

2 Thessalonians 3:13-15**PREFACE**

In this session we will look briefly at a topic which we will be examining more in-depth in our upcoming study of 1 Corinthians. But I did not want to wait until then to recommend a most remarkable book on the subject.

About thirty years ago I was up early one Saturday morning. I pulled a book from a shelf in our library and began reading—and I did not put down the book until I had read the last page. The emotional, honest intensity of the story grabbed hold of me and would not let me go.

Beyond Forgiveness, by Pastor Don Baker, is a true story of church discipline, carried out in obedience to God's word. Even today, when I turn to just about any page in the book, I am still moved by the powerful narrative of a pastor and a church pursuing the biblical discipline, and restoration, of one in its family—in this instance a member of the pastoral staff.

For anyone in the family of God, but especially for anyone who has struggled with the concept of church discipline, I heartily, unequivocally recommend this book. It can still be found in a number of places online, including through *Amazon* and *Barnes & Noble*.

Beyond Forgiveness: The Healing Touch of Church Discipline, by Don Baker. Multnomah Press, 1984.

In the passage before us today the apostle succinctly describes the essential framework of church discipline. In v12 Paul addressed the idle offenders; for this passage he addresses specifically those who will be, if necessary, disciplining these layabouts. To be precise, today's passage reiterates what he wrote when he launched into this topic, in v6.

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6.

Now our passage for today.

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:13-15.**v13**

For this verse I prefer the KJV:

But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.

Not only is this more eloquent, but there is a subtle improvement over the "of" in the NASB and NIV. It is, admittedly, a small point, but on occasion tiny two- or three-letter words in Scripture can carry more weight than we might at first think.

To my ears, "do not grow weary **of** doing good" suggests the picture of someone who *periodically* does good, and he is encouraging them to not be afraid to do it again, while "do not grow weary **in** doing good" (NKJV, ESV) suggests the picture of someone *actively involved* in doing good, and he encourages them not to stop.

Some place v13 as the end of the previous paragraph, but I think its content fits better with what follows, vv14-15. Doing good—*kalopoeio*; used only here—comes from the root *kalo*.

kalo = properly **beautiful**, but chiefly (figurative) **good (literal or moral)**, i.e. valuable or **virtuous** (for appearance or use, and thus distinguished from <G18> (agathos), which is properly intrinsic) :- × better, fair, good (-ly), **honest**, meet, well, **worthy**.

Why would Paul need to encourage his brethren to not grow weary in doing good, in doing that which is virtuous? Well, very often doing what is right and good in the eyes of the Lord—such as the topic at hand, church discipline—is not easy: either we give up in the middle of it, failing to see it through to the end, or we shy away from even initiating it. (*It's just too hard!*)

v14

If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter...

Here the “anyone” refers to the unruly, the undisciplined, the slackers.

Question: And what was Paul's instruction to them?

v12: **Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.**

If the offenders refused to change, the church was to

take special note of that person and do not associate with him

Not everyone agrees on the scope of “do not associate with him.” Some commentators believe that the correction here is the same as that that Paul prescribed for the Corinthian church: excommunication, expulsion from the church. Others say that the situation in the Thessalonian church was less egregious, and that the correction entailed not expulsion from the church, but more what we might refer to as giving someone the cold shoulder—i.e., not associating with them even though they remain in the church.

I'm not sure how this would work in practice: the individuals can still attend, but they are effectively black-balled, ostracized—the British would say they have been sent to Coventry. They would be ignored, and certainly be refused from the love feasts and accompanying communion. It seems to me, with treatment like that they would soon leave on their own.

Supporting the same excommunication argument, it is true that the Greek word translated “associate” here is also used in the passage in 1 Corinthians.

Read 1 Corinthians 5:9-11. (stay here)

associate, keep company = *synanamignymi* = from <G4862> (sun) and a compound of <G303> (ana) and <G3396> (mignumi); **to mix up together**, i.e. (figurative) associate with :- (have, keep) company (with).

Still one cannot miss the difference in the offenses—in Corinth, incest; in Thessalonica, idleness—and the difference in Paul's response. He is appalled not just by the sin, but the church's response in Corinth.

Read 1 Corinthians 5:1-5.

Compare that to the matter-of-fact tone of v14 in our text:

“If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame.”

Sidebar: The Thessalonian letters predate the Corinthian letters by several years; they were written while he was in Corinth.

