

Thessalonians

A Careful Study Of Thessalonians

January 30, 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. By working to support himself, Paul set an example of how to live according to his teaching and commands concerning the Christian work ethic. And in **vs 6-13**, Paul directs three commands at both the sincere and wayward believers concerning responsible Christian living.
1. **First**, in **vs 6**, he commands the sincere believers to keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life instead of living according to the tradition which they received from him.
 2. **Second**, in **vs 10**, Paul reiterates a previous command that if someone who can work chooses not to work, then he is not to be feed from the church food supply or by others in the church who might give him food or invite him home for a meal.
 3. **Third**, in **vs 12**, Paul commands and exhorts those who have not been working but could work, to start working in quiet fashion and to eat their own bread.
- C. Two weeks ago we looked at four principles regarding Christian living and church discipline. Today, I want to remind you of the first two.
1. Modeled behavior – be it good or bad – when repeated over a period of time becomes an influential force in the lives of those who 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.

D. Pray

II. The Christian work ethic and how to deal with those who reject it

A. I want to remind you that in **1&2 Thessalonians**, Paul addresses numerous areas of Christian living, and as part of that, he often reminds us that living Christianly is vital to being properly prepared for Christ's return. Here in **2 Thess 3**, Paul is dealing with the Christian work ethic and the church's response to wayward Christians.

1. As you know, the Christian life is not confined to reading and studying the bible, praying, attending church on Sundays, being part of a small group during the week, serving one another, helping the needy, financially supporting the work of the church, and involvement in some form of evangelism.
 - a. Though all these things are important to Christian living, how we speak to and treat our parents, siblings, spouse, children, extended family, neighbors, and co-workers is just as important.
 - b. And, what we set our mind on, how we fashion our attitudes, how we deal with anxiety and fear, what we treasure, who we seek to please, where we turn for comfort, pleasure, happiness, and diversion, how we use our free time, and what we do or say when in the confines of our home or when all alone are also equally important to living a Christ-like life.
2. Yet godliness doesn't stop with these things either. The Christian's work ethic is equally important – which is why Paul addresses this issue in several letters. For example, we read in –
 - a. **Colossians 3:23-24**, “Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men, [24] knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.”
 - b. **Ephesians 4:28**, “He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.”
 - c. **1 Timothy 5:8**, “But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”
 - d. Therefore, we read in **verse 7**

- B. [7] For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you,
1. From the beginning of their ministry in Thessalonica, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy worked to support themselves (1) so that the believers would not be burdened with caring for them, and (2) to set an example of what the Christian work ethic looked like in everyday life.
 2. We read this in **1 Thessalonians 2:9-10**, “For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. [10] You are witnesses (*you’ve seen us in action*), and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers.”
 3. It is probable that living off the charity of others when one could work and provide for himself was an accepted practice in Thessalonica before Paul got there with the gospel. And apparently some of the converts brought this practice into their Christian life. In fact, this was such a problem that Paul dealt with it in four ways:
 - a. By setting the example of working to provide for himself;
 - b. By teaching them God’s way of working as opposed to their prior practice of freeloading;
 - c. By giving them the command that if anyone is not willing to work, he is not to be fed by the other believers.
 - d. And by providing a method of church discipline to discourage this practice and encourage those practicing it to change their ways.
 4. We don’t have this problem in our church, currently, so I am not going to dwell on this. I do, however, want to encourage you to think about modeled behavior and its effect on your life.
 - a. Here in **2 Thess. 3:7**, Paul reminds them of his example and that he expected them to intentionally follow it.
 - b. Are you aware of examples set by others that you have followed or are still following? If you are not aware, then I am urging you to give this serious consideration because it is probable you are following the example of more than one person – whatever the example may be. (*11th grade teacher*)
 5. Paul called the Thessalonian believers to intentionally abandon the old practice of not working and eating off the benevolence of others, and instead follow his example of working to provide for themselves.
 - a. Are there any bad examples that you knowingly follow, or maybe even unthinkingly follow?

- b. Are there good examples that you have observed or are currently observing that it would be wise for you to follow?
 6. There is power in modeled behavior – for good or for ill. May we work at following good examples and turn away from bad examples. And may we make it our aim to be good examples – in the home, workplace, community, among friends, and in our church life.
- C. [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;
 1. This does not mean Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy never accepted an invitation to someone's home for a meal. What it means is that they did not impose on anyone as if the believers in Thessalonica had to provide them with food.
 - a. It is probable there was a significant amount of persecution induced poverty among the new believers at that time, therefore Paul's motive was more than an effort to model godly behavior, it was to show them love.
 - b. In other words, beyond setting an example, Paul was protecting the new believers from further hardship by providing for himself.
 2. Paul, himself, states this in his farewell words to the Ephesians in **Acts 20:33-35**, "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. [34] You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. [35] In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"
- D. [9] not because we do not have the right to [having our physical needs cared for by the people to whom we are ministering], but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example [of loving one another by **NOT** adding to anyone's burden].
 1. It was Jesus who established the principle of missionaries being cared for by those to whom they bring the gospel. We read this in **Matthew 10:7-10**, "As you go, preach, saying, 'The kingdom of heaven is at hand.' [8] Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give. [9] Do not acquire gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts, [10] or a bag for your journey, or even two coats, or sandals, or a staff; **for the worker is worthy of his support.**"

