

2nd Thessalonians

"Order in the Church"

(2nd Thessalonians 3:6-18)

The Big Picture: Problems within any Christian church must be dealt with. If left unaddressed these problems can become worse and affect more and more people. Paul had written to the Thessalonians and indicated that he desired to be with them and to supply what was lacking in their faith (1st Thess 3:10). He had warned them to not be idle but to be a person of integrity acting responsibly before the Lord. They were also told to (1) live quietly, (2) mind their own business and (3) work with their hands (1st Thess 4:11). He told the leaders of the church to warn those that were not adhering to this encouragement (1st Thess 5:14). Yet still, some members had misinterpreted Paul's teaching about the return of Christ, left their responsibilities and became idle, and at the same time expected the church to support them while they waited for the Lord to come. This is the very practical result of errors in doctrine. When we are incorrect about what God is revealing to us, we can arrive at wrong conclusions about how we should live to please God. Paul gave four reasons for the careless Christians that had emerged in Thessalonica to repent and to start acting responsibly: (1) The Exhortation of the Word (3:6), (2) The Example of the Apostle (3:7-10), (3) The Encouragement of the Church (3:11-15) and (4) The Enablement of the Lord (3:16-18).

The Text: ⁶ Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. ¹³ As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. ¹⁴ If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. ¹⁵ Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. ¹⁶ Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all. ¹⁷ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write. ¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. (ESV)

The Exhortation of the Word (3:6) Paul had issued commands before. He had given them instructions in the Lord Jesus (1st Thess 4:2 & 11). Paul had confidence that they would do what he had commanded (2nd Thess 3:4). He issues commands here, and he will do it again before he completes his thoughts (2nd Thess 3:10 & 12). Paul uses the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus is the head over all things to the Church

(Ephesians 1:22) and his lordship over us includes our work and how we support ourselves. Work was instituted by God long before the fall of man (Genesis 2:15). God creates man for a purpose and work is involved in carrying out that purpose. Think about the heroes of the faith, Moses, Joshua, David, many of the apostles and Paul, and about what they were doing when God called them. We will see that each of them was involved in work to support themselves. This is why Paul does not want them to be idle. Jesus was a carpenter before his messianic ministry began. We should be working as well.

The Example of the Apostle (3:7-10): Paul had previously stated that he had worked hard to support himself so that he would not be a burden to the Thessalonians while he was preaching the gospel to them (1st Thess 2:9-10). He wanted the people to see this and compare this fact to the accusations made against him that he was in it for the money and/or self-gain. He had a biblical right, as every Christian worker does, to receive support from the church as he served (1st Corinthians 9:6-14). But any servant of God has the privilege of setting aside that right to the glory of God. A leader earns the right to lead by being obedient to the word of God while serving the people in the will of God. The apostle John said, "Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth." Paul intended to live that way as an example for those that he was teaching so that they might imitate him. He knew that this would be pleasing to the Lord.

The Encouragement of the Church (3:11-15): The overriding principle in this passage is that Paul did not want the Thessalonians to become discouraged and give up themselves (2nd Thess 3:13). The sins of some can have a harmful effect on many others. According to the word of God, we belong to one another and can affect one another (1st John 4). The bad behavior of a few saints can prevent the local church from accomplishing its mission rendering it ineffective. So, Paul gave some "Do's and Don'ts." Don't be idle. Do be busy at work. Don't grow weary of doing good. But what if one ignored these instructions? Paul had warned them once (1st Thess 5:14). He now warned them a second time (2nd Thess 3:12). If they still would not believe, the members should personally discipline them. How? By not having social contact with them to the point of their shame. They were to be ostracized (excluded from a society or group). Paul quickly tempered this procedure. They are to be treated like a brother, not an enemy. How does this change things? Any social conversation needs to be personal, short and to the point, and not overly dramatic. And the goal must be one of reconciliation, not division.

The Enablement of the Lord (3:16-18): Our God is a God of peace and having peace with God enables believers to be obedient to him. So does the presence of God in our lives and Paul desired that for his Thessalonian converts. There is good evidence that Paul dictated his letters to another writer who then wrote them down for him (Romans 16:22). However, here as he closed, he wrote in his own hand and then explained that it was a sign of genuineness to his audience that the writing, in fact, had come from him. Remember that the Thessalonian church has received an erroneous letter (2nd Thess 2:2) and Paul was providing a practical method for them to determine what was from him and what was not. He closed with an emphasis on the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ which, of course, is sufficient for all believers (2nd Corinthians 12:9).

Calvary Bible Church and the Thessalonian Letters: The Constitution of the Calvary Bible Church (CBC) makes reference to 2nd Thessalonians 3:10-15 in support of Article VII, Church Discipline, Paragraph J: The procedures in this section are based on Matthew 18:15-20; Romans 16:17-18; 1 Corinthians 5:1-13; 2 Corinthians 2:1-11; Galatians 6:1; 1st Thessalonians 5:14; 2nd Thessalonians 3:6, 10-15; 1 Timothy 5:19-20 and Titus 3:10-11.

Next Week: "The Abrahamic Covenant" (Genesis 12:1-3)