



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond

V25 N31

July 30, 2023

LIVING HOPE

“Dealing with Sinners in the Church”

2 Thessalonians 3:14-15

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

The Church

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish his purposes on earth today.

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.”

Ephesians 4:15-16



How are disobedient believers corrected?

We often think of “church” in *local* terms—each local congregation being a *church*, and all the congregations in a particular area being *churches*. Paul frequently uses the term in these two ways in the openings of his letters. For example, in 1 Thessalonians, he writes: “Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you” (1:1; cf., 2Th 1:1), and in 1 Thessalonians, he also writes: “For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of God’s churches in Judea, which are in Christ Jesus: You suffered from your own people the same things those churches suffered from the Jews” (1:14; cf., 2Th 1:4). But we ought also to think of “church” in *universal* terms—all believers of this age being the church, the body of Christ. In Ephesians, Paul writes: “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way” (1:22-23; cf., 4:4-6; Col 1:18).

Another prominent metaphor used in the New Testament to refer to the church is *family*. The church is a “body” (Col 1:24; 1Co 12:12-27; Eph 4:4-5, 11-16); it is also a “family.” Paul refers to “the family of believers” in Galatians 6:10. And in 1 Thessalonians 4:10 he refers to Thessalonian believers as part of “God’s family throughout Macedonia.” Peter also uses the same metaphor to refer Christians, calling them “the family of believers” (1Pe 2:17; 5:9). In the same way one might say that each individual church is a body within the larger body of Christ, one might also say that each individual church is a family within the larger family of God. And just as *discipline* is essential to any healthy family, it is also essential to any healthy church.

Allusions to the discipline of “those who are idle and disruptive” are found in Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians. In one place he writes: “And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive” (1Th 5:14), and a few weeks later in 2 Thessalonians, he writes: “Keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us”

(3:6), namely, “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat” (v. 10). And then regarding a persistent situation in the church, involving some who are reportedly “idle and disruptive,” and “are not busy” but are “busybodies” (v. 11), he writes: “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” (vv. 14-15).

Of course, not all corrective discipline is the same. Some is *personal* and *private*; some is *communal* and *public*. An example of the second type is found in 1 Corinthians 5. Apparently, a man in the church was “sleeping with his father’s wife” (v. 1), perhaps his stepmother. One commentator writes: “The problem for Paul is twofold: that a believer is living in an incestuous relationship that even pagans disallowed is bad enough; but far worse is the church’s relaxed attitude toward it—they were arrogant” (Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, NICNT, 196). Drastic times call for drastic measures! So in this case disassociating from the one who claims to be a brother but is sexually immoral (v. 11) requires that the guilty party be *excommunicated* from the congregation. Paul commands the church to “Expel the wicked person from among you” (v. 12).

Perhaps an example of the first type is found in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 and 2 Thessalonians 3: 6, 14-15. For some reason, perhaps an eschatological misunderstanding, there is an “idle and disruptive” element in the church, who are unwilling to work in order to eat and anxious to exploit the generosity of others. Paul disrupts their codependency by commanding the generous ones, “Do not associate with them” (v. 14; cf. 1Co 5:11), the lazy ones. While many commentators see here an example of *communal* and *public* church discipline, to the contrary, one writes: “This seems to be what each faithful brother should do *individually*; no mention is made of public identification and discipline in the church (2 Thes. 3:14-15)” (Thomas L. Constable, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 724, italics added), which is more likely.



EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15

14 *Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instruction in this letter. Do not associate with them, in order that they may feel ashamed.* 15 *Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer.*

Read in other translations

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.* (ESV)

14-15 *If anyone refuses to obey our clear command written in this letter, don't let him get by with it. Point out such a person and refuse to subsidize his freeloading. Maybe then he'll think twice. But don't treat him as an enemy. Sit him down and talk about the problem as someone who cares.* (MSG)

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Underline "Take special note" in v. 14.
- Bracket "of anyone who does not obey" in v. 14.
- Circle "instruction" in v. 14.
- Circle "associate" in v. 14.
- Box "in order that" indicating *purpose* in v. 14.
- Circle "ashamed" in v. 14.
- Box "Yet" indicating *mild contrast* in v. 15.
- Box "but" indicating *contrast* in v. 15.
- Circle "enemy" in v. 15.
- Circle "warn" in v. 15.
- Box "as" indicating *comparison* in v. 15.

