

2 Thessalonians 3 • Instructions for the Church

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Life Bible Ministry

2 Thessalonians chapter 3. All right, follow along as I read through the chapter and then we'll open up in prayer.

“¹ Finally, brothers, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, ² and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith. ³ But the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. ⁴ And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command. ⁵ May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.

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 that you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

¹³ As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. ¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

¹⁶ Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.

¹⁷ I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write. ¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.” (ESV)

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, as we dig into your word here this morning and finish out 1st or 2nd Thessalonians, we just really pray for the ministry of your Holy Spirit among us. We need your spirit, Lord, to be able to understand and take in and apply Your Word. And so we ask you, Father, to do that in us, to make us aware, to open our spiritual eyes, our spiritual ears. Lord, enable us, we pray, to really assimilate the Word and let it nourish our hearts.

You know everybody here, you know everybody who's watching us right now online. You know every heart, you know every need, you know every concern, you know every circumstance, you know every pain, every tear, every joy.

Father, you know best how to apply Your Word to each heart. And I'm so thankful, Lord, that you're the one who does it. And I ask you, Father, to minister your grace and wisdom and peace. And I ask it in the powerful name of Jesus Christ, amen. Amen.

Well, as Paul is wrapping up his second letter here, he adds some closing thoughts to it, to kind of talk to the church about the life of the body of Christ and the instructions that he wants to kind of give them here at the end.

And he begins by saying, “*Finally, brothers, pray for us...*” so he begins by asking them to remember his team in prayer, and he's not asking them to just shoot up a quick prayer here. The Greek word where he talks about pray—it speaks of continuous prayer. It's kind of the way people say today, “Keep us in your prayers.” And that's what it means: Keep on praying. Don't just pray, but keep on praying. And this was a common thing for Paul to ask for in his letters.

We sometimes think of the apostle Paul as being this just incredible bastion of spiritual strength, but he recognized his need for prayer. He recognized his need for the prayers of the saints, for his ministry to be effective, and he often asked for it.

And in verses 1 and 2, if you look there again, you'll notice that he asks them to pray for three things. First, he says that, “...*the word of the Lord may speed ahead...*” and that's the first thing that we notice that he asks for. Speed ahead is kind of an interesting translation. It just simply means that the Word of God would spread rapidly.

You know, we're talking about a time in human history where many places, many places in the world had never heard the gospel before. And so Paul is saying, "I want you to pray that the Word of God gets out and spreads like wildfire." Boy, do we know about wildfires and we know how quickly they can take up acres and land and so forth. Paul says, "I want the word to go out just like that."

But the Greek language speaks of not just spreading, but it means spreading without hindrance. In other words, pray that the Word of God would go forth quickly—spread, but spread without problems, without issues because, you know, it always seems like there's issues doesn't it?

Do you remember how Paul wrote about this sort of thing in his first letter to the Thessalonians when he talked about just hindrances? Let me show you this on the screen. From 1 Thessalonians 2, it says,

1 Thessalonians 2:18 (ESV)

because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us.

So, you know, I think most of the time you and I are probably, largely unaware of the hindrances that often dog our path or the paths of others or the Word of God or whatever that are going on all around us, the spiritual hindrances. And we look at the thing from the outside and all we know is that things aren't happening. Like we can't get this thing off the ground or there's just issues or frustrations and that's all we see. And that's all we talk about.

And all the while, there's probably spiritual things that are going on in the background that we're just not discerning because, you know, we have to recognize that spiritual warfare is a very real dynamic. And the Bible talks a lot about praying through situations and fighting situations, facing them head on, and knowing that we can overcome hindrances, and spiritual resistance through prayer.

This was a very difficult lesson for me to learn as a young man, probably in my late 20s. Sue and I were going through a situation that involved a lot of spiritual warfare, but I was completely unaware of it. All I saw was how I felt. Of course, isn't that usually the way it is? I knew exactly how I felt, and I was slightly aware of how Sue was responding to it, but I was mostly aware of just myself.

And I won't go into the whole long story, but we got into a situation where we found ourselves at a church service where there was a man who we had never

met before. He didn't know us from anyone. And he was ministering to the people in the Word. And after he got done ministering in the Word, he grabbed his wife by the hand and came down onto the floor, off the platform and he said, "Now we're going to begin to minister to some of you and just pray for you."

