

Waiting

Believers are to live in obedience while waiting on the return of Christ.

2 THESSALONIANS 3:6-15



...SAL
wake
ch him.
togeth-
also ye do.

...RSELVES
ethren,⁶ to know
g you, and are over
dmonish you;
them very highly in
s sake.⁷ And be at peace
s.
nort you, brethren,⁸ warn
unruly,^{9a} comfort the feeble-
support the weak,^{9b} be patient
men.
e that none render evil for evil unto
an; but ever¹⁰ follow that which is
good, both among yourselves, and to all
men.
¹⁶ Rejoice evermore.
¹⁷ Pray without ceasing.
¹⁸ In every thing give thanks: for this
is the will of God in Christ Jesus concern-
ing you.
thers;
¹⁹ Quench not the Spirit.
²⁰ Despise not prophesyings.
ne night;
²¹ Prove all things;^{21a} hold fast that which
is good.
drunken in
²² Abstain from all appearance of evil.

FINAL EXHORTATIONS
²³ And^{23a} the very God of peace^{23b} sanctify
you wholly; and *I pray God* your whole spirit
and soul and body^{23c} be preserved blameless
unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

⁴ 25:17 Luke 18:1, 21:36; Rom. 12:12; Eph. 6:1-8; Col. 4:2, 1 Pet. 4:7 ⁵ 5:18 Eph. 5:20, Col. 3:7 ⁶ 5:19 Eph. 4:32; 1 Tim. 2:8; 1 Cor. 14:33 ⁷ 5:20 1 Cor. 14:33 ⁸ 5:21 1 Cor. 7:11, 15, 1 John 4:1 ⁹ 1 Pet. 4:8 ¹⁰ 5:22 1 Thess. 4:17 ¹¹ 5:23 1 Pet. 4:8 ¹² 1 Thess. 3:13 ¹³ 1 Cor. 1:6

...coming are caught up (Gk. har-
...e clouds to meet the Lord in the
...erm "rapture" is derived from rap-
...in the modern state of Israel. Just before
...the day of the Lord when people think they
...have this peace, sudden destruction will
...Christians will be kept out
...hour of testing (Rev. 3:10)
5:10 See note at vv. 4-8.



What makes waiting a challenge? What things do you do to pass the time when waiting?

Paul told the church at Thessalonica that they had to wait. They were waiting for Christ to return, and they were to actively live in obedience to God's commands while they waited. The commands they followed are commands that we too are to follow as we actively wait for His return.

UNDERSTAND **THE CONTEXT**

Paul's relationship with the Thessalonians began when he established the church in their city during his second missionary journey (Acts 17:1-10). After a brief stay, he was forced to leave when his enemies stirred up a mob against him.

Paul made his way to Corinth and sent Timothy to check on the welfare of the Thessalonians. Timothy's report was positive, leading the apostle to write his first letter to the church. Most scholars believe that Paul was still in Corinth when he wrote 2 Thessalonians. The second epistle was probably written within months of the first. The Thessalonians had more questions that needed answers, and Paul wrote back to encourage them and to correct misunderstandings caused by the false teachers.

Like in his first letter, Paul praised the church for their faithfulness (2 Thess. 1:3-12). He was encouraged by their perseverance and challenged them to remain loyal to the gospel. He urged them to remember what they had learned about Jesus' return (2:1-12).

Paul emphasized the importance of prayer, assuring the Thessalonians he was praying for them and asking them to pray for him (2:13-3:5). Paul instructed his readers to live out their prayers in the everyday world. This would include avoiding people whose lives contradicted the gospel, especially those who were idle (3:6-12).

Rather than giving in to laziness or complacency, believers are called to work with excellence (3:13). Paul warned the Thessalonians to hold at a distance anyone who disagreed with the teachings he provided—but not so far away that they could not return to the congregation once they repented (3:14-15).

Paul closed his second letter to Thessalonica with a prayer for peace and for God's presence (3:16-18). He reminded his readers that he had written the letter with his own hand, which proved the sincerity of his words and his love.

