



PAUL'S LETTERS TO THE
THESSALONIANS

Lesson 11 • 2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

November 14, 2021



LESSON PLAN



Lesson	Date	Passage
1	9/5/2021	Introduction
2	9/12/2021	1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
3	9/19/2021	1 Thessalonians 2:1-16
4	9/26/2021	1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13
5	10/3/2021	1 Thessalonians 4:1-12
6	10/10/2021	1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11
7	10/17/2021	1 Thessalonians 5:12-28
8	10/24/2021	2 Thessalonians 1:1-12
9	10/31/2021	2 Thessalonians 2:1-12
10	11/7/2021	2 Thessalonians 2:13-3:5
11	11/14/2021	2 Thessalonians 3:6-18
12	11/21/2021	Review
13	11/28/2021	Reading and Reflection

Passage Outline

- A Warning Against Idleness (3:6-10)
- A Persisting Problem (3:11-12)
- A Warning Against Ongoing Disobedience (3:13-15)
- A Closing Blessing (3:16-18)



5 minutes – 11:10 to 11:15

- After giving a thanksgiving and prayer Paul moves on to one final topic and then closes his letter. This section echoes a point in the first letter, where in Chapter 5 and verse 14 Paul urges them to admonish the idle. We can imagine that this was a topic that Paul taught while he was in Thessalonica. Having made the point briefly in his first letter, Paul now addresses with more force and detail. Perhaps Paul had heard that even after his first letter, this problem persisted in the church there. It would seem from the strength of these instructions that such was the case. Therefore, as the situation was not resolved, our text this morning is a somewhat strongly worded teaching on the course of action the church should take to correct the conduct of the idle and disobedient members.
- We are not told why there were some in the church who were not working. One theory is that they were anticipating Christ's coming, which seems plausible as Paul also addresses this topic in both letter. Another theory is that there were some in the church who had decided they would stop working to serve in the church and expected others in the church to support them. Regardless of the reason, it is clear that there was a significant problem with people choosing to no longer work and expecting the church to support them and their families.

- Read 2 Thes. 3:6-18
- Review Outline

A Warning Against Idleness (v. 2:6-10)

- Responding to the idle (v. 6)
- An example to imitate (v. 7-9)
- A clear command (v. 10)



10 minutes – 11:15 to 11:30

- Paul begins in verse 6 with an important command. We see the significance in two ways. First, in the strength of the wording, “Now we command you”. Second, in addressing them as “brothers”, which was meant to draw attention to the weight of what was being said. Paul is making the point to address them directly and with **the authority of Paul as an Apostle**. It is interesting that in the previous few verses, Paul led into this section by indicating his confidence in the Thessalonian believers and that they would do all that they had commanded. The word for command here is that of orders being given by one in authority, such as a military commander. In fact, the word command, is used in this final chapter 4 times. Whatever the reason for Paul’s concerns, it had risen to the point where it was needed to call these believers to obedience.
- **What authority is behind the command?** By the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. While Paul had authority as an Apostle, he appeals the greater authority of Christ in calling them to obey.
- **What is the nature of the command?**
 - To keep away from those who are idle. The idea here is they were not to associate with or avoid those who were not living in the ways Paul had

taught them. They were to separate themselves **with** those who were not obeying God's commands. They were not to participate in any way that would be seen as condoning the idleness or disobedience of others.