What one word would you use to describe the **TONE** of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the **THEME** of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. “Take special note” — informal *personal* note or formal *public* note? Which fits the context better and *what* makes you think so?
2. “Anyone who does not obey our instruction.” *Who* exactly is Paul referring to (cf. v. 6; cf. 1Th 5:14)?
3. Exactly *what* instruction is he referring to (cf. vv. 11-12)?
4. Is the problem to which Paul is referring a *contemporary* problem too? Explain.
5. “Do not associate with them” (v. 14). Again, is this what those who are *not* “idle and disruptive” to do *individually* or what the church is to do *corporately*?
6. The word translated “associate” means “to mix up together with.” What kind of *association* might this involve?
7. Identify the *immediate* purpose behind Paul’s command.
8. But his *immediate* purpose is not Paul’s *ultimate* purpose. Identify his *ultimate* purpose.
9. Explain the *contrast* in verse 15.
10. **Discussion:** Talk about how Paul’s commands can be applied in a large contemporary church setting.

Commentary On The Text

The instructions in 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15 are closely linked to the preceding verses, “having in view everything discussed since 3:6” (Michael W. Holmes, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 275). The two verses contain four commands, two negative and two positive, that describe how the congregation is to respond to those who are “idle and disruptive . . . busybodies,” more specifically to those who refuse to obey Paul’s command “to settle down and earn the food they eat” (v. 12). The four imperative verbs are “note,” “associate,” “regard,” and “warn.”

The issue is an important one for the church. One commentator writes: “Membership in a Christian church in a pagan city imposed serious obligations. Christians were an unpopular minority and those who disliked them or wished to counter their influence lost no opportunity to spread unfavorable rumors about their conduct. It was most important that Christians should live in such a way as to provide practical refutation of such rumors. This was one reason for the emphatic ethical injunctions so characteristic of the NT letters, including 2 Thessalonians. The ethical injunctions of this letter are aimed mainly at those members of the church who were giving it a bad name by living as idlers and busybodies. Such a person while not guilty of the kind of conduct which called for outright and formal excommunication, must nevertheless be treated in a way that might bring him to his senses and teach him to live as a responsible member of the believing community” (F. F. Bruce, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 45, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 211).

The four commands are not given to “the idle and disruptive . . . busybodies” and not to congregational leaders per se, but to all others in the congregation. First, the others are to “take note” of those who refuse to follow the example set by Paul when he first visited Thessalonica. He writes: “We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you” (vv. 7-8). Paul, Silas, and Timothy were not hypocrites; they followed their own oral instructions that Paul alludes to in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12. “You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you . . . so that you will not be dependent on anybody.” “Take note” more likely refers to a *personal* and *private* taking note rather than a *communal* and

public taking note. One commentator writes: “This seems to be what each faithful brother should do *individually*; no mention is made of public identification and discipline in the church (2 Thes. 3:14-15)” (Thomas L. Constable, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 724, italics added).

Second, the others are not to “associate with them,” i.e., “the idle and disruptive . . . busybodies.” The verb used literally means “to mix, mingle,” suggesting that others in the congregation are not to have close personal social contact with them. It apparently does not forbid all personal contact, since the last two commands (v. 15) presume some ongoing interaction. Herein lies the problem for interpreters. “The precise extent to which contact is to be broken off is unclear” (Michael W. Holmes, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 275). Some commentators speculate the disassociation is *communal* and *public*, extending to participation in the church’s worship gatherings, the Lord’s Supper, and the communal meal associated with it (cf. 1Co 11:20-22). One commentator even says: “Non-association must have also excluded hosting a private meal for such a person” (Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *1-2 Thessalonians*, BECNT, 624). Others speculate it is more *personal* and *private*, extending only to the severing of close personal ties. Personal relationships should not continue uninterrupted as if nothing were wrong (cf. Constable, 724). What that disassociation might look like would likely vary from person to person. Paul’s purpose is twofold, “so that they may feel ashamed” (stated) and so that they might repent and be restored (implied).

