



# 2 Thessalonians

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**For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; 2 Thessalonians 3:7**

The word "For" is given here based on the words of the previous verse which exhorted those in Thessalonica to "withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly..." It then is explained in this and in the coming verse. Now, he says, "For you yourselves know." As he has done on numerous occasions, Paul calls to memory what occurred in the past. Each time he does this, it solidifies his argument and his exhortations, because there can be no doubt of what he relays. He and his associates acted in a certain way, and they saw it with their own eyes.

Understanding this, he goes further by saying that they know "how you ought to follow us." The meaning of "follow" is "to imitate." In the manner that he and his fellow-workers acted, the church should also act. The missionaries had set the standard, and those ministered to should take note and follow accordingly. This "how you ought to follow us" is actually described by him in his first letter to them –

*"You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; <sup>11</sup> as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, <sup>12</sup> that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory."* -1 Thessalonians 2:10

The final words of the verse, "for we were not disorderly among you," are not meant to contrast for the purpose of condemning. Rather, they are words of contrast for the purpose of exhortation that they would choose and walk on the right path. The Greek word he uses which is translated as "disorderly" is the verb form of the adverb he used in the previous verse which was also translated as "disorderly." Thus, he is saying, "Just as you are to withdraw from those who are disorderly, you should emulate one who is marching in proper order, for we were not walking in a disorderly way among you."

He is using a negative in order to form a positive example in the eyes of the Thessalonians. Like his description of himself in his first letter, he will next again provide concrete examples of the conduct he and his associates demonstrated while he was among them.

Life application: Paul's words are as much to us as they were to his original audience. If we want to live properly, all we need to do is go to the Bible and apply its precepts to our own lives. This is especially so with the words of Paul's epistles. They are our "marching orders" during this dispensation. All Scripture is profitable for this purpose, but his words are especially directed to this Gentile-led church age.

**...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, 2 Thessalonians 3:8**

These words are not just descriptive reminders, but they are instructive as well. Paul just said, "For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us." By stating what they did, he is instructing what those in the church should do. He began that instruction by stating they were "not disorderly." Now he continues in this verse with, "nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge."

Paul and his companions didn't just come to town, proclaim the gospel, and then say, "As your instructors, we hope you will provide for our means while we are among you preaching and teaching." Instead, he uses a Hebraism – "eat anyone's bread" – to show that they tended to their own basic needs. "Bread" here is used as a metaphor for that which sustains life. Not only did they shun pay for their instruction, they even refused to accept a gift (free of charge) for the most commonly needed of provision. Instead, they "worked with labor and toil night and day."

They were willing to expend themselves for the sake of those they ministered to rather than accept what they were actually rightfully due. Elsewhere Paul says, "The laborer *is* worthy of his wages" (1 Timothy 5:8). He also says, "Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches" (Galatians 6:6). However, it is obvious that Paul and his associates perceived that there was a streak of slothfulness in the Thessalonians which needed to be rebuked through living example. As Charles Ellicott notes, "There is a flavour of scorn in St. Paul's disclaimer of such a parasite's life."

In order to quench this attitude among the Thessalonians, they worked all the more heartily, even night and day, in order to be living examples of how to conduct one's affairs. This is all the more certain, because he and his associates were willing to receive pay at other churches (see 2 Corinthians 11:8). But for those churches which needed proper guidance in how to

conduct life's affairs, they would go the extra mile in being the right example. This was so "that we might not be a burden to any of you."

In seeing this example, they would hopefully learn to rightly live as well. Instead of being freeloaders, they would learn hard work, industry, and making one's own way in life. This will continue to be seen as Paul continues.

Life application: With the advent of liberal policies, and handouts from the government, being a freeloader has become an acceptable part of society. However, it is not an acceptable attitude according to the Bible. The book of Proverbs, in particular, has strong words against such people. They are leeches that need to be scraped off from the bloodied flesh they cling to, and they need to either fend for themselves, or suffer the consequences of their own idleness.

**...not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.** 2 Thessalonians 3:9

One can see the importance of apostolic authority in Paul's words. He has explained why he and his associates did not impose upon those in Thessalonica. It was because they did not desire to be a burden on them. However, he now notes that they had every right to do so with the words, "not because we do not have authority." They had a legitimate right to partake of anything any other apostle was entitled to. They bore the word of God, and they transmitted it to the church there.

