

Withdrawing From The Disorderly

Rodney Pitts

Text: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

Introduction:

- I. Disorderly brethren and the necessity of dealing with them properly have been a matter of concern for the Lord's church since its beginning.
 - A. Evidence of this is seen in the instruction given by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5 and here in our passage of concern today.
 - B. One only has to face such a situation to know the difficulty that often surrounds this action being carried out properly by all involved.
- II. I agree with the sentiments of Allen Dvorak who stated: "Congregational withdrawal is a controversial topic; there exists much disagreement among Bible students about what exactly should be done, when it should be done and to whom it should be done." ("Get the Leaven Out," 2006 SITS Conference)
- III. Not surprisingly, there has been controversy among brethren surround the teachings of 2 Thessalonians 3 in connection with the questions listed above.
 - A. Questions, however, are not reason to ignore the instructions of this passage, nor are they reason to believe a good understanding and application of this passage's instructions cannot be achieved.
 - B. It is my hope, with great humility, to present my understanding of the teaching of this passage and to clarify certain matters of concern.

Body:

I. General Context:

- A. 1 Thessalonians:
 1. Paul calls their attention to his and his companions' work ethic in the secular realm, speaking of their "labor and toil...night and day" so as to provide their own food, *etc.* He also addresses their behavior in the spiritual realm, being gentle toward the Thessalonians while imparting to them the gospel as well as their own lives (1 Thess. 2:3-12).
 2. Paul speaks of their continual exhortation to the Thessalonians to abound in their "walk and to please God." This involves avoiding sexual immorality, growing in love, working in quietness with their own hands to support themselves, and continuing on with confidence while understanding that neither they nor their loved ones had missed the resurrection (1 Thess. 4).
 3. Paul instructs these brethren concerning how the time of the "day of the Lord" is unknown and how the faithful continue to work and serve the Lord as they wait (1 Thess. 5).
 - a. They were to "esteem" those who "labor among you...for their work's sake" and be at peace (2 Thess. 5:13).

- b. They were to patiently comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, while also making the effort to “warn those who are unruly” (5:15).
 - 1) “Unruly” is the same word used in 2 Thess. 3:6, being the noun form here and the adverb form in 3:6.
 - 2) Although the problem of “unruliness” had not likely progressed to its full blown stage as it had when addressed in 2 Thess. 3, it was an issue of concern that Paul had to address.

B. 2 Thessalonians 1-2:

- 1. Paul speaks of his and his companions’ abounding thanks for these brethren because of their continued faith amidst persecution (2 Thess. 1).
 - a. He reminds them that God will repay those who trouble them and tells them of his continued prayer that God would count the Thessalonians worthy of their calling and be glorified in them and they in Christ.
 - b. Being *worthy* involved God fulfilling “all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power” in them (2 Thess. 1:11).
- 2. Paul encourages them not to be “shaken in mind or troubled” as if the day of Christ had come, seeing that the “man of sin” must first be revealed, who will deceive those who do not love the truth (2 Thess. 2).
 - a. Continual thanksgiving was given to God for these brethren because they were chosen for salvation and belief in the truth through the gospel.
 - b. Their salvation necessitated that they “stand fast and hold to the traditions which they were taught, whether by word or our epistle” (2 Thess. 2:15).
 - c. Paul prays for God’s continual comfort and establishing of these brethren.

II. **Paul’s Request For Prayers From The Thessalonian Brethren (2 Thess. 3:1-2)**

- A. Request is made for prayers that the word would “run” and “be glorified” (2 Thess. 3:1).
 - 1. It was of utmost importance to Paul and the Spirit that the *word* would “run,” or spread quickly, throughout the world.
 - a. Preaching the word produces faith and is the effective weapon of the Spirit and the power of God to salvation (Rom. 10:17; 1:16; Eph. 6:17).
 - b. Therefore, for the word to have free and swift course in this world was vitally important to soul winners like Paul, and hopefully to each of us.
 - 2. Paul desired prayers that the word would be “glorified” (*i.e.*, “to cause the dignity and worth of some person or thing to become manifest and acknowledged” – *Thayer*, p. 157)
 - a. Only by preaching the “word” can men come to a true understanding of the “dignity and worth” of the gospel message.
 - b. This is why man-made gimmicks, games, *etc.*, will not and cannot work to convert souls to Christ. We must put our faith in the gospel!

