

2 Thessalonians 3:6–18 Confrontation for Incorrect Practice

We finally come to the last section of the final chapter of this short book.

You may recall that the book falls into three main sections:

- I. Comfort for those under persecution (1:3–12)
- II. Correction for misunderstanding the Parousia (2:1–3:5)
- III. Confrontation for incorrect practice (3:6–15)

This third part of the book focuses on practical issues of daily conduct/behavior. Paul has to correct the church for a particular failure that was evident among them. And that failure was disorderly living.

Christianity presents a certain lifestyle, a set of behavioral expectations that all Christians are supposed to uphold. If professing believers do not fulfill these expectations, then something is wrong—something out of order. We call that “sin.” And that’s what Paul is addressing in this last chapter—disorderly behavior among the members of the church.

This text addresses these wrong behaviors and gives us some pointers for confronting disorderly believers. Sometimes, the church has to confront church members about their disorderly behavior. That is usually an unpleasant task, but it is necessary. When a member of the church is guilty of disorderly behavior, the church must confront the person about it.

Let’s consider what Paul says about confrontation for disorderly behavior.

First, let’s consider...

- I. The problem Paul sees—what’s the problem in view in this passage?
 - A. .6 Some of the brethren are walking “disorderly.” Cf. vs. 11—“Some walk among you disorderly.”
 1. You’ll note that Paul uses the word “disorderly” three times in this passage. So this seems to be the main problem Paul is addressing here—people are behaving in a disorderly manner.
 2. The word “disorderly” (ἀτάκτως) means “out of ranks, irregular, irresponsible, deviating from the correct rule of order.”

Paul implies here that there is a proper rule of order, a proper behavior pattern for Christians. We have the right to expect Christians to live an orderly lifestyle. Orderliness is basically obedience to biblical commands. If we violate these commands, we are living disorderly.

3. .6end This behavior is disorderly because it was violating “the tradition which he received of us.”
- a) Some people at the church were not living according to the standards that Paul had taught them. They were violating Christian standards of behavior.
 - b) Paul had taught them the proper way to behave themselves as Christians. He had passed the Christian tradition down to them. He had taught them both the Gospel and how to behave in light of it.
 - c) These people were behaving in a way that violated the good order that Paul expected of Christians.

App: Today, people who profess to be Christians violate this biblical rule of order. They fail to uphold the Christian tradition regarding proper behavior. They live disorderly; some of them live in gross sin, but they think that’s OK. It’s not OK; it is “disorderly,” and the church should not tolerate it.

Let’s look at...

B. The particular disorderly behaviors that Paul is concerned about

1. Idleness

- a) We get a hint about the error in vs. 8 – eating food for nothing. This implies that others were doing this.
- b) We get another hint in vs. .10b – “if any would not work” – lit. “if anyone is not willing (θέλω) to work.” Not that they *cannot* work; they do not want to work.

So here is the disorderly behavior in view—idleness, lack of work. We might call these people freeloaders or loafers.

The people in view here *can* work but they don’t want to. They quit working and started freeloading. They would rather not work; they would rather ask others to provide for them.

- c) .11b not working at all – there is the main disorderly behavior
 - (1) They had quit their jobs; they were not gainfully employed. They were idle, not doing anything of value, not providing for their own needs.

App: A very significant Christian principle is that we expect independent adults to fend for themselves. Those who can work should work to provide for themselves and their own families.

God established work as the normal pattern for humans from the very beginning. God had work for Adam and Eve to do in the Garden of Eden. Because of the curse, work is often very difficult. We make a living by the sweat of our brow. Still, work is part of God's will for us.

We ought to have compassion for those who cannot work. Some people, for various reasons, cannot provide for themselves. In some cases—e.g., with “widows indeed”—the church can provide for them. In modern society, the government collects taxes to provide for those who cannot provide for themselves.

We should be charitable toward people who actually cannot work. Those people are *not* in view here. Paul is addressing those who could work but choose not to.