And so he kind of conferred with his wife for a little bit, and then finally he goes, "All right now," And by the way, the place is packed, probably 400, 450 people. And he goes, "Guy in the back in the blue sweater." And I was like, 'Oh, geez. Yeah, I got a blue sweater.' He says, "Come on up here." And I started to come up, and he goes, "Is that your wife next to you? Yeah. Bring her too." And so he began to pray over us, and I proceeded to get spanked in front of about 450 people for being such a dork head that I too couldn't even recognize and discern the fact that we were in the middle—Sue and I have some very intense and very serious spiritual warfare.

And what this man said to me over this protracted prophetic prayer that he prayed over us was, "You don't have to just sit and let the enemy beat your brains out. You can stand up against this thing. You can pray and there can be victory, but you don't have to just sit idly by and let the enemy waltz into your camp and take what he wants whenever he wants, you know." And it was a real eye-opening time in my life and the Lord opened, kind of opened my eyes to what was beyond just me, that's a tough thing for him to do because that I'm all about me.

And so for him to open my eyes to get me to see how Sue was doing, and how it was affecting our relationship, and we had too little tiny children at the time, and how it was affecting them and so forth, and how it was affecting our Ministry, and it was a revelation. But it was a revelation that was vitally important in my personal life to help me to grow beyond just sitting around and just letting things happen, but rather to be in prayer and to be, you know, the Bible says, "*Resist the devil and he will flee from you.*" (James 4:7)

How often do we do that? How often do we really truly put up resistance? You know, James says, "Resist the devil." And that resistance means push back and you guys, you know that's got to be a kind of a popular term 'push back'. Usually, we refer to it as people who argue. Well, you can argue against the enemy's intentions, and you can push back in prayer, and there can be victory because there's great power in the name of Jesus Christ, and He's given us that power through His name. And yet, so many times, and myself included, we sit around and we just don't take advantage of it. We're like, 'Oh, God, we're going through terrible times. The enemy, you know.' And we just, and we love to cry and moan, 'we're just being attacked.'

And we've been given armor, Paul tells us in Ephesians, part of which is offensive. Much of it is defensive, but some of it is offensive —the sword of the spirit. That sword isn't just for show or to wave around and scare people. It's to use, you know. Jesus used it when he was under attack. So it's a situation that we have to become aware of. And I often wonder how much the Word of God is hindered, or the works of God are hindered in our lives because we're just simply unaware. And we're not discerning what is actually going on. And we haven't prayed, we haven't prayed. You know, have you prayed about it? Well, I kind of wanted to tell you first. Wrong person to talk to.

Secondly, Paul asks them to pray that the word would be honored. And he says, “Pray that the word would *be honored*, just like it was (*as happened*) among you.” And that basically means that people would recognize it as the inspired Word of God with all the authority that goes along with that, you know. God's Word has authority because it comes from a source of authority and when you and I read the Bible and we go, ‘Yeah, that's the Word of God.’ We're honoring the Word.

Now, when you read the Word and you go, yeah, yeah. You know, like people love to say, “Those are just the, that's just the words of some old guys that, you know, that were religious and they're just talking, you know.” Obviously, that's not an, that's not honoring and recognizing the Word of God for what it is. Paul is asking the Thessalonians to pray that other people would respond, well recognize, and then respond to the Word of God as they also did.

And finally in verse 2, Paul asked them to pray that he and his team might be delivered. Notice in verse 2, he says, “*that we might be delivered from* (what he calls) *wicked and evil men.*” Those are two interesting words. The word ‘wicked’ means people who are capable of harming others, and the word ‘evil’ speaks of those who have been thoroughly corrupted. We're not just talking about guys who are just a little nasty. And there's a good chance that when Paul asked for prayer to be delivered from such, that he was even thinking about things that he was going through right at the time. Because we know that Paul was writing this letter from Corinth, and he was involved in some pretty dangerous situations at that time. And so, you know, he's asking for prayer that he might, they might be delivered.

