

Paul could have concluded the letter here, but he has one more concern to call to their attention. Not quite an afterthought but concerning an issue of different character than the deceit that the enemy had used to attempt to derail their faith and testimony before their persecutors. There was one or more among them walking in a disorderly manner. At least one of them was not working for his living. This made them vulnerable to the attack of the enemy. It gave him an opening to slip in a wedge of resentment tending to division among them. So far they had handled the situation with typical Christlike mercy and grace. They were supporting the indolent one(s). Love was flourishing—personal love for one another abounded. The natural immunity to disease found in newborn babies seems to have a parallel resistance in newborn believers. As new born saints they had not allowed personal rivalries, envy and strife to arise. Any suffering they experienced was from others without. No attacks or snubs occurred among them. In fact now Paul has to exhort them to lovingly impose a social rebuff on those among them who had ceased working for their living. This was obviously uncomfortable for all. But it was essential to their continued spiritual well being and their safety from the subtle divisive inroads of the enemy. Satan hates to see believers' united testimony to the saving grace of the Lord Jesus. Grace that not only saves them personally but unites them together in one body. Paul addressed this letter to them as the assembly of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Now the disorderly conduct of even just one among them threatened what God had wrought in them. Paul had commanded (2Thessalonians 3:10) about this situation while yet with them prior to his first letter. In it he had reminded them of his supporting himself and the others with him by working with his hands.

1Thessalonians 2:9 For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you.,

Apparently the disorderly had ignored his command. The activity; or rather the **lack of activity**, had persisted. He had even asked them to admonish the unruly (disorderly).

1Thessalonians 5:14 But we exhort you, brethren, admonish the disorderly, . . .

These actions by Paul are an example for us. First, be a consistent, good example. Commend that which is commendable. Discuss scriptural principles and issues together, so that anyone might see inconsistencies in his or her walk. If a disorderly one becomes adamant and willful, he is still to be patiently regarded as a brother (sister). But his behavior should not be condoned, much less reinforced. Having been given teaching and admonishment, disorderly conduct cannot be allowed to persist unchallenged. It becomes a threat to the spiritual well being of the whole assembly. It dishonors the Lord and thereby quenches the Spirit in their midst. It

compromises a forthright, pure testimony of Christ in that locale. And it cripples any gift the person has.

They were to mark that person and cease to mix with him. Isn't it sweetly ironic that the action Paul decrees to protect the unity and testimony of the saints involves shunning one of themselves who continues to be disorderly. A seemingly disunifying action is taken in order to preserve unity. A temporary disruption is needed to faithfully preserve the whole intact. This does not seem to advocate individual action except as part of a unified decision. The greater the unity of purpose in carrying out the shun the sooner a positive change will be achieved.

We are not told the outcome of this incident. We don't know if the Thessalonians obeyed. We don't know if their concerted action was effective in bringing the disorderly one to his senses, ending the disorder, restoring a loving unity in the midst of the persecution they were suffering together. Satan loves to see situations like this arise within an assembly (or between assemblies) so he can move in to divide that what God gave His Son to unify, Acts 20:28. Such a little thing! But beware,

The little foxes spoil the vine. Song 2:15.

Note the limits Paul places upon their action. The brother, though disorderly, is not to be thought of as an enemy. He, as a brother, is being strongly encouraged by his brethren to change his behavior. This is not a new concept. The Law of Moses has it.

Leviticus 19:17 Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart: thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him.

Yet this is an uncomfortable period for all. Those faithful to the Lord and to their disorderly brother will, in love, impose the shun as directed. They are not to mix with this person. This might mean canceling a fishing trip with a best buddy, miss a customary meal out together, or not being able to enjoy a pleasant conversation after meeting. Tough Love! But worth it. It is done for the Lord, the assembly and the brother. But we must avoid a disrespectful or self righteous attitude which can so easily arise in our hearts. He is NOT an enemy!

Yet note the risks involved. What if not all shun him? What if some continue as if nothing is wrong? Perhaps some might want to avoid the embarrassing situations that are bound to occur. Or they may empathize with the him and feel sorry for him. Maybe he's a close relative. Some may even take sides against those shunning, inducing the one being shunned to resist rather than submit. In taking sides with the disorderly one wouldn't they be disorderly too? All this shows how the disorderly conduct of even one person might create a crisis in the assembly. May the Lord give grace.

