

27] Don't Enable Sinful Behavior (Sunday, July 11, 2021)

Scripture: Proverbs 6:6-19; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12

INTRODUCTION

One of the temptations that we still face as believers is to turn God's grace and His many blessings to us into grounds for boasting.

Look at me.

Look at what I/we have done.

God must really think I am special because of all that I have done or what we have been given.

Families and churches face this.

Here is the truth.

The Lord raises up faithful churches and ministries. Sometimes they last for generations and other times for just a season.

While we all have our duties and responsibilities, we must always remain very humble before the Lord and never look at what we have done as grounds for pride or boasting.

As Jesus said, at best we are unprofitable servants!

I say this in light of what we know from 1st and 2 Thessalonians.

This was a faithful congregation.

They had truly come to know the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

They were useful in the support and spread of the gospel.

There is a great honesty in this book.

There were members of this congregation who were not living in an orderly and obedient manner.

Correction was needed! The entire congregation had to respond properly.

Do not enable or encourage sinful behavior!

1] Command to withdraw from the disorderly, v. 6

2] The example of Paul, Silas, and Timothy, vv. 7-9

3] Command to work and the command for busybodies, vv. 10-12

1] COMMAND TO WITHDRAW FROM THE DISORDERLY, V. 6

One of the key principles of interpretation is understanding the grammar and the historical context of a passage that you are studying.

So, what is the historical background that we have here?

Ben Witherington does a good job helping to explain some of the background of our text that we know both from Scripture and from history.

Consider a few points.

First, 1 and 2 Thessalonians both speak of the persecution that believers in Thessalonica were facing.

Second, an aspect of the cultural background is that of **patron** and **client**.

Some people, the clients, lived off the generosity of others, and in return were expected to do things for their patrons.

Third, we do know of a famine about the time that 1 and 2 Thessalonians were written. This famine caused all sort of economic issues and would have particularly affected Christians.

Fourth, keep in mind that Paul wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians while he was in Corinth.

And recall some of the issues that the Corinthians had in terms of temples and eating food sacrificed to idols and the like.

The patron-client relationship could well lead to situations that would be ethically compromising for Christians.

Witherington says that Paul may have felt some urgency about this matter being in Corinth and seeing first-hand what sorts of compromising relationships were doing to new believers.¹

So although this was overall a faithful congregation, there were sinful behaviors and members that had to be addressed by the congregation.

Verse 6 gives a direct command with respect to the issue – **keep away from those who are walking disorderly.**

The verb **withdraw** is used only here in the NT.

What does this mean?

We will look more at this, but we can say from our text that it is **not excommunication.**

Those described here as being disorderly are **brothers.** They are not pagans or those beyond hope of repentance.

But they are not living as they should be.

The word **disorderly** is a key word here used both as an adverb, v. 6 and 11 and a verb, verse 7.

It is a military term referring to insubordination or disorderly conduct.²

The problem is not just idleness but a refusal to be a faithful worker and soldier of Jesus Christ!³

¹ Witherington, 248-249

² Ibid., 251.

³ Ibid., 251.

Notice that this command is given in the **name of our Lord Jesus Christ!**

That is not a very common phrase in the NT, but you do find it elsewhere notably in 1 Corinthians.

1Cor. 1:10 ¶ Now I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you, but *that* you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

The command is for the faithful to withdraw from these not living as they should.

I understand this as in part meaning, **do not enable or encourage sinful behavior.**

Part of our challenge in understanding the context of this passage is that generally speaking we live much more separate, isolated lives.

Thessalonica was a very densely packed city. Being part of a community would have been very important.

This was not suburban living where we might see each other once a week or so.

It would also seem that **food** was involved in terms of living in community.

This withdrawal is meant to bring shame and by God's grace to bring repentance.

Before we reflect on some basic application of this verse, we should consider the word tradition used in verse 6.

This reference to tradition is not to some separate body of authority possessed by some in the church but refers to that which Paul and the others taught to the church in Thessalonica.

This tradition, this authority is now found in the completed Scriptures.

Generally speaking, we live very different lives than these believers.

Our context of middle-class living means we are more isolated and independent. Fellow church members are not looking to us to be a patron.

Our duty is the same; the application might be a little different.

A more general application is that if we know of another believer who is not living as they should be in terms of the general pattern of Christian living that we do not do anything to affirm or encourage sinful behavior.

2] THE EXAMPLE OF PAUL, SILAS, AND TIMOTHY, VV. 7-9

You sometimes hear people say, well the reason that young people leave the church is because of some problem going on in the church.

Well, the sad reason that young people leave the church is that they are not regenerate.

Here I am speaking not of those who go to another church but those who stop going to church entirely and forsake the Christian faith.

Now this truth in no way justifies hypocrisy, sinful behavior, and the failure of those who still are part of a church.

Sinful actions give *justification* often for those who turn from Christ.

They are extra logs to throw on the fire of unbelief.

And we know that Scripture gives a special word of warning to those who are leaders and teachers in churches.

James 3:1 My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.