In our society, millions of people could work but would rather not. Millions of people in our country are scamming fellow citizens out of billions of tax dollars every year because they would rather not work.

Christians ethics/morals teach us that if people can work for a living, they must work. If they expect to eat, they must work.

- (2) Why would they not be working? Why were they idle? From the context of the book, it appears that they thought that they were in the Day of the Lord—i.e., that Jesus was coming back immediately (cf. 2:2).

In a certain way, it would make sense to quit work if the 2nd Coming in glory—the Parousia—were just around the corner. When Jesus returns, everything will be changed.

As they were awaiting Jesus' 2nd Coming, they were just lounging around, relaxing, taking it easy, waiting to hear the trumpet.

And apparently they were scrounging off others as they waited. They quit work, used up all their own resources, and were now asking others to feed them.

App: It is disorderly to avoid work and scrounge off of others when you could be working and providing for yourself. Millions of people in our society may be doing that, but Christians should not be among them. Idleness when one should be working is disorderly living; it's a contradiction of Christian principles.

They were not busy working, but they were...

2. .11end Busybodies (περιεργάζομαι)

We can understand this word in two sense:

- a) Passively: the word implies doing nothing of value; not engaged in productive or constructive labor.

And because they were not working, they were asking the church to support them.

.8a Eating other people's food "for nought." I.e., they were freeloading, taking advantage of the charitable nature of the other people in the church.

- b) Actively: sticking one's nose into the affairs of others; getting involved in other people's business; meddling. Since they had quit working, they were busy meddling in other people's business.

1 Thessalonians 4:11 ... *mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you,*

App: Mind your own business is a biblical principle. We should be concerned about other people and have compassion when they suffer, but we should not be sticking our nose into other people's business. We should certainly not be meddling where we do not belong. Paul calls that disorderly living.

Disorderliness could refer to many kinds of behaviors. Idle meddling is only one form of disorderly behavior. We could expand this to any kind of behavior that clearly violates Christian values and ethics. When a church member is guilty of disorderly behavior, the church should do something about it. We do not just ignore it or tolerate it.

Disorderly people must quit that kind of behavior and get back to Christian living. Paul exhorts them to mind their own business and do their own work.

Trans: So first we have the problem Paul sees—meddlesome idleness—and next we have

II. The example Paul (and his colleagues) left

A. We set a good example to follow.

1. .7 Follow – (μιμείομαι) – to imitate, to mimic. “You ought to (δεῖ).” This is a moral obligation—you should follow our example. The text says literally, “you to follow us is necessary.”
2. .9 “example” (τύπος) – pattern, form, imprint
3. Paul frequently urges his readers to follow the example he and his colleagues set—cf. 1 Cor 11:1.

Phil 4:9 Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: ...

4. .9 Paul would rather lead with his example than press his “power” or authority (ἐξουσία) over people. The apostles had the authority to command the churches, but instead of demanding behavior, he exemplified the kind of behavior that was proper.

App: When you are not sure what kind of behavior is appropriate or right, follow the example of godly, mature Christians.

This is where so many people go wrong. They decide to behave in ways that older, more mature believers would never act.

B. .7b We did not behave disorderly among you.

1. .7b “not disorderly” (ἀτακτέω). I.e., we were orderly; we behaved ourselves properly. We lived virtuously, according to biblical standards. We exemplified godly, mature Christian living.
2. .8 They provided for their own needs; they paid for their own food. That implies that the disorderly people were not buying their own food; they were asking others to give them food.

3. .8b “with labor and travail...” Paul and his colleagues worked tirelessly to provide for their own needs. Paul worked as a tentmaker when he needed to make money. Other people and churches supported Paul financially, but when necessary, he worked a job. He was bivocational.

App: So following Paul’s example, we should pay our own way, make our own living, and not freeload off others. Avoid being a financial burden to others. The disorderly people were violating these principles.

Our lives in general ought to be characterized by orderly living. Christians live according to biblical standards of behavior. Maybe there are areas in our lives that we could work on to be more orderly.

