

## **R U Ready? 1Thessalonians 3**

### **1Thessalonians 3:1**

*(KJV) Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone.*

*(NIV) So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens.*

Brethren, we will do well to have but one or two friendships like that of Paul and Timothy. In these end times, you and I may very well experience the loss of once-trusted friends. And to what do we lose them? Coldness of heart.

### **Matthew 24:12**

*And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many shall wax cold.*

I have experienced this coldness of heart directed at me from long-time friends. If you haven't been through this kind of heartbreak, give it time—you will experience it soon enough. For all the friends Paul lost to his steadfast obedience to Christ, he models in 1 Thessalonians 3:1 what real friendship looks like in its best Holy Ghost attire. Imagine being a pastor and loving your church family so much that—separated from them for a time—you are willing to be alone, willing to send your best friend to find out how your spiritual children are doing. Paul simply couldn't wait any longer. Though he initially had to depart from the Thessalonians rather suddenly, they never left his mind or heart or prayers. Let's recall these words from Paul:

### **1Thessalonians 1:2-2**

*We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father.*

Pure unconditional love is not fleeting. Pure love is not a lot of things—as Paul lists in 1 Corinthians 13. Go ahead, read it the familiar love chapter again!

However, it grieves me to tell you that in these last days, sincere love for God, His children, and His Word is fading away as fast as the world and its desires. See 1 John 2:15-17. We talk alot about it on this program.

\*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION: Do you have one or two spiritual friends that more closely model 1 Corinthians 13 than others?

### **1Thessalonians 3:2**

*(KJV) And sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith*

*(NIV) We sent Timothy, who is our brother and co-worker in God's service in spreading the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you in your faith*

I've said it many times—we need encouragers today in the Body of Christ! Paul likely did not have to give Timothy much instruction as to what he should do while visiting the Thessalonians. Timothy's heart was such that it mirrored Paul's heart which was full of love

and joy and truth and purity and humility—in other words full of Jesus Himself! Though Paul would be alone after sending his friend and Timothy away, the report back from Timothy would be worth it, to find out how the Thessalonians were doing.

### **1Thessalonians 3:3**

*(KJV) That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.*

*(NIV) so that no one would be unsettled by these trials. For you know quite well that we are destined for them.*

### **1Thessalonians 3:4**

*(KJV) For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.*

*(NIV) In fact, when we were with you, we kept telling you that we would be persecuted. And it turned out that way, as you well know.*

The spiritual climate in Thessalonians was hostile towards any teaching outside of the current trendy constructs built like strongholds throughout the region—namely the religious pluralism filled Thessalonica of pagan cults, temples, and deities. Archaeological evidence has turned up evidence of at least twenty-five gods, actively bowed down to in heathen worship, including Zeus, Athena, Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite, Dionysus, and even the Roman emperor! And then there were the casual Gentile proselytes to Judaism, who feared God but didn't buy into it all the way. Sound like today's spiritual idolatrous landscape?

To introduce Christianity into a culture like that meant one thing for the believers—persecution. Paul, Silas, and Timothy were forthright in their warnings to the new converts in Thessalonica—they were destined for persecution.

**\*QUESTION FOR MEDITATION:** When was the last time you were clearly harassed or persecuted for your Christian behaviour or beliefs? How did you react to the enemy fire?

**\*STUDY POINT:** What better way to prepare for the next enemy attack than with the Sword of the Spirit? Write down and memorize eight verses—Old or New Testament—that would be helpful and powerful on your tongue to defend your faith to an unbeliever.

### **1Thessalonians 3:5**

*(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.*

*(NIV) For this reason, when I could stand it no longer, I sent to find out about your faith. I was afraid that in some way the tempter had tempted you and that our labors might have been in vain.*

Paul's concern for his spiritual children after he departed Thessalonica was well founded. He was not unaware of the devil's schemes (2 Corinthians 2:11). Those entrusted with God's flock are held to very high account for any sheep missing in action due to sloppy shepherding. Paul wanted to make sure all the sheep were present and accounted for—still in the Lord.

**1Thessalonians 3:6**

*(KJV) But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you:*

*(NIV) But Timothy has just now come to us from you and has brought good news about your faith and love. He has told us that you always have pleasant memories of us and that you long to see us, just as we also long to see you.*

Paul couldn't have been more tickled to hear Timothy's positive report back about the Thessalonians. As an aside I would say that all true under shepherds give their lives for the sheep. They tend to their practical and spiritual needs and take interest in the spiritual health of the sheep ahead of their own, following the model of Jesus:

**Philippians 2:3**

*Don't do anything only to get ahead. Don't do it because you are proud. Instead, be free of pride. Think of others as better than yourselves.*

The sacrificial love of Christ abounds not only from Paul to his people, but from from the Thessalonians back to him. They genuinely missed him and his team.

**1Thessalonians 3:7**

*(KJV) Therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith:*

*(NIV) Therefore, brothers and sisters, in all our distress and persecution we were encouraged about you because of your faith.*

True friendship weathers the storms of life:

**Proverbs 17:17**

*A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for a time of adversity.*

**Ecclesiastes 4:12**

*Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.*

If you want to know who your true friends are, check to see who is still standing by your side after the storm subsides.

**1Thessalonians 3:8**

*(KJV) For now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.*

*(NIV) For now we really live, since you are standing firm in the Lord.*

Paul's joyous relief is palpable here. He can now thank God and move on, knowing the Thessalonians are not only doing okay but prospering in the gospel and in the love of God. They are standing firm. Believers, we must stand firm upon the kingdom truths we were taught in the beginning:

**1Corinthians 15:1-2**

*Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.*

**1Thessalonians 3:9**

*(KJV) For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God;*

*(NIV) How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?*

Oftentimes we look for signs and miracles from God all around us, when the real miracles are right there in front of us—our redeemed brothers and sisters in Christ! Let us glory in and be thankful for the amazing salvation work of Jesus in our church family, valuing each one by encouraging and praying for them—as our Teaching Room mission verse says:

**Hebrews 3:13**

*But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.*

**1Thessalonians 3:9**

*(KJV) For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God;*

*(NIV) How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy we have in the presence of our God because of you?*

The emotion here is high. Paul's heart, along with Silas and Timothy, is overflowing with thankfulness that the Thessalonians have abounded in the love of the Lord and have responded to His Word with obedience. If we had to boil down our faith walk to its bare essence, here it is: love and obedience. Listen to the words of Jesus:

**John 14:15** *If ye love me, keep my commandments.*

**1Thessalonians 3:10**

*(KJV) Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?*

*(NIV) Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you again and supply what is lacking in your faith.*

**1Thessalonians 3:11**

*(KJV) Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.*

*(NIV) Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you.*

**1Thessalonians 3:12**

*(KJV) And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:*

*(NIV) May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.*

### **1Thessalonians 3:13**

*(KJV) To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.*

*(NIV) May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.*

This four-verse prayer of Paul's reveals the heart of God for his children, and we may do well to break down this prayer into its essential elements—one point of prayer for each verse—that we might pray similarly for our brothers and sisters in Jesus:

1. Praying fervently for, and desiring to meet with brothers and sisters in Christ in any capacity, with the intent of encouraging one another in our faith.
2. Praying that God decide how, when, and where we might meet with the right believers at the right time. This is God's doing and He is purposeful about it. The church is not a social club.
3. Ah, the love quotient by which we will all be judged by God! Praying that love will abound in our church families—one to another—beginning with the leaders.
4. Praying for one another that we each will be ready for Christ's appearing by staying holy by the strength God provides. What a wonderful way to pray for those we truly care about in these end times—those we call true friends!

~ Reverend Darren McClelland