



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for July 25, 2010
Released on Wednesday, July 21, 2010**

"God's Own Faithfulness"

Lesson Text: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-15

Background Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 3

Devotional Reading: Psalm 89:1-8

2 Thessalonians 3:1-15

1 Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you:

2 And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.

3 But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.

4 And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you.

5 And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.

6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.

7 For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you;

8 Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labor and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you:

9 Not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.

10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

11 For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies.

12 Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.

13 But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.

14 And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed.

15 Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

LESSON AIMS

After in this lesson each student will be able to:

1. Summarize Paul's warnings on idleness.
2. Predict some results of unchecked idleness, as Paul uses that concept, in his or her church.

3. Plan an event that encourages 100 percent participation in ministry so that idleness is not found among the church members.

INTRODUCTION To Each His Own

In many passages, Jesus warns His followers not to judge other people. The most famous of such passages is His somewhat humorous rebuke of the critic who seeks to remove a speck of dust from someone's eye while the critic himself has a log in his own eye. That is enough to convince many Christians not to meddle in others' affairs. It is better, they surmise, to leave others alone—after all, no one is perfect. If one combines this with Jesus' warning that each believer will be judged with the same judgment by which he or she has judged others (Matthew 7:2), then an entirely hands-off approach to others' sin seems justified.

This logic seems right, but it's wrong. It is wrong because it leaves others in their sin (Jude 1:23). It is wrong because it ignores Jesus' teaching about confronting those who sin (Matthew 18:15–20). It is wrong because sins are contagious and can spread and infect the whole church (1 Corinthians 5:6, 7). It is wrong because it allows people to dishonor Christ's name before nonbelievers. It is wrong, finally, because it takes a few verses out of context in order to avoid what is arguably one of the most awkward tasks that Scripture commands us to carry out—that of lovingly confronting a sinning brother or sister.

Those who take this practice seriously often turn to Matthew 18:15–20 for guidance. There Jesus sets forth a threefold process for dealing with sin in a fellow believer's life. After studying this passage, it is helpful to see examples of this process in action. A common place to turn for this is 1 Corinthians 5:9–13. Less commonly cited, but nonetheless instructive, is today's text from 1 Thessalonians 3.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In the first two chapters, Paul affirmed the Thessalonians' endurance under persecution and corrected their confusion about the day of the Lord. In this last chapter, he addresses a specific problem that likely resulted from this confusion. Some insiders had convinced many believers in Thessalonica that the persecutions they suffered were signs that the day of the Lord had begun.

This announcement could have influenced people in many ways. It could have produced panic among those who feared being firsthand participants in the intense suffering they expected to accompany the last days. It could have paralyzed others, who would not have known what to expect or how to handle whatever may come their way. It could have excited still others, who would leave behind the responsibilities and routines of everyday life to fully engage the challenges ahead.

It is difficult to know how exactly the Thessalonians responded and exactly what problems elicited the practical advice that Paul gave in 2 Thessalonians 3. There we see him engage this community in prayer, lifestyle mentoring, and basic advice for admonishing believers whose confusion had become a burden to the church and a detriment to their witness. He therefore furnished helpful guidelines for churches of all eras that struggle with internal and external strife.

PRAYER FOR PAUL'S MINISTRY (2 Thessalonians 3:1,2)

1. What was Paul's request for prayer by the Thessalonians (2 Thessalonians 3:1,2)?

Paul began by requesting prayer on his behalf. Paul does not think he is superior to the Thessalonian believers. He and his companions (Silas and Timothy; see 1:1) are coworkers with these churches, who depend daily on their prayers and aren't too

proud to ask. It is tempting for leaders to think that since they are the ones who pray for others, then asking for prayer would express weakness. Paul likely would agree that it expresses weakness, but he does not believe human weakness should be hidden. It is precisely through human weakness, he says, that God's greatness is made known (2 Corinthians 12:9,10).

Paul wanted the Thessalonians to pray that God's message would spread rapidly (2 Thess. 3:1). He used the figure of a footrace with his reference to God's word having "free course," meaning that it would run a rapid race. He used this particular figure elsewhere (1 Cor. 9:24; Gal. 5:7). His desire was that the propagation of the gospel would be accelerated, with all the obstacles of the "wicked" enemies of the gospel being overcome.

Note also the source of human wickedness: it is not simply a matter of upbringing and poor life choices. It flows from lack of faith. Believers must accept the reality that not all men possess faith and so not all will accept Christ. It is this resistance to the Spirit's work that makes them so dangerous. To properly identify this cause is to look in the right direction for a solution. Paul is dedicated to proclaiming the Lord's Word so that people may come to faith and leave their wicked ways behind.

2. What are some specific areas for prayer for your church leaders?

The key role of church leaders is to declare the Word of God. Thus, prayer is needed for them that they may declare the gospel clearly and boldly (Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 4:4). Church leaders also fall under the temptation of Satan to wander from their faith, so we need to pray that they remain faithful in times of trial and temptation. Another role of leaders is to provide spiritual oversight, so this is another area for prayer. In Acts 20:28–31 Paul admonishes the Ephesian elders as to how they are to conduct their ministry. The principles mentioned there are areas where our leaders need our prayers.