III. The commands Paul gives

Here is how to solve this problem.

- A. .12b Lit. “eat your own bread, working quietly.” (ἵνα μετὰ ἡσυχίας ἐργαζόμενοι τὸν ἑαυτῶν ἄρτον ἐσθίωσιν.)

1. Eat your own bread; i.e., make your own living. Provide for yourself and your own family. I.e., don’t sponge off of others; don’t be a bum or a freeloader who is always asking people for food or money.

Honest labor is the means by which people are to sustain themselves. If people are lazy and busy with unproductive activities—and especially if they are meddling busybodies—the church should not bail them out.

We are under no biblical obligation to help those who refuse to work when they could work. Christian compassion does not mean that we give to those who refuse to work for a living.

2. .12 Work quietly, i.e., without drawing attention to yourself. Instead of scheming to get other people to support you, earn your own living. People who are working for a living don’t have time to meddle in other people’s business.
3. .12 “we command and exhort” – so this is a strong admonition, a stern warning to change their behavior. Cf. vs. 6 – “in the name of our Lord...” This is disorderly behavior, so those guilty of this must repent and change.

- B. .6b, 14 Withdraw from those walking disorderly.

1. .6 Here is the main command, and it's a command with authority.
2. Withdraw (στέλλω) from every brother that walketh disorderly. I.e., to avoid, to remove oneself, to depart, stay clear of, keep away from them. Shun such a person.

In some cases, the best way to deal with disorderly people is to simply avoid them, stay clear of them. Don't encourage their disorderly behavior by giving them anything.

We can treat people respectfully and charitably, but we can also simply avoid contact with such people. We can speak to them kindly and civilly, but at the same time, refuse to be closely associated with them.

Who in particular is he speaking about?

3. .14 "If any many obey not our word ..." The grammar here implies that some were not obeying the teachings of Paul. Some people were guilty of violating biblical standards of behavior.
4. .14 "Note" or "mark" (σημειώω) him. It's the root word for "sign." Mark that man; put a sign on him. Pay close attention; observe carefully; identify such people to avoid them.
 - a) .6end The main issue is that they are not obeying the tradition Paul gave them. They are disobedient.
 - b) .14 They are not obeying "our word by this epistle."
 - c) So they know what Paul taught and they are being flagrantly disobedient to the Christian tradition. They are violating apostolic commands.

App: Would a Christian actually do that—disobey the clear teaching of the Bible? Yes, sometimes Christians do that. And when they do, it causes problems for everyone else. Many of us have experienced the problems caused when professing Christians refuse to follow the clear teaching of the NT.

The first thing to do is mark that person, identify him, recognize what he is doing, and then...

5. .6 “withdraw yourselves;” .14 “Have no company” (συναναμίγνυμι) with him – literally “to mix together, to mingle” and thus, to keep company, to be closely involved with, to associate with. Do not mingle or get mixed up with those kind of people. I.e., separate from them.

Quit hosting them; quit feeding them; quit enabling them; quit fellowshiping with them.

Romans 16:17 *Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them.*

6. .14end The intent/purpose: “that he may be ashamed” (ἐντρέπω) – to be embarrassed, to be dishonored.
- a) The intent is to correct the faulty behavior. The goal is not really to embarrass or punish the guilty person.
 - b) The goal is to get the offender to see the sinful nature of his actions. The person needs to know that the church condemns his disorderliness; the church sees this as sinful, disorderly conduct.
 - c) The guilty person should feel ashamed of himself for his disorderly behavior. Genuine Christians would feel that way, especially when the whole church marks them off as disorderly in their behavior.
 - d) The goal is to get the person to repent. The goal is to appeal to his conscience. The HSp might bring conviction on him so as to turn back to the right path.

Some people might look at these instructions and complain that this is too strict and stringent. This is spiritual abuse—to shun someone, avoid him, rebuke him, make him feel ashamed—this is hard hearted and mean spirited. This is too severe, some would say.

