

*2 Thessalonians 3:6-9***PREFACE**

There was a problem in Thessalonica. In his two letters to them Paul has been nibbling around the edges of this problem. Let's go back to the first chapter of the first letter.

Read 1 Thessalonians 1:5.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:10b-12.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14. (adjective of *at'aktos*)

While in their midst, Paul did more than just preach this lesson; he *lived* it.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:9.

Now, in the closing moments of what will probably be his last letter to them, Paul addresses this problem head-on.

v6

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6.

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Three things make it clear that Paul's "command" does not originate with him. First, the Greek word translated "command" means just that—the transmission, passing on, of a command from a higher authority, rather than an order originating from the one speaking.

command = *parangello* = from <G3844> (para) and the base of <G32> (aggelos); **to transmit a message**, i.e. (by implication) to enjoin :- (give in) charge, (give) command (-ment), declare.

Second, Paul explicitly reinforces this by adding, "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." Christ is the one issuing the command *through* the apostle. Third, implicit in how Paul chooses to reference the Lord, he uses Christ's full title of authority.

During this period before the canon of Scripture was completed, when the only Scripture in writing was what we would call the OT, only a true apostle could say this, for only a messenger called by Christ Himself could speak *ex cathedra* as to how the church was to conduct itself. There is no one today authorized to do this; today the reference would be not to the authority of "our Lord Jesus Christ," but to God's holy (written) word.

Paul knew and acknowledged the difference between his opinion and his authority to speak in the name of Jesus the Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:8-12. ("instructions" = *parangello*)

And what was this command from the Lord?

that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life...

On the surface this appears at first to be a rather generalized offense; after all, haven't we all been "unruly" or "disorderly" at times? But because of the immediate context of what follows as Paul expands his thoughts, we know—and the NIV and ESV translate it so—that he is referring to idleness.

unruly^{nasb}, **disorderly**^{kjvs}, **idle, idleness**^{niv,esv} = *atak'tos* = adverb from <G813> (*ataktos*); **irregularly** (moral) :- disorderly; **undisciplined** (military term for out of ranks).

life, live, walk = *peripateo* = from <G4012> (*peri*) and <G3961> (*pateo*); to tread all around, i.e. **walk at large** (especially as proof of ability); figurative **to live, deport oneself, follow** (as a companion or votary) :- go, **be occupied with**, walk (about).

In the following verses (vv7-12) Paul himself will define for us what he means by these words. He says that the rest of the church is to keep away from these individuals.

keep away from, withdraw from^{kjvs} = *stello* = probably strengthened from the base of <G2476> (*histemi*); properly to set fast ("stall"), i.e. (figurative) to repress (reflexive **abstain from associating with**) :- **avoid**, withdraw self.

But note that he still refers to them as "brothers." As with the Corinthian church, Paul is not telling them to utterly, permanently abandon these individuals, but to isolate them for the purpose of instilling discipline in undisciplined lives. It is for their own good, and the integrity of the church—as well as the name of Christ. David Guzik brings out something else.

David Guzik: In an indirect way, Paul showed that his vision for the church was that it should be such a place of love and comfort that it would be a significant deprivation to be put out of it. Churches today should also fit that description.

and not according to the tradition which you received from us.

Remember that the word translated "tradition" in this context simply refers to what Paul taught them when in Thessalonica. Beyond that, it refers to the way Paul *lived* while among them.

w7-8

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:7-8.

For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you,

We really do not know for certain why these individuals were being lazy and not working to support themselves. Some conjecture that some in the church took what he had said in person to mean that the Lord's return was imminent. If so, they concluded, why bother working; just relax and wait for paradise.

That may be, but in what Paul writes in these letters about the end times he does not address that—in fact, quite the opposite. Both times when he addresses eschatological matters Paul tells us why:

1 Thessalonians 4:13 – some were concerned about those among them who had died before the return of Christ; would they be left out?

2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 – some thought that Christ had *already* come, and they had missed the train; that the Tribulation had already occurred.

