

Withdrawing from the Unruly

(2 Thessalonians 3:6-15)

INTRODUCTION:

1. This subject is important because it is a matter of divine revelation.
 - A. This was addressed by Jesus in Matt. 18, by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5, and by Paul here in our passage of concern today, as well as other places.
2. With so much said about it, it might be surprise that there has been a big controversy among brethren surrounding this subject, including the teaching 2 Thessalonians 3.
 - A. Yet, the problem is not so much that the instructions are confusing, but rather that that doing what is commanded here is hard.
 - B. Controversy, however, is neither reason to ignore the instructions of this passage nor to believe a correct understanding and application of these passages cannot be achieved.
3. It is my hope to present the correct interpretation and application of this passage, and to clarify certain matters of concern that some may have.

Body:

● I. **General context:**

A. 1 Thessalonians:

- 1. In chpt. 2 Paul speaks of his company's **blamelessness** in their conduct among them, addressing their boldness, purity, truthfulness, and industrious in supporting themselves, which were apparently issues within the congregation there.
- 2. After receiving an encouraging report from Timothy concerning these brethren in chpt. 3, in chpt. 4 Paul exhorts them to *grow* in their life of pleasing God through sexual purity, love, and working in quietness to support themselves.
- 3. In chpt. 5 Paul wraps things up by speaking of how the timing of the "day of the Lord" is unknown and how the faithful continue to work and serve the Lord as they wait.
 - a. This meant *esteeming* those who "**labor** among you...for their work's sake" (5:13).
 - b. It meant seeking the good of *others* by helping the fainthearted and weak, and admonishing the "**unruly**" (5:14).
 - i. "Unruly" is the same word used in 2 Thess. 3:6, being the noun form here and the adverb form there.
 - ii. Although the problem of "unruliness" had apparently not progressed to the state found in 2 Thess. 3, it was an issue of concern that the Spirit felt the need to address.

● B. 2 Thessalonians:

- 1. In chpt. 1 Paul speaks of his and his companions' abounding thankfulness for these brethren's continued **faithfulness** amid persecution and how God would respond to it.
- 2. In chpt. 2 Paul again addresses the coming of the Lord, but also how Satan will succeed in deceiving those who do not love the truth, requiring that they "**stand firm** and **hold to the traditions which you were taught**, whether by **word of mouth** or by **letter** from us" (2 Thess. 2:15).
- 3. Chapter 3:1-5 Paul addresses his need for prayers concerning the **word** and its **glorification**, the importance of their **obedience** to the word, and his confidence that they would be **directed into God's love and Christ's steadfastness**.
 - a. All of the things addressed were encouragement and instruction they needed.
 - b. But, there was a secondary purpose to mentioning their faithfulness, standing firm in what they were taught, being comforted, glorifying the word, continuing to obey, and being in the love and steadfastness of Christ, and that is...
 - i. The instructions that were to follow would be difficult for many of them to obey.
 - ii. Many might see these demands as lacking in love or contrary to the abounding grace of Christ and be tempted to not obey them.

- iii. Paul was preparing them and us for the difficult task to come—**their need to disassociate themselves from unruly brethren**—by reminding them that this is a matter of obedience, faithfulness, and love for the Lord and their brethren!

- **II. Dealing with the “unruly” (2 Thess. 3:6-13):**

- A. Based on the example of Paul’s company while among them, he commands the brethren to *keep away from* those who *lead an unruly life* or *walk disorderly* (3:6-10).
 - 1. To *keep away* from these brethren is a **command** (Paragello, Παραγγελιο – G3853) “give orders, command, instruct, direct...2 Th 3:6...3:12.” (BDAG – p. 613) (3:6).
 - a. This action is not optional. It must be obeyed by all.
 - b. To **keep away from** (HCSB, NIV, ESV, NRSV, NASB) is also translated **withdraw from** (KJV, NKJV, ASV) and to **keep aloof from** (NASB older version, which means to be uninvolved or unwilling to become involved with; [to be] physically distant or apart – *Encarta English Dictionary*)
 - c. Lexicons (G4724, στελλο)
 - i. **BDAG** – “Keep away, stand aloof...from someone 2 Th. 3:6 (p. 766)
 - ii. **Thayer** – “to remove one’s self, withdraw one’s self, to depart...to abstain from familiar inter[action] with one, 2 Th. iii. 6.” (pp. 586-7)
 - d. From this *command* God clearly demands that we stop associating with, stop all social interaction with certain brethren.
 - 2. The target of this action is those being **unruly/disorderly** (3:6).
 - a. Versions:
 - i. NKJV, ASV, NASB, HCSB, NET describe these people as walking or living *unruly/disorderly/undisciplined/irresponsible*.
 - ii. ESV, NIV, NRSV describe them as those who live in *idleness, loaf around*
 - iii. *These are significant differences*.
 - b. Lexicons:
 - i. **BDAG** – “in defiance of good order, *disorderly...behave irresponsibly* 2 Th 3:6...apparently without respect for established custom or **received instruction...the specific manner in which the irresponsible behavior manifests itself is described in the context: freeloading, sponging**” (*Greek-English Lexicon* - 3rd ed., p. 148)
 - ii. **Spicq** – “...It would not be necessary to insist on the meaning of...“not remaining in his/her/its place, out of order, undisciplined”—if a certain number of exegetes did not suggest translating it “idle, lazy.” But the usage of the verb, the adjective, and the adverb in the Koine [Greek], notably in the first century AD, confirms that the word covers **any breach of obligation or convention, disorders of life in general; and the usage is decisive**... (pp. 223-226, *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*)
 - iii. **Paul** assures us of this general meaning by further describing the unruly as ones not living according to the divine commands received from Him and others (3:6).
 - c. Despite how certain modern translations feel free to give a contextual meaning of “idleness/laziness,” that is not the meaning of the word nor its only application.
 - i. Gene Frost was right: “It is not ours to substitute what we think Paul was “thinking” for what he **said**. We do not have the right to put our interpretation upon the language, to replace a word used with what we think was meant.”
 - ii. So, we must *keep away from* those living in a state of disobedience, insubordination, to the word of Christ—whatever that may be (i.e., forsaking the assembly, promoting false doctrine, refusing to be corrected, falsely accusing the brethren, etc.).
- B. Why did Paul address this? Because there were unruly brethren at Thessalonica (3:11-13).
 - 1. Paul has heard that there are those in Thessalonica “living an undisciplined life” (3:11)
 - a. Without question, being “unruly/undisciplined” is here applied to not working, or being idle, and being busybodies.

