

High Peaks Bible Fellowship

Dealing with the *Unruly* Within the Church (2 Thessalonians 3:6-12)

The sequence of events regarding the *unruly* within the Church

1. When the apostle was with them, he saw that there were people among them who were refusing to work, and he gave orders then that if they would not work, they should not eat (2 Th 3:10).
2. While he was in Corinth Paul heard that such people were still refusing to support themselves, and in his first epistle he exhorted them to work with their own hands (1 Th 4:11-12). At that time he also told the Church to admonish the unruly (1 Th 5:14).
3. After writing the first letter Paul continued to hear that these people still were not following his instructions. This is what causes him to deal strongly with this issue in this second epistle.

Paul's command to the Church regarding *unruly* brothers (2 Thess. 3:6)

- We command (*parangello*) you, brethren = the same word as in 2 Th 3:4. Now Paul puts into action his confidence in their obedience to his commands. Here Paul is addressing the entire Church -- those who are not unruly. In the first letter Paul told them to admonish the unruly (1 Th 5:14), but here Paul tells them to separate from the unruly. When admonitions are ignored, stronger steps are required.
- Name (*onoma*) of our Lord Jesus Christ = the sovereign authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Keep away = literally, "to furl the sails" -- to steer clear of; to move oneself away from or to withdraw oneself from something. The present tense means "to continually keep away." Basically Paul is telling them to discontinue their fellowship and support of the unruly.
- Leads an unruly (*ataktos*) life = literally, "insubordinately live." It means to set oneself outside the designated order; used of soldiers who march out of step. The only times this word family is used in the NT are:
 1. the adverb *ataktos* here and in 2 Th 3:11
 2. the adjective *ataktws* in 1 Th 5:14
 3. the verb *atakteo* in 2 Th 3:7.
 These few usages give us little biblical context for determining the meaning Paul intended here.
- Not according to the tradition (*paradosis*) = the same word as in 2 Th 2:15. This confirms that tradition refers to Paul's instructions given personally or in his letters.

What kind of *unruliness* merits this treatment?

- Are specific believers and specific offenses in view here, or is this a general instruction on Church discipline?
- As we will see later, the action Paul commands would solve the specific problem Paul is addressing. However, it was not necessarily intended as the solution to every problem in the Church.
- Withdrawing from fellowship and support was not a formal sentence of *excommunication*. In other cases Paul did recommend a more severe treatment of believers who were indulging in blatant sin (see 1 Cor 5:5; 1 Tim 1:20). Also in the case of unbelievers, the Church was not to be as strict (1 Cor 5:9-13).
- The principle Paul shares could be used to handle similar situations within the Church, but we must remember that Paul is dealing with a specific situation: people who are expecting fellow-believers to support them.

The Reasons for Paul's Command (2 Thess. 3:7-11)

#1 They are obligated to imitate Paul's example (2 Th 3:7-9)

- For (gar) = introduces Paul's explanation or reasons for the command he gave in 2 Th 3:6. Additional reasons are introduced by this word in 2 Th 3:10 and 2 Th 3:11.
- You yourselves know (oida) = to know by observation, by perceiving with the senses, and therefore to have complete or full knowledge. Paul calls the Thessalonians as eyewitness to his holiness of life (see 1 Th 2:10).
- You ought = you must; it is a strong necessity, given the circumstances.
- Follow-our-example (mimeomai) = mimic, imitate. The present tense means "be constantly imitating us."
- Because = could be translated "since" -- Paul now describes several aspects of his example:
 1. We did not act-in-an-undisciplined-manner (atakteo) = the verb form of the adverb "unruly" that was used in 2 Th 3:6. Paul acted "according to the tradition" while the unruly ones acted "not according to the tradition."
 2. We did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it
 - Eat anyone's bread = this is a Jewish expression for earning a living.
 - Without paying for it = literally, "neither *giftwise* bread did we eat." Paul and his companions did not receive their meals and lodging free of charge -- they did support themselves.
 - Kept working (ergazomai) = to make gain by trading, to do business in an occupation. Present tense shows that he continually worked during the entire time he was among them. They worked even when it caused them intense toil and weariness. They worked during normal working hours (day) as well as beyond normal working hours (night).
 - So that = Paul did this so that his needs would not weigh heavily upon anyone in the Church.
 3. Not because we do not have the right to this
 - Right (exousia) = support from the Church was an entitlement of his designated position of authority in the Lord.
 - Offer (give) ourselves as a model (tupos) = the mark of a blow; then the figure formed by the blow; the mold, form, or pattern to be imitated. Paul gives himself as the mold, and he expects the Thessalonians to pour themselves into that mold.
 - So that you would follow our example (mimeomai) = literally, "into us to imitate." The present tense means that they must constantly mimic or imitate Paul's example.

