

2 Thessalonians 3:6-18 – “Duty, Discipline, and Diligence”

Summary Statement:

Some of the believers in Thessalonica became so preoccupied with the return of Christ that they withdrew from the daily responsibilities that should govern their lives. In so doing they began to become needy and noseey. Paul commands them that they need to take responsibility and work to provide for themselves. If not, discipline was necessary.

1. Don't Be a Drain – 3:6-11

3:6 - *But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.*

Paul speaks very strongly here giving a command, and one that's not just from Paul, but from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Notice he's speaking to the brethren, this is directed to the believers; fellow Christians in Thessalonica. And the command is to withdraw from those who are walking disorderly and not according to the traditions given them.

Now this all seems pretty strong and harsh and it gets into an area we don't often like to talk about, and that's the area of church discipline.

I'm thankful this is something we haven't had to do a lot of here at Riverside. This doesn't consume us or dominate much of the ministry, praise God. But it's a necessary practice that is biblical and profitable.

Robert Murray M'Cheyne was a 19th century Scottish minister who died at age 29, but not before seeing a great revival in his church located in Dundee, Scotland. He said this about church discipline:

“When I first entered upon the work of the ministry among you, I was exceedingly ignorant of the vast importance of church discipline. I thought that my great and almost only work was to pray and preach. I saw your souls to be so precious, and the time so short, that I devoted all my time, and care, and strength, to labour in word and doctrine. When cases of discipline were brought before me and the elders, I regarded them with something like abhorrence. It was a duty I shrank from; and I may truly say it nearly drove me from the work of the ministry among you altogether. But it pleased God, who teaches his servants in another way than

man teaches, to bless some of the cases of discipline to the manifest and undeniable conversion of the souls of those under our care; and from that hour a new light broke in upon my mind, and I saw that if preaching be an ordinance of Christ, so is church discipline. I now feel very deeply persuaded that both are of God—that two keys are committed to us by Christ, the one the key of doctrine, by means of which we unlock the treasures of the Bible, the other the key of discipline, by which we open or shut the way to the sealing ordinances of the faith. Both are Christ's gift, and neither is to be resigned without sin." ¹

So church discipline is a very proper and helpful course to take in the life of the church.

And Paul is calling upon the church to deal with those in the church who are walking **disorderly**. That means that they've been unruly or as this word can mean – idle.

Paul used it in **1 Thessalonians 5:14**, "*Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly...*"

- This word unruly is the Greek word *ataktos*, and in Greek society it was used for those who did not show up for work.

Paul is addressing some of these Christians who have gotten lazy, they've forsaken their responsibilities and have become idle.

- This word *ataktos* also spoke of those who have gotten out of rank (often so of soldiers). They've slipped away from their duties and are not doing what they should be doing. They have orders to follow, but they're not following it.

Paul says that these are Christians who have not been following the orders that have been given to them. He says that they've walked **disorderly and not according to the tradition which [they] received from us**.

We saw in the last chapter (2:15) that this word tradition spoke of the truth passed down by Paul and the apostles, whether by word or by letter. This spoke of the authoritative Word of God given through these men which became the Holy Scriptures for us – the completed Word of God.

Paul left them with full instructions and there were those that were not walking according to these truths, and they were becoming a problem in the church.

¹ Bonar, Andrew. *Memoir and Remains of the Rev. Robert Murray M'Cheyne* (pp. 104-105).

What were they doing that was disorderly? They became idle.

- Some believe with the emphasis we've seen on Paul teaching them about last days and the return of the Lord, that some began to think that if the Lord's coming back, they may as well stop working. What's the point of it if we're going to be out of here, they thought.
- Some believe that these new believers began to lean too heavily on Christian charity and graces. They thought, if the church is going to take care of me, I can just be on permanent vacation. They became loafers and sponge off the goodness of other believers.

As I pointed out in 1 Thessalonians 5:14, Paul has already warned these people not to live like this, but now after the *warning*, and obvious lack of change, he says ***withdraw***.

This is where church discipline comes in. Now this may sound kind of harsh and some of you may think, this is unchristian, unloving, and ungracious. But it's to show the severity of the situation and jolt people like this into understanding that they're out of line. The purpose is to wake them up and bring the individual to a place of repentance and walking rightly as a believer.

- We see another example of church discipline in 1 Corinthians 5 where a brother in the church was involved in an illicit relationship with his father's wife. And Paul had to call it out and excommunicate the man because he was not repenting of it.
- In the situation here in 2 Thessalonians 3, the result may not necessarily be excommunication but certainly ex-fellowship. Meaning, they're not to keep company with them. Don't give room for these disorderly people to affect the health of the church.

We'll talk more about how they were to handle such people later in the passage. But continuing on, Paul sets himself and his co-workers, Timothy and Silas, as an example to follow...