The third and fourth commands given to the others are found in a contrasting pair (v. 15). The others are not to “regard them as an enemy,” that is, one outside the family of God, but to “warn them as you would a fellow brother.” To do otherwise would frustrate the purpose behind the discipline. “They were not to think of the offender as personally antagonistic toward them, nor were they to feel hostile toward him. His objective relationship to them as a brother in Christ should govern their feeling and actions, rather than subjective feelings that might be aroused by his idleness. They were to warn (*noutheteite*) him, not denounce him” (Constable, 724). Given Paul’s ambiguity and the personal and private nature of the discipline, following his instructions in a house church is one thing, in a large church is another. It seems that they might best be carried out in biblical community in larger congregations.

Word Studies/Notes

v. 14 **take special note** Cf. Ro 16:17. The word can have either a *positive* or a *negative* connotation; here and in Romans 16:17, it has a *negative* connotation. "In what way the congregation is to 'note' or mark the individual is not stated. Lenski observes that the verb 'does not imply that the congregation had a blackboard on which it wrote the names of its black sheep.' It may simply mean that they are to note his disapproval in their own minds, but more probably some form of *public censure is implied*. Whatever the form of action to impose discipline, for effectiveness it would need to be the united act of the congregation" (D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 379, italics added). Contra, "This seems to be what each faithful brother should do *individually*; no mention is made of public identification and discipline in the church (2 Thes. 3:14-15)" (Thomas L. Constable, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 724, italics added).

v. 14 **of anyone who . . .** The ESV translates the conditional clause literally, "If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, [then] take note of that person . . ." "The second and most important imperative in the closing commands is given in the form of a first-class conditional (if *x* then *y*) clause. The pairing of the particle *ei* with the indicative typically assumes the truth of the protasis, or 'if' statement (BDF §372.1), suggesting that Paul does, in fact, expect one or more among the rebellious idlers to 'not obey our command in this letter'" (Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *1-2 Thessalonians*, BECNT, 624). "The conditional clause at the beginning of v. 14, 'If anyone does not obey . . .,' is structured in a way that assumes there were indeed some who were not obeying the teaching of the letter" (D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, NAC, 285).

v. 14 **instruction** Lit., "word;" cf. NKJV. "The 'instruction [*logō*] in this letter' is a sufficiently ambiguous phrase to cover a multitude of apostolic commands." However, "The only ethical issue addressed in the letter that might require such extreme action is that of the behavior of the *ataktōi* [i.e., the idle and disruptive]. As a result it is most likely the word delivered in v. 12, 'Such persons [as the *ataktōi*] we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living' (NRSV), which the church was directed to enforce" (Martin, 285). "Most rightly view 'our word' to be looking back to the immediately preceding material of verses 6-13, especially the command given directly to the rebellious idlers in verse 12 that 'they eat their own bread by working with quietness'" (Weima, 624-25).

v. 14 **do not associate** Cf. 1Co 5:9, 11. "The negative infinitive is quite literally, 'not to be mixing yourselves up with him' (Rotherham). The simple verb,

meaning 'to mix, mingle,' is prefixed with two prepositions that add the thought of accompaniment (*sun*) and interchange (*ana*). The expressive compound thus has the meaning of *intimate association with an individual as a close and acceptable friend*" (Hiebert, 379, italics added). "This nonassociation does not involve cutting off all forms of contact with the person (excommunication), since the corrective commands in the following verse presuppose some degree of ongoing interaction" (Weima, 625). "The precise extent to which contact is to be broken off is not clear" (Michael W. Holmes, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 275).

