

A Case for Boundaries

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[0 : 00] and you can find your way on over to 2 Thessalonians, and we are looking for chapter 3.

So if you have a Bible, that would be a great time for you to get on over in your Bible, or your app, or your Kindle, or whatever you're going to use to try to pay attention, over to 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, and verse number 6 is where we're going to start today.

2 Thessalonians chapter 3, and verse number 6. So that we would not be a burden to any of you. It is not that we don't have the right to support, but we did it to make ourselves an example to you, so that you would imitate us. In fact, when we were with you, this is what we commanded you. If anyone isn't willing to work, he should not eat. For we hear that there are some among you who are idle. They are not busy, but busy bodies. Father, thank you for gathering us together.

[1 : 25] Thank you for your kindness to encourage our hearts and to give us the strength that we need for today to be here and to engage in this time of worship together.

Thank you for the love that you, Father, have for sinners like us. Thank you, Lord Jesus, for the love that you have for sinners like us, so steeped, so stuck in our sin that we can't get ourselves out of it. As Ryan reminded us, we were stuck in miry clay, and yet you have delivered and rescued us from that miry clay, and we are so, so very grateful.

Thank you for delivering us from the kingdom of darkness and transferring us into the kingdom of your beloved Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Holy Spirit, thank you for the remarkable, miraculous part you play in this, granting life, helping us to see the gospel clearly, helping us to see Jesus as beautiful and wonderful and compelling.

[2 : 46] Thank you for granting life and repentance and faith so that sinners like us can call out and repent and believe this gospel.

Would you please help us, Holy Spirit, as we now take some time to engage with your word? Would you please guard my mind and my heart and help me to be helpful to your people?

Would you please show us our Savior, the Lord Jesus? And as we have sang together, would you please speak, O Lord, open your word to us, reveal yourself to us, reveal our sin, and again, our need for a Savior and our need for forgiveness.

We ask that you would do this as we have this time together now to continue in worship by sitting under the preaching of your word. We pray all of this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Doing nothing can be very disruptive. Doing nothing can be very disruptive.

[3 : 55] Think about in the year 2020, when we were all quarantined into our homes. Do you remember that? We did nothing, right?

It seemed like we were doing nothing, and yet it was totally disruptive to the whole world. Early in the 1920s, there was an Italian swindler who made an offer that thousands of people could not resist.

It was here in the United States. This was his offer. You invest your money with me, and in 45 days, I will give you 50% return on your money, and in 90 days, I will give you 100% return on your money.

Now, if you're an adult, then you know that this is too good to be true, and if you're a child or a young person, you should know this is a deal too good to be true, and sure enough, sure enough, Charles Ponzi's scheme was a sham.

He was taking in new investors, but he was not doing anything with their money, and this was very disruptive.

[5 : 20] The greatest Ponzi scheme in the early 1990s was run by a man named Bernie Madoff. It was very similar. The offer was not quite as good.

It was not 50% return in 45 days and 190 days, but it was still too good of an offer to refuse, and that's why so many people gave their money to Bernie Madoff, and yet he was doing nothing with their money other than giving it to future investors, and this is why it's called a Ponzi scheme. But Madoff's doing-nothing disruption caused financial losses estimated to be \$64.8 billion. \$64 billion. Doing nothing can be very disruptive. There aren't too many commands in the book of 2 Thessalonians.

I don't know if you've noticed that or if you highlight those in your Bible or make note of those in your Bible when you're reading. I like to make note of them in green. I don't know why I picked green.

[6 : 33] I just did. So I went back and looked at the start of 2 Thessalonians. There have not been that many commands. We are commanded in chapter 2, verse 2, that we are not to be easily upset or troubled, and we are not to allow anyone to deceive us about anything.

There's another command to stand firm and to hold fast to the traditions you were taught. And last week we saw a third command here in 2 Thessalonians when Paul asked the Christians to pray. Our text today begins with a command. Look in your Bible, 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 and verse number 6.

Now, now, we command you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from every brother or sister who is idle and does not live according to the tradition received from us.

Now notice a couple of things about this command. First of all, this command is to the entire church. Do you see that there in your Bible? If you see brothers and sisters, that's helpful.

[8 : 01] If you see just brothers, you should know that this extends to the sisters as well. This is not a command just for the elders. This is a command for the whole church.

If you hear this verse, chapter 3 and verse 6, you are responsible to obey.

Notice also, a second interesting thing about this particular command. It comes to the Thessalonians and also to us with the weight of divine authority.

Do you see that there in your Bible? Paul is not saying, look, if you have time, you should really pay attention to this or when you get around to it or it would be nice if you would do this.

No, no. Brothers and sisters, anyone who is hearing this command, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, this command carries divine authority.

