

Living in the Hope of Glory:
The Message of 2 Thessalonians: #6

Keeping the Salt Salty:
Displaying the Life-Changing Power of the Gospel
Before a Watching World
2 Thess. 3:6-18

--CEFC 8/5/18; 8/1/04

Topic: Church Discipline

The public debate on marriage in recent years
has raised some interesting comments.

Some people have expressed the view that Christians were being hypocritical
when speaking of the sanctity of marriage
when it was found that Christian marriages were just as likely to end in divorce
as non-Christian marriages.
"Shouldn't you get your own house in order," they said,
"instead of trying to tell everybody else how they ought to live?"

It's an important issue that we have to face—
getting our house in order.

Now, in fact, the divorce rate for those who don't just call themselves Christians,
but who are actually active in a local church and attend regularly
is substantially lower than the national rate—by about 30%,¹
which of course still too high.

And a precept can be true even if the practice of it is not perfect.

But that aside, this argument reflects a significant assumption.

The world expects to see a difference in the way Christians live—
and they are watching.
The way Christians actually behave
makes a significant difference in our witness to the world.

And I am afraid that the church has, as one writer has called it, a *credibility gap*.²
David Kinnaman and Gabe Lyons underscored this in their book,
unChristian: What a New Generation Really Thinks About Christianity.
"Eighty-five percent of young outsiders," they concluded,
"have had sufficient exposure to Christians and churches
that they conclude present-day Christianity is hypocritical."

¹See the study by H. Bradford Wilcox from UVA, cited in CT, Aug, 2004, p. 44.

² Todd Wilson, *Zealous for Good Works*, p. 18.

Our lives are meant to commend the gospel,
but sometimes they do just the opposite.

Jesus talked about that, didn't he?

Speaking to his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount,

"You are the light of the world.

**Let your light so shine before others that they may see your good deeds
and praise your Father in heaven."**

But immediately before that, he said,

"You are the salt of the earth.

But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again.

**It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out
and trampled underfoot" (Mt. 5:13).**

We are the salt of the earth—

but our salt better be salty!

What could be worse than stale and insipid salt?

It's worthless.

In fact, it's worse than worthless.

It is positively harmful,

for it sends a false message,

pretending to be something that it is not.

The point here is that the behavior of Christians,

the kind of community we are,

the way we live

and the standards that we endorse

and enforce in our midst,

cannot be separated from our message.

In fact, unless there is some connection, some correlation,

between our beliefs and our behavior,

our message will lose all credibility.

The Apostle Paul was very conscious of that fact.

In his first letter to the Thessalonian Christians he had said,

"Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life,

to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you,

so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders . . ." (1Th. 4:11,12)

In 1Tim. 3:7, speaking about the kind of man who should be an elder in the church,

he includes the provision

that **"He must also have a good reputation with outsiders,"**

He encourages younger widows to live in such a way that they

"give the enemy no opportunity for slander" (1 Tim. 5:15).

And in his letter to Titus,

Paul urges the believers there to be zealous for good deeds

**“so that in every way
they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive” (Titus 2:9).³**

Peter says it, too, echoing the words of Jesus—

**‘Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong,
they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us’ (1Pet. 2:12).**

We as Christians live before a watching world.

They are waiting to see if what we believe--this gospel message that we proclaim--
can really make a difference in the quality of our lives.

In other words, they want to know if being a Christian actually means anything?

Paul is convinced that it does,

and that it must—

that's why he is so concerned about the behavior

of some of the members of the church in Thessalonica,

and why he is concerned that something be done about it.

For if the salt is not salty—

if the church is not what it is supposed to be—

if the lives of Christians are no different from those of the world—

then that salt is good for nothing,

and, in fact, it brings discredit to the gospel

and dishonor to the Lord himself.⁴

So, briefly this morning, we want to look first at the specific issue that Paul must address,

and then at the broader concern that it raises in the life of the church—

how we are to deal with those

whose lives bring dishonor to Christ.

2 Thess. 3:11—**“We hear that some among you are idle. . . .**

v. 12-- **Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ
to settle down and earn the bread they eat.”**

Evidently, some in the church had for some reason decided

that they didn't need to work,

and that they could simply depend on the support of others for their daily needs.