v. 14 **ashamed** "In a society oriented primarily toward the group rather than the individual and in which honor and shame were fundamental motivations for human action, the prescribed social separation that provoked shame would have been a powerful discipline. Honor in Mediterranean societies came from the group to which one belonged, and the loss of honor resulted in shame. To be dishonored by the community was a strong moral condemnation. The censure of the body to which one belonged would have been one of the most effective ways to assure conformity to the standards of the group" (Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC, 355).

v. 15 **enemy** Or "do not *ever* consider him as an enemy" (Weima, 627). "In carrying out Paul's instructions, the Thessalonians are not to treat an offender as an 'enemy' (i.e., an 'outsider'—a course of action that 'would more than likely result in their complete alienation from the community'). Instead, they are to 'warn [*noutheteo*, as in 1 Thess. 5:14] him as a brother,' that is, treat him as an 'insider,' still a member of the congregation" (Holmes, 276). "The person continues to be a member of the community of faith, or a *brother*. This designation, which appears repeatedly in these letters (see 1 Thess. 1.4 and comments), marks him out as one who is part of the Christian family" (Green, 356).

v. 15 **warn** The verb *noutheteo* can have either a *positive* connotation, i.e., "instruct," or a *negative* connotation, i.e., "admonish" or "warn." "This is clearly the meaning of the term in Paul's exhortation in the previous letter to 'admonish the rebellious idlers' (1 Thess. 5:14) and also in the preceding description of the role that congregational leaders play in 'admonishing' fellow believers (5:12)" (Weima, 628). "While refusing intimate association with him as though there were nothing amiss, they must not simply neglect him but patiently admonish him, putting him in mind of his duty by calling attention to his failing" (Hiebert, 380).



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Church members should not continue to closely associate with flagrantly disobedient congregants, so that the disobedient might repent and be restored to fellowship.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?
2. What does this passage teach me about myself?
3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

There's an expression we say in my mom group that serves as a gentle reminder, "Good, smart kids do bad, dumb things." Your kids, their kids, all kids. It's easy to point the finger at another child's behavior or mistake and tell your precious little one to stay away, especially as they launch into those tender tween years when kids lose their ever-loving mind. But let's tap the breaks on that a bit because one thing I can absolutely guarantee is your good, smart kid will eventually do something bad and dumb. Our prayer is that the solid, faith-filled friends will stick around when it happens. In the meantime, we face a parenting tension. We want our kids to stay away from negative influences but also be the light in darkness. Our job is to teach our kids discernment. Let's help our kids understand the difference between when to step in if a friend is headed the wrong direction, when to stand by and intercede for their friend in prayer, and when (and how) to step away from a friend that refuses to hear wisdom about returning to God. I don't know too many adults that do this well, so you can bet this will be clunky and messy for our kids as they learn how to follow God and be a good friend. Have lots of conversation with your child and walk with them the whole way. Do your best to gently nudge them and guide them toward the best way to handle the situation. Remember, one day, your child will be on the opposite end of the conversation. Praying for grace for you!

What Does The Bible Say?

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15.

1. Who should you take special note of?
2. How should you treat this person?
3. How should you think of this person?

What Do You Think?

What does "special note" mean?

What Do You Do?

How would you tell a friend they aren't following God?
How would you act if a friend told you that you're not following God? Write a story about it and share with the family.

CORE COMPETENCY: The Church

I believe God uses the people in the church to do His work.

MEMORY VERSE: Hebrews 12:28-29

"Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our 'God is a consuming fire.'"

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRAL Kids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- ☐ I completed my Bible Study
- ☐ I memorized this week's verse
- ☐ I brought my Bible to church
- ☐ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)
I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)
I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)
I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)
I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)
I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)
I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)
I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)
I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)
I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)
I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)
I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)
I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)
I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)
I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)
I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)
I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)
I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)
I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)
I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)
I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)
I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)
I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)
I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)
I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)
I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)
I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)
I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)
I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

The Scrolls Bible Study is a spiritual growth resource of Central Bible Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

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BIBLE CHURCH**

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