[9 : 12] And here's the command. Keep away from. Keep away from. This sounds a little strange to us, doesn't it?

That we would be called to ask to stay away from someone? We should look and investigate this a little more. Who is it that we are supposed to stay away from?

Who is it that we are supposed to avoid? Notice. Stay away from. Keep away from.

Every. Brother. Or sister. Hmm. He's talking about a Christian.

Someone who professes faith in Jesus. What an interesting contrast. You'll recall last week we had this contrast about those who do not have faith.

[10 : 13] I think that was two weeks ago. Those who do not have faith. But here, he gives a command to the brothers and sisters and says, I want you to keep away from any brother and sister.

Or sister. We should investigate this further. Keep away from every brother or sister who is idol.

Now notice, this is not idol. I-D-O-L. He's not talking about American idol. This is the different word that sounds like that word.

Every brother or sister who is idol. But we need to be careful with this because this does not merely mean someone who is lazy.

When we read that, we initially think, oh, this is just someone who is lazy. And that is not the point that Paul is making. The word here, the Greek word here, looks like this.

[11 : 18] I want to show it to you because it's kind of fun to say. If you can say takos, you can say this Greek word. But notice it has the letter A in front of it in English.

That's what we would put in front of it so that we could pronounce it. We would say ataktos. Do you want to try it? Ataktos. It's very fun. If you can say taktos, you can remember this.

This is the word that is underneath what gets translated for us idle. But this is not about someone who is lazy.

This is about someone who is disordered. Someone who is out of step. Someone who is undisciplined. This word is not used terribly often in our Bibles. and that makes it a little bit challenging for us to figure out the full nuance of the meaning. But there is a second century document called the Testament of Naphtali and this word is used there and when it's translated for us it comes out this way.

[12:30] You ready? Do nothing in a disorderly way. There's a warning about those who are doing nothing but in their doing nothing they are doing it in a disorderly a disruptive way.

I think the ESV captures a little of this when it says walking in idleness. It's not that they're lazy. It's that in their doing nothing they are disruptive.

Like COVID doing nothing but very disruptive or like a Ponzi scheme doing nothing but in the end very disruptive.

The third thing that we should notice about these folks back in verse number six they are notice not living according to the tradition received from us.

They are disorderly disruptive. They are out of step with the teachings of the apostles that are sourced in the words and the ways of Jesus.

[13:40] Well what are these teachings of the apostles? Well we don't have to look very far because Paul gives them in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 beginning at the second half of verse number 10.

This is what Paul says. But we encourage you brothers and sisters to do this even more to love one another is what he's been talking about and to seek to live a quiet life to mind your own business and to work with your own hands as we commanded you so that you may behave properly in the presence of outsiders and not be dependent on anyone.

Okay? So what do we have so far? We have a brother or sister who is idle. Not merely lazy but disordered, undisciplined and they are not living according to the tradition.

What tradition? Well they're not working with their hands. They're not living a quiet life. They're not behaving properly in the presence of outsiders and they have become dependent on others.

notice also skip down chapter 3 and verse number 10.

[15:10] When we were with you, this is what we commanded you. If anyone isn't willing to work, he should not eat.

We should notice this. This is not someone who is unable to work that therefore necessitates the help of the church. This is someone who is unwilling to work.

They could get a job. They could submit to the apostles teaching and do something to keep themselves busy, provide for themselves and for the needs of others. But they are not doing that.

They are unwilling to do this. keep away from every brother or sister who is a toktos, like a Ponzi schemer, doing nothing but doing it in a disorderly, disruptive way.

They are unwilling to work and they refuse to submit to the apostles' teaching. Now what might this look like? We don't know exactly for sure, but let me offer you three ideas.

[16:23] It could be that Paul is talking about some within the church who are just chronically lazy. They have too much time on their hands. And with that too much time on their hands, they are getting involved in everybody else's business.

Perhaps they have come to think that serving is not their gift. That when Paul gives these commands about staying busy and having things to do, they say, well, this is fine for thee, but not for me.

It's not my gift. Perhaps they have lost sight of this, that what you believe leads to what you behave, but it also works with bad beliefs also, right?

If you believe the wrong things, you should expect to have bad behaviors. And perhaps that is true here.

Perhaps they have some bad beliefs, some bad doctrine that has resulted in these bad behaviors. And sure enough, if we take a look in Scripture two other times, Colossians chapter 2 and verse 5, 1 Corinthians chapter 14 and verse 40, Paul uses an antonym, the opposite of our word ataktos, and he is talking about bad doctrine that has led to disordered living.

[17:55] And he wants to correct that. It could be that these are bad beliefs that has led to bad behavior. It could also be that a particular feature of the Greco-Roman world called patrons and clients has continued to persist in the church, and this is causing problems.

