



"No Loitering..."

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
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- 2 Thess 3:6-18

6 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you

withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, 9 not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. 10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. 11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. 12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. 13 But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. 14 And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. 15 Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. 16 Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all. 17 The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Paul has for several weeks been encouraging us to remain strong and faithful in times that seem rather to illicit a general panic. My mind hears those ferry speakers on the boats in the Philippines... "*stand by, stand by, stand by...*" However, as we seek to remain patient and enduring until our Redeemer returns for us, we must resist the temptation to be idle in our living. If God did not have a purpose and a mission for us individually and corporately, I have no doubt that He would have snatched us away the moment we received His gift of salvation!

As Paul now heads to the end of this letter, he gives us some rather practical final directions. Things simple to understand, yet not always so simple to obey. You may read these last comments and see them as trivial, but they clearly are not to Paul and they should not be to us either. Church problems are like physical problems: if left unsolved, they grow and become worse, and they inevitably infect more people. The local church is a body, and what germs are to the physical body, sin is to the spiritual body. What Paul is dealing with here is not merely inconveniences. They are sin: for those who are guilty of the acts, as well as those who refuse to deal with the offenders.

When Paul wrote his first letter to this church, he warned the idle busybodies to get to work (1 Thess. 4:11). He admonished the church leaders to "warn them that are unruly" (1 Thess. 5:14). The word

unruly means “a soldier out of rank.” Apparently these troublemakers did not change their behavior because Paul is dealing again with this issue, even warning the rest of the church that if behavior didn’t change in these folks, that they would need to take further action concerning them.

3:6-7

Paul had been warning the believers there in Thessalonica as well as us here in Dunn County, to pay attention to the dangers and the issues that would tend to distract us from our mission. We all know that there is always plenty of things that can sideline us if we are not consistently on our toes. It would be nice to think that people are generally good and they would never move us off course, but sadly that’s not reality. After having already warned this church about these issues in the first letter, he now apparently feels that further warning is warranted. Paul directs them...*he says, he “commands” them*, to “withdraw from everyone who claims to be a believer but yet still walks ‘disorderly’ ... “idle” *is one English translation*, and lives contrary to the established word which Paul had taught.”

I know that this issue can be a touchy subject for many of us. It has taken some straight out of these seats and out of the church because they refuse to be obedient in this matter, and always while flinging accusations of cultish and elitist theology over their shoulder. However, Paul is clearly not attempting to establish some sort of perfect behavior or a cookie-cutter tribe of believers. This, like all of Paul’s directives and teaching in his letters, is simply a matter of holiness, sanctification, and practical thinking. It is about peace and unity and “family” in the church...and our participation in such is not a “right” but a privilege.

It may be a hard and oft expensive lesson to learn, but we cannot expect to saddle up next to such folks and have them not rub off of us. It’s going to happen! Even if it didn’t, our overt and casual interaction with them and their behaviors will only encourage and embolden their resolve on the issues they face, and will say to other unbelievers (and other believers that you know) that you support them in their unscriptural positions and actions. Again...*hear me on this*, I am not...*Paul is not*, saying that we are to operate in a bubble wherein we crack the whip every time someone stumbles spiritually. Ultimately we must remember that they belong to God, not you. So all correction needs to be handled with grace, patience, and understanding.

The proper handling of such matters in community is really not as complicated as we often make it. But that does not mean that it is not important! Yet still many of us simply reject this premise and refuse to obey it. I certainly don’t want to put words in Paul’s mouth, but in light of all of his teachings as well as the fact that he already dealt with this issue previously, I don’t think he is saying that the place to *start* with these problem people is to avoid them. It would be hard to be a real faith community if that is our starting point! Paul seems to be saying that folks who refuse to hear the warnings and the correction on these matters and refuse to pull up, that they on some level have to be marginalized.

Now note here that this is not an issue of “shunning” them...that’s a term that is so often thrown around by such folks when you are just trying to be obedient on this matter. It is simply...as verse 14 will say, an issue of ‘having no company with them.’ It doesn’t mean you can’t say hi to them in Walmart!

The fact is, there will always be renegades in the wider church of God. There will ...however inexplicable it might seem, those that will want to be a part of the church on some level, but they reject the premise of anyone teaching them anything or that they are there to learn, change, and grow into the greater image of Christ. They want to believe that no one has anything to teach them or correct them concerning and they effectively belong to no one other than themselves and they will fall under no one’s authority. Now why they go to church then is a mystery to me. Loneliness perhaps. However, their lifestyles perpetuate their isolation. Alone in a crowded room.

Invariably, there is no “order” to these folks lives, and Paul has a lot to say about that too, as well as its priority in the church family:

“For God is not the author of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints....Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:33, 40).