Paul doesn't tell us why they had come to this conclusion.

Perhaps it had something to do with the false teaching that was floating around there,

that Paul addressed in chap. 2 of this letter,

to the effect that the Day of the Lord had already come.

Maybe these folks were so certain that the coming of Christ was upon them

³ This is specifically addressed to slaves, but is applicable to all those Paul addressed in this letter.

⁴cf. Rom. 2:24--“God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.” --citing Isa. 52:5; Ezek. 36:22

that they felt work was unnecessary—
and they just went out on a hilltop
to look for the Lord coming in the clouds.

Or maybe these folks were of a super-spiritual sort
who believed that since the Day of Christ had already come,
as Christians they had passed out of that old cursed world
that involved work,
and had already entered into God's eternal Sabbath—
that rest of God from all labor and hardship.

Or maybe these folks just had benefactors who were now Christians
whom they could presume would care for them however they behaved.

Paul doesn't say, and it doesn't matter.

All Paul is concerned about is the impropriety of it all—

And he had already made it clear what he expected of them—

v. 10—" **For when we were with you, we gave you this rule:**

"If a man will not work, he shall not eat."

And not only had Paul taught them this basic precept,
he also lived it out in front of them to make it absolutely clear.

v. 7—" **For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example.**

We were not idle when we were with you,

8 nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. . . .

9 We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help,

but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow."

Paul and Silas could have taken support from the church

for their spiritual labors among them,

but they didn't.

Probably labored as a tent-maker,

Paul worked with his own hands to provide for his own living

just to make a point—

"The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat."

Now why is Paul so upset about this behavior?

Why does it matter to him?

What difference does it make?

I see several reasons.

1) The first is one we've already referred to—

Paul felt that such laziness,

sponging off the generosity of others,

would not look good in the eyes of unbelievers.

I've referred already to his earlier words to them in 1 Thess. 4:11—

"mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you,

so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders . . ." (1Th. 4:11,12)

Paul was very concerned that Christians be good workers.

He urged slaves, for example, to be faithful and diligent in their work,
as if the Lord himself were their master (Col. 3:23).
He didn't want people to slander the gospel
because it appeared to make people lazy or irresponsible.

Have you ever thought that the way you do your work
is a reflection on the Lord and may affect your witness?

Paul would tell you,
Don't read your Bible when you should be working—
Your work matters.
God created us to reflect him as workers—for he is a worker.

Col. 3:23-- "**Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart,
as working for the Lord, not for human masters.**"

2) Second, Paul is insistent that we work
so that we don't become a burden to other people.
v. 8—"we worked night and day, laboring and toiling
so that we would not be a burden to any of you."
Don't let your irresponsible behavior become a hardship for someone else.

Now, don't misunderstand this.
There will be times when we will need help from others,
and we should be willing to receive it and to give it.
"**Carry each other's burdens,**" Paul says in Gal. 6:2, "**and so fulfill the law of Christ.**"
But he also says later in that same passage,
"**each one should carry his own load.**"

In that context, a burden is a hardship that comes upon you and you need help with;
a load is a responsibility that is yours to bear.

Paul is saying, work for your bread and so carry your own load,
so that you won't be a burden to others.

3) Third, our work is important **so that we will be able to help others.**

Paul hints at this in v. 13—

" **And as for you, brothers,
never tire of doing what is right.**"
Or perhaps better, "**never tire of doing what is good.**"⁵
And helping those in need is a good thing.

But how can you help those in need if you don't have any resources to do it?
And how can you have resources if you don't work?

This is what Paul says in Eph. 4:28—

"**He who has been stealing must steal no longer,
but must work, doing something useful with his own hands,**

⁵ καλοποιοῦντες. That's how the NIV11 translates it; also in Gal. 6:10.

that he may have something to share with those in need."

Let that be one important motivation for you as you go off to work tomorrow morning—
How can I share what I earn today?

4) And finally, working is important
simply because it can keep you out of trouble.

Look what happened to these people—

In v. 11 Paul had heard that because idlers were not "**busy**,"
they had become "**busybodies**."

The translation here reflects a Greek play on words.⁶

They were "minding everybody's business but their own."⁷

What's the old saying?--"Idle hands are the devil's workshop."