2 THESSALONIANS

3:6-15

6 Now we **command**^A you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from every brother or sister who is idle and does not live according to the tradition received from us. **7** For you yourselves know how you should **imitate us**^B: We were not idle among you; **8** we did not eat anyone's food free of charge; instead, we labored and toiled, working night and day, so that we would not be a burden to any of you. **9** It is not that we don't have the right to support, but we did it to make ourselves an example to you so that you would imitate us. **10** In fact, when we were with you, this is what we commanded you: "If anyone isn't willing to work, he should not eat." **11** For we hear that there are some among you who are idle. They are not busy but busybodies. **12** Now we command and exhort such people by the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and provide for themselves. **13** But as for you, brothers and sisters, do not grow weary in doing good. **14** If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take note of that person; **don't associate with him**^C, so that he may be ashamed. **15** Yet don't consider him as an enemy, but **warn him as a brother**^D.

Passage Outline

Establish Standards
(2 Thess. 3:6-9)

Provide
(2 Thess. 3:10-12)

Discipline
(2 Thess. 3:13-15)

Key Words

- A. Paul's directive carried a tone of extreme seriousness. The church's health and witness for the gospel was at risk.
- B. Paul often encouraged his readers to "imitate" his example of Christian living and faith (1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Heb. 13:7).
- C. Paul admonished the church to "have nothing to do with him" (ESV)—the disobedient and disorderly—in hopes that their exclusion would bring about a transformation in the lives of those who had turned from the faith (1 Thess. 5:12-14).
- D. Paul displayed care and concern for those who refused to follow his teaching. By calling "him as a brother" and not "as an enemy," the person, while being rebuked, still remains a member of the Christian family.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

God established the standards for His people to follow. The missionaries knew they had significant influence in the life of the church. However, they chose to stand on *the name of our Lord Jesus Christ*. The commands they were proclaiming were not from them but rather from Him.

How might the low standards being carried by some of the Thessalonian believers become a problem?

The missionaries had lived out obedience in such a manner that the church knew what they needed to do and how to *imitate* the missionaries' actions. The word *know* indicates having a personal knowledge of something. Paul challenged the church to put their knowledge of obedient living into action.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of living in a fishbowl where everyone is watching you?

BIBLE SKILL: Examine passages that inform a doctrine. Paul was clear that believers who refused to work should not expect to eat (2 Thess. 3:10). Our understanding of work is based on Genesis 1-3. Review these three chapters and reflect on the work done. How did God model work in the days of creation? When did God first direct humanity to work? What tasks did He give Adam and Eve? How is work related to the curse in Genesis 3? How is that connection often misunderstood?

Being unable to work is one thing, being unwilling to work is something completely different. Paul made a distinction between individuals who could not work and those who would not work. Those who were unwilling to work had developed a habit of living in this state. The ones who exhibited this lifestyle must live with the consequences of their actions.

How is calling out a believer who is disobedient an act of love? How would you characterize Paul's response to the idle believers?

Instead of becoming weary, Paul wanted the Thessalonians to continue doing good. He commanded them to pay special attention to those living outside of God's will, so that those living in disobedience would see their errors and return to God's ways.

How do people feel when they think about church discipline? Why is church discipline not practiced more frequently in the church today?

Paul underscored that these were not heretics trying to destroy the church. They were family members who needed restoration, love, and healing.

How can a person not associate with someone and yet not view him or her as an enemy as well?

KEY DOCTRINE: Sanctification. Growth in grace should continue throughout the regenerate person's life. (See Col. 2:6-7; 2 Pet. 3:18.)

APPLY THE TEXT

- Believers must hold up standards that remove barriers to the gospel.
- Providing for our families is one way we demonstrate Christ to others.
- Believers should lovingly hold other believers accountable.

Review your habits and practices, looking for things that might be a barrier to the gospel. What changes do you need to make to remove any barriers discovered?

Reflect on the different ways God has provided for your needs in the past and in the present. Thank Him for opportunities He gives you to provide for your needs and the needs of your family.

Discuss with your Bible study group the role they play in warning other believers of the consequences of disobedience in an effort toward restoration. What actions can your group take to help other believers without becoming a busybody?

Prayer Requests



DAILY EXPLORATION

Day 1: Avoid idleness.

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6, contemplating who believers should stay away from.

