

Introduction

Recently, a man was trying to explain to me about his life and how he needs to be organized in order to have peace. Then, he made the comment that I seem to handle chaos well. He obviously does not know me as well as he thinks. I am very organized, and I cannot stand chaos. I don't like a messy room, office, or house, so having things picked up and in place is important. I don't like conflict and relational chaos. I don't like chaos in the business world. I like businesses to run smoothly, and for there to be clear policies and expectations. When I encounter chaos, I figure out what needs to be done to set things in order.

The Apostle Paul did not like chaos, and when he encountered things that were out of order, he addressed the problems and put things in order. In his letter to the Corinthians, he addressed the use of gifts in their meetings. People were talking at the same time, and it brought confusion and chaos. People were speaking in tongues and nobody else was being edified. He instructed them to focus on things that would edify the entire body. He told them to prophesy, one by one, and then pass judgment. He said that God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

(1 Co 14:33) “for God is not *a God* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints.”

(1 Co 14:40) “But all things must be done properly and in an orderly manner.”

In Paul's letter to Titus, he said that he had left him in Crete to set things in order. He knew what needed to be done, and he instructed Titus to ordain elders in every city. He told him that there were many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, who needed to be silenced because they were upsetting whole families.

(Tt 1:5) “For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you,”

Our text today is 2 Thessalonians 3:4-18 and I have titled it: Setting Things in Order. Like the churches on the island of Crete, the Thessalonians had been deceived, and there had been false teaching about the Day of the Lord. Paul wasted no time in writing this letter because he wanted the Thessalonians to know the truth about the Day of the Lord. He wanted to clear up any confusion and chaos, and put things in order. Paul had heard that there were some unruly and undisciplined people that were not working, and our passage is about setting things in order. The Greek word that is translated as unruly and undisciplined is *ataktos* (Strong's G814). The root word is *tasso* (Strong's G5021), which means to be under proper order and arrangement, and it has a negative prefix, meaning a person that is not in proper order. To set things in order, Paul, Silas, and Timothy gave the Thessalonians three commands. He commanded them to keep away from those who lead an unruly life and do not live according to the tradition given to them. Second, he commands those who were not working to work and eat their own bread. Third, he commands the church not to associate with those who do not obey these instructions.

Setting Things in Order (2 Th 3:4-18)

1. Command to keep away from those who lead an unruly life and do not live according to tradition given to them
2. Command to work and eat your own bread
3. Command to not to associate with those who do not obey these instructions

(2 Th 3:4–18) “We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will *continue to* do what we **command**. {5} May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ. {6} Now we **command** you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an **unruly** life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. {7} For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an **undisciplined** manner among you, {8} nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we *kept* **working** night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; {9} not because we do not have the right *to this*, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example. {10} For even when we were with you, we used to give you this **order**: if anyone is not willing to **work**, then he is not to eat, either. {11} For we hear that some among you are leading an **undisciplined** life, doing no **work** at all, but acting like busybodies. {12} Now such persons we **command** and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to **work** in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. {13} But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good. {14} 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. {15} *Yet* do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. {16} Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all! {17} I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write. {18} The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”

1. Command to keep away from those who lead an unruly life and do not live according to tradition given to them

The Greek word, *parangello* (Strong’s G3853) is used four times in this passage. It is translated as command three times and order one time. It means to command, charge, or order. In verse four, Paul, Silas, and Timothy wrote, “We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command.” I believe they were confident in the Lord that they would do what they were going to command them to do. I also believe it was a positive way to introduce some difficult commands that they were going to give. People like to hear positive things said or written about themselves, and this is a clear vote of confidence that they will do what is commanded.

(2 Th 3:4) “We have confidence in the Lord concerning you, that you are doing and will *continue to* do what we command.”

Every translation that I have looked at include verses four and five with the preceding verses. I think it really belongs with the next section. They have just asked the Thessalonians to pray for them about being rescued from perverse and evil men. Now, they are going to talk about some commands to bring order into the church. The use of command in this verse also ties into the verses that follow.

Before they give the commands, they give some goals for giving the commands. The commands are going to be given to direct their hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ. If someone told me that they were going to give me a command which would direct my heart into the love of God, I would immediately be receptive to it. I want more of the love of God in my life. I also want to be steadfast in my walk with the Lord. In addition to the vote of confidence, these two goals are very positive and motivating.

(2 Th 3:5) “May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ.”