- c. The Thessalonians glorified this word in their lives through faith and obedience, working to spread the word (1 Thess. 1:6-10).
 - 3. Note that there is both a *divine* and a *human element* involved in spreading the word and its glorification.
 - a. The divine element is seen in seeking God’s help (*e.g.*, Colossians 4:3 – “*meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains*”).
 - b. The human element is seen in the request to “*pray for us, that the word may run swiftly...*” (see Eph. 6:18-19).
 - c. God makes provision; but we must be willing to act upon that provision.
- B. Paul also desired prayers for the safety and success of their preaching efforts (2 Thess. 3:2).
 - 1. He wanted to be “delivered,” or to be rescued, from “unreasonable” (*i.e.*, lit. out of place) and “wicked” men (see *Thayer*, p. 83).
 - a. There are recorded events of persecution of Paul and his companions in Thessalonica (Acts 17:5), in Berea (Acts 17:13), and in Corinth (Acts 18:12ff.).
 - 2. So, these requests were both appropriate and timely, seeing that “not all have faith” or appreciate the gospel’s saving message.
 - a. Unbelieving individuals often act deviously and/or violently toward those who teach the truth and those who preach it (2 Timothy 3:12).
 - b. We need to be keenly aware of the worldly dangers of standing for the truth and be praying for one another.
 - c. Sometimes such people are within the local church itself (*e.g.*, Diotrephes, 3 Jn.)! I have been treated far worse by my brethren than I have ever been by those outside the faith!

III. Paul Now Expresses His Confidence In God’s Work Among The Thessalonians (2 Thess. 3:3-5)

- A. Paul speaks of his confident expectation concerning the “faithfulness” of the Lord in establishing and guarding them in their service to Him (2 Thess. 3:3-4).
 - 1. Lenski makes a good point in stating that “the one [establish, rp] refers to inward rooting and grounding, the other [guard, rp] to protection from outward assaults.” (Lenski, p. 449)
 - 2. Paul shows great concern for his readers in that instead of stating how he hopes God would deliver him and his companions, he states instead his confidence that God would deliver the Thessalonians!
 - a. The “faithfulness” of the Lord can always be counted on by those who truly desire salvation and that dedicate themselves to serving Him.

-
- b. Paul had previously called upon the Lord’s faithfulness to encourage these brethren (1 Thess. 5:24).
 - 3. Paul states that the Lord will faithfully “establish,” or cause these brethren to stand firm, in Him (2 Thess. 3:3).
 - a. This was the reason Timothy had been sent to them (1 Thess. 3:1-2).
 - b. Paul was assuring them that God would do what Paul had already expressed concerning them (see 2 Thess. 2:16-17).
 - 4. Paul also adds that God would guard them from the evil one, or Satan.
 - a. God has done all that is necessary that they might be “sanctified” and kept “blameless” until the end (2 Thess. 3:3b; 1 Thess. 5:23-24; see also 1 Cor. 10:13).
 - b. Yet, God’s “guarding” is only as effective as our desire to be guarded and our willingness to do our part toward sanctification (see 1 Thess. 4:3-5; Jude 21, 24).
 - 5. Paul expresses his confidence “in the Lord” that these brethren would obey what they were commanded (2 Thess. 3:4).
 - a. “In the Lord” indicates that Paul’s confidence toward the Thessalonians was in the grace, strength, and power of God’s might in their lives.
 - b. Because Paul knew of the surety of their conversion and obedience, he was confident that they would respond in obedience to what *was to be commanded* (see 1 Thess. 1:2-4).
 - c. This was important because Paul was about to command them to do something that could be very difficult (*e.g.*, 2 Thess. 3:6, 10, 14-15).
 - B. Paul prays that God will direct these brethren’s heart “into God’s love and the patience of Christ” (2 Thess. 3:5).
 - 1. To “direct” here has the meanings of “to make straight” and “removing hindrances.” Here Paul has in mind the hindrances that would keep the Thessalonians from knowing the “love of God and the patience of Christ” seen in God’s wonderful plan in Jesus (*Thayer, p. 339*).
 - a. Reception of God’s love expressed in Jesus’ death on the cross for sinful man should produce in us a deeper love for God and man that motivates us to obey even when it is difficult and painful (Rom. 5:6-8; Jn. 14:21; 2 Jn. 1:6).
 - b. Therefore, I believe I can say that withdrawal is an act of love. It is not to be described as “running them off” or “kicking them out of the church” as is sometimes done.
 - c. Note: Although the NKJV begins 2 Thess. 3:6 with “**But** we command...,” as if almost in opposition to 2 Thess. 3:5, most modern translations render it “Now we command...”
-