Question: How is this shunning to be instituted? How will every one be alerted and know to cooperate? Is it brought about by a "buzz" behind the scenes? Who organizes it? Should anyone? Is it to be simply a godly

decision, reached in common by many personally led by the Spirit about the same time? Is it to be instituted by a public rebuke issued by a respected brother at his own behest before the Lord? Or is it to stem from a meeting of the assembly? Or are some elders called to determine what to do and how? How is unity maintained? What are consequences if some abstain? Lots of questions!

Paul coordinated it in this case. He had credentials of a good conscience, having supported himself while first among them. He had admonished them verbally while first with them. This was not a recent development but existing during the short time Paul was with them when they were converted. Perhaps this was a slothful carryover from a man's unsaved days. Paul commanded them to mark out that brother and not to mix with him. Following Paul's example one or more respected brothers could do the same. This passage from 2Thessalonians could be read and then the conduct that is scripturally disorderly described with other scriptural support, as led. A plea for change could be made with prayer for the brother, and for the assembly. There is much room for humbling here and for the leading of the Spirit in each particular situation.

How is this shunning different from putting away one "called a brother" from among themselves as was done in 1Corinthians 5? There sin was being openly practiced by one among the Corinthians. They were to not only shun the person but to put him away from among them, not permitting him to partake of the Lord's Supper. Even then it was with a view to his conversion or restoration as the case may be. Note that in a situation where the sin is not so public he is to be confronted privately by those who first learn of it. See Matthew 18:15-20. One who resisted the pleas of his brethren and of the assembly was ultimately put out from among them as well.

Psalm 93:5 Thy testimonies are very sure: holiness becometh thine house, O LORD, for ever.

The situation in Thessalonica was serious but not so serious that it required putting away. But it did require corrective action on the part of all. Are there some other things that are disorderly, besides declining to work for one's own support? What other conduct might require unified corrective action as directed to the Thessalonians?

The Greek, akatastasia, means instability,

i.e. disorder:— commotion, confusion, tumult.

1Timothy 3:14 These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly: 15 But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how **thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God**, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. {ground: or, stay}

What are some scriptural examples of order and disorder? There was disorder at the Lord's supper in Corinth

1Corinthians 11:34 And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.

Paul, in 1Corinthians 14, devotes much discussion to avoiding disorder and confusion in the assembly touching upon the use of tongues, orderly prophesying, and general

orderliness and peace in the assembly. Read it.

1Corinthians 14:32 And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. 33 For God is not the author of **confusion**, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints. 34 Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.

14:40 Let all things be done decently and in order.

Even after his first epistle there was incipient disorder in the assembly at Corinth. He warns them about it.

2Corinthians 12:20 For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not: **lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults:**

James earlier warns the believers of envy and strife.

James 3:16 For where envying and strife is, there is **confusion** and every evil work.

Those who disregard the instructions the Lord, Paul, and other writers have given us in the scriptures are disorderly, if not openly sinning. Are these examples?

*Busybodies. **Meddling** in the affairs of others.

*Talebearers. Unnecessarily spread **defiling** information.

*One who raises disputes over another's consciences, or seeks to **impose** his conscience upon another,
see Romans 14:1 – 15:7.

*One who seeks to **impose** his conscience on the assembly, or to **control** an assembly decision. See 3John 9.

*One who **preempts** the Holy Spirit's leading in a meeting.

1Thessalonians 5:19 Quench not the Spirit.

*One who **ignores** an assembly decision.

*One who **will not support** his wife and family,

1Timothy 5:8 But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

*One who **will not support** elderly parents,

1Timothy 5:4 But if any widow have children or nephews, let them . . . requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God.

Question: What of one who quits a job and goes out in the Lord's work full time? Should he be supported? Yes, 1Corinthians 9:1-15 and 3John 5-8 clearly show that servants of the Lord may/should receive support from the Lord through the ministry of the saints, though each is answerable solely to the Lord for use of His gift. Of course if one neglects his labor for the Lord, he should not be supported and perhaps be shunned. If support is lacking one should humbly work for his living, as Paul often did.

Question: What of one who is disabled or too old to work? Older men, widows, the disabled or otherwise truly in need are to be personally supported by other saints, or the assembly, if they have no family support, 1Timothy 5.

Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all.

By Ron Canner, Jan. 25, 2006