Let me try to explain this. If you were wealthy, you could become a patron. And what that meant is that you were supporting people who were less wealthy, maybe very poor, and you were supporting them in return for favors.

But as a result, you also looked good, right? You got the admiration of culture because you're a patron, and you are supporting those who have less.

Now think about how this particular feature could find its way into a church and how this could be damaging. What might happen to the patrons? Well, culturally, they're well honored, well affirmed, well recognized because I'm a patron.

And so, pride begins to stir up in their hearts for the people that they are supporting. But also in the church, think about those who are perhaps clients taking advantage of their patrons.

[19 : 26] Maybe they could go and get a job, but they're not. And culturally this works, but when you bring it into the church community, it doesn't function very well. Because now there's divisiveness and rubbing against one another, and I'm wondering why are you not working, because I see you showing up to church.

I think you could work, but you're not. And this begins perhaps to create some friction within the church. We don't know exactly what the situation is here in Thessalonica, but we do know now who it is that they need to keep away from.

But I also would like to try to answer the question, why? Because this is a hard command. We should just be honest. This is a hard command to keep away from every brother and sister who is disorderly.

Why does the church need to avoid them? And I think the answer to that question comes to us at the end of our text in verse number 11. for we hear that there are some among you who are idle. They are atoctos. They are not busy, but busy bodies. They are doing nothing in a disorderly way.

[21 : 05] they are meddlers. Busy bodies. That's what a busy body is.

Someone who is meddling. You have too much time on your hands. And now you're getting involved all up in everybody else's business. You know what happens when you have too many times on your hand oftentimes?

You poke your nose in too many things. So easy to gossip. So easy to begin carrying around stories. And Paul does not want that for this church.

And the Spirit does not want that for us either. We don't want to be not merely lazy loafers. We want to guard our hearts against being do nothing disruptors.

think about when you do a group project.

[22 : 06] Could be at work when you're assigned to work with somebody. Could be part of a school project. You have someone who is part of the group who is not just unhelpful but they are actively discouraging the rest of the group.

think about a sports team. Not just someone who is apathetic who is not giving their all but someone who is distracting the rest of the team.

Think about in a community not just a difficult personality where we would want love and gentleness and grace to surround that person with the difficult personality.

Not just a difficult personality but a difficult personality that is also divisive to the community. Think about a church.

not just someone who doesn't give. Someone who doesn't use their gifts for the good of others and the glory of God. But someone who by doing nothing has the time has the capacity to damage the church by meddling politicking gossiping manipulating.

[23 : 35] those who do nothing in a disorderly way are disruptive to the mission and the unity of church.

And that is what Paul is poking at here. He wants the gospel to speed ahead rapidly.

We saw that last week. He wants the gospel to be honored. But these who are ataktos, they are doing nothing in a disorderly, disruptive way.

And they are causing the church to not be effective in its ministry. Instead of imitating these do-nothing disruptors, Paul exhorts the church to obey the teaching and to follow the example of the apostles.

Notice this in verse 10. In fact, when we were with you, this is what we commanded you. If anyone isn't willing to work, he should not eat.

[24 : 54] Now, what did that look like? How did that play out? Notice, the apostles were not hypocrites when it came to this. Verse number 7. For you yourselves know how you should imitate us.

We were not idle. We were not a toktos among you. We did not eat anyone's food free of charge. Instead, we labored and toiled working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you.

How did the apostles behave? In contrast to these folks, not idle, not a toktos. They didn't look for a free lunch.

They didn't leverage their apostleship for their own benefit, though they could have done that. They didn't take advantage of the church or use their authority within the church for personal gain.

[26 : 12] They were not caught up with filthy lucre or filthy money. They weren't in it for the money as Peter writes to the elders in 1 Peter chapter 5.

Instead, the apostles toiled night and day. To what end? Why are you guys working so hard? Well, they tell us at the end of verse 8, so that we would not be a burden to you.

Not because they didn't have the right, but so that they would be setting a godly example. people.

And I think this gets us to some implications.

Why did the apostles work so hard? So that they would not be a burden to the church. And so that they would set for the church a good example to follow.

What implications can we draw from this? Those who are a toktos, those who are translated for us idle, these do nothing disruptors, they are in contrast to the apostles, a burden to the church, and are not an example worth imitating.

[27 : 39] And I believe that's why Paul gives the church this command, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and why the Holy Spirit commands us today.

Keep away, verse 6, from every brother or sister who is idle and does not live according to the tradition received from us.

Keep away from those do-nothing disruptors. Don't give them your time or attention. Why? Because I don't want you influenced by them.

Don't associate with them. Why? Because you ought not to imitate them. God's word commands us to avoid characters who corrupt your character.