2. In addition to God’s love, there is the desire that God would direct them into a greater understanding and appreciation of the “patience of Christ.”
 - a. Christ showed patience, or endurance, when facing great adversity from those He was sent to save.
 - b. The Hebrew writer makes it clear that looking to Jesus is the means by which we can “run with endurance the race set before us” (Heb. 12:1-2).
3. Love and patient endurance would be needed to obey to its completion the commands about to follow.

IV. The Command To Withdraw From The “Disorderly” (2 Thess. 3:6-15)

- A. Paul commands (orders, charges) the brethren to withdraw (keep aloof, away from) those who “walk disorderly” (out of rank, order) and not according to the traditions (teaching, doctrine) received from Paul and his companions (2 Thess. 3:6).
 1. Withdrawal is commanded. It is not optional.
 - a. Most versions translate this as “we command.”
 - b. Lexicons, etc. – (*Paraggello*, Παραγγελλο – G3853)
 - 1) *Thayer*: “1. to transmit a message along from one to another, to declare, announce; 2. to command, order, charge...” (p. 479)
 - 2) *BDAG*: “give orders, command, instruct, direct of all kinds of persons in authority, worldly rulers, Jesus, the apostles...2 Th 3:4...direct, command someone...2 Th 3:6...3:12.” (p. 613)
 - 3) *Strong*: “to transmit a message i.e. (by impl.) to enjoin:--(give in) charge, (give) command (-ment), declare” (p. 54)
 2. Paul had previously written to these brethren urging them to mind their own business and work that they might “walk properly toward those who are outside, and...lack nothing,” while also exhorting them to “warn those who are unruly” (1 Thess. 4:11-12; 5:14).
 3. This command to take the final step to **withdraw** their association from unruly/disorderly brethren was a **test of their obedience** that he had spoken of with confidence earlier (see 2 Thess. 3:4).
 4. This command to withdraw from the disorderly is not given to a select group, but all the brethren of the local church.
 - a. This action may be viewed, therefore, as being only as effective as the commitment of every member to follow through in this matter.
 - b. This standard of judgment is to be applied to all members equally (*i.e.*, not ignoring some because of status – see 1 Cor. 5).
 - c. And, this command was given “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,” emphasizing the authority behind this command. This is not an “option.”
 5. **Withdrawal** involves the ceasing of normal association and social interaction.

-
- a. Withdraw:
- 1) Versions:
 - a) NKJV, KJV, ASV: “Withdraw”
 - b) HCSB, NIV, ESV, NRSV: “Keep away from”
 - c) NASB: “Keep aloof” (*i.e.*, uninvolved or unwilling to become involved with other people or events; physically distant or apart – *Encarta English Dictionary*)
 - d) CEV: “Not to have anything to do with”
 - 2) Lexicons, etc. (G4724, στελλο)
 - a) *BDAG*: “1. Keep away, stand aloof ‘*apo tinos*’...from someone 2 Th. 3:6.; 2. Avoid, try to avoid 2 Cor. 8:20...” (p. 766)
 - b) *Thayer*: “to bring together, contract, shorten...in mid...to diminish, check, cause to cease;...to remove one’s self, withdraw one’s self, to depart., foll. by ‘*apo*’ with gen. of the pers., to abstain from familiar intercourse with one, 2 Th. iii. 6.” (pp. 586-7)
 - b. “They are to keep away from such as are described. This does not prohibit any contact whatever for they are to continue to warn these (see vs. 15). But it is a prohibition against fellowship and intimate association (cf. Matt. 18:17; Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:11).” (Kelcy, 174)
 - c. From this *command* it seems evident that God is demanding that we keep ourselves “aloof from,” or that we do not allow ourselves to continue in any “familiar” activities (*i.e.*, normal social interaction) with, those deemed “disorderly.”
 - d. All actions toward them must be characterized as being *socially* “aloof,” or keeping ourselves “away from” that brother socially.
6. This action is to be taken toward that person in Christ who “walks disorderly.”
- a. Versions:
 - 1) NKJV, ASV: “Walks disorderly”
 - 2) NASB: : “Leads an unruly life”
 - 3) HCSB: “Walks irresponsibly”
 - 4) ESV: “Walking in idleness”
 - 5) NIV: “Idle and disruptive”
 - 6) NRSV: “Living in idleness”
 - 7) CEV: “Loaf around”
 - b. Note the significant differences in the versions listed in 1-3 and those of 4-7.
-

