

1 Thessalonians 3:1-3

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## The Unbearable Care

### 1 Thessalonians 3:1-3

Chapter three begins with the word 'THEREFORE'. Last week we noted that the chapter break was unhelpful in preserving the flow of Paul's thoughts at this point in his letter. This word THEREFORE gives to us the CONNECTION to the closing verses of Chapter 2. There at the close of Chapter 2 Paul told them that he experienced this HEARTACHE because:

- He had been separated from his new-born brothers and sisters — men and women he had led to faith in Christ.
- These new-born brothers and sisters had been deprived of their teacher — like children orphaned

Then Paul told them of the HINDERANCES he experienced — the supernatural opposition of the devil to literally obstruct Paul's desire and repeated attempts to revisit Thessalonica.

Finally — Paul told them of the HOPE that enabled Paul to persevere THROUGH the HEARTACHE the HINDERANCES.

*1 Thessalonians 3:1-3 (ESV) Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, 2and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, 3that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this.*

So the third chapter is truly a continuation of the closing verses of Chapter 2.

**THEREFORE** = on account of the passionate desire, which I was unable to gratify.

THIS IS GREAT — Paul MODELS for them real love. Love is not Sentimental affection nor an emotional feeling. Love seeks the welfare of another. That is the way love is expressed for anyone. If you love someone

- you seek his welfare
- you actually would jeopardize your own life for the person whom you love.

AGAIN — We see in Paul the very LIFE and LOVE of Jesus

*John 10:11 (ESV) I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

"we could bear it no longer"

The first person plural — indicates that this decision was collective. Paul expresses his personal sentiments in verse 5. But his personal sentiments in verse 5 do not negate mentioned in verse 1.



### NOTE WELL:

The LIKEMINDEDNESS of this team of men! They might have had differing opinions on a lot of things. But they were LIKEMINDED when it came to the care and feeding of the flock of God. THAT is so critical to fruitful ministry. When the care and feeding of the flock of God is trumped by their concerns then that team and that ministry and those sheep are headed for trouble.

### KEY OBSERVATION:

The implication is that at some point Silvanus and Timothy traveled from Macedonia to Athens. According to the narrative given by Luke in Acts 17.14.

*Acts 17:14 (ESV) Then the brothers immediately sent Paul off on his way to the sea, but Silas and Timothy remained there.*

Paul departed from Macedonia and traveled on to Athens — leaving Silas and Timothy in Berea.

When he arrived, those who accompanied him went back to Macedonia “with instructions for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible” (Acts 17.15).

It appears that they did that very thing. After coming to Athens — Timothy was sent back to Thessalonica, at which time Paul and Silas were “left behind” in Athens. The narrative of Acts implies that Silas returned to Macedonia. Paul left Athens and headed south to Corinth where Silas and Timothy caught up with him upon their return from Macedonia (Acts 18.1,5).

### NOTE WELL:

We see here not only a like-mindedness in these three men concerning the care and feeding of the flock in Thessalonica. But we see a SELFLESSNESS! For the sake of the Thessalonians — Paul was willing to be left in Athens alone. It cost him something to send Timothy to the Thessalonians — He thought it was a small price to pay.

AGAIN — The LIFE and LOVE of Jesus seen in Paul

*2 Corinthians 8:9 (ESV) For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*

“when we could bear it no longer,”

- BEAR = stego
- from steg = to cover, conceal
- stege = roof

F.F. Bruce — “originally of keeping out or keeping in water or another fluid”

Think of a roof keeping a house dry by bearing up under the force of the wind and water. IF the external forces are too great — there can come a point when the roof can no longer BEAR up or COVER the interior of the house. THAT is the word picture used here. They could no longer hold out against — endure the pressure of NOT KNOWING how those new believers were doing under the pressure of persecution.

REMEMBER the circumstances in which Paul and Silas and Timothy were torn away from the Thessalonians! The load of concern was so heavy that they felt they had to take some action. Their concern for the care and feeding of the flock broke in upon them like a hurricane — resulting in a decision - we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone

- “WILLING” = “to be well pleased — to willingly determine, to think it a good thing to do.”

TOO OFTEN — ministry is performed out of a sense of, “Well, if I have to.” NOT SO with these men — The option the missionary team chose was not done grudgingly. This word stresses the willingness of the decision. This word stresses that this was a decision made from the positive — NOT the negative!

“We WANT to do this because this is the loving thing – the right thing to do” As opposed to – “Well, if I have to.”

**LEFT BEHIND** — was used in secular Greek to describe the leaving of a loved one behind at death. It is a **POWERFUL** word picture of the feeling of loneliness and desolation that swept over Paul when he was left all alone in Athens. THIS is what Paul meant when he said in

*2 Timothy 2:10 (ESV) Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect...*

**ALONE** — means without others or without companions. It indicates Paul was not just left behind but left behind by himself

#### **KEY INSIGHT:**

We gain the full weight of these words when we bring in just a brief bit of historical background on the city where he was left behind alone. The Athenians were said to possess the keenest minds among the Greeks. The University of Athens was the most important school, ahead of those of Tarsus and Alexandria. The Athenians were steeped in pagan religion — In the ancient world it was one of the major centers of blatant idolatry! They indulged in unbridled lust at the festival of Dionysus, the god of wine. They had the accompanying lack of regard for life. They loved the human slaughter in the gladiatorial games. Paul was **LEFT BEHIND ALONE** in THIS huge metropolis.

PAUL’S LOVE and CONCERN for the Thessalonians goes even deeper than willingly being left behind alone!