The implication is that bearing the word of God carries this authority. As the word of God comes through the apostles, only those who bear the word of God, as given by the apostles, have such a right to the same authority. And as there is only one word of God, only those who hold to it alone have a true right to what accompanies its transmission. Someone who stands in the pulpit and dismisses the word of God, or who adds to it, has no authority, or has abused his authority. He is to be rejected. This is all implied in how Paul reveals these truths. The word of God alone is our authority within the church.

He, and his associates, possessed that authority, but they did not exercise it. This was, as he says, "to make ourselves an example." The words "to make" means "so that we might give." They were setting themselves as examples for those in Thessalonica to learn from and to emulate. They had purposefully acted as they did with the intent of teaching those who were slothful among the church. They were to learn by it in hopes that they would emulate what they saw. This is revealed in the words, "of how you should follow us." Paul and his companions had set themselves as a model, and this model was expected to be applied to the lives of those in the church.

What is seen here is a letter which centers on the coming rapture of the church, and then the coming Day of the Lord. It is to be inferred that there were congregants who were sitting around doing nothing because it was so much easier to speculate about the coming of the Lord than it was for them to get up, get out, and work. And it was also so much easier than studying the word, gaining sound theology, and actually applying Scripture to their lives.

They were the forerunners of today's YouTube prophecy addicts who spend all their time in the realm of "goofy" instead of in the realm of reality. They didn't want to work, and they used the soon-coming of the Lord as an excuse to not do just that. They didn't want to strain their minds on sound theology, and they mishandled Scripture in order to avoid learning to rightly apply it.

Before YouTube, one can see them setting up stalls on the road and promoting their wares for everyone to see. Instead of a DONATE button, they had a DONATE slot. Instead of computer graphics, they had their wife paint a bizarro screen at the back of the stall. And instead of an open Bible, filled with study notes, they listened to words of false teachers (see verses 2:1-3), or they simply made things up out of their own heads, passing it off as the truth of God. Paul is (and will continue) telling them that this is not appropriate. They needed to get out there, work, and stop idly speculating about something which is known but to God alone.

Life application: Paul set the example of work and industry. Stop watching 60 hours of YouTube a week, get up, get out, and get to work. And in your free time, read the Bible.

**For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.** 2 Thessalonians 3:10

Food: When you're hungry, nothing satisfies like food. Paul now ties this wonderful necessity in with an oft-dreaded word, "work." We both need food, and we enjoy food. We often do not like work, but according to Paul, we need to work if we want that other thing we need and enjoy, "food." He links the two together as if they are one.

This verse seems to be tied back to verse 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. ... For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat."

And so, "For when we were with you," is first based on that command, and then it was practically lived out by Paul and his associates in verses 7-9. Next, "we commanded you this,"

is tied to what is spoken at the beginning of verse 6, "But we command you." This is now repeated in the epistle to remind them of what they had said. While in Thessalonica, it was evident that some were unwilling to work, but instead were sponging off the kindness of others. "Gee, we're all Christians here, you wouldn't let a hungry brother down, now would you?"

This is something that is still seen 2000 years later. Some people use their status as Christians to guilt other Christians into tending to them, even for their basic necessities. It happens to individuals, and it happens to churches. There are sponges all over the place who take advantage of this. But Paul advises the Thessalonians (and thus us!) to not be duped into this kind of thing. He says quite clearly, "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat."

It is not an optional thing, and Paul actually presents nothing new. Solomon speaks of the need to be industrious on several occasions, and he tells the sad results of being a lazy-Joe –

Go to the ant, you sluggard!

Consider her ways and be wise,

<sup>7</sup> Which, having no captain,

Overseer or ruler,

<sup>8</sup> Provides her supplies in the summer,

And gathers her food in the harvest.

<sup>9</sup> How long will you slumber, O sluggard?

When will you rise from your sleep?

<sup>10</sup> A little sleep, a little slumber,

A little folding of the hands to sleep—

<sup>11</sup> So shall your poverty come on you like a prowler,

And your need like an armed man. Proverbs 6:6-11

In Paul's words then, there is nothing out of the ordinary, nothing un-Christian, and nothing harsh. Rather, there is wisdom which is intended to 1) Get lazy people up off their duffs and out into the world to earn their bread, and 2) Save industrious people from being seduced by those in category 1. We should not feel the slightest bit guilty when a person actually has to miss a meal because he spent the day at the beach or whittled his time away on an iPad.

Life application: For obtaining life-prolonging food-intake, get to work.