The first command is for the Thessalonians to keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life, or a disorderly life. This is a call for church discipline, even though the passage does not use that term. Paul, Silas, and Timothy certainly could not have said that they have confidence in most churches today, as church discipline is not practiced in the majority of churches. In order to have church discipline, there must be a clear understanding of the process of church discipline, by both the leadership and the congregation. There must be church membership, and many churches today do not have church membership. Paul, Silas, and Timothy were confident that they would apply church discipline to those who were out of order and not living according to the tradition that they had been taught.

(2 Th 3:6) “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us.”

When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, he told them to exercise church discipline. There was immorality in the church, and he said, “I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people.” He went on to explain that he was not speaking about the immoral people of the world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or idolaters, as we would have to go out of the world. Paul was addressing any so-called brother who is immoral, covetous, an idolater, reviler, drunk, or swindler. They were not even to eat with such a one. The church is to judge those within the church, and let God judge those who are outside the church. Church discipline is for believers who are living in sin. From our text today we can add to the list, those who are unruly and out of order. The church is to keep away from them, and not to eat with them.

(1 Co 5:9–13) “I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; {10} I *did* not at all *mean* with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. {11} But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler—not even to eat with such a one. {12} For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Do you not judge those who are within *the church*? {13} But those who are outside, God judges. Remove the wicked man from among yourselves.”

Jesus taught the principle of church discipline in Matthew 18:15-17. He said if our brother sins, we are to go and show him his fault in private, and if he listens, we have won our brother. The goal is to win our brother, not to hurt or destroy him. If the brother does not listen, we are to take one or two more with us and go to our brother again. If he listens, we have won our brother, and if he does not listen, then we are to move to the third stage of church discipline, which is to bring it before the church. Again, if he listens, we have won our brother, and if he does not listen, then we are to regard him as a Gentile or tax collector. Jesus was always reaching out to tax collectors and other sinners, so when the church regards a brother as a sinner, we are to continue to reach out to them. However, those outside would not be included in a covenant meal. The goal is always to win and restore our brother.

(Mt 18:15–17) “If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. {16} “But if he does not listen *to you*, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. {17} “If he

refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.”

In Paul’s letter to the Galatians, he addressed how to address one caught in a trespass. He said that “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.” You who are spiritual refers to being in right standing with God ourselves. We have to take the log out of our own eye before taking the splinter out of our neighbor’s eye. Paul mentions the goal, and that is to restore the person. We are to win and restore our brother. Next, Paul gave two attitudes that we must have when confronting. The first attitude is a spirit of gentleness. The second attitude is humility, recognizing that we could also be tempted. We need to be very careful and be on guard against temptations. Finally, Paul shares the commitment we must have with our brother. We are to bear his burden, and fulfill the law of Christ, which is to love our brother.

(Ga 6:1–2) “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. {2} Bear one another’s burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.”

There were some “so-called brothers,” in Thessalonica that were unruly, were not living according to the tradition which they had received from Paul and his team. What was the tradition that Paul, Silas, and Timothy gave? What was the example that they left for them to follow? The Greek word for example that is used is not the normal one, which is tupos. The word used is mimeomai (Strong’s G3401, to mimic or imitate), which we get our English word, mimic. It means to imitate. The passage literally reads, “for you yourselves know how you should have imitated us.”

(2 Th 3:7a) “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example....”

Later in the passage, they do use the word tupos (Strong’s G5179, a die, stamp, model, example), saying that they had offered themselves as a model for them. Tupos means a die, which is struck to leave an exact impression of the die. It can also mean a pattern. In Acts 7:44, the tabernacle of testimony was built according to the pattern given to Moses by God. There are several other ways that the word is used, but the effect is the same. Leaders are to be examples to the flock. The flock should be able to pattern their lives after the leaders. The congregation should be able to mimic and follow the example set by leadership. Paul, Silas, and Timothy had set a good example. With their teaching and their lives they had modeled the behavior the Thessalonians were to imitate. They had struck their die and left an imprint on the lives of the Thessalonians.

(2 Th 3:9) “not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model (tupos) for you, so that you would follow our example (mimeomai).”

(Ac 7:44) “Our fathers had the tabernacle of testimony in the wilderness, just as He who spoke to Moses directed *him* to make it according to the pattern (tupos) which he had seen.”

They did not live in an undisciplined manner while with them. Undisciplined is unruly or a life out of order. Instead, they lived a very disciplined and orderly life. They did not eat anyone’s bread without paying for it. They worked hard night and day so that they would not be a burden to any of them. As those who were sowing spiritually, they had a right to reap materially from the Thessalonians, but they did not use that right, so that they could offer themselves as a model for them.

