

# Thessalonians

A Careful Study Of Thessalonians

January 16, 2022

## I. Introduction

A. **2 Thessalonians 3:6-13** . . . Now we **command** you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you **keep away** from every brother who leads an **unruly life** and not according to the tradition which you received from us. [7] For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an **undisciplined** manner among you, [8] nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; [9] not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example. [10] For even when we were with you, we used to give you **this order**: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. [11] For we hear that some among you are leading an **undisciplined** life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. [12] Now such persons we **command** and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. [13] But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good.

B. Some may read these verses and conclude that Paul is too harsh with the weak or wayward Christians – after all, no one is perfect, no one is sinless, everyone has at least one or two weaknesses.

1. Some think Paul is insensitive, and that he has no compassion or mercy for those in need, regardless of the reason – after all, we read in **1 John 3:17**, “Whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?”
2. Though we are only going to look at **vs 6** today, I am urging you to consider looking at all these verses as a call to care more about the truth of God's word, the spiritual health of the church, the spiritual well-being of each individual in the church, and the testimony of the church in the world than about pleasing everyone or making sure no one feels bad about themselves.

## C. Pray

II. Four principles for using church discipline to promote spiritual health in individual Christians and the church as a whole.

- A. We live in a time and a culture where commanding adults to do something that is in the best interests of the community is seen as an encroachment on their individual rights and personal freedom.
1. We've seen the truth of this most recently and vividly in some of the responses to the government's mandates about how to deal with the covid virus.
  2. This belief in our intrinsic right to personal freedom has infiltrated the Church – so that should the pastor or the leadership command something of those in attendance, their first option is to leave and go to a church that doesn't make such demands.
  3. The reality is, with the exception of a few conservative, fundamental groups or a pastor dominated church here and there, churches generally avoid demanding anything of their attendees.
    - a. And yet, should an adult family member or neighbor or church member stoop to pick up a poisonous snake thinking it is harmless, you would shout, "Don't touch that!"
    - b. And you would utter those words as a command – never thinking you were encroaching on their rights or personal freedom, but rather saving their life.
    - c. And indeed that is what you would be doing – which is why you would be shocked or in disbelief if they got upset with you for encroaching on their individual rights and personal freedoms.
  4. Sadly, not all authority is good authority – which is why we should be careful who we follow or submit to. The reality is, there are authorities who make self-serving, unreasonable, and unjust demands.
    - a. Yet there are also authorities who make demands for our good. And they command such things because they realize how important the situation is, and that the right response is essential to a good outcome.
    - b. This was the case with Paul in Thessalonica. He knew how vital it was to live according to God's word in order to become spiritually healthy, grow in Christian maturity, and be God's light in the world. Therefore, he used commands to achieve this kind of a good outcome.
    - c. We also see that many of the Thessalonian believers obeyed Paul's commands – most probably because they believed God's way was the best way, and hopefully because they valued their own spiritual health and the health of the church over exercising their personal freedom to do as they pleased.

5. What value do you place on God's way, your spiritual health and the spiritual health of our church? Is your freedom to live as you please or deem best more important or less important than being guided or even commanded into godly living, spiritual health, and Christian maturity?
- B. [6] Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.
1. There are four principles in this verse that I want us to consider.
  2. **First**, modeled behavior, especially when repeated over a period of time, becomes an influential force in the lives of those who repeatedly observe or experience the modeled behavior.
    - a. We all experience the influence of modeled behavior, be it in our home, school, neighborhood, friendships, and workplace, or in our church.
    - b. This is good when the modeled behavior is good, and not so good when the behavior of those around us influences us to do what is unloving, ungodly, and therefore spiritually harmful.
    - c. Paul clearly warns us about the harmful effects of bad behavior in those around us in **1 Corinthians 15:33**, "Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals.'"
    - d. Therefore, out of a legitimate concern for the modeling of ungodly behavior in the church, Paul commands the serious believers to keep away from every brother in Christ who leads an unruly life. And in giving this command, Paul establishes a principle for promoting and protecting the spiritual health of the church as a whole and for each individual in the church.
  3. The **second** principle Paul gives us in **vs 6** concerns the use of ostracizing or shunning wayward Christians as a way of encouraging them to change their ways, and as a way of discouraging the rest of the church not to follow their wayward behavior.
    - a. Paul urged the use of this method, not only in Thessalonica, but also in Corinth and Rome. For example, we read in:
      - (1) **1 Corinthians 5:9-13**, "I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; [10] I did not at all mean with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. [11] But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral

person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. [12] For what have I to do with judging outsiders (*unbelievers*)? Do you not judge those who are within the church? [13] But those who are outside, God judges. REMOVE the wicked man from among yourselves.”