#2 Paul had already instructed them on this issue (2 Th 3:10)

- For (gar) = another in Paul's list of reasons for his command in 2 Th 3:6.
- When we were with you = identifies the tradition as consisting of Paul's personal teaching.
- Command (parangello) = same word for command used in 2 Th 3:4, 6.
- If anyone will not work = apparently a Jewish proverb based on Gen 3:19.

#3 Specific brothers were disobeying his previous instructions (2 Th 3:11)

- For (gar) = the final reason for Paul's command in 2 Th 3:6.
- We hear that some = the present tense means "we are hearing right now." There were some who were not obeying what Paul had commanded (as in 2 Th 3:4).
- Paul expands upon his description of the *unruly* by saying literally, "doing nothing but doing around" (*meden ergazomenous alla periergazomenous*). This is a clear play on words used for its

descriptive impact.

- *ergazomenous* = doing business (same word used of Paul in 2 Th 3:8).
- *periergazomenous* = to bustle about uselessly; used of a person who was inquiring into the affairs of others, supposedly in an "official" capacity.

Paul's command to the *unruly* brothers themselves (2 Thess. 3:12)

- Such persons = here Paul directly addresses the unruly ones that he had just described.
- Command (*parangello*) and exhort (*parakaleo*) in the Lord Jesus Christ = admonish, entreat, beseech — with all the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Work in quiet fashion = this is the content of Paul's command to the *unruly*: do your business (*ergazomai*). The present tense means "be doing your business on a regular basis."
- Eat their own bread = make their own living.

Summary of Paul's teaching in this section:

What characterizes the behavior of the *unruly* ones?

1. They were brothers, that is, fellow-Christians (2 Th 3:6).
2. They were disobedient to the tradition that Paul had given them (2 Th 3:6).
3. They were living off of others in the church and becoming a burden to others (2 Th 3:8).
4. They were possibly claiming a right to the support of the church, similar to what Paul could have claimed (2 Th 3:9).
5. They were not willing to work at their own business in order to earn their livelihood (2 Th 3:10, 11).
6. However, they had not become inactive or lethargic — they were very busy in other people's affairs (2 Th 3:11).
7. They were out from under proper authority or acting on their own authority — possibly asserting a self-proclaimed authority in order to claim support from the Church (2 Th 3:12).

Why were they *unruly*?

Paul does not tell us why they were *unruly*, but we can be sure that the Thessalonians knew exactly what he was talking about. Since Paul did not specify, then we cannot be dogmatic about the matter.

Possible Causes:

1. Some of the Thessalonians had the inherent character weakness of laziness. This notion gains support from the fact that the Thessalonians were new believers — they had not had much time to be conformed to the character of Christ.
2. The persecution they were suffering caused them to despair of their lives and also to give up their normal activities (including work). The fact that they were suffering severe affliction lends support to this idea (see 1 Th 2:14; 3:1-4; 2 Th 1:4-7).
3. The nearness of Christ's return led them to the conclusion that they could give up their normal activities. This is a common notion held by many commentators, but it has some drawbacks. The issue of "working with your own hands" (1 Th 4:11) is directly connected to the issue of brotherly love (1 Th 4:9-12), rather than that of their confusion over the resurrection of dead believers. This view is sometimes used by amillennialists as evidence for the destructiveness of the premillennial view of Christ's second coming.
4. On their own authority they claimed the same right of support from the Church that Paul might have claimed (see 2 Th 3:9). They based this claim on their self-appointed spiritual "ministry" activities within the Church. This idea gains support from the fact that some among them were causing them to be disturbed and confused (see 1 Th 5:20-21; 2 Th 2:1-2). These people were, by implication, out from under

proper authority or acting on their own authority. In 2 Th 3:12 Paul implies that they should submit to legitimate authority and not go off on their own.

What is Paul's solution to the problem?

Paul's solution was very straightforward:

- the Church must cut off support
- the unruly brothers must resume gainful employment

In a very practical way this would tend to solve whatever problems might be arising from their fanaticism, their meddlesomeness, and their need of support.

Points of Application:

- One of the lessons we can learn from the sequence of events in Thessalonica is that when we are admonished, we should listen. We should correct our behavior before such extreme measures are required by those in the church fellowship.
- It is one thing to be the individuals that God created us to be (and sometimes to "march to the beat of a different drum"), but it is quite another thing to live in a way that runs counter to the true doctrine and practice that is given to us in the Word of God. Obedience to our Lord Jesus Christ should always be our goal. Are there aspects of your behavior this week that you know should be corrected? If so, be sure to take those steps of correction.
- We should follow the good examples that have been set for us by fellow-Christians like the apostle Paul and his companions. As they have been obedient to Christ, let us follow in their footsteps.
- There is nothing wrong with productive labor in any honorable profession. God holds work of all kinds in high esteem, and so should we. Not only should we value productive labor, but we should be working in whatever areas that God has given us gifts and abilities that can benefit others as well as ourselves.

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High Peaks Bible Fellowship

Our primary purpose is to uphold the truths of the Word of God.

I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:15)

Our primary responsibility is to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-12)