It is not good for human beings to be without work--
without some productive activity to keep us busy.
We don't have to get paid for it—
but we do need something to engage us constructively.

I remember an illustration of this—

a case of good intentions having unforeseen consequences.

I once talked with a Sudanese visitor who had been living in Omaha, Nebraska.
There is a large Sudanese refugee community in Omaha.

Why Omaha, Nebraska? you may ask.

Because the government there has established a very generous welfare program
to meet the needs of refugees.

In fact, it is too generous, according my Sudanese friend.

She told me the people don't have to work—
food and housing is provided for them.

And as a result, she said, people have quit looking for jobs,
alcoholism is rampant,
the crime rate is high, and many are in jail,
and the out-of-marriage birthrate is increasing.

It is very sad. //

It is not good for God's people to be idle, expecting others to take care of them.

It undermines the witness of the church;

it creates a burden for other people;

it prevents people from being able to help others,

and it can lead them into destructive behavior.

That's why Paul lays down this rule:

"If a man will not work, he shall not eat."

⁶ μηδὲν ἐργαζομένους ἀλλὰ περιεργαζομένους.

⁷So, Bruce. Cf. also 1Tim. 5:13.

We see this theme picked up among the early Christians—

The early Christian document called the Didache refers to it—

"If he who comes is a traveler, help him as much as you can,
but he shall not stay with you more than two days or, if necessary, three.
If he wishes to settle down with you and has a craft,
let him work for his bread.

But if he has no craft, make such provision for him as your intelligence approves,
so that no one shall live with you in idleness as a Christian.

If he refuses so to do,

he is making [a business out] of Christ (χριστέμπορός ἐστὶ);
beware of such people" (Didache 12:2-5).

Now this doesn't mean that we should never simply give people material help
without requiring work in return.

There is such a thing as undeserved mercy and generosity.

And there can be all sorts of other circumstances that come into play.

But be careful that the person you help doesn't develop a sense of entitlement
or an unhealthy dependence,
such that they lose that important connection
between eating and work.

And let me say again, Paul's emphasis is on those who refuse to work,
who are unwilling to work,
not on those who can't work for some reason.

Don't confuse those two.

We need to appreciate this important principle,

which Paul gives as a command to the Thessalonian church—

"If a man will not work, he shall not eat."

II. That's the specific issue that arose in Thessalonica,

but now let's move to **Paul's broader concern**—

That is, how the church ought to deal with these people.

This is really Paul's central emphasis in the passage—

Notice how he begins in v. 6—

**"In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers,
to keep away from every brother who is idle
and does not live according to the teaching you received from us."**

He continues in v. 14—

**"If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter,
take special note of him.
Do not associate with him,
in order that he may feel ashamed.**

**15 Yet do not regard him as an enemy,
but warn him as a brother."**

These people had been taught by the Apostle's words and by his example

how they ought to behave.

They had been warned at least twice about their unruly behavior.

In Paul's mind, this was not some trivial offence that could be dealt with privately.

Their **persistent, public, and deliberate disobedience to clear apostolic instruction** could have a significant detrimental impact on the life of the church and its witness to the world.

Now, Paul says, the church must take action against them.

So, what should they do?

In some way they were to dissociate these idle people from the church community.

Paul speaks of "**keeping away**" from them (στέλλεσθαι ὑμᾶς),
and "**not associating with them**" (μὴ συναναμίγνυσθαι αὐτῶ).

Paul urges this kind of response in a number of places—

Rom. 16:17—"I urge you, brothers and sisters,
to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way
that are contrary to the teaching you have learned.
Keep away from them (ἐκκλίνετε ἀπ' αὐτῶ).

In 2 Tim. 3:5 he speaks of the false teachers
who **have a form of godliness but deny its power.**
"Avoid such people (τούτους ἀποτρέπου)," he says (ESV).

In Titus 3:10 he says, "**Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time.**
After that, have nothing to do with them (παραίτου).")

In this, Paul is simply applying the instructions of Jesus—

Matt. 18:15--"**If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault,**
just between the two of you.

If they listen to you, you have won them over.

But if they will not listen, take one or two others along,
so that 'every matter may be established

by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'

If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church;

and if they refuse to listen even to the church,

treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector."

