Loving Church Discipline
2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

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Strong & Ready! (Books of 1 & 2 Thessalonians)
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"Church discipline has as its objective to recover the brother to a position of obedience, to protect the integrity of the name of Christ, to purify the church, to deter sin in the congregation and to reconcile the brother to the body."
~ Curtis Thomas

Introduction: Open your Bible to 2 Thessalonians 3:6-18. I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: "Loving Church Discipline."

False Sense of Security

Have you ever had an experience like this? It's late and you decide to call it a day by heading off to bed. Prior to making your way into the bedroom, you make one last pass through the house, locking the doors, closing the blinds, and turning off all lights. Upon completing this nightly ritual, you enjoy a restful sleep in the safety and comfort of your home. Refreshed and energized by your good night's sleep, you head out of the house to start your day. Upon entering the garage you discover that while your sleep may have been restful, your home was not secure— you left the garage door open all night![1]

Paul does not want the Thessalonians to rest with a false sense of security. So he reminds them of a significant danger to the church. That danger might not live a life that is worthy of the Gospel. There is a danger that we would be mere professors of Christ, and our lives and hearts would be an empty shell. There is obedience and perseverance and accountability necessary to live a consistent Christian life. That's what Paul presents.

God promises to "work all things together for good to those who love God, who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). The next verse says the purpose that He has called us to is to be "conformed to the image of His dear Son."

All things are a pathway to be true disciples of Jesus. Three things are mentioned in this passage that bring us to discipleship with Christ:

- Obedience (6-12)
- Perseverance (13)
- Accountability (14-15)
- *Blessing of Discipleship (16-18)*

[1] Howell, Mark (2015-01-13). Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (p. 246). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

Paul, in a very practical way, gives three routes to discipleship. These are sometimes positive and sometimes negative.

I. The 1st pathway to discipleship: **Obedience** (2 Thess. 3:6-12).

Paul's main purpose at the end of his epistle is to deal with the effect that a wrong view about the Second Coming has on the unity of the local church. Some in Thessalonica had drawn the wrong conclusions and were now living in a way that was living in a way that was "idle and disruptive and does not **live according to the teaching you received from us**" (v. 6).[2]

Ignatius (35-117AD), friend of the Apostle Peter, disciple of the Apostle John, and the third bishop of the church at Antioch summed it up this way:

"The tree is known by its fruit. Similarly, those who profess to be Christ's will be recognized by their actions. For what matters is not a momentary act of professing, but being persistently motivated by faith."[3]

The Principle: Live in Obedience to the Teaching of Scripture

2 Thess 3:6, "In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not **live according to the teaching you received from us**."

Scriptures on Progressive Sanctification & Obedience

Based on the Great Commission's emphasis of making followers of Christ, it is not surprising that Paul tells us in Ephesians that true Christians are to become "imitators" of our Heavenly Father "beloved children" (Eph. 5:1).

True believers delight in obeying God's Word. In 1 Jn. 2:3, John says, "And by this we know that we have come to know him, if we keep his commandments." The word "keep" in 1 Jn. 2:3 speaks of watchful, thoughtful, careful obedience. Jesus said in John 14:24, "Whoever does not love me does not keep my words. And the word that you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me" (cf. Luke 6:46; Mt. 15:13; 2 Tim. 2:19).

Withdraw from a Disobedient Brother

The command to 'keep away [withdraw] from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not **live according to the teaching you received from us**' (v. 6) is about church discipline. The disorderly must be made aware of their sinfulness and be dealt with in an appropriate way, while those entrusted with the task are to remember that the offenders are still God's adopted children (v. 15).[4]

[2] McNaughton, I. (2008). *Opening up 2 Thessalonians* (p. 66). Leominster: Day One Publications.
[3] Cyril C. Richardson, ed. *Early Christian Fathers* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006), 92.
[4] McNaughton, 68.

This is a shocking command in light of all of our Lord Jesus' prayer in John 17 that the whole body should be "one" and that the world will know that we are Jesus' disciples by our "love for one another" (Jn 13:35).

Yet, we must understand that sometimes as sinners we oppose ourselves. We need the accountability of telling us we are out of line.