Here in verses 7-9, we see how Paul and the others gave themselves **entirely** to the work of the Lord so as to not cause offense to Christ and the gospel and to set an example, a pattern for the believers in Thessalonica.

Let's consider some details here in these verses.

In verse 7, we see that Paul, Silas, and Timothy lived in such a way as to be imitated or followed.

The verb **follow** could be translated as **mimic** or **imitate**.

Heb. 13:7 ¶ Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose **faith follow**, considering the outcome of *their* conduct.

3John 11 ¶ Beloved, do not **imitate what is evil**, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God.

Clearly this following is not in some boastful, I am above you, way, or look at how perfect I am.

We consider that as the gospel spread to Thessalonica, there were those coming to faith from totally pagan backgrounds.

An example of **Christ-like living** was very important.

Paul, Silas, and Timothy were in no way **disorderly** in how they lived and worked.

They followed the expected cultural norms, and even more importantly they lived as Christ commanded them to live.

Second, they in no way took advantage of others. They were far from being freeloaders.

The word free in verse 8 is an adverb.

Rom. 3:24 being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,

2Cor. 11:7 ¶ Did I commit sin in humbling myself that you might be exalted, because I preached the gospel of God to you free of charge?

Paul and the others worked tirelessly both in terms of ministry and in terms of other physical labor so as to not have to live off the generosity of the Thessalonians.

Especially in the context of a famine, this testimony stands out. It is difficult for us to appreciate what this meant except from really paying attention to the description that we have here and in 1 Thessalonians.

Labor – activity that is burdensome

Toil – labor, exertion, hardship

1Th. 2:9 For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God.

2Cor. 11:27 in weariness [labor] and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness—

Would it have been right for Paul and the others to receive help from the Thessalonians?

Absolutely!

This is what we see in verse 9.

Here we have a good use of a double negative – not because we do not have authority.

1Cor. 9:4 Do we have no **right** to eat and drink?

1Cor. 9:5 Do we have no **right** to take along a believing wife, as *do* also the other apostles, the brothers of the Lord, and Cephas?

1Cor. 9:6 Or *is it* only Barnabas and I *who* have no **right** to refrain from working?

Notice that Paul, Silas, and the others gave up a legitimate right so that they could demonstrate even more an example to all the believers.

There are some important applications from this passage in terms of making sure we never would **detract** or **distract** people from the gospel message.

We sometimes have to give up a right as we encourage others in terms of God's truth and its application.

We must do nothing to enable or encourage sinful behavior and that also calls us to consider our own actions and patterns.

3] COMMAND TO WORK AND THE COMMAND FOR BUSYBODIES, VV. 10-12

Notice the word command or commanded used four times in this chapter:

Verse 4, 6, 10, and 12.

When Paul, Silas, and Timothy were with the Thessalonians they repeatedly stressed the truth and command of verse 10 – **if a man will not work, he should not eat!**⁴

Ben Witherington points out that some of what Paul is saying here would have been part of the cultural background in terms of familiar writings including famous Greek philosophers like Aristotle.

I suppose that is very possible, but the main emphasis here is on what they taught while they were there and the problems that were still continuing.

In a sermon on 1 Thessalonians, I mentioned that some might have justified their lack of work with a misunderstanding of the timing of the return of Christ.

It is not a crazy thought, I don't think.

However, we do observe that Paul does not connect these issues.

There is space between the instruction in 2 Thessalonians 2 and what we have here in 2 Thessalonians 3 that should likely be considered.⁵

More likely there were those who found a way out of legitimate work and lived off the support of others not because of **eschatology** but simple laziness.

Obviously Paul is not referring to those who cannot legitimately work.

⁴ Leon Morris, *1 and 2 Thessalonians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 13 of Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. IVP/Accordance electronic ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1984), 142.

⁵ This is a good insight mentioned by Witherington.

We are talking about able-bodied people who choose not to work and instead look to take advantage of other people's generosity.

1Th. 4:11 that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you,

Somehow communication from Thessalonica came to Paul and the others in Corinth about those living disorderly, as we see in verse 11.

There is a great play on words in the original Greek that translates fairly well in English – not working but busybodies.

NET Bible - "working at nothing, but working around,"

1Tim. 5:13 And besides they learn *to be* idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and **busybodies**, saying things which they ought not.

1Pet. 4:15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a **busybody** in other people's matters.

Notice the very strong language of verse 12 – **command and exhort!**

And also we see very importantly this is not the authority of Paul and his team.

This is through the Lord Jesus Christ that this command is given.

The command is **work in quietness and eat your own bread.**

Quietness has the idea of stop causing problems through busybody behavior and the like.⁶

Shut your mouth and get to work.

Don't eat the bread of others. Make your own way!

CONCLUSION

Do not enable or encourage sinful behavior!

- 1] Sinful behaviors or patterns in our own lives?
- 2] Thankfulness to work and provide for our families
- 3] The call to diligence and sacrifice for the sake of others
- 4] Christ-centered focus, nothing that would bring shame to our Lord and the message of the gospel.

Prayer

Hymn 278

BENEDICTION – HEBREWS 13:20-21

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

⁶ BDAG, s.v. “ἡσυχία,” 440.