Perhaps more important than this apparent contrast is the similar goal for both. What they have in common is that they are discipline of a brother; even if one was more severe than the other (of which there is no certainty)—neither was meant to be (from the perspective of the church) permanent excommunication of someone who would henceforth be as a stranger. Both responses were intended for the good of the offenders, and for their eventual reintegration into the church body.

In the Corinthian case, “...so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” At Thessalonica, v15: “Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”

v15

This goes all the way back to the Mosaic Law.

Read Leviticus 19:17-18.

The passage in 2 Corinthians that seems to be a follow-up to the discipline narrative in the first letter (not everyone agrees) clearly makes the point.

Read 2 Corinthians 2:6-8.

There are different forms of church discipline, but the purpose behind all is not alienation or punishment, but restoration. These two episodes, one in Thessalonica and one in Corinth, differ not just from each other, but from the detailed instructions given by Jesus in Matthew 18.

Read Matthew 18:15-17.

Though circumstances may differ, the purpose and goal of discipline in the church is always to be the restoration of a brother or sister—and a restoration of the body's communion with them.

Listen to the first part of the concluding chapter of Pastor Don Baker's book:

The silence of my study was interrupted by the persistent ring of the telephone. A longtime friend from a distant city was calling.

“I’m sorry, Don, to interrupt your morning, but I’m interested in one of your people. We desperately need a staff man here, and it seems that from what I’ve heard, your man Greg meets the qualifications for the job.”

I listened as he described their church and their needs. Then I asked the question that had to be asked—the last question in the world that I wanted to ask.

“Do you know that Greg has been under discipline here at Hinson for the past twenty-six months?”

“Yes,” he answered.

“Do you know why?” I asked.

“I’m not sure I know the whole story, but I understand there was some moral problem in his past.”

I then proceeded to tell him the entire story—all that I knew—in confidence. I have always been a firm believer in the necessity for correct information to be passed from church to church regarding prospective staff people.

When I finished there was a long pause, and then the question for which I had waited so long: “Do you think he is ready to go back to work?”

“Absolutely!” I answered. “He has undergone his discipline admirably. He has completed nine months of psychological counseling. He has proven his repentance and has completely forsaken his sin. He has assumed the spiritual leadership of his home and family. His and Joanna’s relationship is stronger than it has ever been. He is displaying himself as a man of God. In fact, I think Greg is probably better equipped to serve Christ today than most of us who have never been through the terribly painful process of discipline and restoration.”

It wasn’t long before Greg received his “call” back to the ministry. He accepted with great enthusiasm.

The church was smaller than any he had ever served. The salary was barely adequate, but those things were incidental to the fact that Greg was being offered a second chance. He could hardly wait to accept it.

The night of their farewell finally came—twenty-six months and two weeks from the night of their humiliation. The church family crowded back into the same auditorium to face the same two people. This time, however, it was not with shame. It was with great joy. (from *Beyond Forgiveness: The Healing Touch of Church Discipline*, by Don Baker. Multnomah Press, 1984.)

In v15 Paul tells us that those that require correction and dissociation are not now our enemies or adversaries, but remain our brothers, our sisters. They are still members of the family. Pastor Baker in his book refers to the staff member caught in sin as a soldier fallen in battle, a comrade who must be rescued from the bloody field and put back together again.

All of this is to be done carefully and gently.

admonish, warn = *noutheteo* = from the same as <G3559> (nouthesia); **to put in mind, i.e. (by implication) to caution or reprove gently** :- admonish, warn.

Look at what Paul wrote in his first letter to the Thessalonians.

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:14-15.

To the church in Galatia he wrote

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted. Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:1-2)

Discipline in the church is hard; that is because those who are doing the discipline—not just the leaders, but the church as a whole—are coming alongside the offender and sharing his burden. Brothers and sisters do not stand away at a safe distance, pointing an accusing finger and throwing stones; they come alongside and even as they admonish they are holding up, helping, loving. It requires effort, even pain.

This is one thing that sets the church apart from the rest of society—and, by the way, what sets the church apart from her Lord. When Jesus, on the cross, bore the burden of *the entire world's* sin, He bore it alone. Even His Father had to turn away. But because of that, we have each other, and when one of us is crumbling under the weight of *just his own* sin, the church comes alongside to share some of that weight—to reprove, yes, but also to help facilitate confession and repentance.

But in all this we must not forget the injunction to not associate with such a one, to “keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life” (v6). Sin spreads faster than righteousness. As Paul wrote to the Galatians, “A little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough.” ([Galatians 5:9](#))

Even while loving and helping the offender, we must always guard the integrity of the body.