

SEPARATE FROM AN ERRING BROTHER WITH LOVE

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the Scripture for this lesson. First let the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.

Summary and Historical Background

As he did in I Thessalonians, Paul concludes this second letter with practical exhortations. A problem that Paul had anticipated and warned against in 1 Thessalonians had become more developed by the time of the writing of this second epistle. Their instability and excitement over the doctrine surrounding the Day of the Lord had produced some serious practical disorders. Certain members of the church were walking disorderly, not working at all, and had become busybodies. Paul very expressly instructs the church to carefully deal with these members. If a church is to remain healthy, discipline is imperative, and Paul reveals how it is to be carried out.

I. Confidence in the Thessalonians — 3:1-5

3:1 — "Pray for us" - Paul's request for prayer that the Word of the Lord may have "free course" is an illustration drawn from the race track. The term is a picture of runners advancing toward the finish line. The prayer is that the Gospel may keep on advancing toward the goal without hindrance. The goal is that it be glorified in the lives of many people.

3:2 — The petition for deliverance from "unreasonable and wicked men" is a reference to the persecution Paul was encountering in Corinth (cf. Acts 18:1-17).

"Wicked" — Points to the active maliciousness on the part of Paul's persecutors.

3:3 — God's faithfulness is shown to the Thessalonians in two specific areas: (1) God would establish them; and (2) God would guard them from the evil one. The Lord actively defends the believer against the onslaughts of Satan.

3:4 — Before Paul begins his authoritative apostolic directives to this church, he takes special care to express his complete confidence in them. This serves to temper the harshness of the chapter.

3:5 — The word "direct" might be rendered "pave the way" (lit. to make a smooth and direct road).

"Love of God" — signifies both their love for God and God's love for them.

"Patient waiting for Christ" — Refers to the Rapture of the Church by Christ.

II. Concern over Disorderly Members — 3:6-15

A. The Command — 3:6

3:6 — Paul stresses the importance of the command by reiterating the source of his authority: the command was "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"Withdraw yourselves" — It must be kept in mind that Paul had warned against this disorderliness in his first letter (1 Thess 4:11, 12; 5:14), and it was the persistence of some members to continue their disorderly conduct that caused Paul to command them to withdraw themselves from these disorderly brethren.

"Brother" — Paul, twice in this chapter, reminds the church that the disorderly ones are brethren (cf. v. 15).

"Walks" — This verb designates a continual course of action. Their disorderliness was their lifestyle.

B. The Example — 3:7-10

3:7 — Paul appeals to the idle members to follow his example of hard labor. This is how he conducted himself among them. It appears that some believers had misplaced their enthusiasm for the Lord's return and had so involved themselves in propagating their fanaticism that they became a financial burden to the church. Paul's example of self-support even as he carried out his intensive work of church planting was used to speak right to the heart of this issue.

Paul's positive example had three aspects.

3:8 — He did not make himself dependent upon any of the Thessalonian believers for his living. He worked and toiled "night and day" until he was exhausted.

3:8-9 — His hard labor had two purposes: (1) that he would not be chargeable to any of them (3:8); and (2) that he could provide a proper example for them (3:9).

3:10 — Paul appeals to a universal maxim that he had taught the Thessalonians: "If any would not work, neither should he eat." Notice, Paul does not condemn those unable to work, but those unwilling to work.

C. The Problem — 3:11

3:11 — Paul outlines the specifics of the disorderly walk so that there could be no doubt as to what Paul had in his mind. A play on words is evident in the description. They are described literally as "doing nothing but doing around," or "doing no business but being busy-bodies." They were engaged in a flurry of pious activity and meddlesomeness, but they were not engaged in productive labor.

D. The Solution — 3:12-15

3:12 — Paul makes an appeal to the disorderly that they settle down to live a quiet and productive life. Notice how solemn Paul's exhortation is: "we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ." First, Paul's appeal is for them to have a settled and quiet spirit, and then get engaged in regular employment. They were to "eat their own bread" in contrast to eating the bread of others.

3:13 — Paul now turns from his appeal to the disorderly to give instructions to the majority.

First, they were instructed, "Be not weary in well doing." Unlike this disobedient minority, the church was told never to tire in doing what was right. Part of doing right is the weariness that comes with the constant maintenance of church discipline.

3:14 — Second, Paul's appeal to the majority in the church is to separate themselves from any disorderly members who refuse to work. Each offender must be noted (marked out) and disciplined. Their discipline was to give them no food.

Furthermore, the goal for separating from an offending brother must be kept in mind: "that he might be ashamed." The social ostracism of the offending brother is designed to turn his thoughts inward upon himself and to make him come to a full realization of his offense.

3:15 — Paul gives a final exhortation to the majority that they maintain a proper attitude throughout their discipline action. The offending brother still remains a brother and he is to be treated as such. The church must exercise patience in admonishing the brother with a constant view to his restoration.

III. Conclusion of the Letter — 3:16-18

3:16 — Paul prays for the peace of this young congregation. The Lord of peace is requested to

give them peace at all times and in all ways. This peace is the inner peace that the Spirit of God can minister to the heart of the believer in all circumstances. Neither time nor circumstances can destroy this peace. This was important to those believers who were facing a nasty discipline experience.

To this prayer for peace is added a prayer for the presence of Jesus Christ to be with them (cf. Mt. 28:20).

3:17 — Paul is careful to sign this letter with his own hand. His signature was the identifying sign that renders the epistle authentic. The need for this authenticating mark was occasioned by the spurious letter mentioned in 2 Thessalonians 2:2.

3:18 — "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" - Paul concludes his letter with a benediction that requests this third blessing for this church. Some members would need His grace to administer discipline in the correct manner and other members would need it to accept the discipline and get back to work.