

2nd THESSALONIANS

3:6-18

Introduction

You should stay busy for Jesus until He comes for you. He's coming soon to Rapture His Church home to heaven; you want to tell as many people as you can that God loves them so much He sent Jesus that whosoever would believe in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

You should stay so busy for Jesus that occasionally you need someone to come alongside you and say, "*Brother, Sister – Do not grow weary in doing good.*"

Most of the believers in the Church at Thessalonica were busy for the Lord; and some of them needed to be encouraged to not grow weary.

There was also another, smaller group of believers who were busy - but in the wrong way. You read about them in verse eleven,

2 Thessalonians 3:11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are **busybodies**.

The word translated "busybodies" is from two words meaning *to work* and *around*. The idea is that they were always around work, but never doing any work! There is also a word-play between "working" and "busybodies" in the original text that is hard to preserve in English. *Busybodies instead of busy* is as close as we can get to capturing the thought.

The proper functioning of the Church of Jesus Christ on earth is often compared to that of a human body. Thus we could say that, in the Church at Thessalonica, there were those who were busy in the body, and there were those who were busybodies.

Since the same can be true of any Church, of any "body" of believers, we want to understand how to encourage both types of believers. We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Don't Let

Busybodies In The Body Go Without Warning, and #2 Don't Let Being Busy In The Body Get You Weary.

#1 Don't Let Busybodies In The Body
Go Without Warning
(v11; 6; 10; 12; 14-15)

Most commentators think that the "busybodies" were those who had quit their employment to wait for the Rapture. The group could also include any who simply had a poor work ethic and were looking for the Church to be their source of support. They were worse than freeloaders in that they went about interfering and meddling in the affairs of the other members.

I want to sift through these verses and separate the busybodies from those who were busy in the body. We'll see at least two things about the busybodies: Their *description* and their *discipline*.

Their description is in verses six and eleven. Let's read those verses together:

2 Thessalonians 3:6 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us...

2 Thessalonians 3:11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.

There is one particular word that describes them: They are "disorderly." It's a term borrowed from the military that means *out of rank*. Both times they are said to "walk... disorderly." The Church is being pictured as a well-disciplined army on the march but some are out of step, running into the others, knocking them down, tripping them, and in every way hindering their progress.

In the movies this kind of thing can be funny. In real life it can be deadly for soldiers in the field. In the Christian life it is no less deadly "for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high *places*" (Ephesians 6:12).

As I already mentioned, the particular expression of disorderly conduct among this group was that they refused to "work" to earn

their own living. These verses speak directly to any Church who has such members.

I think we can carefully expand the idea to include other types of disorderly behavior. Any brother or sister who is meddling and interfering with believers in a way that causes them to stumble is a person we want to encourage to get in step.

The second thing we see about the busybodies is their discipline; or, more precisely, how to discipline them. We begin again in verse six with the phrase, "every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us."

The word for "tradition" was defined earlier in the chapter, in verse fifteen, as "the traditions which you were taught, whether by word or our epistle." It's referring to God handing down to mankind His authoritative Word through the inspired teachings and writings of the first century apostles. We have these now as the Bible, the completed Word of God, which contain everything we need for godly living.

The place to begin discussing the discipline of disorderly believers is with God's Word. We are to judge our own behavior and the behavior of others according to the standard of God's Word. We must have a solid Scriptural basis for concluding someone is acting disorderly and needs to be disciplined.

Once we determine from the Bible that a brother or a sister is walking in a disorderly manner, we are to first of all **warn** them. I get that from Paul's first letter to the Church at Thessalonica where he said, "warn them that are unruly..." (5:14).

They were warned when they heard the first letter read. I'm sure the other believers, at least some of them, also took it upon themselves to warn them. The warning did no good; they were continuing to be disorderly.

The next 'step' was to **withhold** from them. Let's read verses ten and twelve together:

2 Thessalonians 3:10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat...

2 Thessalonians 3:12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

Quit feeding them! Once their charitable support is **withheld**, they will be forced to go back to work to support themselves. Realize we are not talking about people with genuine needs, but those who refuse to meet their own needs and burden the rest of the body.

In conjunction, or following soon after, you would **withdraw** from them. You were first told to "withdraw" in verse six; it is defined in verses fourteen and fifteen:

2 Thessalonians 3:14 And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed.

2 Thessalonians 3:15 Yet do not count *him* as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother.

Withdrawal involves "not[ing] him and "not keep[ing] company with him." These are quickly qualified by the reminder in verse fifteen that he is not your enemy, but remains your "brother" and still needs to be "admonished," which means *warned*.

The word for "note" means *to mark out*. It seems to indicate some sort of public statement. It means you tell the other believers it's time to withdraw from the brother or sister by not keeping company with them. This would involve not allowing them the privileges of the Church, such as communion. It would also involve cutting-off social ties with them; you wouldn't invite them over for dinner or have any normal fellowship with them. By these withdrawals you hope the disorderly brother or sister "may be ashamed." If everyone acts as one to show them their conduct is wrong, they will perhaps be led to repentance – which is the ultimate goal in any discipline.

This is not excommunication or shunning. You don't treat this person as if he doesn't exist. You treat them as if their sin is causing a break in your fellowship and you urge them to repent and be restored.