Neither of these reasons address the issue of someone becoming lazy because they assumed Christ's return was imminent. So while he speaks to the existence of the problem, I do not think Paul gives us a clue as to *why* these individuals (presumably men) were now chronically idle.

What *is* clear is that these idle members of the church were behaving this way while Paul was in their midst. This is at least one reason why he and his fellows dispensed with any need for the church to support them. So that they might be a healthy witness to the church, and specifically the lazy among them, Paul and his men worked to support themselves while in Thessalonica.

nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you;

In thinking through this situation, that certain men in the church were choosing to be idle, rather than be gainfully employed, I wondered, *So what?* Not that I thought it was all right, but who were they harming beyond themselves? Why did Paul consider this a problem worth addressing in his letter? And I believe he answers this question at the end of v8: "so that we would not be a burden to any of you."

Turn please to 1 Timothy.

In this letter to Timothy Paul counsels the young man about widows in the church; in so doing he offers us insight into the situation with the idle in Thessalonica.

Read 1 Timothy 5:3-4.

The local church is a family, and it has the obligation to look after the needs of those who have been left in bad straits. In a time and place without governmental safety nets, when women whose husbands had died faced the very real possibility of object poverty, the church became that safety net.

But Paul counseled that the church should not take on this burden if the widow had immediate family—children or grandchildren. Those in her blood family were the ones to shoulder the responsibility. And he goes on to say that if the widow is younger, she should remarry, rather than become an idle gossip (vv11-15).

Then, in v16 he reinforces this with a final injunction regarding widows in the church.

Read 1 Timothy 5:16. (NIV)

Paul's point in 1 Timothy—and the answer to my question, “So what?”—is this: The church has many legitimate burdens, such as seeing to the needs of older widows without any remaining blood kin. It doesn't need the unnecessary burden of widows who's families will not take responsibility for their needs. It doesn't need young widows with time on their hands spreading gossip and being busybodies. And, to the Thessalonian church, it does not need the extra burden of able-bodied slackers not willing to go out and get a job. [Back to v8.](#)

nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it

“Eat bread” is a Semitic idiom [[a common, non-literal phrase](#)] for eating any kind of food (Thomas); similar to how we might say in our vernacular, “break bread” (with someone). So Paul and his fellows obtained gainful employment during their stay in Thessalonica so as to be able to pay for their food. (He makes no mention of paying or not paying for their accommodations.)

v9

They did not do this because it was expected; nor is there any evidence that the Thessalonians were unwilling to support them. Quite to the contrary, the apostle and his men had every right to be supported by those to whom they were ministering. Not only was an itinerant apostle rightly to be supported (as Paul explained at length in 1 Corinthians 9), but even though they were in the minority at this church, for Jews even a total stranger was to be offered food and a place to stay. No, Paul had another motive.

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:9.

My thinking is that any Jews or other Semites in that church were embarrassed that the evangelist was paying for his meals; in their culture it would have been a shameful thing. My guess is that they probably plead with Paul to accept their hospitality. But to Paul, creature comforts and traditional pleasantries took a back seat to proper instruction to converts, and to the health of the church.

Sidebar: I wonder if perhaps his environment and experiences in the city where he was writing this second letter might have influenced his decision to address this. Paul wrote both of these letters while he was in Corinth, and that church had a multitude of behavioral problems. Witnessing the many societal conflicts as he formed the Corinthian church may have sensitized him to the comparatively smaller problems in the Thessalonian church.

For the good of the church, as well as the individual offenders, Paul was willing to make himself and his fellows an example, a template, for good and righteous behavior—which was his *modus operandi*. Let's close with what he has to say about this in 1 Corinthians 9. Just after outlining in detail the rights due him as an apostle, Paul writes, in v15, “But I have used none of these things.” Then he describes his philosophy of evangelism.

Read 1 Corinthians 8:8-13; 9:19-23.

Paul was willing to work night and day for the privilege of being a living object lesson to those unwilling to work.