EXPECTATION OF GOD'S PROVISION (2 Thessalonians 3:3-5)

3. In what way is the Lord faithful to keep us (v. 3)?

In stark contrast to "wicked men" (v. 2, above), *the Lord is faithful*. Paul acknowledges his vulnerability to wicked schemes, but he refuses to linger there. He refuses to sulk about specific harms suffered or specific men who cause him pain. Instead, he directs our focus to the Lord's faithfulness. Human wickedness must never be the last or even loudest word. We must not give it more exposure than it deserves. Though faithless people would rob us of stamina and standing, our faithful Lord strengthens and protects us.

Paul offers similar words of encouragement in 1 Corinthians 10:13: "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it." Paul has no desire to ignore the reality of *evil* and the schemes of the evil one (2 Thessalonians 2:9), but believers must remain confident that God's faithfulness is of such superior power that our victory is guaranteed as long as we remain in Him (see 1 Thessalonians 5:24).

4. What confidence did Paul have regarding the Thessalonians (vs. 4,5)?

In verse 4 Paul begins switching gears. He expresses confidence in God's work in the Thessalonian church, but he draws on this confidence to issue a *command*. It is uncommon, but not unheard of, for the apostle Paul to issue commands to churches. He prefers gentle exhortation. The fact that he is preparing them for a command indicates that something critical is at stake.

Before issuing this command, Paul pauses to lift these believers before the Lord in prayer (v. 5). He asks God to *direct* their *hearts* in a twofold manner patterned after God himself. This text has been translated in two ways. The *King James Version* places the emphasis on the believers' action and encourages them to love God and patiently wait for Christ. But the grammatical structure here can also emphasize God's example and represent a command to direct their hearts to God's *love* and Christ's patience.

We need not choose between these two meanings. God's love is always the pattern for human love, and Christ's patience the pattern for human patience. Either way, Paul prays that God will engender proper heart condition as he lays before these believers a sensitive command.

DISCIPLINE OF DISORDERLY MEMBERS (2 Thessalonians 3:6-15)

5. What decisive action was to be taken regarding the disorderly (v. 6)?

Finally, Paul issues his command: that the church distance itself from members who do not walk according to Paul's teaching and example. The exact nature of their transgression is not clear. Our text here describes it as *disorderly* living, whereas some translations call it idleness. The original word means something like "not in proper order," so the translation in the *King James Version* has much to commend it. The issue of idleness is clearly in view, however, for Paul spends much time persuading his readers to work responsibly. He even equates disorderliness with laziness in verse 11.

Perhaps it is best to understand the term in the broadest sense, as the problem may involve many forms of disorder, one of which (or even the most prominent of which) is idleness. The term *disorderly* is broad enough to include both the failure to work and the tendency to meddle excessively in others' affairs, as these same persons obviously are doing (v. 11).

The point Paul begins to make here is that such disorderly believers are compromising the church's integrity in such a way as to require some form of separation. Before describing what this separation should and should not look like, which he does in verses 13-15, he first reminds them that such living is not in keeping with the faith *tradition* they *received* and explains why it has become such a problem.

6. What work ethic example had Paul and his associates set (vs. 7-9)?

Paul and his missionary associates had provided clear examples of a solid work ethic (v. 7). The Thessalonians could testify to that fact. They were under obligation to follow the example. Paul taught by way of example as well as by precept.

The missionaries were not idle loafers, for they worked while among the Thessalonians. They paid their own way (1 Thess. 2:9). The disorderly not only failed to follow the apostles' instructions but also disregarded their living example. These people were lazy and sponged off others, making themselves a financial burden. This was a poor testimony and therefore a hindrance to the propagation of the gospel ministry.

Paul reminded the Thessalonians how he and his coworkers had gone about earning their own food (verse 8 of today's lesson). They labored strenuously night and day in order not to be a financial burden to them.

Since the missionaries were also apostles, they had the authority to receive financial help for their ministry (1 Cor. 9:6, 11-14). However, they chose to waive their rights in order to teach the Thessalonians the importance of self-sacrificing love. The vital importance of the gospel ministry made such selfless action necessary.

7. Why did Paul have to repeat his instruction regarding these disorderly busybodies (vs. 10,11)?

Paul's example in Thessalonica has been reinforced with clear teaching (v. 10), yet some obviously have chosen to ignore it. But why? Paul repeated his instructions on the work ethic. The idle who could work but would not, "neither should they eat." Whatever the excuse for idleness the disorderly might devise in their own minds, Paul gave no place to it. Their idleness was a form of selfishness, for they were becoming unnecessary burdens to others.

They were not to be supported by the church, even out of a sense of charity. To support them was to enable their disorderliness. If need be, the church was to let them go hungry. This was tough love in action, but these delinquent members needed to learn an important lesson through church discipline.

Paul had to address this particular problem because he kept hearing more and more about the problem (v. 11). The news was disturbing. Some were not just refusing to work; they were also meddling in the affairs of others. Their behavior was disruptive for other people.