- c. To “walk” disorderly is to conduct one’s life in this fashion. This is not speaking of a one-time deviation from God’s will. It is speaking of those who make disorderliness a way of life.
- 1) The term “walk” is indicative of continued action. A step is not walking.
 - 2) “**Walk**” (*peripatountos*, περιπατουντος, V-PAP-GMS, G4043)
 - 3) Lexicons:
 - a) *BDAG*: “fig...of the walk of life...In the NT this use of the word is decidedly Pauline...live, conduct oneself, walk...2 Thess. 3:6, 11” (p. 649)
 - b) *Thayer*: “to regulate one’s life, to conduct one’s self...2 Th. iii. 6,11” (p. 504)
- d. To walk “disorderly” is to walk “out of ranks,” to be insubordinate to the rule.
- 1) Lexicons, etc. (Disorderly, *ataktōs*, ατακτως, adverb, G814):
 - a) *BAGD*: “adverb of ατακτως in the sense of insufficient inclination to disciplined work in a disorderly or an irresponsible manner...2. Fig. live in idleness...2 Th. 3:6, 11” (2nd ed., p. 119)
 - b) *BDAG*: “adv. of *ataktos* **in defiance of good order, disorderly**, holding religious services without regard to established times *arbitrarily* 1 Cl 40:2... *ataktōs peripatein behave irresponsibly* **2 Th 3:6**...apparently without respect for established custom or received instruction, as the qualifying clause *kai...hamon* indicates (cf. Mk 7:5), **11**; the specific manner in which the irresponsible behavior manifests itself is described in the context: freeloading, sponging.” (3rd ed., p. 148)
 - c) *Thayer*: “‘disorderly’ 2 Th. iii. 6...” (p. 83)
 - d) *Strong*: “adv...irregularly (mor.)--disorderly”
 - e) *Spicq*: “In 1 Thess. 5:14, St. Paul asks the community to take back the brothers who are living in a dissolute manner (*noutheteite tous ataktous*). In his second letter, he more severely prescribes keeping away from every brother who is leading a dissolute life (*ataktōs peripatountos*, 2 Thess 3:6, 11), giving himself as an example: ‘We ourselves did not lead a disorderly life in your midst.’ It would not be necessary to insist on the meaning of *ataktōs*—“not remaining in his/her/its place, out of order, undisciplined”—if a certain number of exegetes did not suggest translating it “idle, lazy.” But the usage of the verb, the adjective, and the adverb in the Koine, notably in the first century AD, confirms that the word covers any breach of obligation or convention, disorders of life in general; and the usage is decisive.

