

Paul taught a good work ethic during his brief time at Thessalonica, but not all of the Thessalonians obeyed this command. Some of the Thessalonians had become lazy and expected the others to feed them. Paul reminds them that he, Silas and Timothy had worked to provide for their own needs while they were in the city and that the Thessalonians should follow their example.

Verses 1-5: Paul asks the Thessalonians to pray for him and his companions (Silas and Timothy), praying that their preaching of the word of God would not be hindered and that God would protect them from wicked men who would try to stop their gospel ministry. Paul also expresses his confidence in the faithfulness of God, who would continue to keep the faith of the Thessalonians grounded in the truth and protect them from evil. Paul was also confident that God would help the Thessalonians continue to obey the commands given by Paul and his companions, guiding them to love one another and to patiently endure as they waited for Christ's coming.

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. 7 For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you;

“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” – Paul issues another command given in the name of Jesus Christ. Paul's authority is not his own but by the authority given him as an apostle and by the teachings of Christ.

“that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly [deviating from the prescribed rule or law], and not after the tradition which he received of us” – Paul, in his brief time at Thessalonica before he was forced to leave (Acts 17:1-10), had taught them the way that God wanted them to behave as Christians. There were those, however, who did not feel compelled to obey all of the apostle's teaching and chose to obey their own will rather than God's. Paul instructs the Thessalonians to withdraw fellowship from these people, both to provoke them to repent (v. 14) and to protect themselves from the temptation to become disorderly themselves.

“For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you” – Paul reminds the Thessalonians that they should follow the example of Silas, Timothy and himself. Paul and his companions were not hypocrites when they were in Thessalonica. They obeyed the same commands and teaching that they had given to the Thessalonians.

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. 10 For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

“Neither did we eat any man's bread for nought [free]” – When Paul, Silas and Timothy were there, they did not expect the Thessalonians to feed them for free.

“but wrought [to work] with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you” – Paul and his companions worked day jobs in order to support themselves. They did not want to be a burden to anyone.

“Not because we have not power [authority], but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us” – Paul could have used his authority as an apostle to compel the Thessalonians to provide for their needs, but he chose not to do so. He wanted to provide the Thessalonians an example of how a Christian should live, loving others above themselves.

“For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat” – Paul reminds them of a command he had given while in Thessalonica: Anyone not willing to work should not expect to eat. Obviously, this command does not apply to those who are unable to work. However, any able-bodied person who does not work to support himself should not expect others to cater to his laziness by feeding him. Such people become an unsustainable drain on church and even government resources.

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.

“For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies [to meddle; to be busy in worthless activities]” – Paul focuses on the specific disorderliness that concerned him. Apparently the latest reports that Paul was hearing mentioned certain people who thought that they did not need to work, but could rely on the other Christians to provide for their daily needs. With nothing else to occupy their time, they apparently busied themselves doing things of no value or meddling in other people's business.

“Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness [to mind one's own business without causing trouble] they work, and eat their own bread” – By the authority of Jesus Christ, Paul commands these “busybodies” to mind their own business and “get a job” so that they can provide for their own needs rather than being troublemakers that depend on others to provide for them.

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

The Thessalonians who were working to provide for their own needs had likely gotten tired of giving to feed the lazy among them. Paul encourages them to not stop doing good because of the lazy since there were still needy Christians who were unable to work and genuinely needed help. We should not allow the bad behavior of others to discourage us from doing what pleases God.

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.

“And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man” – Among the needy in church, there were those who were genuinely needy and then there were those who were able to work but chose not to. Paul instructs the Thessalonians to take note of any man who still chose to not work even after reading/hearing the contents of this epistle commanding him to work. The Thessalonians should identify these lazy Christians while continuing to help the genuinely needy (v. 13).

“and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed” – They were to withdraw fellowship from the lazy man (v. 6) in order to shame him into recognizing that what he was doing was wrong.

“Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish [warn] him as a brother” – Withdrawing fellowship from the man was not done as a punishment as much as a means to encourage him to repent. They were not to consider the man as an “enemy” (unbeliever) but treat him as a wayward fellow believer who needed to be led back into obedience to God.

Verses 16-18: Paul closes this epistle by expressing his desire/prayer that the Lord of peace would grant His peace and His presence to the Thessalonians. Apparently Paul had someone else do the actual handwriting of the original epistle, because in v. 17 he writes his salutation himself as the “token” (sign) that this epistle was genuinely from him, unlike the fake epistles that had been written to the Thessalonians (2 Th. 2:2). Paul closes this epistle with his prayer that the grace of God would always be with them.