

## 2 Thessalonians 3:6-17

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 21 June 2015

Preacher: Stuart Cashman

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, on the 30th of September 1938, not very far from here, the then Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain got off a plane, waved a piece of paper in the air, on which Hitler had promised! that he didn't want to go to war with Britain again. And so Chamberlain declared that this accord signalled peace for our time, the culmination of the government's policy of appeasement, the policy of not ruffling German feathers, kind of giving them what they wanted, to have appeasement instead of war.

Well, we all know there was not peace for our time at all. The rest, as they say, is history. But part of the reason the government pursued that policy was they felt a lack of resources to actually fight any war that came up, a lack of resources to deal with the trouble Hitler might cause. They feared they didn't have what it would take.

I wonder if sometimes we're tempted to do the same even in the church. We are happy to settle for appeasement, for not ruffling feathers, for just letting people go their own way, rather than pursuing peace.

Because peace can be costly, can't it? It would have cost Chamberlain in 1938. It ultimately cost Europe a great deal, didn't it? And sometimes we think, well, it would be too risky to work for peace. Let's just let people go on and do what they're doing.

Our thought would be very un-British to confront people, for those of you who are British. It's great we have a diversity here. Some of you from other cultures can teach us a thing or two. Those of us who are like me, very British and don't like to offend.

[ 1 : 41 ] Of course, there are other influences as well as relativism. That says, actually, if they want to do that, if they want to believe that, then that's all right. So, it's just their interpretation. Who am I to say mine's right?

It causes the pressures of individualism. Who gives me the right to criticise somebody else? They're their own individual, they can do what they want. Sometimes just plain personality holds us back, doesn't it?

I can be a real people pleaser, and so confronting other people is very painful for me. At the heart of it, perhaps we lack faith that we have the resources to confront what needs to be confronted.

Whether it's false teaching or false living. So, we'd rather settle for appeasement than work for peace. But that is exactly what the Apostle Paul is criticising here.

He will not settle for appeasement. He wants something deeper for the Thessalonians. He wants real peace. You can see that if you look at verse 16 at the end of this section.

[ 2 : 46 ] This is what Paul wants. Now, may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. That's what Paul wants. But the journey to get there is a journey that's going to involve some conflict.

Because he's got to deal with a painful problem. In fact, this is always Paul's pattern. When he's telling people to deal with a problem, he then comes to peace after, because that's what he wants. It's the same back in 1 Thessalonians. Back at the end, chapter 5, verse 23. Having told them to deal with all sorts of problems. He then ends up with a similar prayer.

Now, may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely. And make your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless of the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. See, Paul's praying for peace here. Paul's commanding them to work for peace. But why? Because the way to peace is through living in obedience to God's truth. It's the truth of the Gospel that brings us peace, doesn't it? Peace with God, peace with one another.

[ 3 : 47 ] And so it's by pursuing that peace, pursuing that truth of the Gospel, by clinging to it, by living it out, that we can have peace. So the Lord alone gives peace to his church.

And so as believers, we need to seek peace, not by avoiding confrontation, not by being nice, but by living according to his word. So in these verses, Paul is describing first of all a persistent problem, and then a surprising solution.

So first of all, a persistent problem. You can see the outline of it in verse 6. Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness, and not in accord with the tradition you receive from us.

This is a persistent problem. We know that because Paul had written about it back in 1 Thessalonians as well. So in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 verse 12, he told the Thessalonians to walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

In fact, the previous verse, verse 11, he said, work with your hands as we instructed you. It seems there were some people in the church who weren't working for a living, they were just living off other people, being dependent on others.

[ 5 : 01 ] That was creating bad impression. But you see the problem, another problem here in 1 Thessalonians, in 2 Thessalonians rather.

That there was a lack of peace in the church. Not only because there were idle people who were disturbing the peace, but also because of the false teaching that had come in. So back in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, stay over the page.

In verse 2, Paul says to him, don't be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word or a letter seeming to be from us. They were shaken in mind, they had no peace in this church.

They were worried about what they were taught, and they were worried about these idle people in their midst. So it was a persistent problem. But there's actually a deeper root to that problem.

