

THE THESSALONIAN EPISTLES: DIRECTION FOR THE LAST DAYS

XII. Living In Holiness In View Of The Rapture

(2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-18)

I. Introduction

- A. Because they faced an errant, troubling view of the rapture, Paul's readers needed to live responsibly and not like believers who adopted the error, what required that they separate from ungodly believers.
- B. Accordingly, 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-18 deals with the need to live separately from even ungodly fellow believers for one's own spiritual edification. We view this passage for our insight, application, and edification:

II. Living In Holiness In View Of The Rapture, 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14-18.

- A. In a very strong command that appealed to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Paul ordered his readers to "keep away, stand aloof from" (*stello*, Arndt & Gingrich, A Grk.-Eng. Lex. of the N. T., 1967, p. 773) every spiritual "brother" (*adelphos*, U. B. S. Grk. N. T., 1966, p. 718) in Christ who lived "in a disorderly manner" (*ataktos*, *Ibid.*, p. 119) and not after the "tradition of teachings, commandments" (*paradosis*, *Ibid.*, p. 621) they had received from Paul's apostolic ministry and team members. (2 Thessalonians 3:6)
- B. In the context, and as we learned in our previous lesson, this meant that Paul's readers were to avoid spiritual fellowship with fellow believers who were living off the livelihoods of others instead of working for a living and who were wrongly becoming busybodies in the matters of others, cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:7-13.
- C. However, we can broaden the application of this directive to any issue where fellow believers disobey any teaching in God's Word that influences other believers to sin! God wants His people to live lives that are orderly and that conform to what Scripture teaches, so separating close ties with even fellow Christians whose influence causes us to be tempted to live in equally disobedient lives is a step that God wants us to take!
- D. Paul clarified **how** this separation from ungodly believers was to be practiced in 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15:
 1. If any believer disobeyed the commands of the apostolic authority in Paul, the readers were not to "mingle or associate themselves with **for one's own benefit**" (*sunanamignusthai*, present **middle** infinitive of *sunanamignumi*, "mingle or associate with;" The Analyt. Grk. Lex., 1972, p. 386; *Ibid.*, Arndt & Gingrich, p. 792) with that believer, that he might "be put to shame" (*entrape*, passive of *entrepo*, "to shame," *Ibid.*, p. 269), 2 Thessalonians 3:14.
 2. Nevertheless, this separation was not to be so severe that the godly regarded the disobedient believer as an "enemy" (*echros*, *Ibid.*, U. B. S. Grk. N. T., p. 719; *Ibid.*, Arndt & Gingrich, p. 331-332), for that level of separation was to be practiced with apostates who taught a false Gospel of salvation or who denied Christ's deity or incarnation according to 2 John 9-10. (2 Thessalonians 3:15a) That was "first degree" separation.
 3. Rather, with a **fellow believer** who lived in disobedience to Scripture, the godly were to practice "second degree" separation, that is, separation in fellowship from that fellow but disobedient believer. This "second degree" separation was to be done to "admonish, warn, instruct" (*noutheteo*, *Ibid.*, p. 546) the wayward believer as a "brother" in order to see him repent and obey God's Word, 2 Thessalonians 3:15b.
- E. Such separation is itself often viewed by Christians as being ungodly, but the Apostle Paul's continuing remarks in 2 Thessalonians 3:16-18 of closing out the epistle demonstrates that such separation truly edifies:
 1. Paul followed up his teaching on "second degree" separation by giving a benediction that the Lord of peace might Himself give his readers peace at all times and in every way, and that the Lord might be with them all, 2 Thessalonians 3:16. Thus, true experiential peace at all times and in every way in fellowship with the Lord can occur only if "second degree" separation is Biblically practiced, for a perfectly sinless God Who is holy, or separate from sin, fellowships only with perfectly holy believers! (1 Peter 1:15-16)
 2. In case his readers might question his teaching in this epistle, especially his teaching on "second degree" separation just clarified, Paul closed the letter by taking the pen from the secretary who was writing the epistle by dictation to write in his own hand his closing greeting and stating that this was his typical proof that the epistle was from him, 2 Thessalonians 3:17.
 3. Paul then closed the epistle, calling for the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to be with all his readers, v. 18.

Lesson: *In order to please the Lord and enjoy close fellowship with Him at all times and in every way, we believers must obey His Word, and practice Biblical "first degree" separation from apostates and, if Biblically necessary, "second degree" separation from those fellow believers who disobey Gods Word'!*

Application: *For God's rich blessing, may we live holy lives in practicing "first" and "second" degree separation!*