Exclusion from active fellowship

is the church's most serious and ultimate sanction.

But it is hard to know exactly what form this exclusion should take—

Paul uses a different Greek expression in each of the verses I listed,
so each situation may be slightly different.

And the kind of exclusion may depend on the seriousness of the sin
and the possible danger to the church.

But in some way it must become clear that these people
are no longer members in good standing,
and that they do not represent the church, the body of Christ,
as they continue to engage in their sinful behavior.

In this case, it doesn't appear to include total shunning--never talking to them.

**"Do not regard him as an enemy," Paul says,
"but warn him as a brother."**

Elsewhere Paul says, **"if someone is caught in a sin,
you who are spiritual should restore him gently"** (Gal. 6:1).

Paul's desire is that by this action of the church,
the offenders may come to their senses,
see the error of their ways, and **"feel ashamed,"**
and that this shame might lead to repentance.

The goal in church discipline

is always to win the offenders back to the fold.

I assume that in most cases,

they could continue to attend worship (if they would even want to)—
so that they might hear the word of God and repent.

But discipline for public and persistent unrepentant sin
would likely include exclusion from sharing in the Lord's Supper—
which is the visible expression of our union in the body of Christ.

Such people should no longer receive the assurance of the church
that they are, in fact, Christian believers,
nor should they presume to represent themselves that way before the world.

Paul wants to make it perfectly clear

that someone who continues to live with clear unrepentant sin,
unwilling to respond to the voice of the church calling him to repentance,
that person is in grave spiritual danger.

I don't care if they have walked the aisle, prayed a prayer,
been baptized and joined the church five times over--

if there is no concern for holiness in his life,
no concern to live in a way pleasing to God,
they ought to have no assurances that they are truly saved at all.

And the church does them a dangerous disservice
by not making that point very clear to them.

In other words, the discipline here is *remedial*--it is for their own good.

It is an action of the church performed out of love
to show these offenders just how serious the situation truly is.

Paul's purpose here is lead these people into repentance

and to restore them into fellowship--
fellowship with the church and with the Lord of the church.

I don't know about you,

but I want to be a part of a church that cares enough about me

to seek to bring me back if I was engaging in bad behavior,
calling me to repentance.

But until that repentance takes place,
wayward sinners cannot be allowed to continue as they are—
for that would bring danger to the church
and dishonor to the name of Christ.

For somehow, we must maintain a distinction between the church and the world.
The people of God are to be the salt of the earth,
and we must work to keep that salt salty.

Now this doesn't mean that the church is only a place for perfect people.
Not at all.

In fact, I saw a banner in front of a church that made this point:
"Wanted: Imperfect People," it said.
I know that if I ever found a perfect church,
I would never join it—because I'd ruin it!

And that's true--
Church discipline is not a means of purifying the church of all sinners.
For we are all sinners—
If we got rid of all sinners, there'd be nobody left!
Paul has lots to say about the sin of the church in Corinth, for example,
but he doesn't tell them to dissolve the whole church.

Instead, he does call them to grieve over their sin (1 Cor. 5:2)--
that's the key.

A Christian is a sinner who grieves for their sin,
and in that grief finds the forgiveness of God.

The church is full of sinners--
but we are redeemed sinners—
redeemed sinners in the process of being made more like Christ
by the gracious work of the Spirit of God.

And we are called to live in a way
that reflects that new power of the Spirit within us
to live under the Lordship of Christ our King.
There ought to be something different about us—
the world expects to see it.
It's what gives credibility to our message.

Do you understand what a disservice to the gospel is done by undisciplined churches?
Such a church may have 500 members,
but perhaps only half worship regularly.

Those CEO Christians—
"Christmas and Easter Only"—
may delude themselves into thinking that they are spiritually secure

because they are members of First Evangelical Free Church, or whatever,
but the gospel has made no impact on their lives.
They are known in the community as church members,
and in those polls they identify themselves as Evangelical Christians,
but then they live like everybody else—
engaging in all sorts of shady business practices,
in promiscuous sexual activities,
or in mean and spiteful gossip,
perhaps trolling the web to make rude comments,
and they display no compassion for the poor.

People are led to wonder—
"If these are the children of God,
what must their Father be like?"
If these people represent the gospel in a community,
why would anyone ever want to become a Christian?
The salt has lost its saltiness.

