

1 Thessalonians 3:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.

Analysis

For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain—*dia touto kagō mēketi stegōn epempsa eis to gnōnai tēn pistin hymōn, mē pōs epeirase hymas ho peirazōn kai eis kenon genētai ho kopos hēmōn* (διὰ τοῦτο κάγω μηκέτι στέγων ἔπεμψα εἰς τὸ γνῶναι τὴν πίστιν ὑμῶν, μή πως ἐπείρασεν ὑμᾶς ὁ πειράζων καὶ εἰς κενὸν γένηται ὁ κόπος ἡμῶν). Ho peirazōn (ὁ πειράζων, 'the tempter') is Satan's title, the one who tests/tempts to destroy faith. Paul feared Satan exploited persecution to undermine the Thessalonians' faith.

And our labour be in vain (*eis kenon genētai ho kopos hēmōn, εἰς κενὸν γένηται ὁ κόπος ἡμῶν*, 'our labor become in vain')—kenon (empty/fruitless) indicates wasted effort. Paul's concern wasn't personal reputation but fruit's reality. Temporary emotional response or intellectual assent isn't genuine conversion; persevering faith proves authenticity (Matt 13:20-21). The tempter's goal is apostasy—using persecution's pressure to cause believers to abandon faith. Paul sent Timothy to assess whether the Thessalonians' faith was genuine (persevering despite affliction) or superficial (collapsing under pressure). Timothy's good report (v. 6) proved their conversion's authenticity.

Historical Context

Satan's role as tempter is consistent biblical teaching (Matt 4:3; 1 Cor 7:5; Rev 12:9). He exploits persecution to induce apostasy, as Jesus's parable teaches: 'When tribulation or persecution ariseth because of the word, by and by he is offended' (Mark 4:17). Paul's anxiety about the tempter's success wasn't paranoia but spiritual realism—many conversions prove superficial under testing (Matt 7:21-23; Luke 8:13; Heb 6:4-6). The Thessalonians' perseverance despite Satan's tempting and persecution's pressure vindicated both God's electing grace and Paul's faithful ministry.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Study Questions

1. How does Satan exploit trials and persecution to tempt believers toward apostasy?
2. What evidence demonstrates that your faith is genuine (persevering despite testing) rather than superficial (collapsing under pressure)?
3. How do you balance confidence in God's preserving grace with sober awareness of apostasy's possibility?

Interlinear Text

διὰ	τοῦτο	κάγὼ	μηκέτι	στέγων	ἔπεμψα	εἰς	τὸ
cause	For this	when I	no longer	could	I sent	in	G3588
G1223	G5124	G2504	G3371	G4722	G3992	G1519	
γινῶναι	τὴν	πίστιν	ὑμῶν	μήπως	πειράζων	ὑμᾶς	
know	G3588	faith	your	lest by some means	have tempted	you	
G1097		G4102	G5216	G3381	G3985	G5209	
ὁ	πειράζων	καὶ	εἰς	κενὸν	γένηται	ὁ	κόπος ἡμῶν
G3588	have tempted	and	in	vain	be	G3588	labour our
	G3985	G2532	G1519	G2756	G1096		G2873 G2257

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 4:3 (Parallel theme): And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread.

2 Corinthians 2:11 (Parallel theme): Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Isaiah 49:4 (Parallel theme): Then I said, I have laboured in vain, I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain: yet surely my judgment is with the LORD, and my work with my God.

Ephesians 4:14 (Parallel theme): That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

1 Corinthians 7:5 (Parallel theme): Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your incontinency.

Philippians 2:16 (Parallel theme): Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.