(2 Th 3:7-9) “For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, {8} nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we *kept* working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; {9} not because we do not have the right *to this*, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example.”

Not only did they work hard and provide for themselves, setting an example to follow, they also taught the Thessalonians that if someone was not willing to work, they were not to eat either. The NASB says, “we used to give you this order.” The Greek word for order is *parangello* (Strong’s G3853), which means command or charge. It is the same word that is translated three times in our text as command. They not only taught them the principle, but they commanded them not to allow anyone to eat that was not willing to work.

(2 Th 3:10) “For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.”

There were some in the church who were still out of order and not working. They were not following the tradition, example, teaching, or command that Paul, Silas, and Timothy had given to the Thessalonians. Now, they are telling them to keep away from these unruly and undisciplined people that refused to work. They are at the third and final step of church discipline at this point. Those that refused to work had already been privately confronted. They had already been confronted a second time with one or two others. The church knew about it, so they have already been through the third step. Since they had not responded, Paul is telling them to carry out the discipline process and keep away from them.

2. Command to work and eat your own bread

The first command was given to the church, and more specifically, to those in the church that were innocent of being unruly and out of order. The second command was a call for those that were not working, to work in a quiet fashion and eat their own bread. They mention that they have heard that some among them are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Again, the Greek word for undisciplined life is *ataktos*, which means not in order. Someone who is not working and providing for themselves is out of order. They may have appeared busy, as they were acting like busybodies. The word literally means to work all around, yet they wrote that they were not doing any work at all, so it is the appearance of work while not performing any legitimate labor that produced income. They are commanded to work in quiet fashion, not drawing attention to themselves.

(2 Th 3:11–12) “For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. {12} Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.”

A few years ago, we had a man who started coming to our church. He was hitting everyone up for a loan, which he never intended to pay back. He would use pressure on people to give to him. I confronted the man and told him that he was welcome to come to our services to worship and learn, but he was not welcome to come and hit on our flock. At that time we had a fellowship meal every week, and he would always eat, but never gave any offerings. When I spoke to him about work, he said he had a job; he was a professional fund raiser. I would not use those words to describe him; he was a panhandler. He particularly liked to hit on veterans, as he said they

were always good for a generous donation. Since he said that he had been in the Navy, it was easy to talk to them. Again, I told him that panhandling was not legitimate work, and that he should get a real job and provide for himself. Eventually, he stopped coming to the services and would come in time for our luncheon. I had to draw another line, and I told him that he was welcome to come to our services to worship and learn, and that our luncheons are for our congregation to have fellowship with one another. I did not allow him to just come and pick up a free meal. He was a busybody, not doing any work at all, and eating off of others.

There are many people today who feel entitled to be provided for. They feel the world owes them a living, and some of these people are in the church. In one church plant that we did, we had a family come for many years that never gave tithes or offerings. At our potluck fellowship luncheons, they never brought food, but they always stayed and ate what others had brought. Paul, Silas, and Timothy had a word for these people: “we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.”

As for the rest of the brethren who were not acting like busybodies, they said, “do not grow weary of doing good.” In other words, keep up the good work. It was a gentle pat on the back and encouragement to continue their good work.

(2 Th 3:13) “But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good.”

3. Command to not to associate with those who do not obey these instructions

The third command that Paul and his team gave is to take special note of anyone that does not obey the instructions in the letter, and not to associate with him. This is the second area of church discipline that they are commanding them to take. The Greek word that is translated as associate is sunanamignymi, which literally means to join in mixing together. The KJV says to have no company with.

(2 Th 3:14–15) “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.”

Someone that does not obey instructions from their leaders is disobedient and rebellious. The Greek word for rebellious is anypotaktos, which is taken from hupotasso and has a negative prefix. Earlier, we saw that tasso means to be in proper order and arrangement. Hupotasso means to be submissive and under proper order and arrangement. Someone who is not under proper order and arrangement, not under authority, disobedient to authority is anypotaktos. Paul and his team are trying to set the church in proper order, and so this is a particularly important point. Anyone who refuses to put their lives in proper order and will not obey these instructions is rebellious and stands to cause continual problems.