And then Paul says, and I love this, verse 3. Look in your Bible, he says, “*But the Lord is faithful,*” that's beautiful. And the reason he's saying that is because he had just previously said, you know, “*Deliver us from wicked and evil men because not everybody has faith.*” But then he goes on to say, “*But the Lord is*

faithful.” So he's drawing a contrast between the faithlessness of men and the faithfulness of God.

And he says concerning the Lord's faithfulness, *“He will establish you and guard you against the evil one.”* There's another good statement about spiritual warfare because Paul is saying here that in God's faithfulness, *“He will not only establish you, but he will guard you against the evil one.”* And that refers to Satan, make no mistake about it.

And the basis of Paul's confidence when Paul says to the believers, *“Hey, God will, He'll guard you against the evil one.”* The basis for his confidence is that the Lord is faithful. He goes back to that beginning. The Lord is faithful because the Lord is faithful, He will faithfully keep and protect his children from the evil one.

And by the way, this is not the only place in the Bible where this promise is given to us. John also writes in his first epistle about this. Let me... up on the screen. He says, John writes,

John 5:18 (ESV)

We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning, but he who was born of God protects him, and the evil one does not touch him.

“We know that everyone who has been born of God does not keep on sinning (or continue in an unrepentant lifestyle of sin), but he who was born of God (and that speaks of Jesus) protects him (and then look at that) and the evil one does not touch him.”

Wow. And the evil one does not touch him. What do you think of that? It's an interesting verse, isn't it? I mean, in particular in light of the fact that you listen to some Christians talk, and even the way they pray, and you would get the impression that these are empty promises.

And I'm not saying the enemy doesn't attack, because I just gave a testimony of a time in my life when the enemy did attack. But the Lord was faithful to make me aware through a wonderful gentleman that I had never met before, but who prayed for me and Sue and who made us aware of that spiritual attack and said, *“Hey, God has given you everything you need to resist the work of the enemy. Now get busy.”*

So, the attack, even the attacks of the enemy that the Lord allows in our lives are for our good. And don't think that the enemy has total freedom to waltz into

your life and do whatever he wants to do anytime he wants to do it. We have ample evidence in the Bible to show that he needs permission to do that in the life of a believer.

We have it in the Old Testament, in the book of Job, and we have it in the New Testament when we come to Peter. Jesus said to Peter at the Last Supper, *“Peter, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat.”* (Luke 22:31) Well, we don't have any problem believing that Satan wanted to sift him as wheat. He probably wants to do that to all of us. The point is he had to ask. He had to ask permission and Jesus went on to say, *“But I've prayed for you so that when you return, you'll strengthen your brothers.”* (Luke 22:32) And that's a very nice way of saying, “I gave him permission to go ahead and do that.”

So, because we are so many times ignorant of spiritual warfare, we're ignorant about the promises of God, and we get almost superstitious about the enemy, and start thinking that God and Satan have, like, equal power, and you never really know who's going to win the game for sure. We create a situation where there's just this ease of the enemy, you know, doing what he wants to do. But, you know, Satan does not have that total freedom to interfere with the life of believers, but you do have the power to interfere with his agenda.

And that's the thing that I had to learn, you know, as a young man, I had to learn that God had given me the ability through the name of Jesus to discern, recognize spiritual attack, and to confront it, and that's not to mean that it's going to be easy that you and I are going to be able to say, “All right, let's do a quick prayer. We got to send the enemy to flight.” No, there might be a real need for persistent, ongoing prayer, faithful prayer. But I believe, I believe that you and I just don't have to sit back and just watch the enemy decimate families and situations and so forth.

Look with me in verse 4 in your Bible. Paul says, *“And we have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will do the things that we command.”* When he talks about command here, he has in mind the things that they've been teaching the church about Christian living their lives in Christ. And then he adds a prayer for them and saying, *“⁵ May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ.”* Now steadfastness, actually if you have a different Bible translation on your lap, your Bible may say, *“...the patience of Christ...”* and that's a good word, but it doesn't even go far enough there. The idea is patient endurance, to endure patiently.

So Paul says, “May the Lord direct your hearts to walk in, to live in the love of God, and also to walk in the patient endurance of our Lord, Jesus Christ.” What

a beautiful prayer, because these are so needed yet today, aren't they? We need love. We need God's love.