“On the cosmic level, matter was ‘disorderly and confused,’ then God takes it from disorder to order [Philo, rp]. In military parlance especially, the word is used with respect to negligent officers...; an army in disarray, undisciplined or insubordinate soldiers. In addition, ‘disorderly’ modifies ‘multitude, crowd.’ In a political context, Josephus compares people who live unencumbered by laws and rules (‘those who live in a lawless and disorderly fashion,’ *ton anomos kai ataktōs biounton*) to those who observe order and common law. In the social realm, if sons do not meet the financial needs of their parents when necessity arises, they become subject to a penalty of a thousand drachmas, according to testamentary convention. In apprenticeship agreements, it is provided that if the apprentice is guilty of misconduct or has been absent for one reason or another, he must work additional makeup days... In sum, the *ataktōs* is the who [*sic*] is defective in action, irregular, against the rule, and since in the Christian life the ‘order’ is established by God or the leaders of the church, disorder can mean sometimes a shortcoming or a discordant note, sometimes law-breaking and moral dissoluteness. The *ataktōi* Thessalonians free themselves from the rule of community life. One thinks of sins against brotherly love, a propensity to favor discord, a refusal to accept the customs or discipline of the church. Certain ‘troubled’ ones seem particularly stormy, befuddled types who disturb the peace (1 Thess 4:11-12). At any rate, ‘their walk is not in line’ (Gal 2:14). They are ‘culpable’ and probably stubborn.” (pp. 223-226)

- 2) It should be noted that some feel the context in 2 Thess. 3 presses the matter sufficiently to translate and even define this word figuratively as “idleness/laziness.”
 - a) I am bothered by this approach.
 - 1] Although I realize that a “literal” translation of Greek to English is not really possible, I was taught in college Greek to avoid as much as possible presenting the “thought” of the text.
 - 2] Instead I was taught to do my very best to translate the Greek as close as possible, whenever possible, to the words in the text.
 - b) I believe a quote from Gene Frost is food for thought in addressing these matters: “When some translate *ataktos* idly in 2 Thess. 3:6, they attempt to clarify what to them is the specific disorder, idleness, which is determined by the context. This, then, is a gloss rather than a verbal translation. ‘Is Paul thinking of ‘those who will not accept discipline’, or ‘those who do not want to work’?’ The ‘context makes it quite clear that Paul is speaking

of a refusal to work.’ (Ellingworth-Nida, op. cit.)

“Our response: it is not ours to substitute what we think Paul was ‘thinking’ for what he said. We do not have the right to put our interpretation upon the language, to replace a word used with what we think was meant.” (Frost, pp. 25-26)

- c) Example: 1 Corinthians 5:1 says there was “sexual immorality” (*porneia*) among the Corinthian brethren and goes on to describe it specifically as “a man has his father’s wife.”
- 1] Are we to assume that because Paul gives a specific application of *porneia* in the context that this word should be translated as only “adultery” in this context (1 Cor. 5:1, 11)?
 - 2] If so, is the command of 1 Corinthians 6:18 to “flee sexual immorality” limited to the contextual “description” of 1 Cor. 5:1?
 - 3) It is my **humble** conviction, therefore, that one can safely (and should) translate the word as “disorderly,” while understanding that “idleness” is a definite application in the present context. I believe this approach best fits the words of the text.

- B. Paul reminds the Thessalonians of his and his companions’ example of living in an *orderly* way while among them (2 Thess. 3:7-9).
1. To live in a disorderly fashion is to reject their *teaching* and *example* concerning industriousness in supporting oneself (2 Thess. 3:7-8).
 - a. The fact that they “knew” they were to follow Paul and his companions’ example would indicate that this was one of the “traditions” given to them (2 Thess. 3:7; 2:15).
 - b. By working to supply their own bread (*i.e.*, not being loafers or “leeching” off their brethren), they presented an antithesis of disorderly conduct.
 2. Paul and his companions supported themselves by manual labor despite having authority to live off the gospel. This was done because they wanted to be examples to these brethren (2 Thess. 3:9; see 1 Cor. 9).
 - a. They chose to support themselves, possibly due to a keen awareness of the tendency toward laziness in Thessalonica. (Kelcy, p. 176)
 - b. Paul also stated elsewhere that doing this gave him one thing for which he might “boast”—a boasting concerning giving up his rights rather than exercising them (see 1 Cor. 9:13-18).
 - c. In the immediate context, therefore, being “disorderly” is applied specifically to being idle, or lazy, seeing it is set in opposition to Paul’s company’s industriousness.
- C. While working with the Thessalonians Paul had *commanded* “if anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thess. 3:10).