So that word, if you look back to 2 Thessalonians 3, back to our passage for the night. That word translated idleness, being idle. It actually has a range of meanings.

[ 6 : 01 ] Certainly these people were being idle, they clearly weren't working. But back in 1 Thessalonians, where it's first used, chapter 5, verse 14. In our footnotes, it actually gives us another translation, which is a better translation.

It can be translated disorderly. When this word is used outside the Bible, it's used to describe armies fleeing from a conflict in a disorderly manner.

The opposite word is used one time in the New Testament, in Colossians 2, verse 5. Where Paul praises the Colossians for being orderly in their worship, in the way they are as a church.

So the word here translated idle really means, it's first meaning, it's basic meaning, it needs to be disorderly, be disruptive. You see, the idleness was a presenting problem.

The cause, the deeper cause, was actually they were disruptive people. They were people who weren't following the teachings that Paul had given them. They weren't holding to the traditions, as Paul put it in verse 6.

[ 7 : 05 ] That's not the church traditions, it's not traditional teaching, rather it's the apostolic teaching. It's the gospel message. They were not holding to it, they were not living according to it.

So, it was this disorderliness that was leading to the idleness. And that was because they weren't holding to the traditions. And that was exactly what Paul was commanding people to do in this letter.

Back in chapter 2, verse 15, he told them to stand firm and hold to the traditions you are taught by us. And they were to keep believing the gospel. Don't be rattled by this false teaching coming in. But you notice, false teaching will lead to false practice. So these disruptive people seem to have latched on to the false teaching.

They seem to have latched on to the idea that Jesus had come back already. And so they're using that, perhaps they're using that as the excuse not to work. So, well, if Jesus has come back, then what's the point working?

[ 8 : 04 ] What's the point working? It doesn't matter anymore, does it? Maybe that's what they're saying. It's the false teaching that was leading to false practice. We remind ourselves about that this morning.

Paul gave us a very powerful reminder, didn't he, from 1 Timothy 4. That we need to keep growing. We just want to keep growing in our knowledge of the Lord. We want to keep growing by listening to good teaching.

And that is very important. Very important. But the thing about good teaching is we don't just listen to it, we need to put it into practice. The good teaching should lead to good practice. There is a connection between right doctrine, believing the right things, and therefore behaving in the right way. Because belief is always demonstrated in behaviour. Right belief, right teaching leads to right practice.

Equally wrong teaching and wrong belief will lead to wrong behaviour. And that was part of the problem here in Thessalonica. This wrong teaching had come in. These idle people embraced it. [ 9 : 04 ] And so we're stopping working. Maybe they thought that Jesus' return was just a spiritual thing. Therefore, physical things like work didn't matter anymore.

Or maybe they thought, well, if he's here, then everything's going to stop soon, so what's the point of working anymore? Whatever their problem, their faulty teaching resulted in false living. It's always been the same for church history. Whenever people have got wrong ideas about Jesus' return, it's ended up in wrong actions in their lives. If you think back even just a few years, May 21, 2011, Harold Camping, a so-called prophet in California, had announced that Jesus was going to come back.

It was the end of the world. And so a lot of his followers stopped working and went out in the streets giving out flyers telling everyone what was going to happen. In fact, Camping himself invested millions of dollars in big advertising campaigns.

Wrong teaching led to wrong behaviour. Today, older views about the end of the world, meaning that everything physical would just be destroyed, lead some people to a wrong attitude to the environment and to caring for the planet.

[ 10 : 20 ] God has entrusted to us. False teaching can lead to false practice. But also, it can go the other way around. False practice can lead to false teaching, or at least can foster false teaching.

Look down to verse 11 for a moment. Paul says this, We hear that some among you walk in idleness, you're not working, not busy at work, but busy bodies.

Now there was these people who weren't working, not only were they just not doing what they should be doing, they gave them a great opportunity to be busy bodies, to get involved in stuff they shouldn't have been involved in. To get involved in speaking about things they shouldn't have been speaking about.

Paul addressed a similar problem. I'll get this in a couple of these times, Paul preachers on 1 Timothy 5. In 1 Timothy 5, he uses a different word, but he's talking about widows who aren't getting married, who are just being busy bodies.