Quiet and Careless Disobedience

The word 'disruptive is used by Paul three times (vv. 6–7, 11). It speaks of those who are unruly and without discipline, and would have been used of a soldier who was out of step and insubordinate (compare 1 Thes. 5:14).[5]

Surprisingly, one of the greatest dangers to the Thessalonian church was not a blatant attack from people on the outside, but the carelessness and laziness of people on the inside. Paul refers to these individuals as those who behave "irresponsibly" ("idle" and "disruptive") (3:6,11). They were the unruly church members who were causing problems for everyone else.[6]

The Consequence of a Disobedient Brother

In the context of Matthew 18, this is the third step in the process of church discipline. Step one is to confront the sinning believer privately; step two is to confront him again with two or three witnesses present; step three is to tell the offense to the congregation and cut the offender off from the normal life of the church. For those who persist in sinning after the first three steps, step four is to remove them from the fellowship altogether (treat them as unbelievers; Matt. 18:17). Since a disciplined sinner was still to be regarded as a **brother** (cf. 3:15), this disfellowshiping stopped short of the complete and final (barring repentance) excommunication of step four.[7]

The purpose of church discipline is always to **restore** and **reconcile** the brother or sister to fellowship.

Living, Full Faith

James 2 says, "Faith without works is dead." Works are the evidence of true faith.

Do you have a living faith? Paul wants to warn us so we don't have a false sense of security. There were all these believers who were living in a disorderly manner saying their motives were godly: "We're not working because we are waiting for the coming of Jesus." How do you dispute that?

People can have good motives for the bad things they do. They were contradicting Scripture. It's never right to do wrong in order to get a chance to do right.

Motives matter, but actions also matter. Motives do not overrule or negate actions. "I meant well" is not a good excuse.

The Imperative and the Indicative: Walk Worthy

In every epistle of Paul's his theme is a full faith. Theologians call this the "imperative and indicative." If you have a true faith, then it will show in your life.

Like Paul says in Ephesians, Romans and in all of his letters, if you are "in Christ" (the indicative) then you should "walk worthy" of the calling with which you are called (Eph 4:1).

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[5] Ibid.
[6] Howell, 247.
[7] MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2002). *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (p. 304). Chicago: Moody Press.

The Issue: Follow the Example of Godly Obedient Leaders

2 Thess 3:7-10, "For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our **example**. We were not idle when we were with you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. 9 We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as **a model for you to imitate.** 10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat."

Work is tough. God tells us in the Word of God to work six days and rest on the seventh.

Discipleship: Imitate, be a Learner, Follower

The apostle Paul would have agreed wholeheartedly with the statement of the Puritan Thomas Brooks, "**Example is the most powerful rhetoric**."[8] Therefore, he bracketed this section with the phrase **you … follow our example.**

This is the centerpiece of discipleship – to be a disciple is to imitate, to be a learner, a follower.

Paul Worked Hard

The phrase to **eat … bread** refers metaphorically to food and sustenance (cf. Gen. 3:19; 43:32; Amos 7:12; Matt. 15:2; Luke 14:15). Though they apparently stayed at Jason's house (Acts 17:7), the missionaries did not eat at his expense. They insisted on paying for their own food and perhaps their lodging; **with** strenuous **labor and hardship** they **kept working night and day so that** they **would not be a burden to any of** the Thessalonians—a truth the apostle had also reminded them of in his first epistle (1 Thess. 2:9; cf. Acts 20:34; 1 Cor. 4:12).[9]

These Brothers Knew Better

2 Thess 3:10, "For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat."

These brothers knew better. They were using this "spiritual reason" as an excuse. They knew better because Paul had already taught this to them when he was with them.

Paul's point is simple: if people get hungry enough, they will work to get food. As Solomon put it:

- "A worker's appetite works for him, for his hunger urges him on" (Prov. 16:26).

Believers who have the opportunity and the ability to work for their own food are to do so. Those who do not are "worse than unbelievers" (1 Tim. 5:8).[10]

Summary

So to summarize, it is characteristic of believers to practice a lifestyle of godliness, and that includes hard work and good works.

The Solution: Work Hard in Obedient Living and Earn a Living

[8] I. D. E. Thomas, *A Puritan Golden Treasury* [Carlisle, Penn.: Banner of Truth, 1977], 96
[9] MacArthur, 306
[10] Ibid., 307.

Standing on the platform of his personal integrity and pastoral example, Paul directly addressed the root of the problem in the church:

2 Thess 3:7-11-12, "We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. 12 Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat."

