

A Painful but Necessary Task

by Bryan Gibson

Read carefully the following text from 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15:

(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. (7) For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; (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, (9) not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. (10) For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. (11) For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. (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. (13) But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. (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. (15) Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

To make the teaching in this text as clear as possible, let's break it down into five parts.

1. The Problem

One specific problem is identified in v. 11: "...there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. They should have known better, both from Paul's teaching (v. 10), and from his example (vv. 7-9). There are other ways to walk disorderly, of course, which explains the more general warning given in v. 14: "...if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle." A church must take action against those members who refuse to obey the Lord (see 1 Corinthians 5 for further teaching on this subject).

2. The Action to be Taken

"Withdraw from" is the command given in v. 6, an action which is further explained in v. 14: "...note that person and do not keep company with him." Don't make the mistake of supporting those who refuse to do what they know is right—"if any man will not work, neither shall he eat" (v. 10).

3. The Spirit in Which This Action Should Be Taken

"Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother" (v. 15). His soul is precious, so don't cut off all contact with him. Just make sure that your contact with him is for the purpose of urging him to repent.

4. The Purpose of This Action

The purpose is stated very clearly in v. 14: “that he may be ashamed.” It’s that shame that will hopefully lead him to repentance.

5. The Way This Action Could be Avoided

Get back to work and quit depending on others to take care of you—“we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread” (v. 12). But that’s not the only commandment given through Jesus Christ. If every member would obey Him (v. 14), the action described above would never be necessary.