Lord, I need your love for people because people can really bum us out. Do you know how many people no longer go to church because of other people? They went to church once, and somebody messed them over. Somebody, you know, got in their way. Somebody stepped on their toes, hurt their feelings, offended them by something they said, some random comment, careless, dumb, whatever.

Did you know people can be careless and dumb? Did you know they can make random dumb statements that'll hurt feelings and you need to just kind of expect it. When you go to church, people are going to say something. They're going to say something, okay? Somebody's going to say something that's going to upset you. Expect it. I'm not telling you just kind of, you know, doing that number where you're always looking over your shoulder, waiting for somebody to smack you or something. But just understand that those people that you go to church with are just like you, and they're fallible.

And you were never told in the Word of God to put your eyes on other people. You were told to put them on Jesus Christ and to walk in the love of God toward people. It's like, well, I don't have very much love. Exactly. We're to walk in the love of God toward people, not your love.

Notice Paul doesn't say that, "I'm just really praying you guys are going to walk in your love for one another." Are you kidding? We'd kill each other. No. Walk in the love of God and walk in the patient endurance that is in Christ. In other words, that is exemplified and available to us through Jesus.

Patient endurance, when we hear the word "patient," we kind of think about waiting patiently. Like for our food to come when we're at a restaurant or for something to start that we're looking forward to. But that's really not what it's talking about here, the ability, or the term to "patiently endure," it means to endure to the end patiently through difficulties. It's not a passive sort of a thing. It's an active thing. You are actively, patiently enduring through life because life is an endurance run, isn't it? Have you noticed that? Everybody who's either lost their hair or has it, it's turned white. Most everybody is yeah. It's hard. It's hard. Life is hard, and we have to patiently endure, and we're called to do that.

Now, as we get into verse 6 and following, we're going to read about some matters related to church discipline, which I know is one of your favorite topics. So, let's get into this. Paul says, verse 6, "*Now we command you, brothers, in*

the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother...

Now stop there, because the word 'brother' means believer, that's the way Paul uses that term. So, he's talking about responding to a fellow Christian. You with me? So let's read it again: *“Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any fellow Christian who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.”* All right, let's stop there, just for let's look at what Paul is saying.

First of all, he begins by saying, “I command you now,” that's a very very strong way to come out and talk to people to say, “We command you.” I mean, I don't even remember saying that to my children. I mean, I was doing it, but I don't ever remember saying, “I command you, do not ride your bicycle past our block,” or something like that. It's a strong way to speak. And what Paul is saying in this is, “This is not some casual suggestion that I'm offering up here. I'm not saying, hey, you know, if you guys, if you get around to it you know, if you kind of notice some guys that are kind of playing fast and loose with being idle, you might want to...” No! This is very strong, it's very authoritative, ‘I command you.’

But he doesn't stop there, he actually says, “We command you, brothers, in the name of the Lord Jesus.” That even goes beyond, ‘I command you’, doesn't it? Now he says, “I command you in the authority of Jesus Christ,” which is what that means. When anybody ever says in the name of Jesus, it means in the authority of. So, what is the command? It's concerning people who walk in idleness.

Now, if you have a different Bible on your lap, you might have a different word there, instead of idleness, the ESV uses idle. It literally in the Greek means disorderly or undisciplined, but it came to refer specifically to people who refused to work, and that's why the ESV translators use the words 'idleness' there. And by the way, the Greek language speaks of a continuous action. Paul isn't saying, “For anybody who is occasionally idle.” He's talking about someone who is constantly, it's a regular pattern of their lives to be idle and not to work.

And we, you know, we dealt with some of this in our first letter to the Thessalonians, but concerning such a person, Paul said to the believers there, *“I want you to keep away.”* And if you have a New King James Bible your Bible says, *“withdraw”* instead of keep away. And that's what he was telling the believers to do, to withdraw from such a person in the form of fellowship.

And we'll talk here in a little bit about why. Because he's going to make another reference to it, but it's difficult for us to read these kinds of passages. I'll just address the elephant in the room. And I'm sure there's probably someone thinking, 'Wow, that sounds pretty drastic. Just because somebody in the body is not working.' And not that, they're just not working, but they refuse to work. They're unwilling to work. He said, "You know, to pull away from them and wow, you know, that seems kind of..." But once again, this was a problem. And it was a problem that Paul had previously already addressed with the church in Thessalonica.