1 Timothy 5.13. He says, They learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busy bodies saying what they should not.

[ 11 : 25 ] See, people who aren't actually working have time to get involved in just gossip and spreading rumours and perpetuating false teaching. See, that could have been going on in Thessalonica as well.

See, false teaching leads to false practice. But false practice can also foster false teaching. That's why Paul wants to get at this.

Well, we looked at the presenting issue, this idleness, we looked at the cause, the false teaching, but what's the effect? Well, the effect was disturbed peace, wasn't it? We've seen that back in chapter 2.

But also, the other effect was a damaged witness. In his first letter to Thessalonians, Paul had urged them to work hard at their own hands, to live properly before outsiders, he said in 1 Thessalonians 4.12.

Not to be dependent on others. For the witness of the church was being damaged by these idle people, who were sitting around sponging off others, eating what other people had worked for. And notice, that is one of Paul's big concerns here.

[ 12 : 34 ] In the section we looked at last week, he had prayed, wanted the Thessalonians to pray, chapter 3, verse 1, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honoured.

He wants the gospel to triumph, like the athlete winning the race, to speed ahead and be honoured. He is not being honoured, but being brought into disrepute, where these lazy people are sponging off others.

And the world is looking on at the church, saying, if that's what Christianity is, I don't want to be a part of it. See, instead of the gospel running on, it's like these lazy people were tying the gospel's

legs together, so it couldn't progress.

And the same problem happens in the church today, doesn't it? Not necessarily with idleness, but where Christians are not living consistent with the gospel. It disturbs the peace of the church, and damages the witness of the church.

And that can happen in moral aspects, when Christians are engaging, so-called Christians are engaging in sex outside of marriage. It means they're starting to renegotiate biblical ethics with their own feelings or contemporary values.

[13:42] And that destroys the church's witness. The church looks on and can't see a difference. Or the world looks on at the church and can't see a difference. Or the peace of the church will be disturbed when Christians just give up on the idea of waiting for a Christian spouse to start dating people who are not believers.

And that disturbs the peace. So those who are trying to be faithful to the Lord in that area start to think, well, am I taking it too seriously? Should I just give up on that?

Is that not important? And so the peace of the church is disturbed. See, that's why Paul will not let the church in Thessalonica, or us, settle for appeasement.

That's why he doesn't end the letter at verse 5 of chapter 3, but presses on. He desires the peace of the church and the progress of the gospel. And so he will not settle for appeasement.

But demands, commands, and prays for peace. So how can the peace come about? Well, let's look briefly at the surprising solution there. I say a surprising solution because often people think that the truth, someone trying to persuade others that their position is true, is actually bound to lead to discord.

[15:00] Bound to lead to problems. So the surprising solution is that actually, no, that's not the truth. That's not right. It's holding to the truth. Living out the truth. Encouraging one another to live the truth that will lead to the peace of the church.

So that's why Paul calls the whole church to action. He has four basic steps, which, rather cornerly, all begin with a W. So watch for the right examples, walk in the truth, warn the offending brother, and wait on the Lord.

Watch, walk, warn, wait. First of all, watch. Verses 6 to 11. Watch for the right examples and avoid the bad examples. Look again at his command.

Now we command you, brothers, this is serious, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, this is with apostolic authority coming straight from Jesus, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition you receive from us.

He's saying keep away from them, so you're not influenced by them. Hounslow schools had an outbreak of measles back in January. And so my doctor told me, you need to keep away from the school.

[16:10] I haven't had measles, and with my compromised immune system, if I got it, it would be big trouble. So he told me to keep away, for my own good. So it's quite nice, it's huge not to have to take a kiss to the school, but anyway.

It's the same principle here. Keep away from these people. They're going to have bad influence. As Paul said to Corinthians, bad company ruins good morals.

Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise. Companion of fools suffers harm. Quote Proverbs 13, 20. So keep away from the bad examples, but do imitate the good examples.

Watch out for those good examples. And what is the good example? That's Paul himself, verse 7. For you yourselves know how you ought, literally how it is necessary for you, to imitate us.