I probably don't need to tell you that Churches struggle with the exact steps to take when disciplining a member. Some would never dare discipline their members, while others have it so structured there is no room for mercy. Even in balanced Churches leaders can't always

agree on who needs to be disciplined and for what. If there is agreement that someone needs to be disciplined, there can be disagreement on how aggressively they need to be approached, or when to tell the Church, or how many in the Church need to be told.

I'm not saying it's impossible and can't be done! We had a situation some years ago that required my standing before the Church and dealing with disorderly conduct. Warnings take place on a one-to-one basis all the time. I just want you to realize how seriously we take these things.

The things I do know about Church discipline: It should be pursued on an individual level as long as possible, then kept as private as possible until the believer repeatedly refuses to repent. If it must go 'public' it is to as small a group as is possible but as large a group as is necessary... But never in front of unbelievers; it is a family matter. Always the goal is repentance and restoration.

What if you're not a busybody but you are busy in the body?

#2 Don't Let Being Busy In The Body Get You Weary (v13; 7-9 & 16-18)

One commentator described the phrase "be not weary" by saying,

"[It] does not mean that they have already succumbed but rather that they **must not yield** to such a reaction. They must be on guard against the temptation to... lose courage, falter, and give up..." (Hiebert).

We need to hear these particular words more often in the Church. It's more common to hear "take a break from your ministry," or, "you're doing too much," or something along those lines. "Burn-out" has crept into the Church as something that lingers like a bogey-man around every ministry. Christians are always pacing themselves so as not to get "burned-out."

Rather than give you my commentary on what I think of all this, let's see what the apostle Paul thought about it. In verses seven, eight, and nine he gave them (and us) the **example** we should follow in staying busy in the body. Let's read those three verses together:

2 Thessalonians 3:7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you;
2 Thessalonians 3:8 nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,
2 Thessalonians 3:9 not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

"You ought to follow us" as your "example." In the arena of working for a living, Paul and the other missionaries were not "disorderly" like the busybodies. They "worked with labor and toil night and day..." They arrived in Thessalonica and immediately, without any difficulty, found gainful employment so that they could meet their own needs. He had the "authority" to receive wages from the Church; he waived his rights to be supported in order to "not be a burden" to them.

They worked night and day to support themselves **so that they could continue in their real work, the ministry of the Church!** In First Thessalonians he said,

1 Thessalonians 2:9 For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God...
1 Thessalonians 2:11 as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father *does* his own children,
1 Thessalonians 2:12 that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

As busy as they were working to support themselves, they were busier with the work of the ministry – preaching the Gospel, exhorting, comforting, charging the Church, both corporately and individually. They were busy in the body; that was the example the believers were to follow and not let themselves get weary in following.

Let me ask you a question: Can you imagine the apostle Paul taking a break from his ministry... Or thinking he was doing too much for God? *You can't!* That is the example.

You are to be busy in the body, serving other believers. You're to serve to the point of exhaustion if necessary; after all, the Lord could return at any moment. You've plenty of time to rest in heaven.

It's good to be busy doing good. It's good for others; but it is also good for you. It keeps you on course in your walk with God; walking in step rather than out of rank. It's good for your family – for your

children especially as you establish a Christian ethic in your example. Your busy-ness in the body shows them the priority of Jesus in your life and in theirs.

Let me put it another way. I've known lots of believers who were busy, then felt burned-out. No one told them "do not grow weary in doing good." Instead their solution for burn-out was to back-off. The trouble with backing-off is that it can easily become *backing-away* and lead to being *backslidden!* Onward, never *backward*, is the Christian life.

Maybe you feel burned-out; or you've been talking to someone who feels burned-out. What you need to hear or say is, "**Do not grow weary in doing good.**" Stay busy in the body. Get even busier! The Lord is coming soon and you'll get plenty of rest in heaven!

Where do you find the strength to labor and toil night and day? There are three resources tucked away in the closing verses that speak of your source of strength: Peace, the Word of God, and grace.

Peace:

2 Thessalonians 3:16 Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord *be* with you all.

In verse sixteen you see that Jesus is the "Lord of peace." That means He is the true source of peace. Whenever you are feeling stressed, thinking about being burned-out, He can give you peace. "Always" means you can have His peace without interruption; "in every way" means in *any* and *every* possible circumstance.

The Word of God:

2 Thessalonians 3:17 The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write.

Paul signed the letter personally to show it was no fraud. God has given you letters like this and all the other inspired Scriptures as a source of strength to not grow weary in doing good.

Grace:

2 Thessalonians 3:18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you all. Amen.

"Grace" reminds you that God is sufficient for you moment-by-moment, day-by-day. You don't get grace in advance; you get it when you need it – and it is always enough.

Conclusion

I'll close with some practical advice. The place to begin being busy in the body is to simply be present when Christian assemble. Not just when you have a responsibility to be there; **just be there!** Keep Sunday morning a priority... Come-out on Wednesday night... Plan to join us the first Sunday night of every month. Over time you will find yourself more-and-more involved, busy in the body.

If you do have responsibilities, take them seriously – more seriously than if they were your employment.

Soon – very soon – you'll be standing before your Lord. He'll look you in the eyes; the words you want to hear are, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter into the joy of your Lord!"