Busy with the Wrong Things

There is a play on words in the Greek; Paul says they were "not busy, but busybodies." They were busy with the wrong things. Instead of working themselves, they were keeping other people back from their work.[11] Often when we are not living right for the Lord, and we are not busy doing the right things, our time will be snatched by us doing the wrong things.

II. The 2nd pathway to discipleship: **Perseverance** (2 Thess. 3:13)**.**

2 Thessalonians 3:13, "And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good."

Don't Give Up When Discouraged by Inconsistent People

Paul is clearly speaking to a specific situation. The specific situation is this. The majority of the congregation seems to have been discouraged by this minority that has stopped working and is depending on them to take care of them. And they're kind of throwing up their hands in frustration and saying, "You know, I've had enough of this." And Paul is turning to them and saying, "No, no, no. I know it's frustrating what you're dealing with. I've had to write to you twice about this. It's frustrating to me too, but do not grow weary in doing good." Now this is not the only time that Paul gives this exhortation in the Bible.

- **Galatians 6:9,** "Let us not grow weary in well doing."
- **Romans 7:21**, Paul refers to "the one who would do the good."

This is a common saying for the apostle Paul, but he's saying it to the Thessalonians because he knows that they may be discouraged themselves because they've got people in their midst that aren't doing what Paul has taught them to do.

Perseverance

Those who have the new nature and God's Spirit in them will never ultimately fall away from holiness. If they do, it reveals they were never sealed by the Holy Spirit of God. Consider what Paul says in **Col. 1:21-23**:

"And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heav-en, and of which I, Paul, became a minister."

[11] Marshall, I. H. (1994). 2 Thessalonians. In D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer, & G. J. Wenham (Eds.), *New Bible commentary: 21st century edition* (4th ed., p. 1290). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press.

A Christian is guaranteed to progressively depart from iniquity. Those who do not "continue in the faith, stable and steadfast" are not true believers. Saving faith always continues and perseveres to the end. We are not saved because we continue, but because we are saved we continue grounded in the faith, persevering to the end.

III. The 3rd pathway to discipleship: **Accountability** (2 Thess. 3:14-15).

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15, "Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instruction in this letter. Do not associate with them, in order that they may feel ashamed. 15 Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer."

Warn the Brother

Nevertheless, despite Paul's repeated instructions in this letter, it was possible that some people might continue in a way of life that was out of harmony with the gospel. In that case, discipline was to be used as a last resort. An offender was to be noted.[12] The purpose? Warning: "warn them as you would a fellow believer" (vs. 15).

Disfellowship for Reconciliation

There was to be no fellowship with such a person. In the light of 1 Cor. 5:9–11 this most probably refers to exclusion from the common meal which was an especially significant part of the church's life. Such exclusion, however, was meant to be remedial, to make people feel a sense of shame and lead to their repentance.[13]

Don't be misguided – the shame is not for shunning, but to lead the person back to reconciliation with the Body of Christ and with the Lord.

Benediction

In this benediction, we are blest with the greatest blessing, the peace, the presence and the grace of Jesus Christ.

Benediction of God's Peace and Presence. **2 Thess 3:16**, "Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you." What greater blessing can we have than God's *shalom* (though Paul is writing in Greek, the concept is the same). This is the well-being that comes from being a disciple of Jesus. Be sure it's not peace in this world. Jesus said, "In this world you shall have tribulation…" No, it is metaphysical peace with God. It is peace in the *heart* and *soul.* It is the peace that everyone is longing for and money can't buy it. And this kind of peace is "at all times and in every way." Why? Because "the Lord" is "with all of you." That's peace! It comes through God's presence.

Benediction of God's Authority and Authenticity. **2 Thess 3:17**, "I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write." Paul is indicating that his letter is no counterfeit, but it is the very Word of God. That's a blessing and benediction! There were those who would write counterfeit letters in Paul's name, and Paul wanted to bless them with the assurance that his letter to them was legitimate. It is the Word of God, breathed out by the Holy Spirit.

[12] Ibid., 1291.
[13] Ibid.

Benediction of God's Grace. **2 Thess 3:18**, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." We look at this passage applied to our life. We indeed do grow weary. But now we have the secret to true Christian discipleship. It is the power of God's grace. Grace is God's favor and also His power. He blesses us with the reminder that from beginning to end, our salvation, our sanctification, and our suffering are all endured by the sufficient grace of God.

Praise be to His Name!