Because we were not idle when we were with you. Nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it. But with toil and labour, we worked nights and day.

[17:10] Why? Well, two reasons. Firstly, that we might not be a burden to you. And secondly, it was not because we did not have the right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate.

Here Paul's emphasis on hard work. And he what motivated him to that hard work was love. He didn't want to be a burden to the Thessalonians, and he wanted to give them an example to imitate. The sense of which the Christian life is taught, but also caught.

We need good examples to follow. Why is that important on this particular issue? Well, because work matters to God. God created the universe.

Physical things are good. He made us to work. That's part of what it means he made in his image. We need to work for our living as well. When Adam and Eve had eaten the fruit, they disobeyed

God.

God said to them, it's with toil, said to Adam, it's with toil that you will now eat bread from the ground. And that's the same phrase that's actually used in verse 12.

[18:16] It's translated here to own their own living. Literally, it's to eat their own bread. It's the same language used in Genesis 3. So that's the background here. Work matters to God. Work is, we're made in God's image.

Also work is the means which God has appointed for us to earn our own living. It matters. As we mentioned earlier in the children's talk. The way we work in our workplaces is important. It's part of our worship to the Lord. The way we work will either adorn the Gospel, or it will show the Gospels will be disruptive. May the Gospel look good or disreputable.

One of the two. Paul talking to the slaves, teaching Titus, Titus chapter 2, what to say to slaves, tells them how to behave. To be well-pleasing, not argumentative.

Not pilfering, but showing all good faith, certain everything that may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour. The way we work matters. It matters to God. It's part of our witness.

[19:17] There's a second little implication here for all of us who profess faith in Jesus Christ. Not only is our work important, but actually we are all examples. This is how Paul strives to be a good example.

Every one of us who professes faith in Christ is an example for other people. We're either a good example, like Paul, or a bad example, like the people Paul told them to keep away from.

But we're all examples one way or another. And we all have examples around us. So first step, watch for the right examples. Secondly, they walk in the truth.

Look at verse 11. For we hear some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busy bodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to own their own living.

See how important this is to Paul? Again, commanding in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, if you're ignoring this command, Thessalonians, then you're ignoring Jesus, not just Paul.

[20:22] He said walk in the truth. Walk in the light of what we've taught you, what you've seen in us, what you know to be true. Walk in it. And then he goes on and addresses the same command, the same principle to those who are doing the right thing.

As for you brothers, the ones who aren't idle, do not grow weary in doing good. In other words, keep walking in the truth. Keep living out the gospel. Now it could mean he's just saying, don't be weary doing good to those who actually are in need.

That is possible. But I think it's more broad than that. The words here are almost exactly the same as in Galatians 6, verse 10. Paul quoted those this morning as well. And in there, Paul has been looking at the contrast between living according to the Spirit or living according to the flesh, our own natural sinful desires.

And there he rounds up that whole discussion by saying, so then, Galatians 6, verse 10, as we have our opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

In other words, walking in the truth, walking as those who have the Spirit in our lives, means we'll want to do good to everyone. The Spirit will give us strength and energy not to just get weary doing that.

[21:36] So here's Paul's basic command. Watch for the good examples to follow, and then walk in the truth. Don't get tired in that, but rely on the Spirit's power. Keep going.

So watch, walk, and thirdly, warn. Look at the harsh warning in verses 14 and 15. If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed.

Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. Warn him. Warn the unrepentant. Now, time for the warning had come.

If people were not listening to the command Paul had given, the Lord Jesus command, then they needed to be warned. Warned that they're not actually living as believers, and therefore perhaps they're not actually believers.

That's the point here. Now on the whole, we don't like warning on the people, do we? That sounds very uncomfortable. It's very hard to say, look, say to someone, look, you're not behaving in a

Christian way.

[ 22 : 41 ] You're living in disobedience to the Lord Jesus. You who are sleeping with someone you're not married to. You who are fiddling your expenses and lying on your tax returns. You whose gossip is hurting your relationship with the Lord and others.

Often we don't like to have those conversations, do we? We think, well, somebody else will know them better. Someone else should have that conversation. Or who am I to tell someone else that they're doing things wrong?

