

Disciplining the Disorderly

Intro:

1. Our society has nearly abandoned the principle of discipline and punishment, from parents to schools to judiciary to churches.
2. It seems that there is little sense of accountability in local churches. Fellowship has a revolving door - people come and people go at their own discretion. "Withdrawal" is usually the reading of a letter about a brother long gone and nearly forgotten.
3. Environmental difficulties in Thessalonica were not an excuse to delay or withhold discipline. There is **no acceptable excuse** for failing to confront sin and exert the rightful authority of the church in matters of correction.

1. Dealing with the Problem in Thessalonica - 2 Th 3:6-15

- A. The specific problem was idleness leading to meddlesome behavior. "Not working/busybodies" (3:11) is a play on Gk. - no business but busy at nothing. Perhaps this was an outgrowth of misunderstanding concerning the time of the Lord's return.
- B. Note the divine basis for Paul's instructions for discipline: 3:4, 6, 10, 12, 14. We **must** understand that God expects local churches to discipline.

C. What is involved?

1. **Action:** "Withdraw" (v 6), "note" (v 14), "do not keep company" (v 14). Jesus first touched on the process in Mt 18 - *"let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector"* (v 17). Paul said, *"taken away from among you"* (1 Cor 5:2); *"deliver such a one to Satan"* (5:5); *"put away from yourselves"* (5:13).
 - a. Includes public declaration of intent: *"when you are gathered together"* (5:4).
 - b. Involves social interaction: *"not even to eat with such a person"* (5:11).
 - c. The persistent sinner is to be given a tangible taste of life without God and God's people, for that is what he is choosing.
2. **Attitude:** As a brother, not an enemy (2 Th 3:15). The Scriptures clearly tie discipline with *love*, not hatred (see Heb 12:5-6). Hatred or apathy does *nothing* and leaves the brother in his sin.
3. **Effect:** *"that he may be ashamed"* (2 Th 3:14). Shame leads to repentance; unfortunately, shame has nearly been eradicated in our society.

2. Key Principles Regarding Discipline

- A. Local churches **are** to make judgments upon the spiritual condition of its members (1 Cor 5:12). This is a delicate process and must be done with prayer, fairness and thoroughness.
- B. There must be unanimity. The power is in collective disapproval. The whole multitude says, "This behavior is unacceptable and we consider you to be out of God's fellowship. Therefore, we cannot fellowship you." **Illus:** Know of one situation where members continued to socialize with disciplined member.
- C. The process is stressful, confrontational and unpleasant. *It is designed to be.* The discomfort of the situation is not a reason to neglect or oppose it.
- D. The deterrent effect is invaluable. When Christians see other Christians under the watchful eye of their brethren and know that remedial measures will be taken against them if they fall into sin, they will have added incentive to resist sin.

3. Failures in Discipline

- A. Pessimism: "It won't do any good." But we are not religious pragmatists. We are **obedient**. This is the *best* opportunity to induce repentance if at all possible.
- B. Preemptive withdrawal: "**I** withdrew from **you** so you can't withdraw from me." This argument is based on the concept unilateral local church membership: it is all determined by the joiner. But the church also *extends* fellowship and its community image is affected by those who claim (or disclaim) membership. **Illus:** Would the bar have no recourse if a lawyer simply "withdrew" his membership? How about the military? A doctor? The NBA? NFL? PGA?
- C. Family: Some bluster, threaten or otherwise challenge the church to discipline a member of the family. But what is the family interested in? Turning their loved one from sin or protecting the family name?

Conclusion: Failure to discipline is *itself disorderly* and not according to traditions (2 Th 2:15). Is a congregation which does not properly exercise discipline "sound"? Are we selective on what constitutes "soundness"?