2. Paul referenced Jesus and the OT to support extending this principle to pastors and teachers.
 - a. **1 Corinthians 9:13-14**, “Do you not know that those who perform sacred services eat the food of the temple, and those who attend regularly to the altar have their share from the altar? [14] So also the Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel.”
 - b. **1 Timothy 5:17-18**, “The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. [18] For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle the ox while he is threshing,’ and ‘The laborer is worthy of his wages.’”
 3. The point being, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy had the God-given, biblically supported right to expect the Thessalonian believers to provide for their physical needs. But they chose to do otherwise – for the sake of love and at a significant cost to themselves.
- E. [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.
1. In other words, God’s way, the Christian way, the way of loving your neighbor as yourself is this:
 - a. If anyone can work to provide for himself and his family’s needs – be it his immediate or extended family – then he is to work.
 - b. If anyone who can work does not work to provide for himself and his family, then he is not to be fed from the churches’ food bank or by other church members who either have sufficient food to share or who feel it’s their Christian duty to share even if they barely have enough for themselves.
 2. Apparently, this was a problem from the beginning of Paul’s ministry there. But the problem was not one-sided, as if it were only with those who could but would not work.
 - a. This was a two-sided problem, for it included the believers who, from a misunderstanding of love or a misplaced sense of compassion or an unbiblical idea of Christian duty were caring for the needy regardless of the reason they were in need.
 - b. Paul confirms that this is a two-sided problem with the commands he gives in **vs 6**, **vs 10**, and **vs 12**.
 - (1) In **vs 6**, he commands the responsible, **sincere believers** to keep away from the irresponsible, **wayward believers** who were leading an unruly or irresponsible life.

- (2) In **vs 10**, Paul reminds the **sincere believers** that they are not to feed the believers who could work to provide food for themselves but would not work.
 - (3) And in **vs 12**, Paul commands and exhorts the **wayward believers** to become responsible, go to work, and eat what they are able to provide for themselves.
- c. Now you may be thinking, “What about the believer who works but wastes his money on non-essentials so that he does not have enough for the essentials?” I won’t be answering that directly, but listen thoughtfully to what comes next and it may help you find a godly, love your neighbor as yourself, answer.
- 3. Godly love can sometimes seem harsh, lacking in compassion, or the neglect of our Christian duty – especially when it requires saying **NO** to someone who is obviously in need. Yet the reason for saying **NO** is because they are in need for reasons they could have avoided.
 - a. To help you understand this, consider **Romans 13:10**, which says, “love does no wrong to its neighbor.” This means that love will not intentionally or carelessly or naively or even from good intentions harm anyone effected by its choices and behavior.
 - (1) When we apply this principle to helping the needy, we see that if we harm someone by how we show them love, we are not really loving them – such as feeding someone who is hungry because he will not work when he could work. In this case, feeding such a person makes it safe for him to continue being self-centered and irresponsible, as-well-as uncaring as to how his behavior harms others.
 - (2) In like manner, to love one person at the harm of others is not love at all – such as in giving food to someone who could have provided for himself so that there is less or even insufficient food available for those who are truly needy.
 - (a) In this case, feeding someone who could have fed himself diminishes what we can do for those who are truly hungry.
 - (b) In other words, feeding one who is hungry because of his own foolish or selfish choices harms those who are needy through no fault of their own by wrongfully diminishing what can be done for them.
 - b. This does not mean we are to have a hard, suspicious heart toward the needy, for that is just as unloving as a soft, indiscriminating heart.

- (1) What we need is godly wisdom, thoughtful discernment, and love that looks out for the good of everyone so that we don't meet one person's need at the expense of the truly needy.
- (2) And beyond these things, we need a heart of compassion, patience, kindness, tenderness, mercy, and even long-suffering so that we don't turn a cold, hard heart toward someone in need due to their own foolishness.
- c. The reality is, we can go too far in meeting needs just as some of the believers in Thessalonica went too far in feeding their fellow believers who could work but would not work.
- d. But it is also probable that some of us can judge the needy too harshly, and in so doing fail to show appreciation for the mercy and grace God has shown us – even though we do not deserve it.
- e. Either way, we have failed to love as we ought.
4. Therefore, for those times and situations where it is difficult to discern what the right decision is, pray for wisdom. Act from love. Examine the need and how it came about. Look to see if anyone will be harmed by meeting this need. Then, act from love, compassion, kindness, and tenderness – even if you say **NO**.

III. Conclusion

- A. Paul finishes this section with one command and an exhortation.
 1. [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.
 2. [13] But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good.
- B. It is my intention to begin with **vs 11** the next time we meet.