Do you remember? He's not just coming out of the chute and saying, "Hey, if you notice anybody who isn't willing to work, I want you to pull away from them." Do you remember what he said in the last letter? Up on the screen from 1 Thessalonians,

1 Thessalonians 5:14 (ESV)

...we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle...

And the word "admonish" we learned last time means to warn. So, he's already been giving a warning, you see. This isn't just this immediate worst-case kind of response to somebody who's walking in disobedience. You don't do that. You're talking about somebody who has been warned and warned repeatedly, you need to change. This is not the way the Lord would have you to live your life. You know, you're responding to just the benevolence of the body of Christ in such a way that you're taking advantage. And that's not the way the Lord would have you to do that.

So now when he comes to the second letter, he's following up on these people who have refused to respond to his first letter, who were warned and warned and didn't respond. Now he says, "It's time to take stronger measures, related to this particular act of disobedience, and now it's time to withdraw." And again, we'll talk about why here in just a bit.

But first, Paul is going to remind them of the example that he and his team showed when they were there in Thessalonica for that short period of time. Verse 7 and following, he says, "*For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you.*"

So Paul reminds them here that while they lived and were working among the Thessalonians, that they worked hard to pay for their own needs, and they did it as an example. But you'll notice that he reminds them in verse 9, he says, "*It was not because we do not have the right* (to gain support from the people in the churches, he said), *but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate.*" In other words, Paul is saying, "As ministers of the gospel, we have the right to have support from the body of Christ." Ministers of the gospel have that right, but Paul chose to suspend that right while he was planting a church in order to give the people an example. But you know, he also expected those people to grow up.

And later on, we know that the Philippians, for example, were very generous in their support of Paul in the ongoing support of his ministry, and they would send him support. And Paul was delighted by it because it showed their maturity. And so Paul, because of the Philippians, would be able to go to another city, and he'd be able to devote himself completely to the gospel because support from the Philippian church had made its way to where he was. And that was a great blessing, and he even made reference to it in some of his letters.

But, when he was there, among those early believers, bringing the gospel into their lives, he felt the need to exemplify the gospel by working hard. And we know that he was a tentmaker by trade, and he would work. He would work, and pay for all of his needs. He would not allow those young churches to support him, because he wanted to give them an example. Plus, he also wanted to make sure they didn't come to the conclusion that he was somehow in the ministry for people to take care of him, and just to give him money, and that sort of thing.

So he goes on in verse 10 and he says. "*For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.*" Well, there's another strong statement. But I want you, and we brought this out when we were going through 1 Thessalonians, because it tied in.

But I want you to notice, he doesn't say that, 'I want you to take note of somebody who can't work.' He says, "I want you to take note of somebody who is unwilling to work." And that's the key right there. Paul says in verse 11, "*For we hear that some among you walk in idleness (they're), not busy at work, but they're busybodies.*" And that's the problem. You see, when we're idle, you know, we weren't really created to be idle.

We love to use that term when it refers to, like retirement, you know, we have to work that word into places for people to live. We work it into RV names. We work it into, you know, campgrounds where people are just supposed to just come and sit around and do nothing. But fundamentally we weren't created to do that. We weren't created to be idle. We were created to be busy. It's the way God made us. In fact, specifically for men, men are actually occupational by nature. Now that doesn't mean women can't function in an occupation. They can and do very well. They tend to be a little more relational. But men are over the top occupational.

And what that means is, when you have a man who's able bodied, and he can't find work, you have a miserable man. Men need to work. And when you take that need away from them, and you start giving them hands outs, well, we all know what the problem is, we all know we've watched it happen in our country. And it's very very sad because Paul says here, “instead of being busy now, you've become busy bodies.” In other words, you should have been doing something positive but as it is now, they've just started doing things that are negative, because they've got all kinds of free time on their hands.

And what happens when we have free time on our hands? You know, we long for that, don't we? Isn't that funny? You know, we come to our day off or something like that. And Sue and I, sometimes I'll say to Sue, “I just want to just do nothing today,” and I get to the end of that day of doing nothing, and I feel horrible. I wish I'd have done something.