When the church must take this act of church discipline, they are not to regard him as an enemy, but are to admonish him as a brother. They are assuming that the person genuinely believes in Christ and has genuinely made a profession to follow Christ, but the person needs some correction and discipline. They are to admonish or gently warn him. We saw earlier in Galatians 6 that Paul said that those in sin are to be corrected with a spirit of gentleness. Sometimes, we want to come on stronger with those who are rebellious, but the word says we are to correct with gentleness, and in this case, to gently warn the man. The goal is to restore and win the brother. It is to bring the person back into fellowship with God and with others. It is to help the person be steadfast in Christ.

(2 Th 3:15) “*Yet* do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”

If the Thessalonians will do this, they will find peace. When those who are rebellious are removed, strife and other things will end. Solomon wrote that through insolence or stubbornness comes nothing but strife. He also said that if you drive out the scoffer, contention will go out. Paul, Silas, and Timothy end with a prayer of blessing. “Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all.”

(2 Th 3:16) “Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!”

(Pr 13:10) “Through insolence comes nothing but strife, but wisdom is with those who receive counsel.”

(Pr 22:10) “Drive out the scoffer, and contention will go out, even strife and dishonor will cease.”

Paul wrote the final greeting himself with his own hand. He said that this is a distinguishing mark in every letter that he writes. This is a very significant piece of information for the Thessalonians, as they had been deceived by someone who said they had a letter from Paul, and it was not from Paul. From this point on, they know to check the closing greeting to see if it is Paul’s handwriting. In Galatians 6:11, Paul wrote, “See what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.” Apparently, Paul’s writing was very large, leading many to believe he had poor eyesight.

(2 Th 3:17) “I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write.”

(Ga 6:11) “See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand.”

The final blessing is that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ would be with them. We all need God’s grace in our lives to do the things that He has called us to do. The grace of God is not just His undeserved and unmerited mercy, it is also the desire and ability to carry out the things that He has gifted and called us to do. We need His unmerited mercy in our lives, and we also need His grace to accomplish His plans and purposes for our lives.

(2 Th 3:18) “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”

Conclusion and Applications

Paul, Silas, and Timothy loved the Thessalonians and when they heard that they had been deceived and upset by a message and a fake letter from Paul about the Day of the Lord, they immediately wrote and brought correction. They explained that the Day of the Lord had not come, and they had not missed out on anything. The Day of the Lord was not going to take place until the apostasy, and the man of lawlessness was revealed, and the one restraining him was removed. They also gave some understanding of how Satan tries to deceive people with power, signs, and false wonders. They told the Thessalonians not to allow anyone to deceive them. God does not want any of us deceived. He wants us to know truth, and to be alert.

The apostle Paul liked things to be in order. There were some in Thessalonica that were out of order. Some were not working and eating their own bread. They were living off others, which is out of order. Paul and his team had set a good example for them to follow, working hard day and night so that they would not be a burden to anyone. They had also commanded the Thessalonians to work, and if they did not work, they were not to eat. This is a follow-up on what they had already modeled and taught. Now, they are commanding the Thessalonians to keep away from every brother who is living an unruly life and not according to the tradition that Paul and his team had left.

Finally, they commanded the church to take special note of anyone that does not obey the instructions in the letter and not to associate with them. The lack of association was meant to shame them into doing what is right. They were also to gently warn or admonish them. The goal of church discipline is to win and restore our brother. They were not to treat the wayward man as an enemy, but to gently warn him as a brother.

Closing Prayer

Father God, thank You for these letters to the Thessalonians. They were a model church to the churches in Macedonia and Achaia, and they are a model church for us in 2024. Thank You for the instructions about the Day of the Lord and, in particular, the things that must take place prior to the coming of the Lord. Thank You for the example of church discipline. When we need to exercise church discipline, may we do it with a spirit of gentleness. May we do it with the right goals, to win and restore our brother. May we do it with love and bear our brother's burdens. May it be done so that our hearts are directed into the love of God and the steadfastness of Christ. I ask You, our Lord of peace, to grant us peace in every circumstance that we are in. I ask You for your grace to be with us. I ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

Setting Things In Order

Introduction (1 Co 14:33, 14:40, Ti 1:5, 2 Th 3:4-18)

- 1. Command to keep away from those who lead an unruly life and do not live according to tradition given to them** (2 Th 3:4-10, 1 Co 5:9-13, Mt 18:15-17, Ga 6:1-2, Ac 7:44)

- 2. Command to work and eat your own bread** (2 Th 3:11-13)

- 3. Command to not to associate with those who do not obey these instructions** (2 Th 3:14-18, Pr 13:10, 22:10, Ga 6:11)

Conclusion and Applications