Paul exhorted the church to *keep* away from brothers and sisters who were living *idle* lives. Staying away showed purposeful intent. One cannot casually embrace this command; one must be intentional. Paul likely was referring to a group within the church that had strayed from the basic teachings of the faith. The word translated *idle* indicates a habit or lifestyle. In addition to laziness, it also includes the idea of creating chaos or disorder. In Paul's context, it meant failing to live according to the apostle's teachings. He had addressed this matter in his first letter (1 Thess. 5:14) but felt the need to revisit his earlier warnings.

How might carrying low standards impact the cause of Christ today?

Day 2: The church is called to a higher standard.

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9, highlighting the word imitate.

What established standards did the Thessalonians see lived out by Paul and his coworkers? First, they were *not idle*. This is the same word used in verse 6. Another established standard they modeled was that they *labored and toiled*. The trio had engaged in difficult work while in Thessalonica. Furthermore, they had done so *night and day*. Finally, they did not want to be a *burden* to anyone. The word *burden*, as used here, has financial implications. Paul, Silas, and Timothy did not want to cause any financial strain for the church. The church was already going through enough. The missionaries had two goals. First, they wanted to set *an example*. They did not want to say one thing to the church family and then live a different way. This is hypocrisy at its best. Second, they wanted the church family to *imitate* the model that was lived out in front of them. Paul was calling the church to a higher standard.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of living in a fishbowl where everyone is watching you?

Day 3: Loving discipline is sometimes necessary to guide people back to God.

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:10-11, considering the sins Paul called out.

Part of loving someone means calling out sinful behavior. The writer of Hebrews said, “the Lord disciplines the one he loves” (12:6). Such discipline is not a heavy hand but rather a loving heart seeking to guide His children back to His ways. Paul emulated this loving discipline toward the church at Thessalonica. Commenting further on those within the church who were *idle*, Paul said they were *not busy but busybodies*. The term *busybodies* refers to people who are dealing in the affairs of someone else to the neglect of their own. This term reflects a habitual lifestyle. The church needed to be busy about the things of the Lord as they patiently waited for His return. But some church members were busy meddling in everyone else’s business instead of working.

How is calling out a believer who is disobedient an act of love? How would you characterize Paul’s response to the idle believers?

Day 4: Work honestly and be generous.

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:12, noticing the command.

The instruction here is that the busybodies should get back to work. Paul used two words that showed this was not a mere suggestion: *command* and *exhort*. *Command* hints at Paul’s apostolic authority. *Exhort* indicates urging or encouraging and can be seen as a plea from a concerned friend and leader. Paul’s teaching came *by the Lord*. Again, he was not simply sharing personal opinion. He was revealing divine truth that deserved the highest priority. This admonition related to work included two aspects. The first was to *work quietly*. This word *work* comes from the same Greek word as “busy” in verse 11. Paul wanted these believers to live productive lives. The errant Thessalonians should mind their own business. (See 1 Thess. 4:10-11.) Instead of instigating chaos, they should settle down and demonstrate the satisfaction and contentment that comes from productive labor. The second aspect of Paul’s admonition was to *provide for themselves*. This is similar to Paul’s encouragement to the believers in Ephesus who had once made their way by stealing (Eph. 4:28). The remedy, Paul said, was to work honestly and earn enough to meet their own needs. As a bonus, they would also have enough to be generous. Taken together, the commands provide the remedy for the idleness that was plaguing the church in Thessalonica.

How would you distinguish a believer who is busy from one who is a busybody?

Explain.

Day 5: The goal of church discipline is restoration.

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:13-15, noting the command in verse 15.

Paul told those who were faithful to *take note* of those who were unfaithful. The command was to pay special attention to those living outside of God's will. What's more, the Thessalonians should refuse to *associate* with such people. Church discipline, in order to work, would require the participation of every member in good standing. The intended result of this command was that those living undisciplined and disobedient lives would be *ashamed*. The goal of church discipline is always restoration. Paul did not want the wayward members permanently removed from the fellowship. It was the church family's responsibility to fulfill this command so that those living in disobedience would see their errors and return to God's ways.

**How do you feel when you think about church discipline?
What would happen if church discipline were practiced
more frequently in the church today?**



TALK IT OUT

Reflect on the truths found in 2 Thessalonians 3, sharing with the other members of your Bible study group.

Why is idle living unbecoming for Christians?

How is the consequence for not working both a rebuke and motivator?

What does it mean to hold others accountable?