It's just another way of saying 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and verse 33. bad company corrupts good morals.

[28 : 50] and so when you encounter a do-nothing disruptor this is an appropriate and biblical time to set a boundary.

Now I don't have a whole bunch of time to dig into this today but Lois and I read a great book about this about a year ago. It's by a sister named Lisa Turkhurst.

The name of the book is Good Boundaries and Goodbyes and I think she does an excellent job explaining this but let me just summarize her argument for you. The purpose of a boundary is not to keep another person away.

It is not to keep another person at arm's length. The purpose of a boundary is to guard your own heart so that when that person is around you are not tempted to sin.

Do you see how that connects with the thought here? What is the sin that Paul would be concerned about? He mentions it multiple times.

[30 : 11] Imitate us. We set an example. Don't imitate the do nothing disruptors. The sin that Paul is concerned about is that the church would associate with those who are doing nothing in a disruptive way and they would follow their bad behavior and sin.

Instead he wants the church to follow the apostles example. To work hard. To earn money as they are able. To be able to support others.

Why? Why is this so important? Because that do nothing disruption causes the church to be ineffective in its ministry to the world.

We ought not to be a busy body rather than being busy. And we ought not to imitate the disorderly in their divisive, disruptive, destructive behavior.

This will slow the spread of the word of God and dishonor the gospel. when I think about boundaries, I am reminded of the Lord Jesus.

[31 : 40] If there ever was a moment when a boundary needed to be set, right? It was between holy God and sinful creatures. This seems like an obvious moment to set a boundary.

glory. But God's love moved him. And unlike a Ponzi schemer doing nothing in a disruptive way, in his grace, God did something disruptive.

He sent the Lord Jesus. And Jesus came near us. He came to us. He became like us without any concern about being tainted by our sin, our weakness, our failure.

Jesus welcomes sinners to eat with him, to come near him. Jesus walks with sinners, engages with sinners, and in an ultimate display of grace, Jesus identifies with sinners in our sin.

And this is what we read, God made Jesus, who knew no sin, to be sin for us, so that we might become the righteousness of God in him.

[33 : 09] I wonder, do you have that kind of a right standing with God? Do you have the righteousness of Christ?

That's true if Jesus is your Savior. If not, then let me ask you, why are you holding God away at arm's length?

why are you holding Jesus away? What keeps you from trusting Jesus when he has opened his arms and says, come to me, trust in me, believe in me, and you will be saved?

Brothers and sisters, for the sake of the gospel, people. And because of the sin that still lurks inside of us, you may discern a need to set a boundary in order to guard your heart from sin.

You may need to avoid characters who corrupt your character. And if you discern that that is true, please set boundaries with as much gentle grace as God allows, very much aware of the logs that are in our own eyes.

[34 : 42] Do you know what I'm talking about? Set those boundaries with as much gentle grace as God allows. Mindful of God's love, mindful of Jesus' death that reconciled you, a sinner, to God.

mindful of the forgiveness that the death of Jesus makes not just possible, but a reality for all who will repent and believe in him.

Let's pray. Good Father, we are so grateful to receive your word. God, would you please help us to consider these truths that we have heard, to be like the Bereans searching to understand, checking scripture to see whether these things are true.

please help us, by the power of your Holy Spirit, to be mindful of do-nothing disruptors, and to be mindful when that might be us.

would you help us to submit to this command, and to discern when the moment is right, to establish some kind of a boundary, in order to protect our hearts us, from imitating the sin, or falling into the sin of others.

[36 : 32] Good Father, we ask this, not because we are to be those kind of people who are legalistic, looking down our noses at others, but because we recognize that from time to time it will be us, and in our do nothing, in our doing nothing, we will be disruptive, and we will need faithful brothers and sisters, to come and to speak with us, and to remind us of the love of God, and the endurance of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, that compels us to avoid meddling, and busy boding, and gossiping, and manipulating to get what we want.

Would you please help us in those moments to be sensitive to your spirit, and to repent, and to receive again the forgiveness that is ours because of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Holy Spirit, would you help us right now as we take a moment or two to reflect, and to discern our own sin, first of all, and then also to consider where obedience to this particular command is necessary today, and perhaps we have been negligent of that.

Please help us as we take a few moments right now and prepare our hearts to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Father, your amazing grace is so disruptive.

You would have been just to leave us in our sin. That is what we deserved. and yet you have shown us goodness that we did not deserve, and you have not punished us for our sin, and instead you inflicted the punishment that our sin deserved on our Savior, Jesus.

[38 : 46] And for this, we are humbly grateful again this morning. Please help us as we continue in our time of worship, and in particular, as we gather together in a circle and receive communion, receive the Lord's Supper, the bread, and the cup.

Help us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.