I don't know, I'm not talking about doing my regular kind of work, but I'm talking about doing something productive. Oh, it feels so good to get done with a day off, and having just... I mean, I was out working on stuff or getting things fixed or whatever it needs to happen, but I get done with a day off like that and I'm just like, yes, that was a day off! But I was busy. So, you know, we just don't do very well when we're not busy.

Why does God want us to be busy? Let me show you a passage from John chapter 5. This might help a little bit. It says,

John 5:15-17 (ESV)

The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answers them, “My Father is working now, and I am working.

Do you like that? I do. I'm working. God the Father is working, and I am working. And I know you guys don't get it because it's the Sabbath. But work is good for us. I believe work helps us physically, spiritually, and emotionally. I really do.

Verse 13: “*As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.*” And this is kind of a contrasting statement. He's talking about, you know, he's been talking about those people who've been taking advantage of the good nature of others, leeching off the majority. Paul encourages, though, the rest of the people not to grow weary of doing the right thing. Because you can get weary. You know, work can make you weary. Gee, I think I'd rather rest. No, don't get weary of doing the right thing. Because doing the right thing is always the harder path. Have you ever learned that? If you haven't learned it, you need to learn it. Doing the right thing is the harder choice. Always. And going with the flow of the world is always the easy thing to do.

So Paul says, “Don't grow weary of what you know you ought to be doing.” Very, very important thing to remind, you know, as Jesus said, “In the last days because of the lawlessness that exists in the last days (he said), the love of many will grow cold.” (Matthew 24:12) Have you ever thought about that? Because of lawlessness, the love of many will grow cold. And that means, they become weary, and it just seems so much easier to go the way of the world which is lawlessness—contrary to the Word of God.

Now, verse 14, we return to church discipline briefly. Paul says, “*If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and (again, he repeats) have nothing to do with them...*” —which is again, to withdraw from fellowship. But then he explains why, and we've been waiting for this: “*...that he may be ashamed.*” And that's the purpose there, not just shame, but the purpose behind it: withdrawing a fellowship was to get the person to recognize their sin and that their sin is the thing that separates.

And why does he say withdraw? Because people sin separates. It separates us from God, and it separates people from people, doesn't it? It separates husbands and wives. It doesn't mean that it automatically creates a divorce in your marriage. But when I do something against Sue, it creates a separation. I have to go to her then and say, “I shouldn't have done that or said that or whatever it was. Would you forgive me?” And I have to allow that separation to be healed.

Sin always separates. And when we pretend like it doesn't, we do the person who is involved in the sin a great disservice, when we just kind of go on and say, “Oh, well, whatever it's okay.” It's not okay! If it was okay, God wouldn't

call it a sin. So it's not okay. Sin is not okay. So Paul says. "If anybody doesn't take note of what we're saying in this letter and they choose to disobey, you need to withdraw from this person." But the whole purpose is that they would then repent, that they would feel bad about their decisions and say, "I was wrong about the way I was responding."

So the ultimate goal in church discipline is always restorations, always restoration. Did you hear me? The ultimate goal of church discipline is always restoration, very important that I say that, very important that you hear it. That's why Paul says in verse 15, "*Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.*" And that withdrawing from that brother is an act of warning them. Something's wrong, something's wrong, there's been a barrier that's been created by your actions.

Now I know that as we talk about this, there is a great challenge today in applying biblical concepts of church discipline. It's just that the challenges are very significant in our modern world. Let me just say that, and some of them are because of our own doing. For starters, you know, we've all been influenced by the doctrine of tolerance, whether we talk about it and put it down as an overreach of understanding, we've been influenced by it. We have been influenced by it. And our culture tells us that to basically tell someone that they need to change their behavior is morally wrong. Morally wrong, you with me? That's the doctrine of tolerance. If you say anything to anybody about their behavior being wrong, you are treating them in an immoral way. You're wronging that person by telling them they're wrong, which is, you know, it's crazy because they're telling people that do that, that they're wrong.

But the result is that when we read instructions like this in the Bible from the Apostle Paul, we're instantly made to feel uncomfortable. We read this and he goes, "withdraw." And we kind of go, "ugh, yuck, yeah, withdraw. I don't like to pull away from somebody in fellowship, pull away, wow, it's like, doesn't sound very merciful to me, you know." Then we got all the people that have the gift of compassion, and they have a real struggle with this.