- (2) **Romans 16:17**, “Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them.”
- b. And possibly to reinforce his directive in **2 Thess 3:6**, Paul says this in **2 Thess 3:14-15**, “If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and **do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame**. [15] Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”
- c. One of the major challenges for those carrying out this kind of church discipline is the attitude in which it is done.
  - (1) Though Paul addresses this in **3:15**, he states it very clearly in **Galatians 6:1**, “Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a **spirit of gentleness**; each one (*humbly*) looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted (*to sin in how you deal with your sinning brother*).”
  - (2) In other words, our attitude toward the wayward Christian is to be governed by humility, and the method of shunning is to be governed by gentleness. WHY? For two reasons.
    - (a) **First**, ostracizing or shunning our wayward brother in Christ has as its purpose redemption, not punishment. We are not punishing the wayward believer, but calling him back to the word of God and godly living – and our attitude in carrying out such discipline must reflect this.
    - (b) **Second**, any amount of pride when dealing with a wayward believer opens the door to sinning ourselves in how we deal with him or her – be it an attitude of superiority, unkind or harsh words, or unloving deeds.
- d. So, let us not abandon the method of shunning, though it is not as effective in our culture as it is in an honor-shame based culture. But also, let us never abandon humility and gentleness when using any method of disciplining wayward believers.

4. The **third** principle Paul presents in **vs 6** shows us that church discipline is the responsibility of all the sincere believers in the church. True, church discipline is often led by the church leaders, but it is to be carried out by **all** the sincere believers in the church.
  - a. As in any community, the community works best when each member in the community does his or her part. And since the individual's spiritual health is essential to the overall spiritual health of the church, we all have a part in promoting and protecting the spiritual health of each individual in the church.
  - b. The necessity of the community working together to ensure the spiritual health of the community is first presented in **1 Samuel 12:13-14**, "Now therefore, here is the king whom you have chosen, whom you have asked for, and behold, the LORD has set a king over you. [14] If you will fear the LORD and serve Him, and listen to His voice and not rebel against the command of the LORD, **THEN** both you and also the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God."
  - c. And in **Revelation 2:1-7**, God praises the church in Ephesus because they "cannot tolerate evil men, and they have put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false." In other words, the whole church was involved in promoting and protecting the spiritual health of the church.
  - d. The point being, church discipline is a function of the whole church working together for the good of the individuals in the church and the spiritual health of the church as a whole – which includes such things as its leadership, practices, traditions, teaching, outreach, use of finances, care for the poor and needy, and image in the community.
5. The **fourth** principle presented in **vs 6** conforms that the word of God is the only dependable and unchanging standard for godly living in any setting or situation.
  - a. In other words, godliness, waywardness, and church discipline are to be determined, measured, and evaluated by God's word. We have no other dependable and unchanging source for this.
  - b. True, people's interpretations or explanations of scripture may change with the times, but the Scriptures themselves do not change. Therefore, those who seek to understand them and explain them from a pure heart find the truth that was put there by those who wrote them.

- c. Paul confirms this in **2 Timothy 3:16**, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.”
- d. So once again I want to affirm that the word of God is the only dependable and unchanging standard for godly living in any setting or situation.

### III. Conclusion

- A. Jesus appears to give church leaders room to decide what activities and behaviors best exemplify Christianity in their time and community. We read this in **Matthew 16:19**, where Jesus said to Peter, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven.”
- B. This is known as the “binding and loosing” principle. In my experience, it has been used properly by some and abused by others. There isn’t time today to deal with this passage from Matthew, and so I will close with this – for any demand or command from a church leader to be legitimate, it must meet two conditions.
  - 1. **First**, it must be made in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that is, it must agree with what Jesus would require – which in our day means it must be in agreement with and supported by God’s word.
    - a. For me, this includes any demand or command attributed to the leading of the Holy Spirit, the still small voice of God, impressions deemed as having come from God, and decisions of the leadership made on the basis of the binding and loosing principle.
    - b. Therefore, for any current demand or command to be legitimate, it must be in agreement with and supported by God’s word.
  - 2. **Second**, for any demand or command from a church leader to be legitimate, it must promote and protect the good of all – from the least to the greatest, and from the newest believer to the most mature believer.
- C. Finally, let me restate the four principles from **vs 6**:
  - 1. Modeled behavior, especially when repeated over a period of time, becomes an influential force in the lives of those who repeatedly observe or experience the modeled behavior.
  - 2. The purpose of ostracizing or shunning wayward Christians is to encourage them to change their ways and discourage the rest of the church not to follow their wayward behavior.

3. According to the scriptures, though church discipline is led by the church leaders, it is to be carried out by all the sincere believers in the church.
4. The word of God is the only dependable and unchanging standard for determining, measuring, and evaluating godliness, waywardness, and church discipline.