- b. So, this is the specific application made of a far more generic term, like saying “stop misbehaving, and that means stop hitting your brother/sister.”
- c. In such a situation, we would think it foolish if the child then spit on their sibling and claimed we did not say they could not do that!
- 2. The Spirit’s answer to idleness is to repent and **obey Christ’s command** to “work quietly and so provide their own food to eat” (3:12).
- 3. Instead of being destructive through idleness and meddling, all are commanded to “not grow weary in doing **what is right**,” or in *obeying* what has been commanded, including *supporting ourselves* and *keeping away from the unruly* (3:13).

● ● III. Dealing with the disobedient (3:14-15).

- A. As Paul is concluding his instructions, he emphasizes *again* that the ones he is addressing, the unruly, or disorderly, are those disobedient to the word given in the epistle (3:14, compare 3:6).
- B. Our response to *anyone* who is *disobedient* is to...
 - 1. (1) “Take special note of” that person, or mark them, because of their disobedience.
 - a. Why? Because disobedient brethren are a threat to the work and soundness of a congregation and the souls of its members (1 Cor. 5 talks about this).
 - b. This noting/marking must be done even when the unruly person has left the immediate fellowship of brethren because **all need to know not to associate with them and why**, which is not going to happen if we do not first note, or mark, them.
 - 2. (2) We are to *not to associate with* these brethren, not to keep away with them, not to have any social interaction with them.
 - a. May seem harsh, but these brethren’s eternal souls are at stake here. **SERIOUS!**
 - b. And like I said above, this command must be obeyed even when they have stopped worshipping with us! Withdrawal is not about the assemblies, but about everyday living!
 - 3. (3) The goal of God’s instructions, who BTW knows the workings of the human mind infinitely better than we do, is so that the offender will be **ashamed** and ultimately repent!
 - a. Despite what we may think of this goal, it is a loving goal and the right goal—one that God commands because it is the only thing that will result in the salvation of their soul.
 - b. If people are not ashamed of their disobedience, they can never properly repent and be forgiven (2 Cor. 7:10 – “For **godly grief** produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.” – ESV)
 - 4. (4) In doing this, we must not regard the erring Christian as an enemy, but rather admonish them as brethren in Christ (3:15).
 - a. Here we must note a *distinction* being made between “keeping company with” this person who insists on sin and having contact with them so as to “admonish” them.
 - i. In other words, although normal social interaction is prohibited, one may contact that person to *admonish them* unto repentance. **This is an important distinction!**
 - ii. I believe we, myself included, need to be a bit more attuned to this responsibility.
 - b. Now, in response to this I hear people defend “hanging out” with the withdrawn because they say their goal, like that mentioned by Paul, is to get them to repent and return.
 - i. But God’s response to that would be “are you seeking their repentance by *noting* and *keeping away from them* as I commanded?” To which that person must answer “no.”
 - ii. So, despite not treating them as an enemy, we must treat them similarly to a disobedient child and not reward bad behavior, but instead *keep away from them* socially to cause them shame while seeking to admonish them to repent.
 - c. And, whether this “works” or not is not our problem. Our job is to obey God’s commands, not to judge them!

CONCLUSION:

1. I hope that I have achieved my goal of properly explaining God’s will on this matter, as well as helping all of us see the importance of church discipline to the souls involved.

2. Local congregations of the Lord and the members must withdraw themselves from the unruly, or disobedient, brethren among them.
3. It is commanded and vital to the faithfulness of the local church. More on this in the future.
4. In another way I hope it has impressed upon you the seriousness of obeying the Lord in faithful fashion. That is what the saved, or disciples of Christ, do. They follow Jesus!
 - A. Following Jesus is worth everything it requires, because with it comes salvation.
 - B. That salvation and discipleship is offered to you right now through the grace of God and the gospel, or good news, of Christ and His sacrifice on the cross to forgive your sins.
 - C. Will you accept God's grace by putting your faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, by repenting of your sins, by confessing your faith in Christ, and by being baptized into Christ and his death that your sins might be forgiven? Will you do these things today and be saved?