1. The gospel of Christ requires honest work from all who profess faith in it! Work is not just a “good thing”; it is a necessary thing.
 2. “They had declared that those not willing to work should not be supported by others... The tenses Paul uses are interesting. **We gave you this command** is imperfect, indicating that they had repeatedly urged this practice. **Will not** is present tense, indicating a habitual and constant attitude. It is the one who is lazy, who is habitually unwilling to work, that is not to eat at the expense of others.” (Kelcy, 176)
- D. The reason for specifically addressing this is now given. Paul has heard that there are those in Thessalonica “walking disorderly” (2 Thess. 3:11-13).
1. Without question, being disorderly is here applied to “not working,” which also leads to being “busybodies” (2 Thess. 3:11; 1 Tim. 5:11-13).
 - a. Those who are not busy with their own affairs will likely busy themselves in the affairs of others (preachers included)!
 - b. Lenski and Morris believe that these idle brethren were also proselytizing, trying to convince others to give up working. Lenski, however, also believes they were teaching that “the Lord’s day is already here.” (Lenski, p. 463; Morris, p. 147)
 - 1) If they were proselytizing others to be lazy, getting back to work could stop their problematic behavior.
 - 2) If they were proselytizing by **teaching false doctrine**, it is difficult for me to see how telling them to “get to work” would solve the whole problem (see 2 Tim. 2:16-18), unless Lenski is also right in assuming that these instructions also imply that they should “stop spreading their false ideas.” (Lenski, pp. 463, 465; Morris, p. 147)
 2. The answer to idleness and being busybodies is to repent by obeying the “command and exhortation” through Jesus Christ to “work in quietness and eat their own bread” (2 Thess. 3:12). This is not an option.
 - a. This has always been God’s desire for His people (see 1 Tim. 2:2-3).
 - b. I have little doubt that many of the local church’s problems would go away if people were truly *busy* in matters of the Lord and personal upkeep.
 3. Instead of being destructive through idleness and being busybodies, they were to never “grow weary in doing **good**” (2 Thess. 3:13).
 - a. Note how the spiritually destructive characteristics of idleness and being busybodies are contrasted with being untiringly busy in “doing good,” or being spiritually/socially constructive.
 - b. From this we see that our **actions** are vital in determining whether we are “walking in rank/order” with the Lord or whether we are out of step and opposing Him in our walk of life.
- E. Those who “do not obey” the words of this epistle were to be “noted” and the brethren were “not to keep company with” them (2 Thess. 3:14).

1. The actions of noting and withdrawing from anyone who “does not obey our word in this epistle” indicates the divine authority of the revelation given in the epistles (see also 1 Cor. 14:37).
2. **“Note”** (G4593, *semeioo*, σημειωω):
 - a. Lexicons, etc.:
 - 1) *BDAG*: “1. note down (for oneself), write...2. Mark, take special notice of τινα someone 2 Th 3:14” (p. 748)
 - 2) *Thayer*: “to mark, note, distinguish by marking;...to mark or note for one’s self...: 2 Th. iii. 14” (p. 574)
 - 3) *Strong*: “to distinguish, i.e., mark (for avoidance):--note” (p. 65)
 - b. Translations:
 - 1) NKJV, ASV, KJV: “Note”
 - 2) HCSB, ESV: “Take note of”
 - 3) NASB, NIV: “Take special note of”
 - 4) CEV: “Be on your guard against”
 - c. Those who refuse to obey the divine revelation are a threat to the work and soundness of the congregation, as well as to the souls of individuals. Therefore, special note of them should be made in the eyes of all, exposing the sinister nature of their influence.
 - d. It seems appropriate that noting them for their dangerous influence should be done even when that person has left the immediate fellowship of brethren. For, the problems connected to *associating* with that person does not go away just because of a change of location!
3. In addition, faithful brethren are to no longer “keep company with” this person.
 - a. **“Do not keep company with”** (G4874, G3361; *sunanamignumi*, συναναμειγνυμι; με μη):
 - 1) Lexicons, etc.: **“Keep Company”**:
 - a) *BDAG*: “mix up together...pass. Mingle or associate with w. dat. of the pers.” (p. 784)
 - b) *Thayer*: “to mix together;...to keep company with, be intimate with, one:...2 Th. iii. 14” (p. 601)
 - c) *Strong*: “to mix up together, i.e., (fig.) associate with:--(have, keep) company (with)” (p. 68)
 - 2) Translations:
 - a) NKJV: “do not keep company with”
 - b) NASB, NIV: “keep away from”
 - c) HCSB: “don’t associate with him”