I'm not perfect myself. Warning others can be difficult. But it's vital, isn't it? Who of us would want a doctor who, having seen our blood test results, seeing early indications of some cancer markers, just sends us where to like, I don't want to trouble him with that news.

I say, go away, you're all right. We wouldn't be happy, would we? If too late in the day we found out the cancer was actually inoperable. What would happen to that doctor?

He wouldn't be applauded, would he? He'd be struck off the medical register. Yet here, the stakes are so much higher, aren't they? Paul is saying, if these people who are professing faith in Jesus Christ still are not obeying this clear command I'm giving you, then you have to take note of them and keep away from them.

[ 23 : 57 ] You have to treat them as if they're not believers, because their lifestyle is suggesting they are not believers. It would be so much worse, wouldn't it, than just finding you had a cancer that's inoperable, to wake up on Judgment Day and find that the faith you professed was not genuine, when others could have warned you on the way.

So you cannot give false confidence to people who are in terrible danger. That's Paul's point. They're in terrible danger. So they need to be warned. That's why he says, take note of that person, they have nothing to do with them.

It means treat them as if they're outside of the church. And yet notice the qualification straight away. Verse 15, Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. So as this church discipline unfolds, yes there's to be some severity, keep away from them, yet also kindness.

You're warning as a brother, not just vilifying or judging. There's decisiveness, keep away from them, yet there's hope. So he's warning them as a brother in the hope that they will repent and turn back.

And that's always the goal in the New Testament, when we look at church discipline. It's what our Lord Jesus commanded in Matthew chapter 18. So if your brother sins against you, go and point out the fault to him.

[ 25 : 11 ] If he doesn't listen, go with two or three witnesses and point out his fault. If he still doesn't listen, go to the church. But the whole aim of this is to gain your brother, the Lord Jesus says.

But if he refuses to listen, Matthew 18 verse 17, If he refuses to listen, leave him to the church. Let him be, he is a Gentile tax collector. Now let's treat him as an outsider.

Leave him out of the church. Why? So that he will come back. As Paul puts it here, so that he might be ashamed. Ashamed leading to repentance.

That's the process Paul is looking at here. These disruptive, idle people, they've been warned in the first letter. They've been warned a second time here in the second letter, verse 6, chapter 3.

And now if they're still not listening, Paul says, treat them as if they're not part of God's family. And yet don't treat them as enemies. And why is Paul so adamant about this?

[ 26 : 10 ] Well, do you see what's at stake? They're disturbing the peace of the church. They're damaging the witness of the church. And they're potentially deluding themselves about their standing with God.

If they will not heed God's word, they are not really believers. And so they need to be warned. See what would stop us warning people if they're not walking according to the truth?

Fear of embarrassment? Fear of not being appreciated? Fear of not being liked? Fear of not being liked. Fear of not being liked.

Yet if we don't warn people when they're in danger, then you ultimately we are loving. We're just loving ourselves, aren't we? We're loving our own comfort. So we need to pray the Lord will give us the hearts, the value of what he values, the courage to speak his words and his truth to where that is needed.

So we need to watch for the right examples, we need to walk in the truth, we need to warn the unrepentant. We finally need to wait on the Lord. Look at verse 16 again, so 18. Now may the Lord

of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way.

[ 27 : 21 ] The Lord be with you all. See ultimately who is going to bring peace? Who is going to bring back the errant brother or sister? Who is going to maintain the unity of the church?

It's the Lord himself, isn't it? Paul prayed for peace back at the start of this letter. Verse 2 of chapter 1. Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And he ends with peace and grace, verse 18. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. So where does peace come from? It comes from the Lord. So ultimately we wait on him, we pray, we look for him to act and bring peace.

So the church will have peace and so the gospel will progress. It didn't work out like that for Neville Chamberlain, did it? The cost of appeasement was huge.

The war that came was terrible. The cost in the church would be terrible if we just let things go. But if we seek God's peace by watching out for the right examples, by walking in the truth, by warning the unrepentant, and by waiting on the Lord, then the gospel will go ahead and the church will have peace and God will be glorified.

[ 28 : 35 ] Let's pray.