

# 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/1thess/1thess-3/1-thessalonians-311-13/>

*Paul still desires to see the Thessalonians in person and to teach them more. He tells them to love each other and all other people with an overflowing love. Love is the means by which Jesus prepares us for His return to earth, so that He will find us living a life set apart from the world which He will judge.*

Even though Paul has finally learned that the Thessalonians are enduring persecution for their faith and have not successfully been tempted to abandon it, he still expresses a desire to visit them in person and “complete what is lacking” in their faith (v. 10).

Paul specifically hopes that the church’s love will grow, saying *may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you.* Faithful endurance largely involves living a life of love towards others. Paul exhorts them to *abound* in their *love for one another*. This is consistent with the command of Jesus, which He called a “new commandment,” that believers “love one another, even as I (Jesus) have loved you” (John 13:34). Jesus loved even to death. Paul has copied Jesus, and says that they should copy his love for them. Paul’s love for the Thessalonians is to seek their true best interest, which lies in faithful obedience to Christ, even through rejection by the world.

But it is not only *love for one another* that Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to display in their daily walk. It is also *love for all people*. This provides great insight, because it is clear that the conduct of the Thessalonians is highly offensive to many in their community, provoking them to persecute them. But the Thessalonians are not to seek affirmation from the community. They are to have the courage to lead the community to the truth, to show them their true best interest.

In chapter 1, Paul mentioned one way in which the Thessalonians might have shown love to their neighbors, while also offending them: the Thessalonians had “turned to God from idols.” In turning from idols, they had, through their choice of lifestyle, demonstrated a better way. But idols are generally used by people as a way to provide moral justification for self-seeking behavior. So when their moral ruse is exposed, it often makes them mad, which leads them to seek retribution. Self-seeking is at its root exploitative of others, so it is consistent to persecute anyone who does not comply.

This also provides an example of the form of love used here, which in Greek is the word “agape.” Agape love is making a choice based on values. This is rather than basing love on affection or emotion. In asking the Thessalonians to love those who are persecuting them, Paul is asking them to make a choice to seek the best for the very people who are seeking them harm.

This keeps with the command of Jesus to “love your enemies” (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27,35). In his letter to the Romans, Paul wrote “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head” (Romans 12:20). The best way to bring justice into our lives is to love those who persecute us.

There is not a particular level of love that is to be achieved, then we say “That is enough.” Rather, Paul exhorts them to *increase and abound in love*. Here is Paul the great coach again, always exhorting them to improve, and grow. In this case, to increase in loving others. And not to hit the minimum. But to *abound in love*. Paul desires them to have so much love that it overflows.

Why should someone return love for hate? Good for evil? Paul answers that, saying the Thessalonians should love one another, and all people *so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints*. Paul again inserts the eternal perspective of life. When the *Lord Jesus* returns to earth, we want to stand before Him *without blame*, having lived in *holiness*. That is the way we will gain the greatest reward, the maximum joy and fulfillment from a well-lived life.

And we will not be alone when Christ returns. We will be there with *all His saints*. A “saint” is someone who is set apart for special service. To be “holy” is to live according to that special service. The special service believers have been appointed to is to have increased and abounded in *love for one another, and for all people*. To love all people, even our enemies, requires trusting that God’s way is truly for our best, choosing this perspective, that our eternal good is worth the current pain or inconvenience, and then putting that into action.

Loving others, including enemies, involves exercising all three things we control (who or what we trust, the perspective we choose, and what we do). And it requires submitting all three of those things we control to the obedience of Christ. This is the path to our greatest fulfillment, but it won’t necessarily feel that way. It requires faith, and an eternal perspective.

The reason we want to be *without blame in holiness* when *Jesus* returns is because we will all stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ. Paul wrote this letter to the Thessalonians from Corinth. To this day in the city of Corinth, there are remnants of a Judgement (Bema) Seat. This Bema Seat was a raised platform from which Greek judges offered their judgements. It could refer to the platform from which Olympic athletes were awarded their great prizes. Paul is using this Greek picture to convey the idea.

He describes this moment of judgement in a letter to the Corinthian believers:

“Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade men, but we are made manifest to God; and I hope that we are made manifest also in your consciences”  
(2 Corinthians 5:9-11).

Pleasing God is the core purpose of our lives, it is the path to fulfillment. Every one of us will stand before Jesus. Not before one another, but before Jesus. There are rewards for good, and rewards for bad. Paul mentions that we know the fear of the Lord because one day every knee will bow to Jesus; we will care very seriously what Jesus thinks of the way we lived our lives.

This is something that ought to bring great fear to us. Fear of losing the greatest opportunity of our lives, to fulfill our purpose and please God through our lives. It is what ought to drive us to gladly endure persecution, because the alternative is to displease Christ.

This picture of *the coming of Christ with all His saints* should hang before us as we live our lives of faith. This is what Paul was setting in front of the Thessalonians, reminding them that when this day comes we want our *hearts without blame in holiness* when we stand *before our God and Father*. Paul points to the way Jesus can *establish* this blamelessness in the Thessalonians' hearts, if they *increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people*.

Here is what the Apostle John says about this:

“By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.”  
(1 John 4:17)

When we are like Jesus in this world, then we can have confidence in our judgement seat appearance. If we are not living like Jesus, we ought to have fear. Since none of us can fully live like Jesus, then all of us ought to be motivated by fear. Which is biblical, since the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and wisdom is living in the most effective manner, the way that is in our true self-interest (Proverbs 9:10; Acts 10:31).

But it is worth pursuing living like Jesus. That is the path to having confidence at the judgment. How did Jesus live? He was the servant of all. He obeyed to the point of death. He spoke the truth relentlessly. He gave His life as a ransom for others. Jesus reamed the Pharisees and Sadducees for being exploiters. We should serve one another, not exploit each other. But Jesus loved His enemies. He even prayed for the forgiveness of those who crucified Him, while hanging on the cross (Luke 23:34).

### **Biblical Text**

**11 Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; 12 and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all people, just as we also do for you; 13 so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.**