

Church Discipline: Lesson Four

Walking Disorderly

By Benjamin J. Williams

II Th. 3:6 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.

Well spoke the Apostle when he summarized all that a Christian must do by saying, “whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus” (Col. 3:17). All that a Christian does is to be done by the authority of Christ, so when a situation concerning church discipline arises, we ought to know that this same rule applies. We read this for a personal sin. “For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). We read this for a public sin. “In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, [5] To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (I Cor. 5:4-5). We should expect no difference in this new situation that has arisen in Thessalonica.

The authority of Christ carries with it some inevitable conclusions. First, it demands that the commandment being given be received with the credence it would receive if were our Lord were standing in our midst making the commandment for Himself. It is not to be ignored or shuffled carefully aside. It is to be carried out with diligence. Second, it means that all other courses of action are unacceptable. All other positions or procedures with regard to the matter are void and without consequence. It is only our Lord’s will that matters.

Concerning this particular situation, this is not the first commandment that Paul had given on the matter. As in I Corinthians 5, we are in a situation where he has given a command that has not been kept altogether. In the prior epistle, we read, “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men” (I Th. 5:14). The word “unruly” is from the same word as “disorderly” in our text. The word means “irregular”. We come to expect a Christ-like behavior out of our brethren. When they act differently, they are acting irregularly. This is a case where the brother should “know better”. By stating that they are not walking after the traditions, Paul is referring to a prior discussion in the last chapter. “Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle” (II Th. 2:15). Because this behavior was contrary to the traditions of God, the brethren in error must be warned of their sin.

However, in this case, the brother’s problem was persisting past the warnings commanded in the first epistle. Paul elaborates now at length on how to handle this problem.

An Ensample

II Th. 3:7-9 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 labour 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.

If warnings fail, our duty is to be sure that we do not become caught up in the sin as well. Often, as in Corinth, one person's sin is used to excuse others in their sin. This must not be done. To make this point, Paul reminds the Thessalonians of the behavior he showed in his time with them. Though preachers of the gospel have a right to be fed and paid for their labor, Paul had asked for no "freebies", so that his conduct could not be slandered. In so doing Paul left behind a pattern of good conduct that they could follow. Compare that to some evangelists today that are so often parasites, leeching their followers dry and leaving them with empty pockets and false hopes.

This is the principle of the extra mile. Instead of seeing how much we can get away with, we ought to be trying to be the best people we can be. In this we follow the pattern of our Lord and His apostles. While the early Christians sold their possessions and had all things in common, they were not to take advantage of this situation. The church's benevolence is for the needy, not for the lazy.

We Command

II Th. 3:10-12 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.

The law on this matter was clear, as Paul had given it to them before. Christian's are to work for their sustenance. "Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth" (Eph. 4:28). Christians are to work for three reasons. First, by working we are not tempted to sin to survive, which is the obvious alternative (as in this situation). Second, by working we are doing something that is declared to be good for ourselves and others. Third, it allows us to help others that are not as fortunate as we. Thus, the simple principle: if any would not work, neither should he eat. Welfare at its finest!

Some in this situation were not working at all. Without wholesome labor in their lives, they busied themselves with that which is evil. They leeches off that which should have been given to the needy. They also allowed a crevice for sin to crawl into their lives, as they filled their free time with other men's matters. The church is a loving, benevolent organization, but it is not designed to feed all people that hunger, let alone those that could work for their own bread. As always, the matter is to be settled doctrinally by an appeal to the authority of Christ. We must work with quietness, a term being contrasted to being busybodies. We must work for and eat our own bread.

That He May Be Ashamed

II Th. 3:13-15 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.

In situations like this, it is easy to get “fed up”. For the Thessalonians, the people they were feeding were spending their free time meddling in their affairs. This is a time to firm up our resolve and continue in the law of the Lord.

If some will not obey this command, the next step is clear. Having been warned, they are to be noted. This word is to mark or distinguish. The brother in sin is to be excluded from our company, or as verse 6 said, we are simply to withdraw ourselves from his company. Some object that this will do bad things to the person’s “psyche”. That’s the point! This person thinks they can live the way they are living without consequence. God says to let them feel shame.

Now, it is never to be the case that we count this brother as an enemy. That isn’t our goal. The shame we place on him is to cause him to repent. Even in our withdrawal from him, we are to continue to admonish him as a brother. We will continue to try to bring this brother to repentance that his shame may be lifted and that his fellowship in the service of Christ may be restored.

Peace, Peace

II Th. 3:16 Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all.

We long for days of peace, where no conflict clouds the skies, but too many try to gain the flawed false peace that old Israel had. “For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even unto the priest every one dealeth falsely. [14] They have healed also the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace. [15] Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time that I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD” (Jer. 6:13-15). Is this vain peace the peace that we want? Do we want a peace that is an illusion, ready to crumble before God’s eternal judgment?

Brethren, know this: true peace does not come by ignoring sin and letting our brethren war against God! Peace comes from Christ. Christ gave us peace by dying that we might live in God’s service and end the warfare that we wage against God by our sin. Christ gives us peace by telling us how to save our brethren from the clutches of sin that we may live each day in true peace. What day is more peaceful than the day that I can look my brother in the eye and know that we will be together in Heaven? What day is more peaceful than the day that I can look you in the eye and know that you will do what it takes to get me to Heaven?