- Note that the word for idle here is not "lazy". It means literally, those walking in a disorderly or rebellious manner. They were living in a way that was not in order with what they had been taught or with what was best for the church. Their conduct would have created disharmony and a lack of unity because some were not walking in the ways they had been taught.
- We see this in Paul's clarification that this was not in accordance with the tradition of teaching they had received from Paul. We will see in the next few verses that the discord being created was their unwillingness to work. Think of what it must have been like in the midst of persecution, to have some choose to conduct themselves in a way that left the teachings of Christ that Paul had taught them. Living in community was hard enough without some deciding to go against the ways they had been taught.
- In verses 7 through 9 Paul provides instruction and correction that clarifies the problem they were having.
- **Starting in verse 7, what does Paul first appeal to?**
 - He **remind** them of their own example when they were with them. This would have been a strong encouragement knowing that Paul was asking them to do what he had done. As a leader, Paul did what he asked them to do. Throughout scripture there are **command** for leaders to walk in way that is consistently models obedience to God so that others may follow their example **will** not be led astray. And there are appeals for the church to imitate and follow after Godly leadership.
 - They knew themselves (no one should have to tell them). This is the example they should imitate. Just as they followed Paul in other areas, they should follow him in this as well.
- In verse 8 Paul provides a description of their example. **How is it described?**
 - They did not take food from anyone without paying for it. They did not take food as handouts from others.
 - They worked hard to provide for themselves. They did not expect others to support them.
 - **Why?** So as not to be a burden or dependent upon others. It provided credibility to their ministry that they were not like others would come to a community as teachers to build a patronage of supporters. Also, if there was true hardship and persecution, to take from others would have seemed uncaring.
- **What additional point does Paul make in verse 9 about their example?**
 - They had a right to ask to be supported but did not. They could have imposed their right to be supported by the church but did not. We know from other scriptures that those who preach and teach may rightfully ask

to be supported. But this was not Paul's approach in a culture that made much of celebrity teachers and philosophers who demanded support even after they were gone.

- Paul's reason for this was to give them the example of their own lives. As messengers of the Gospel, Paul and his companions chose not to live off the work they were doing for Christ. They did not want to hinder the proclamation and spread of the Gospel by asking for the support of others.
- Paul reminds them in verse 10 of a command that they taught while they were in Thessalonica. **What did they teach about being idle?**
 - If a person is unwilling to work, then let him go hungry.
 - A key part of the command here is the qualification of being unwilling to work. **Why is this important?**
 - **What aspects of Christ's character and obedience are at play here?** Loving others, in the sense that freely presuming on the goodness of others is unloving. Stewardship, in the sense that we are to care for our family, our possessions, and ourselves. Poor testimony to others as a witness of Christ in us.

A Persisting Problem (v. 3:11-12)

- The cause for concern (v. 11)
- The commanded correction (v. 12)



10 minutes – 11:30 to 11:40

- In verses 11 and 12, we finally get to an explanation of the problem. To this point, Paul has addressed how to deal with the problem and encouraged them in the correct way to live. But to this point we could only speculate on what was driving Paul's strong and lengthy instructions. We see this in Paul's opening words of "For we hear that..." We don't know how Paul received this report. But it seemed that the problem Paul had lightly addressed in his first letter had persisted and perhaps had grown worse.
- **From verse 11, what was the report that caused Paul's concern?**
 - Some in the church were walking in idleness; again, the word used for idle here means conduct that is out of order. They did not follow the instructions and command that Paul had given them. The use of the phrase walking in idleness is an exact echo of Paul's words in verse 6. Walking is often used as a metaphor for the way one lived or behaved. Paul's concern is that there are some who were living a life of idleness which was against the godly order they had been taught.
 - Not busy at work; the sense of this is that they did not want to or refused to work. While we do not know the reasons, they were unwilling to keep

busy in working to provide for themselves and would go to others in the church for food. Think of the awkward situation this would have created within the church. And this was not happening occasionally, but apparently on a regular basis.