But if church discipline is such an urgent task,
and if the stakes for the well-being of the church in the world are so high,
why is church discipline--
this dealing with sinful behavior in the midst of the fellowship,
why is church discipline so rarely seen in churches today?

Part of our hesitance, I'm sure, is a result of the cultural climate in which we live.
When it comes to moral matters,
we live in an intensely private and individualistic culture.

Our basic philosophy is "live and let live."
Mt. 7:1--"**Do not judge, lest you be judged**" has become our national Bible verse.

Surely, we are not to be ensorious and judgmental,
but that verse doesn't mean we are not to make serious moral judgments--
in fact, we have a duty to do so.
"Tolerance" can be a euphemism for moral indifference
and a lack of moral conviction and courage.⁸

But having said that,
even recognizing the duty of discipline--
we must still admit that it is not without its difficulties.
Some would even say it is fraught with **dangers**.

One of the biggest dangers of discipline
is the threat of **division** that it can cause within the church.

For we can come at this issue with **different attitudes**—
attitudes that may be rooted in the very work of the Spirit.

⁸So Hayes, 1 Cor..

Some have **gifts of mercy**--
and their sole concern is for the person involved--
How can we be gracious and gentle,
guiding that wayward person back into the way?

Others have **prophetic gifts**--
their concern is for truth and righteousness--
it's not the individual that matters
so much as the community and its standards.

These two perspectives are bound to collide when it comes to discipline.

And don't we as parents sometimes have to deal with these differences
in dealing with our children at home?

Perhaps Mom has as her chief concern
that they not exasperate the child,
so she counsels mercy and patience.

Whereas Dad thinks that the situation has gone on too long already,
and now is the time for some definitive action.

I'm sure most of you parents have struggled with this very thing,
in trying to maintain a united front.

But as with children at home,
despite the difficulty,
however we work it out,
something has to be done.

Another potential for division comes from the fact that we come at church discipline
with **different standards**.

The case that Paul gives us here is clear cut,
simply because Paul himself had given such clear direction in this matter—
but it's not always that way.

Some moral questions are more ambiguous;
some are even left to the individual conscience of the believer.

We will need wisdom to know which is which,
and when something is serious enough to merit church action.
We will need discernment to know what are essentials and what are non-essentials.
We can easily become either "legalists" or "libertarians."

Related to this is the question of authority—
some church leaders abuse their authority
and seek to exercise a control over church members
that simply doesn't belong to them.

Paul acted here with unique apostolic authority,

an authority which none of us has.⁹
Our authority must be derivative—
that is, it must flow from the clear dominical and apostolic teaching
given to us in the Bible.

We must ask, Is the matter at issue one about which the Scriptures speak clearly
and is it a matter of public concern?

And a third potential for division in this area of discipline
comes from the fact that we can use **different methods**.

A key passage in this regard is 1 Thess. 5:14--

"Live in peace with each other.

**And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle,
encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone."**

Is the wayward brother or sister idle, in need of warning or rebuke,
or is he or she timid, in need of encouragement,
or is he or she weak, in need of help and loving support?
How long are we to be patient?

Our discipline needs to fit the situation, and the person--
and we may differ on that.

Paul's instructions in our passage are different even from that in 1 Cor. 5--

There the offender is a "**so-called**" brother,
here they are brothers.

There are no easy, pat answers to all of this--

no formula that tells us exactly what to do in every case.

We need wisdom and good judgment

that is sober, sound and sensible--

guided by much prayer.

Church discipline is difficult,

filled with the potential to cause great division.

But it is still critical for good of the wayward believer,

for the health of the church,

and for its witness to the watching world.

⁹ Stott—note the emphasis on authority in this passage, beginning with v. 4.

cf. Morris: "There is a military ring" about these verses, for the words παραγγέλλω and παραγγέλια where the usual terms for "the commands given by the officer to his men."

