct their hearts unto the perseverance of the Christ.

The heart is the seat of our being – our emotions, thoughts, and will (cf. Mark 7:21–22). Considering carefully God's love will enable and motivate to love (cf. 1 John 4:19). Considering carefully the perseverance of the Messiah can motivate similar endurance (Hebrews 12:2–3). Here is a model of prayer, that the Lord direct the hearts of believers to embrace the love which God has shown and the endurance of Christ Himself.

In his absence Paul had to entrust the Thessalonian believers in the hands of the Lord. He did so confidently, because "faithful is the Lord." Paul did not neglect his own responsibility, but ultimately trusted in the Lord. He provides an example for us, to actively entrust other believers into the care of the Lord. It is also a challenge, to be sure that our faith is genuine, so that we can trust the Good Shepherd to be caring for us as His own.