- But were busybodies; notice the play on words. Not busy with their own business but were busy with the business of others. Because they were not working, they had plenty of time deal in the business of everyone else. They were wasting not only their own time, but the time of other's as well. So not only were they leaning on others for food, but they were also disturbing the harmony and peace of community.
- In verse 12, Paul addresses these people with a command of correction. Paul uses this letter to speak directly to those who were idle. To these people, Paul uses two verbs of exhortation to add strength by compounding "command" and "urge" together. The combination of the two verbs underscores the authority and the necessity of obedience to what Paul is saying. There is probably no way that Paul could have said this in a stronger way.
- **What two things does Paul tell them to do?**
 - To work quietly; to live a quiet and orderly life. The command here is similar to what we might say to an unruly child. Something like, "settle down and be quiet". Paul is telling them to stop being disruptive and to settle in to a quiet way of life; minding to their own affairs. In a more general sense, the idea here is that believers are to live in a way that does not upset or cause others to be troubled. We are not to stir up controversy or be disruptive to the unity of the church.
 - To earn one's own living; literally, to eat one's own bread. To work for and eat the food you have earned on your own. In other words, they were to live off the fruit of their own labor and not the labor others.
 - Such commands are rooted in the context of our being created in the image of God whose work is seen through out scripture. In other NT letters, we are instructed to work as unto the Lord and in submission to our employer. In living quietly and providing for ourselves as good stewards, we are a witness to others of a Christ-directed life.

A Warning Against Ongoing Disobedience (v. 3:13-15)

- Encouragement to do good (v. 13)
- Dealing with disobedience (v. 14-15)



10 minutes – 11:40 to 11:50

- After addressing those who were not following Paul's teaching, he switches to address the rest of the church. The question he is addressing was one that would likely have been on their mind. In essence, the question would be "so what should we do about this problem?" "How should we respond?" Paul gives them two instructions.
- In verse 13 Paul starts with the positive. **What does he encourage them to do?**
 - Do not grow weary in doing good; in other words, don't grow weary in doing the good that God calls you to. Given they were dealing with a number of people in the church who were causing trouble by not working, we could understand that they would become discouraged. They were working hard and following Paul's teaching. They wanted to love others and share with those in need. So Paul assures them to not become tired of doing good. In other words, don't let the conduct of some cause you to give up on doing what is good. Just because there are those who have taken advantage of you, don't stop caring for others. Do we ever feel this way? Do the actions of a few make us want to give up or cause us to grow tired of being kind? Do we complain and grumble about being the ones

who do what is right? **What should we do? How should we respond?**

- However, there is another side to Paul's instruction on how to deal with this problem in the church. **What additional teaching does Paul give in verse 14?**
 - Take note of those who are idle; the idea here is to formally identify those who were walking in idleness. Given Paul's instruction, this taking note would have to be a public action involving the church. Those we refused to work would be identified and noted.
 - Have nothing to do with them; not the repetition from verse 6 earlier in this text. The command here is to not associate or join with those who were idle. As we discussed early, the point here was to be separated from those who continued to refuse to work and remain disobedient. The purpose here is not to punish. Rather, the purpose was to encourage them to repent and change. By not socializing and participating in life with them, the hope is that they would become ashamed by their behavior and convicted by the Spirit.
 - What would happen if the church were to do nothing? This would in effect condone and encourage the disruptive behavior. The goal of these actions is always to redeem and restore. There is no pleasure or joy in not associating with them. The joy is in seeing those who refused to walk in a way that pleased the Lord, turn from their sinful and selfish ways and be restored to fellowship.
- Paul offers a final caution in verse 15. **What are the two commands of contrast regarding dealing with those who were idle?**
 - Do not regard him as an enemy; while there was to be separation, it was to stay within the bounds of kind community. There was to be no hatred or retaliation as there might be toward one's enemy. There was to be no hostility in the relationship toward those who were idle.
 - Warn him as a brother; although the person no longer to be associated with, there is some level of contact that continues so there is opportunity to admonish and correct him. The desire is that these warnings will be well received and lead to a change of heart. They were to be addressed as one who is part of the Christian family. Despite their behavior, that Paul is still concerned for these people and desires them to change.
 - **Why do you think Paul provides this caution?** To keep the separation from being excessive. To be sure that there is opportunity to admonish and correct the erring brother.