-
- d) ESV: “have nothing to do with him”
 - e) CEV: “not having anything to do with them”
- b. It is very difficult for me to see how combining these instructions with those of 2 Thess. 3:6 and 2 Thess. 3:15 can cause us to come to any conclusion other than that we are to have no “normal” social interaction with that person except to contact them for the purpose of admonishment.
- 1) “Not to keep company with” is a translation of the same Greek words (or derived from the same Greek verb, depending on which textual reading is correct) used in 1 Cor. 5:9, 11, in which the extent of that command includes “not even to eat” with that person.
 - 2) And, I don’t believe that a withdrawn-from person is going to accept any sort of intimate association with one whose only purpose is to “admonish” them so as to make them “ashamed” of their actions!
 - 3) I simply cannot perceive such actions as being jovial or enjoyable in any way, nor surrounding any enjoyable social interaction.
- c. As stated above, the purpose of withdrawal is that this person “may be ashamed” of his actions and repent.
- 1) I believe my notes from Allen Dvorak’s session on 1 Cor. 5:1-13 were correct in stating that sometimes we flip-flop this, giving greater welcome to the fallen away brother when he/she shows up for worship than we do to the faithful. (“Get the Leaven Out,” 2006 SITS Conference)
 - 2) Backsliding Christians need to be ashamed of their actions. We must so treat them that shame for their sin is the result.
 - 3) Just coming into the building is not indicative of a desire to repent!
- d. I believe it is fair to say that we should make a distinction between “noting” (Gk. *semeioo* – “to mark, to note, distinguish by marking” - Thayer) a person and “not keeping company with” that person.
- 1) Paul *adds* to “noting” that we must also “not keep company with” this rebellious brother.
 - 2) Although the actions of some will make it almost impossible for the second part of this command to have any effect, seeing they have already withdrawn their association from the brethren, this does not change the fact that we should still “mark” them, assuring that the congregation is aware of their harmful influence and sinful actions.
 - 3) Yet, should the opportunity present itself, the rules given here for the need of social “aloofness” in relationship to this person must be followed. Yet, how will this happen without *marking* them?
4. In connection with *noting* and *not keeping company with* this person, he or she is not to be counted as an enemy, but rather admonished as a brother (2 Thess. 3:15).
-

-
- a. Obviously, there is a distinction between “keeping company with” this person and having contact with them so as to “admonish” them.
 - b. Although normal social interaction is prohibited, one may contact that person so as to “admonish” them unto repentance.
- F. Paul concludes with salutations of well-wishing, hoping for God’s peace, care, and grace to be with them continually and in every way. He also assures them of the letter’s authenticity by writing the salutation with his own hand (2 Thess. 3:16-18).
- V. **Further Clarification: Who Are The Disorderly Of 2 Thessalonians 3?**
- A. A question of interest (and debate) is whether these instructions for withdrawal from the “disorderly” are limited specifically to the “idle” and “busybodies.”
- 1. Although some believe it is, others argue for a more general principle of withdrawal from anyone who lives their life in opposition to the teaching of God’s word.
 - 2. Without question Paul makes specific application of the term disorderly to being **idle and busybodies** in 2 Thess. 3:6ff.
 - 3. Yet, here is a thought to consider:
 - a. Would not a person be considered “disorderly” (*i.e.*, out of step/rank with the divine command of scripture) if they **refused** to obey this command to withdraw from their disorderly brethren and were possibly encouraging others to do the same (2 Thess. 3:4, 6, 14)?
 - b. If so, we should admit that although the context specifies idleness as a form of disorderly conduct, there could be other logical applications, even within the context.
 - 4. And, it seems that a broader application can be argued in this context when we connect the more general statement of 2 Thess. 3:14 with 2 Thess. 2:15, which commands following the traditions of Paul and company given by word or epistle.
 - a. The epistle addresses what is necessary for one’s salvation from the fiery wrath of Christ’s return (*i.e.*, “obedience to the gospel” – 2 Thess. 1:8).
 - b. It addresses eternal punishment for the wicked (2 Thess. 1:9).
 - c. It deals with false teaching concerning the resurrection (2 Thess. 2:1-12).
 - d. Lenski, however, believes these instructions (*i.e.*, of 2 Th. 3:14, rp) to apply specifically to 2 Thess. 3:12 stating, “In case anyone does not obey our word by this letter (namely the order of v. 12), note this man so as not to associate with him in order that he may be ashamed’ and may mend his ways... ‘Our word through the (this) letter’ expresses one thought and refers to v. 12.” (Lenski, p. 467)
 - 1) I am unsure how he can be sure of the specific nature of this reference!
 - 2) “This epistle” says much more.
-