3:7-8 - *For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you;⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,*

Paul often times worked on the side to be able to provide for himself. He didn't come into a town and announce that he's the great Apostle Paul, who wants the blessing of having me over for dinner?? He wasn't a free loader. He put in long

hours, working night and day to put food on the table, but then also doing his missionary work of sharing the gospel with anyone willing to hear it.

Paul's desire was not to be a burden to anyone. He didn't want anyone to think that he was coming to them just to get a handout. He wanted them to know his main purpose was to share the good news.

3:9-10 - *not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.*

The wild thing with all this is that Paul had full rights to receive support from those he ministered to. This was a biblical reality (see 1 Corinthians 9:6-14).

1 Corinthians 9:14, *"Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel."*

But Paul laid aside these rights and freedoms so that he could be an example to these new believers that there is blessing and honor in working hard and not relying on the charity of other believers.

- Paul also was waiting for the return of the Lord but it didn't cause him to be idle.

So Paul modeled this life of providing for yourself and he also taught them this when he was with them, more so, he commanded that: ***if anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.***

This is a pretty simple rule and one we shouldn't think needs to be said. But throughout history, and certainly in our time, there have been those that feel entitled, or feel that they should just be given a handout. But this is not the Biblical way.

Yes, the Bible says we should be caring for one another:

- **James 2:15–16**, *"If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit?"*
- **1 John 3:17**, *"But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?"*

There are people who will be in need, perhaps they'll be laid off, or be too sick to be able to work. The Church and fellow Christians should definitely help one

another in such situations. But Paul doesn't say if anyone *cannot* work, but rather, if anyone *will not* work. This didn't come down to ableness, but willingness. And if a person just shirks their responsibility for unnecessary reasons, then don't give them a handout.

Withdraw from them. Don't invite them over for dinner. Let them see that they're in the wrong and they need to take action to rectify this situation. Again, the purpose of church discipline is always repentance, restoration, and reconciliation.

Paul further gives some clarity as to why these people were needing some correction.

3:11 - *For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.*

There were those in the church at Thessalonica that had just checked out of work. I mean, who wouldn't want to do that?

It's interesting how much God's Word speaks into this lazy or idle lifestyle that many can fall into. And the Word is clear that those who walk in that way are not going to profit.

Many Proverbs speak of the sluggard or lazy person.

- **Proverbs 19:15**, "*Laziness casts one into a deep sleep, And an idle person will suffer hunger.*"

Some, like these believers, were coming up with excuses as to why they didn't need to work.

- **Proverbs 22:13**, "*The lazy man says, "There is a lion outside! I shall be slain in the streets!"*"

We can easily come up with lots of reasons why we can't work, or just don't want to.

- "Commentator David Hubbard argues that hard work ought to be routine for those who profess to serve a carpenter-Christ, admire a tentmaker-apostle and 'who call ourselves children of a Father who is still working (John 5:17)'. C. H. Spurgeon used to say that he did not want 'drones' in the church he pastored. He wanted every member to be a worker. The devil finds work for idle hands to do and we need to take steps to avoid laziness."²

² Brady, G. (2003). *Heavenly Wisdom: Proverbs Simply Explained* (pp. 166–167). Evangelical Press.

Here's the thing, idleness can easily lead to sinfulness. The devil is looking for people that are inactive and he will be more than happy to help them find something to do which will not be profitable.

Here in Thessalonica there were those who in their idleness were becoming ***busybodies***.

- This word speaks of people who meddle in the affairs of others. They get themselves all busy with useless or needless matters that don't pertain to them.

Paul uses an interesting play on words here. He says there are those not working (which is the Greek word *ergazomenous*) and they've become busybodies (*periergazomenous*).

This verse has been paraphrased to say:

- They are not busy people but rather busybodies.
- They're not busy in their own business, but over busy in other people's business.
- They mind everybody's business but their own.

Perhaps you've had people in your life who likes to get involved in things that they don't need to get involved in. And your response is usually, don't you have anything better to do?

Well for these Thessalonians, their answer was: *No! We've quit our job and have lots of time on our hands now.* This wasn't productive or profitable.

They would go from house to house as gossipers, stirring up trouble, and infecting the church. Of course they'd probably show up just as you were about to sit down for lunch or dinner. This is why Paul says to withdraw from them. Don't invite them in. Have nothing to do with them. They are not walking in a Christlike way.

It's to these people that Paul gives this command...

2. Don't Be Discouraged – 3:12-13

3:12 - *Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.*

Paul speaks under the authority of Jesus Christ that these busybodies start working in quietness. Don't be complaining that you have nothing to eat now that you've quit your job and start sponging off the good will of other believers. Work

diligently and work in quietness. Provide for yourself what you need so you can enjoy the fruit of your own labours.