A Closing Blessing (v. 3:16-18)

- Prayer and blessing (v. 16)
- A personal note (v. 17)
- A brief benediction (v. 18)



10 minutes – 11:50 to 12:00

- Much like the first letter, we have a brief closing to the letter. It similarly follows the theme of peace of Paul's traditional closing. It also includes a benediction for grace and peace tying it back to the themes with which Paul opened this second letter. The striking difference between this closing and that of the first letter is the absence of any final instructions.
- In verse 16 Paul begins with a prayer of blessing. Note that unlike the prayer in the first letter where the petition is addressed to "the God of peace", here it is offered to Jesus Christ, who is the Lord of peace. And while the prayer of that letter asks God for the sanctification of the church, the request of this prayer is that Jesus Christ himself give them peace.
- **What does Paul ask for in the first part of verse 16?**
 - To give them peace at all times and in every way. There is a boldness to this request in the breadth and depth of the ask for peace. At all times, speaking to both a sense of continuity through time and to every situation. Paul is asking for peace in everything. In every way, speaking to every scope and manner of life and living. Paul is asking for peace in all that we do and are.

- How might this have been a significant request for the Thessalonians? Peace from those who persecuted them (external). Peace from those who were bringing discord and disrupting their community from within (internal).
- **What final blessing does Paul close his prayer with?**
 - The Lord be with you all. I think we should see this short blessing in two parts.
 - First, that the Lord be with them. Paul anticipates the presence and power of the Lord to always be with them. This is how Paul could pray that Lord would bring them peace at all times and in every way; because his presence would always be with them. In every situation both now and in the future.
 - Second, that the Lord be with them **all**. Paul’s request here for is for all of those who hear the letter. Both those who had been admonished and those who followed in the ways that Paul had taught.
 - **How would this have encouraged the Thessalonians?** Christ was always with them. Even in the midst of all their trouble.
 - What an encouragement to us as well. What a hope we have knowing that our Lord is always with us. In the midst of conflicts and confusion, we are never alone. The Lord is always our “Emmanuel”. He is “God with us”.
- Paul adds a personal note to the closing in verse 17. Although Silas and Timothy certainly contributed this letter in varying degrees, it is Paul who is the primary author. We see this as he adds this final greeting to the end of the letter. **What does he note here?**
 - He writes this greeting in his own hand; it is likely the letter was dictated and written by a secretary or someone who was skilled at putting pen to scroll. It is possible that with all of Paul’s injuries, he was not able to write well. And so he notes that the clear change in handwriting carried the distinguishing mark of his style and would have been obvious to the reader. Perhaps it was very bad, or shaky, or hard to reach. Whatever the style or penmanship, Paul says this is the way I write.
 - **Why was it important for Paul to do this at the end of the letter?** To give it authenticity. There letters being sent around that claimed to be from Paul. It also provided a real connection and personal touch to Paul himself that this was his letter to them.
- The second letter to the Thessalonians ends almost identically to the first with the blessing of grace in verse 18. However, unlike the benediction of the first letter, this one is pronounced over “you all”. Perhaps Paul was a southerner using the Greek equivalent of “y’all”. The point of this brief benediction is that Paul directs it all of those in the church. It is by the means of this grace that this church can continue in the faith that Paul handed down and taught to them. They need God’s grace to remain firm in the face of opposition to their allegiance to Christ. In many

ways, grace is the summary of everything we need to glorify God. In the midst of sufferings and in our struggles to know and believe the truth, we cannot get by without God's perfect grace. And in matters of community and living in harmony with one another, we need divine grace. For it is the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that brings the full blessings of salvation day by day. In the words of the familiar hymn Amazing grace...

- Amazing Grace how sweet the sound, That saved a wretch like me, I once was lost, but now I'm found, Was blind but now I see
- 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, And grace my fears relieved, How precious did that grace appear, The hour I first believed
- Through many dangers, toils, and snares, I have already come, 'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far, And grace will lead me home



5 minutes – 12:00 to 12:00