Paul called them busybodies. They were busy trifling in needless, useless matters that were none of their business. A busybody has been described "in some ancient languages as 'one who puts his spoon in someone else's cup' or 'one who always tells another how to buy and sell'" (Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, United Bible Societies).

8. What impact does idleness have on the work of Christ? How can we counteract this?

People with too much time on their hands tend to become consumed with minutiae, even to the point of criticizing others for the most petty reasons. They thus spend their time tearing others down as opposed to building others up. Those who are idle also become dependent on others for help. This may lead to the neglect of those who truly need help—whether material help or spiritual. Some students of church life say just 20 percent of the people in a typical church accomplish 80 percent of the church's ministry. Imagine what could happen if those who are idle would become as active as that 20 percent!

9. What correction command did Paul give to the idle busybodies (vs. 12,13)?

By the authority of Jesus Christ, Paul directly commanded and sternly exhorted the idle busybodies to earn their own living (v. 12). They were to work "with quietness," denoting that they were to do their own work and refrain from intruding into the affairs of other members or their neighbors. This annoyance to other people had to cease.

Paul encouraged the majority in the church who were working not to be discouraged (v. 13). Regardless of the delinquent conduct of some among them, the Thessalonians were never to lose heart or to give up doing what they knew was right (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:58). They were to continue to be diligent workers themselves and to deal firmly with those who deliberately chose to be idle busybodies.

10. What causes a Christian to become weary in well doing? How can we prevent that?

We live in a world where we want instant results. In Christian living, the results are not always immediately apparent. Sharing the gospel with someone may not produce an instant convert.

At other times the weariness comes because we are attacked. We try to stand for the truth of Scripture, but the world condemns and criticizes us. This ridicule and

rejection causes us to become weary. Sometimes the attacks come from fellow Christians, and we question whether it is worth the effort to continue in our pursuit of godly goals and lifestyles. In each of these situations we must remember the words of Galatians 6:9: "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

11. What boundary was prescribed for disciplining the disorderly (vs. 14,15)?

Paul elaborated on his earlier disciplinary instructions. If a disorderly member continued in his misbehavior by refusing to heed Paul's admonition, stringent action would have to be taken by the majority. He was to be marked out and disciplined.

Paul was very specific in his instruction to the church. They were not to keep company with a busybody. This meant "that the rest of the congregation should not 'get mixed up with him' [or] associate with such an individual *on intimate terms* . . . agreeing with him" (Hendriksen, *Exposition of 1 and 11 Thessalonians*, Baker).

The disciplined individual caused his own social ostracism. He was not banished from the church. It appears that communication was still open to him for continued warning, if necessary, about his idleness. The purpose for the discipline was corrective, not punitive. The intended outcome was his personal shame and repentance over his irresponsibility. It was the discipline of love. Social contact was to be broken off until he changed his conduct.

The disciplinary action had its prescribed boundary. The congregation was not to regard the offender as an enemy but as a brother in Christ, though an erring one. He had not been antagonistic to the gospel or to them. Consequently, there was not place for feelings of hostility toward him. He was to be admonished as a brother in Christ.

PRACTICAL POINTS

- 1.** It should be our habit to pray for the unhindered preaching of the gospel (2 Thessalonians 3:1,2).
- 2.** Love for and obedience to God go together; we should pray for both to increase (vs. 3-5).
- 3.** We cannot effectively witness for the Lord while endorsing ungodly behavior among us (vs. 6,7).
- 4.** Claiming our rights is not as important as being an example (vs. 8,9).
- 5.** We should never let the actions of others deter us from doing what is right (vs. 10-13).
- 6.** Real love will not allow brethren to continue in disobedience without rebuke (vs. 14,15).

CONCLUSION

Each Is Our Own

When we truly love a brother or sister, we will not let that person go down without a fight. To fight for a loved one begins with prayer, but it doesn't always end there. It requires ending her illusion that all is well between her and God and His people. A church that believes each member is vitally important will therefore intervene decisively to bring order to disordered lives.

In 2 Thessalonians 3:1-15 we see such intervention unfold. It begins with correct teaching and positive examples; it continues with verbal warning and admonition. It may lead even to spatial separation until the problem is resolved. Though it is painful

to withdraw from someone we love, it is far more agonizing to watch that person destroy his or her life and that of others. Since each member of Christ's body is one with it, it is the business of all to call the wanderer back (c.f. James 5:19,20).

PRAYER

Forgiving Father, we thank You for teaching us that forgiveness is not simply a state of mind, but a holistic practice that requires painful choices. Increase our faith so we can see the needs of our brothers and sisters. Increase our resolve that we may do the right thing. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Care enough to admonish the disorderly ones in your life (Galatians 6:1,2; James 5:19,20).

ANTICIPATING THE NEXT LESSON

Next week's lesson is "**Sharing God's Grace.**" Study Philippians 1:1-30, and think about the prospect of being suddenly taken out of this world to be with Christ but wanting to remain here to serve Him. Think upon how concerned we should be to share God's grace.

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

Willie Ferrell

Jesus Is All Ministries

www.jesusisall.com

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