But you have to understand that he's referring to people who have been confronted in love repeatedly. Because you never just go to the final step of church discipline. Have you ever, I mean, I got to be careful how I say this, but, you know, as a parent, I had to be very careful when I was raising my kids and I wasn't always very careful, but I wanted to be careful that I didn't ask something from my kids that they didn't understand I was asking from them beforehand, you know what I mean? Or that I didn't punish them for some act of wrongdoing that they didn't understand was wrong. And I caught myself as a

dad doing that on a couple of occasions, and I felt awful about it. I didn't take the time to really invest in the instruction, and then to give warnings, ample warnings when there were violations to those instructions. That's how good parenting ought to function. We instruct, we educate, we warn when there are violations, and then when there are repeated and rebellious violations, then you bring out the bigger gun, and you bring on some kind of discipline into the situation. I didn't always do that as a dad. I regret that. Thankfully my kids all still like me, so they've been very forgiving.

But in church, discipline matters. It's the same thing. These are people who have repeatedly been warned over a protracted period of time. And they still choose to persist in their disobedience. So, we have to understand that. But the second thing that really makes church discipline very difficult in our world today is that, if we were to withdraw from someone as a fellowship, there's really nothing stopping them from just walking down the street and popping into another church where nobody knows about what has happened in their lives and carrying on as if there were no act of disobedience in the first place.

And believe me, it happens. It happens in the rare times over the years that we have had to bring some level of correction. And often it doesn't even ever get to church discipline. I'll just tell you right there. We don't even get around to church discipline. We get in, we're in the warning stage, and they'll leave. They just leave. So rather than even to listen to the warning, they just, they'll go down the street and pretty soon we find out they're fellowshiping at a different church, and nothing has changed in their lives except they've just ignored the warning that they were given about whatever was happening that was contrary to the Word of God.

And the reason this happens, guys, is largely our fault. We've allowed the body of Christ to become fractured into different groups, denominational groups, and all the things that go along with that. And we've created a situation where church discipline has become largely ineffective and it's our fault, but you know, it's just the way the thing is.

But I think one of the biggest reasons that we read passages in the Bible about church discipline and we become uncomfortable is because we've seen it handled badly too many times. We've seen situations played out in the church that were just unfortunate. Where people were humiliated, treated like lepers, when they should have been loved like family, and disciplined in a loving and gracious way.

I will tell you church discipline can and does take place today. It's kind of a different situation. It takes place in the hearts of people who are soft. The people who are hardened like I said, you bring some kind of word of correction or word of warning and boom, they're gone. But the people whose hearts really want to change really want to know Jesus, walk with Jesus, and they want to please Jesus in their lives, they respond the way you would hope everyone would respond when being corrected, or even when your children are being corrected. They respond by saying, "You're right. You're right, I was wrong. That was inappropriate, or that was unbiblical. And I need to apologize and I need to get back on track." That does happen. I'm very pleased to say that does happen. But again, it happens to people whose hearts are kind of soft. So, you know, church discipline just has to be done prayerfully with a lot of wisdom.

Paul closes this letter, verse 16, by saying, "*Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way.*" Paul prays for peace, the peace of God. In this letter he says, "*The Lord be with you all.*" And then Paul puts his little stamp at the end of the letter. He says, "¹⁷ *I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write.*" And the reason Paul did that is, you know, apparently there were already letters circulating among the churches purported to be from the Apostle Paul when in fact, they were not.

And so, Paul had to put his little security stamp on his letters, which was the way he wrote. And it almost kind of sounds like he's apologizing for his handwriting, doesn't it? When he says, "You know, this is the way I write. Sorry, but this is the way I write." And we know that Paul had issues with his eyes, and I believe that he had a hard time writing because of these issues with his eyes. In fact, in one of his other epistles, he even says, "*See what large letters I use when I write with my own hand.*" (Galatians 6:11) And I think Paul was just, he struggled to see because of those issues with his eyes and so forth. And so Paul ends this letter saying, "¹⁸ *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.*" And we've talked so many times about how important grace is in our Christian life.