“For though I am absent in the flesh, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the steadfastness of your faith in Christ” (Col 2:5)

Our faithful action and reaction to this situation is honestly not an easy obedience. Maybe it shouldn't be! For it is a serious matter and can be a painful issue when it is someone you care about. But note that we are not called to cease our love for them, but rather to act out our love for them by being obedient in this as much as we are with arms of forgiveness. It is crucial that we do not become complicit in the sins of others, and we can do that inadvertently by passively allowing dangerous behavior or by simply looking away when it occurs. Our *disobedience* in the way we handle all of this can be the equivalent of showing someone the door to hell. If not eternally, certainly in quality of life now!

Paul went so far as to tell the Corinthians that there are times we must “deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” Once again, that can no doubt seem extreme, but loving people is not always chocolates and roses. Such is especially confronting in our day, wherein the new street definition of loving people is acceptance ... “tolerance,” of all behavior, priorities, and actions. But it never was with God. Loving can be difficult, uncomfortable, and hard. Our hope always is that there is eventual repentance and restoration. Not that they become *you* or simply do what you deem to be the standard. But it is to guide them to what God deems is the standard, and hold the line. Again, this is a hard thing, but a crucial one. For the other person as well as for you. We must understand that it is not enough to simply *believe* something; we must *live out something*.

3:8-10

Paul, *it seems*, was always somewhat reluctant to be financially supported by anyone. He accepted such when he really needed to, and when the heart behind the giving was right. But he held to the premise that a man ought to work for a living.

I myself held a secular job for many of the early years of pastoring here. I only began to draw a wage when the ministry demanded my full-time attention. We have held to that premise for all staff as they came on board.

We practice this same ideal with the flock also. We have always been slow to give financial resources out unless the receiver was working or at the very least working hard to find work. We don't want to support people in their laziness and rebellion. Your job may not be your ideal picture of vocation for yourself, but that's why they call it “work.” Be busy about your own support while educating or maneuvering to get into your perfect vocation.

We have even fought against cultural mores in the mission field, and refused to financially assist native pastors who had no time or church attendance issues which would prohibit them from carrying a secular job and pastoring too, but they would not do so because it was not “socially ideal.” It was good enough for the apostle Paul, thus I think we all can follow him in this matter.

Often there are those who come around to work the church circles to seek and receive money. They come by here from time to time and are quickly disappointed in our response to them. They move on rather abruptly once they realize our position in this matter!

3:11-12

People with too much time on their hands often become gossips and intrude into the lives of others. They have time for Facebook, video games and for TV, but little time to support themselves it seems. Again, Paul lays out not a *suggestion*, but a *command*: “work for your own bread.”

“And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not” (1 Timothy 5:13).

“But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters” (1 Peter 4:15).

“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8)

“Some people assign to themselves the prerogative of religious cops. They love to tell other people how to run their lives. They know how to run every other family better than their own. They know how to run the church better than anyone else does. This is a great problem in many churches today. We need to deal with it like the apostle Paul did.” (Dr. Grant C. Richison)

3:13

Despite some heavy direction here, Paul still wants to leave these believers with some encouragement. It is a word of encouragement that we all can use regularly! He says “*Don’t grow tired of serving God, kingdom, and each other.*”

Obviously, if Paul is warning us of this, it can easily happen! Perhaps we don’t get enough pats on the back and enough words of thanks for our service. It is often the case in life. Maybe the results of our efforts are slow to appear and we are tempted to throw in the towel. But anyone who has walked with God and served Him well for any amount of time will see that patience in these matters is a necessity. God is faithful to “throw us a bone” once in a while, even though He is in no way required to do so! But spiritual development can take time, and for many, *a long time*.

No one promised us great rewards or kudos for our service and efforts. We must serve and work for the love of God and for the obedience to Him who calls us to get out there.

3:14-15

Here again Paul calls for a separation from those who rebel against God and His instruction! He goes a little further this time with actual instruction on what it means to “withdraw” from these folks. We aren’t to see these people as enemies. Better to see them as a brother or sister, albeit a rebellious one who God is seeking to humble and break and we must be diligent to not get in His way. We often can be guilty of trying to dig someone out of the consequence of their sin...the consequences that are often spelled out on the pages of scripture. By doing so, we are getting between a person and his or her Creator, and whether we agree or not, it seems often the pain we endure because of our actions is the only motivator to avoid certain behaviors.

Sadly, *once again*, this is often a sorely abused directive, on our part. Not only do many of us still keep company with such folks, many of us actually date them and establish life relationships with those who are clearly not going the same direction as we are. For these folks, life is going to be very, very difficult!

3:16-18

Paul ends this letter with a desire that all that read it will receive and know the peace of God. Such peace only comes through the trust and the fostering of trust toward our Lord. That is assuming He is actually your Lord and not merely your “Savior!” The fact is, God IS always faithful. To you as well as the other people we have been discussing. In this, there is no debate. The question forever is: are you faithful to Him, and are you faithful to do right by the other individual?