3:13 - *But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.*

It could have been easy for some of these diligent workers to look around and see the slothful sipping their margaritas in their poolside lounges and think, why should I keep working so hard? But Paul reminds these believers that despite any of the injustices, or the free-loaders you see around you, keep doing what is good. Never grow weary when you're doing what is right and of the Lord. God will reward you for all you do and He'll judge those that seem to be getting by in laziness.

- I'm sure there are times when we feel like we're giving our best and it just doesn't seem to be paying off. Paul's exhortation is to keep going.
- In **Galatians 6:9** he adds a few helpful words in a similar verse: *"And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart."*

That's the truth my friends. We need to be diligent to serve the Lord despite what's going on around us, or perhaps more so, what's not happening around us because of laziness. We serve the Lord. So don't grow weary. He sees all and rewards all.

3. Don't Be Destructive – 3:14-15

3:14-15 - *And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*

Paul returns to the thought he shared in vs. 6 regarding the discipline of the lazy brother. **Note that person**, mark him, and stay away from him. Again, this is all with a purpose: **that he may be ashamed**.

Now again, that can sound kind of harsh. But we're not to treat them as an enemy. We're not to condemn them in anger but correct them in love.

We're to **admonish him as a brother**. That means we're to warn them. You admonish your little 2 year old not to touch the top of the stove when you're cooking. You're not trying to condemn them in it, but warn them for their own good and protection.

“There’s a fine line between putting a person to shame and shaming a person. When a person is *put to shame*, the individual feels sorry for those sins and laments the pain caused to others. Such a repentant person eventually seeks to make things right. *Shaming a person*, however, leaves little room for repentance and restoration. It tends to be spiteful, vindictive, and punitive rather than redemptive.”³

Paul’s point here is that the goal is always to bring restoration and reconciliation through an attitude of repentance.

Before we get to Paul’s closing, I find it interesting that this brand new church, at the beginning of the church age, was so focused on the Lord’s coming that many abandoned their livelihood. However, the pendulum seems to have swung so far the other way today that people are more focussed on their livelihood than they are on the things of Christ.

May we never be at a point where the things of the world overshadow the things to come. May we be diligent and faithful in our daily responsibilities, but may they be done with the view of eternity.

4. Don’t Be Dismissive – 3:16-18

3:16-18 - *Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all. ¹⁷ The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write. ¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*

Isn’t that such a great title for our Lord – the Lord of peace. True and lasting peace can only come from Him, and it goes beyond our circumstances. May you always be experiencing His peace in your life.

And know that the Lord is with you, always. This should be a great motivator for living life with diligence and care.

“Ben and John worked as janitors for the same company. Ben felt his Christian testimony should be reflected in his work. John knew this as well, but never seemed to let that interfere with a good conversation. One day Ben was busily washing windows. John was busy too, busy talking to Ben. Ben wanted to stop and talk, but knew he had to stay

³ Swindoll, C. R. (2016). *Insights on 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Vol. 10, p. 158). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.

focused to do a good job. He was soon glad he had resisted the temptation to goof off. In the reflection of the glass, he saw the supervisor walking up the stairs behind them. Ben continued to clean. John continued to talk. The boss continued to observe. Several minutes later, John turned and noticed the boss. He greeted him with a quick, “Oh, Hi,” and moved along to his area. Later John asked “Ben, why didn’t you tell me the boss was standing there?” “Well, not to sound mean or anything,” Ben replied, “but Christ was standing there the whole time, and that didn’t seem to bother you.” John got the point and worked more faithfully from that point on.”⁴

Many believe that this was one of the earliest letters that Paul wrote. He ends this by writing the last couple verses with his own handwriting (typically letters were dictated to a scribe or secretary). But Paul would often write a part of it, to authenticate that the letter was from him. When he says, this ***is a sign in every epistle; so I write***; he’s saying you know my penmanship, and you can see this is from me.

He could also mean that he ends each letter with a similar benediction, and that is: ***the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all***.

- “(Rom. 16:24; 1 Cor. 16:23; 2 Cor. 13:14; Gal. 6:18; Eph. 6:24; Phil. 4:23; Col. 4:18; 1 Thess. 5:28; 1 Tim. 6:21; 2 Tim. 4:22; Tit. 3:15; Phmn. 25; and, if Paul wrote Hebrews, Heb. 13:25). From these references, we see that all his Epistles end on a **grace** note.”⁵

Paul concluded each letter with a reminder of our need for grace and for the grace of God to be with us. What a blessing to know the great grace of our Saviour!

Points to Ponder:

1. Am I contributing to the work of the Lord and the strength of the Church?
2. What does my work say about my faith?
3. How do I handle correction?
4. Is my life balanced between earthly responsibility and eternal expectation?

⁴ Leadership Ministries Worldwide. (2003). *Practical Illustrations: 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (p. 131). Leadership Ministries Worldwide.

⁵ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer’s Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (A. Farstad, Ed.; p. 2059). Thomas Nelson.