Paul would disagree with that assessment. Paul recommends “tough love” in this case. The goal is to correct the behavior, to change it. These people are guilty of violating clear biblical guidelines. They refuse to listen to the commands of the apostles of Jesus Christ. This is necessary discipline designed to bring them back into the right kind of behavior.

So mark and avoid these people, However...

- C. .15a Do not consider him to be an enemy.
1. This kind of behavior is not a sign of apostasy. This behavior is disorderly, but it's not heretical. This person is not an apostate; he's just acting irregularly and shamefully.

This is a fairly serious error – rejecting the apostolic tradition and the writing of Paul. Still, Paul does not tell the church to excommunicate the person. The guilty person is in serious error, but he's not an enemy of the faith or of the church.

2. Instead of assuming that disorderly people are enemies of the faith, ...

- D. .15b Admonish him as a brother.

1. “admonish” (νουθετέω) – to warn or counsel, to advise; to point out one's error and call to repentance. This is a verbal warning or rebuke.
2. And we recognize that this person is “a brother.” I.e., he's a fellow Christian. He should receive this advice and counsel; he should see the error of his way if he's a genuine believer.

Romans 15:14 ... *you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.*

So the whole church is responsible to confront the guilty person about this bad behavior —“admonish” –warn, counsel, rebuke.

- E. .13 Do not grow weary in well doing. Paul wants to encourage the church to keep up their good work.

Bearing with disorderly people can be discouraging and wearying. A few bad actors can cause the whole church to be discouraged and upset. But the church should keep on persevering in the faith in spite of these idle, meddling people.

Occasionally, the church has to put up with disorderly people. “The Gospel light attracts some strange bugs.” We must have patience and try to help these people change for the better.

App: There will always be a few bad actors who take advantage of charitable people. But that should not stop us from being charitable.

- IV. .16-18 The conclusion Paul makes

Paul finishes the letter with a prayer, a signature, and a benediction.

- A. .16 A Prayer: Paul prays for peace and for God's presence.

Paul began this letter with a prayer for God's peace (1:2), and now he ends the letter in the same way—by a prayer for God's peace—bookends.

Given the context, Paul seems to be praying that the church can deal with this issue properly so as to solve these problems and restore peace in the church. False doctrine and disorderly people had threatened the peace of the church. If they obey Paul's instructions here, they can go back to a peaceful life. That's what Paul desires for them.

App: We should value peace in the church. It's easy to lose that important quality, so we should make peace in the church a high priority. Sometime, we have to take drastic measures to protect the church from those who would upset the peace of the church. We have to confront false doctrine and disorderly behavior.

We certainly do not want to be guilty of upsetting the peace of the church.

- B. .17 A signature: Paul signs his own name.
 - 1. Paul likely dictated most of his letters to a secretary (amanuensis) who actually wrote out the letters. The fact that this final part is in Paul's "own hand" means that someone else wrote out the rest of the letter as Paul dictated.
 - 2. Paul signed his letters at the end and probably wrote out the final remarks himself.
 - 3. Signing his letters personally guaranteed that this letter was actually from Paul and not a forgery.
- C. A benediction: Paul commends them all to the grace of Christ.

That ends our series in 2 Thessalonians.

In this book, Paul has comforted those suffering persecution, corrected various misunderstandings regarding the 2nd Coming/Parousia, and confronted those living disorderly. He has addressed personal needs, doctrinal misunderstanding, and behavioral problems in these three short chapters.

The church in Thessalonica was doing well, and he is confident that they will continue to hold fast to the traditions he taught them. He's confident that God will protect them and keep them in his grace.

This last chapter encourages us to live an orderly lifestyle and follow biblical traditions. Perhaps there are areas of disorder in our lives. Perhaps some of us are guilty of laziness or meddling in other people's affairs. Paul exhorts and admonishes us today to return to obedience to biblical standards of behavior. We should follow the examples of godly, mature believers in our behavior choices. If we follow Paul's teachings here, it will promote peace in the church.