Five times Paul uses this authoritative language—vv. 4,6,10,12,14. Cf. Markus Barth—By these "blunt commands . . . he appears to canonize his own doctrine and writings." No one has such authority today—not the Pope or self-appointed charismatic leaders. The unique authority of the apostles was clearly recognized in the post-apostolic church. E.g., Ignatius—Bishop of Syrian Antioch at the beginning of the 2nd century, condemned to die in Rome for his faith. On his way there he wrote seven letters, in which his high view of the episcopate is evident. Yet in his letter to the Romans he wrote: "I do not give you orders like Peter and Paul. They were apostles; I am a convict." (Ep. ad. Rom. 4:3)

Pray for your church elders as we seek God's direction in these matters.

Perhaps because of the difficulty associated with church discipline,
Paul ends this letter the way he does—
2 Thess. 3:16—"Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace
at all times and in every way."

Peace—the peace that comes from God.

That's what we need.

The peace of God to overcome the potential division that church discipline can create.

But then Paul continues—

"The Lord be with all of you."

That's what makes the church the church, isn't it?—

the Lord's presence in our midst.

If the Lord is not present with us,

we are just another social club, not unlike a bowling league.

But that's what's at stake in church discipline—

the presence of Christ among us.

As the body of Christ, we are called to display the presence of Christ in the world.

What image of Christ does the world get when they look at our lives?

And will Christ continue to abide among a people

who have no concern for the purity of his bride?

As Jesus warns the church of Ephesus in the book of Revelation—

"Repent and do the things you did at first.

If you do not repent, I will come to you

and remove your lampstand from its place" (2:5).

They would no longer enjoy the presence of Christ in their midst.

And last of all, Paul expresses his desire for these Thessalonian believers—

v. 18—" **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.**"

For we as a church are to be a community of grace and truth—

which means "true grace."

And our discipline must never be allowed to obscure that.

We're not accepted by God because we are good enough—

in fact, it is only as we recognize that we aren't good enough,

only as we are humbled by our own moral failure,

and turn from it in faith--

only then can we receive God's gift to us—

the gift of his Son—

who died for our sin on the cross.

There's no place for self-righteousness among Christians—

our only righteousness is an alien righteousness—
the righteousness that comes from Christ and is by faith.
It is righteousness that is then to be imparted to us by the Spirit
as we grow in our relationship with Christ,
and begin to become more like him.

Jesus' death and resurrection—that's our only hope.
as we in faith confess that he died the death we deserved,
and he rose again to give us new life.

That's what we celebrate as we come to worship week after week—
God's grace in redeeming us, saving us, for himself
when we didn't deserve it.

May we encourage one another to live in a way
worthy of that grace of God we have received,
so that we may shine with the light of God's holy love
into a world that so desperately needs to see it.

Prayer—

Closing Song: O Church Arise

Benediction: **The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.**

Living in the Hope of Glory:
The Message of 2 Thessalonians: #6
Aug. 5, 2018

**Keeping the Salt Salty:
Guarding Community Standards
Before a Watching World
2 Thess. 3:6-18**

As a loving father nurturing his family, the Apostle Paul writes to the church in Thessalonica with a serious concern regarding the behavior of some of its members. They are violating clear apostolic commands and show no remorse or repentance. He calls the church to act for the good of the offenders, for the health of the church, for its witness to the gospel, and for the glory of God.

**I. The Specific Issue:
Work and Welfare—**

"If a man will not work, he shall not eat." (v. 10)

**II. The Broader Concern:
Church Discipline—**

*"Do not associate with him,
in order that he may feel ashamed" (v. 14)*

**May the Lord give us his peace,
his presence, and his grace (vv. 16-18).**

Sermon Discussion:

**Keeping the Salt Salty:
Guarding Community Standards
Before a Watching World**
2 Thess. 3:6-18

- Reread this passage, and then read 1 Thess. 4:11,12; 5:14. Obviously Paul is dealing with an ongoing problem, and not a one-time episode. How should that affect the way we go about church discipline?
- What did Paul think was harmful about the behavior of these "idle brothers"? How could it harm themselves? How could it harm others? How could it harm the church and its witness?
- What kinds of action did Paul call the church to take against these "idle brothers"? What was its purpose?
- Read about other cases of church discipline in Acts 5:1-11 and 1 Cor. 5:1-13. What similarities do you see between these passages and 1 Thess. 3? What differences?
- Why is it important for the church to exercise discipline within its membership? Why should you want to be in a church that does this?
- Pray for the witness of our church to the world—that we may shine as light, and function as salt.