

1 Thessalonians 3:1

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone;

Analysis

Wherefore when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone—dio mēketi stegontes eudokēsamen kataleiphthēnai en Athēnais monoi (διὸ μηκέτι στέγοντες εὐδοκήσαμεν καταλειφθῆναι ἐν Ἀθήναις μόνοι, 'therefore no longer able to endure, we thought it good to be left behind in Athens alone'). Stegō (στέγω, 'to endure/bear/forbear') indicates capacity's limit—Paul could no longer bear the anxiety about the Thessalonians' welfare. The phrase kataleiphthēnai... monoi (to be left... alone) reveals his sacrifice: he sent Timothy (his valued coworker and emotional support) to Thessalonica, remaining alone in hostile Athens.

This verse displays authentic pastoral love—Paul prioritized the Thessalonians' spiritual welfare over his own comfort or companionship. Being 'alone' in Athens (where he faced mockery from philosophers, Acts 17:18, 32) was personally costly. Yet concern for distant believers outweighed personal need. True spiritual fathers willingly sacrifice for their children's sake, echoing Christ who 'pleased not himself' (Rom 15:3). Paul's anxiety wasn't weak faith but deep love—he trusted God's sovereignty yet felt human concern for those facing persecution.

Historical Context

After fleeing Thessalonica to Berea, then Berea to Athens (Acts 17:10-15), Paul was separated from his missionary team. Silas and Timothy initially stayed in Berea, later joining Paul in Athens (Acts 17:15-16). The timing is compressed: Paul sent

Timothy from Athens to Thessalonica (3:1-2), then moved to Corinth where Timothy rejoined him with news from Thessalonica (3:6; Acts 18:5). Athens represented intellectual hostility (philosophers scoffed, Acts 17:18, 32); Paul would have valued Timothy's companionship. Yet ministry priorities trumped personal preferences.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What personal comforts or emotional supports have you sacrificed for others' spiritual welfare?
2. How do you reconcile Paul's anxiety about the Thessalonians with trust in God's sovereignty? Is concern for others a sign of weak faith or deep love?
3. What does Paul's willingness to be 'left alone' teach about ministry priorities when personal needs conflict with others' spiritual needs?

Interlinear Text

Διὸ	μηκέτι	στέγοντες	εύδοκήσαμεν	καταλειφθῆναι	ἐν
Wherefore	no longer	forbear	we thought it good	to be left	at
G1352	G3371	G4722	G2106	G2641	G1722

Αθήναις	μόνοι
Athens	alone
G116	G3441

Additional Cross-References

Acts 17:15 (Parallel theme): And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

1 Thessalonians 3:5 (Parallel theme): 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.

1 Thessalonians 2:17 (Parallel theme): But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.

Jeremiah 20:9 (Parallel theme): Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.

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