*1 Thessalonians 3:2 (ESV) and we sent Timothy, our brother and God’s co-worker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, 3that no one be moved by these afflictions.*

- **SENT** = to dispatch, send, thrust out.

It carries with it the meaning of **SENDING** someone to **DO** something.

THE MEASURE OF PAUL’S CARE is seen **NOT** just in the **SENDING** of someone to do something — It is seen in the **PERSON** he sent! He sent **TIMOTHY!** In a moment we will see the **VALUE** of this young man in a moment. But first we want to note that he was sent and not asked to go.

This is consistent with Paul’s authority as an apostle. It is consistent with the Great commission — Even as the Father **SENT** Me — so I **SEND** you. (John 20:21)

We also want to note that Paul’s concern for the care and feeding of the flock of God was not limited to the Thessalonians. Paul sent Timothy on other missions to the churches in...

- **Corinth** —

*1 Corinthians 4:17 (NASB) For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.*

*1 Corinthians 16:10, 11 (NASB)  
Now if Timothy comes, see that he is with you without cause to be afraid; for he is doing the Lord’s work, as I also am. Let no one therefore despise him. But send him on his way in peace, so that he may come to me; for I expect him with the brethren.*

- **Ephesus** —

*1 Timothy 1:3 (NASB) As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus, in order*

*that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines.*

Timothy's missionary trip to Thessalonica was the first recorded ministry that Timothy carried out on his own. By the way — He was at this time very young — and from Paul's letters to Timothy we find that Timothy had struggles with fear and insecurity!

There is ONE other place Paul sent Timothy. I saved this for last because in it we discover the treasure that Timothy was to Paul — and to the Kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul was so overcome by his concern for the Thessalonians that

- he couldn't bear to go any further without knowing how they were — without sending someone to care for them and feed them
- he would willingly and gladly be left behind alone by sending someone to them.

But Paul didn't send just ANYONE — He sent HIS BEST MAN — his own son in the faith.

• **Philippi** —

*Philippians 2:19-24 (ESV) I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. 20For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. 21For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. 23I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, 24and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.*

If I can't be there in person — I will send the MOST valuable asset I have. If I can't be there I want Timothy to be there. He is the only one who thinks about you as I do. He is the only one who seeks the interests of Christ. The sending of Timothy was an amazing act of self-sacrifice on the part of Paul. Paul was willing to be without THIS man in THAT city of Athens. The very center and strong hold of heathenism, full of temples and idols. Paul was willing to be without Timothy BECAUSE his concern for the Thessalonians trumped any and all personal concern or comfort.

In this UNBEARABLE CARE THERE IS SO MUCH of the heart of God seen in Paul

1) The heart of God the Father -

Who could not bear to see any perish that He sent His precious Son.

*John 3:16 (ESV) FOR God so loved the world THAT He gave HIS Only Begotten Son...*

2) The heart of God the Son —

Who could not bear to see us as sheep without a shepherd; SO He was willingly sent by the Father to lay down His life for the sheep

2) The Heart of God the Holy Spirit —

Who is called is the Comforter. IT STRUCK ME THAT — THIS is what real revival looks like on the personal level and in the local church

REVIVAL is not about evangelistic crusades! Revival is about the work of God the Holy Spirit RESTORING the Very LIFE and LOVE of Jesus, the consciousness of those things - To the individual believer and to the Body of Christ at large. RESULTING in evangelism.!

**FIRST** — The Holy Spirit begins to AWAKEN the believer to

- the tremendous DISCONNECT between the heart of God and their own hearts
- the tremendous GULF between the UNBEARABLE CARE of God the Father for this world (demonstrated in

the sending of His Son) – and their own LACK OF CARE towards the needs of the believers and the Lost.  
By the grace of God and the Work of the Holy Spirit they begin to REPENT of their selfishness

**THEN** – They begin to PRAY, to be FILLED with the love of God, to be CONFORMED into the image of His Son.

As God begins to ANSWER those prayers:

- They begin to experience an UNBEARABLE CARE for the Flock of God and for the Unbeliever.
- They begin to see formed within their own hearts the heart of God the Father

Even as God the Father could not bear to see any perish and sent His precious Son so that through Him the world might be saved, they begin to invest even the most precious things in their lives for the sake of the flock of God and the saving of souls. As those prayers are answered they begin to see formed within their own hearts the heart of God the Son –

Who could not bear to see us as sheep without a shepherd – And was willingly sent by the Father serve and give His life for the sheep.

Even so – they begin to find the CARE for the flock and the saving of souls to be so UNBEAR-ABLE that they begin to say, 'Here am I - Send me'. As those prayers are answered they begin to see formed within their own hearts the heart of God the Holy Spirit –

And the spiritual and eternal Comfort of others becomes an UNBEARABLE CARE in their own lives.

What a great portion of the Word to lead us to the Lord's Table - BECAUSE the Bread and the Cup remind each of us of the UNBEARABLE CARE of God. If you have not given your heart and life to Christ – The Body of Jesus broken – The blood of Jesus shed – PROVE the love of God for you. REPENT and BELIEVE the Good News!

If you are a believer – the Bread and the Cup REMIND us of the UNBEARABLE CARE of God for you and me. May the Holy Spirit use the bread and the cup to show us where our hearts are relative to the heart of God the Father – God the Son – God the Holy Spirit. May the Holy Spirit use the bread and the cup to show us where our hearts are in regards to personal revival.

As the Holy Spirit reveals to us our self-concern, may He also use the bread and the cup to REMIND us that the Blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanses us from ALL sin.

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