-
5. And, as stated before, we see on other occasions where the principle of withdrawal applied to a specific sin does not negate its broader application to other sins (see 1 Cor. 5:1-11, 6:18).
- B. Of course, I acknowledge that this approach produces problems relating to **what sins** are worthy of the disciplinary action of withdrawal.
1. Clearly we know that withdrawing from those committing such sins as mentioned in 1 Cor. 5:9-11 and 2 Thess. 3:6, 10-11, 14 is proper.
 2. Yet, to **limit** ourselves to the “**lists**” of 1 Cor. 5:9-11 and 2 Thess. 3:6, 10-11 also creates problems.
 - a. What should we do with someone who continually lies, uses profane language, obtains an abortion, murders, works but uses his money selfishly and refuses to support his family properly, etc.?
 - b. Although these are not in either of the “lists,” those who commit these sins will “have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone” or are said to be “worse than an unbeliever” (Rev. 21:8; 1 Tim. 5:8).
 - c. Jesus mentions the necessity of withdrawing association from one unwilling to repent of sin committed against a brother or sister in Christ. Yet, the type or extent of such sin is not given (Matt. 18:15-17).
 - d. What about those who “cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned” (Rom. 16:17; see also Tit. 3:10-11)?
 - e. What do we do with 2 Timothy 3:1-5 and its list of sins?
 - 1) Paul speaks of those who are lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (2 Tim. 3:1-5).
 - 2) Are we to assume that **none** of these sins should be considered disorderly conduct and worthy of withdrawal?
 - f. And, will not such sins affect the flock and “leaven the whole lump” (1 Cor. 5:6)?
 3. Is it not true, therefore, that just as with the issue of local church fellowship, some judgment will have to be applied in this matter of withdrawal?

Conclusion:

- I. Local congregations must withdraw from the disorderly among them.
 - A. It is commanded and its importance for the spiritual well-being of a congregation cannot be ignored.
 - B. Disorderly conduct, whether in laziness and being meddlesome, or by any other rank refusal to obey the Lord’s commands, creates problems within the local church and is dangerous to the spiritual health of the local church.

-
- II. Let us do our part to be aware of disorderly conduct and deal with the disorderly in biblical fashion.

Rodney Pitts
251 Kinniard Rd.
Cookeville, TN 38501
rodneypitts@gmail.com

Selected Bibliography

- Arndt, Gingrich, Danker. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1979
- Bauer, Danker, Arndt, Gingrich. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature. Third Edition (BDAG)*. Revised and Edited by Frederick William Danker. The University of Chicago Press, 2000
- Frost, Gene, *The "Disorderly" of 2 Thessalonians 3:6*. Gospel Anchor, November 1984 – Volume 11, No. 3
- Kelcy, Raymond C. *The Letters of Paul to The Thessalonians*. The Living Word Commentary – Volume 13. General Editor Everett Ferguson, Austin Texas, R. B. Sweet Co., Inc., 1968
- Lenski, R. C. H. *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon*. Minneapolis Minnesota, Augsburg Publishing House, 1961
- Morris, Leon. *The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries – Volume 13. General Editor: R. V. G. Tasker, Grand Rapids Michigan, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1956, 1978
- Strong, James. *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament*. The Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible. Nashville Tennessee, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1984
- Thayer, Joseph Henry. *The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. Peabody, Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers, 1981