LSB 2 Thessalonians 3:6 - 18

6 Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who walks in an unruly manner and not according to the tradition which they received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we did not act in an unruly manner among you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; 9 not because we do not have the authority, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would imitate us. 10 For even when we were with you, we used to command this to you: if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat. 11 For we hear that some among you are walking in an unruly manner, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ, that working with quietness, they eat their own bread. 13 But as for you, brothers, do not lose heart in doing good. 14 And if anyone does not obey our word in this letter, take special note of that person to not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. 15 And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. 16 Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually give you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all! 17 The greeting is in my own hand—Paul, which is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

We are closing out our study in 2 Thessalonians but we have no incentive to hurry. As I read this particular passage I see dual important issues to study. The obvious one is work. Work ethic. But a secondary issue that is becoming increasingly important in our era, our generation is separation. Departure.

The term in the swing era of music about 1935 was air. She is giving me the air. It meant separation. That girl is gone. She gave you the air.

Today I suppose the term of the generation beyond mine is ghosting. You've been ghosted. Same idea.

We speak of cancel culture these days. Another form of separation. When the powers that be in electronic land dis-agree with what you are saying they can simply turn you off. Electronically. Poof, you gone.

In an age where inclusivity is the new god, how quickly christians are finding that they can be cancelled. Excluded from the inclusive marketplace of ideas. Walled out, as it were. Given the air. Ghosted.

We expect that and welcome it since Jesus told us ahead of time, that's a cause for rejoicing in Matthew 5:11,12 "*Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you*.

But our passage this morning is shocking to christians who have been conditioned by our uber-inclusive culture to consider any discrimination as some kind of a sin.

In our verses this morning, Paul is calling for the Thessalonians, in the most forceful language possible in the New Testament, with all of the weight and authority of his position as an apostle to the church, with the authority of the name of Jesus the Christ, Paul demands that this church discriminate and temporarily, hopefully, exclude from fellowship, some who would claim they are members of the fellowship, because of their lifestyle. Shocking! Excommunication.

In 2012 and again in 2014 I attended the Together 4 the Gospel, T4G conferences in Louisville Kentucky. It was expensive to fly there and stay in a hotel room for 2 or 3 nights. I took my brother in law, Fred in 2012 and Bobby Woods in 2014 and paid for much of their trips also.

My pastor and mentor, John MacArthur spoke at those conferences along with other men who I respected greatly. MacArthur spoke at the 2018 T4G conference, but then he separated himself from that group.

The T4G conferences spawned something called the Gospel Coalition. And little by little, wokeness and social justice came creeping in the back door. Almost exactly the same time that Dr. MacArthur and other respected Bible teachers separated from them.

In 2019, our beloved Dr. Mohler, president of the flagship school of Southern Baptist convention quarreled with Phil Johnson over a statement, (there is a link on our web pages) concerning the christian stance on so-called social justice at a Shepherds conference Q and A session.

In 2020, the last Shepherds conference that I got to attend, just before Covid officially shut everything down for a time, all of those men that I enjoyed from T4G were conspicuously absent. T4G and Gospel Coalition had gone so far down the wokeness and social justice causes road that my pastor was standing clear of all of it, both good and bad.

Are we hypersensitive about our associations? Do we go too far. Some say we do. Myself, I have so much respect for the wisdom of the elders at Grace Community Church, I would align myself with their combined wisdom even if I didn't completely understand all of it. That's where you'll find me.

Christians are called to discriminate. Cut out the cancer. We don't embrace it. That's what Paul is demanding in this text.

About 5 years ago, Jeff will remember this, we were in a meeting with Bob Green who was the Overseer for the Episcopal Diocese who had controlling authority over this building and property. We had an enjoyable meeting discussing our different congregations, the remaining Episcopalians and our little independent group and there was some pressure from him to find common ground and have the two groups do things in common.

I declined any association. And my reason was the same as Paul's in this

passage. The episcopalians had long since left obedience to the authority of scripture behind and gone into very liberal christianity that denies innerrancy and authority of the book, therefore abandoning important moral commands.

You'll recall when those folks were mourning the death of their pastor that we served them at that service. We can serve them in christian love, but that's as far as any association can go. At least on my watch.

Associations cause confusion. When my children were growing up I refused to allow them to go on game nights to the Mormon church with their mormon friends. Dad! It's just kids playing basketball! Sorry, no. Nor would I allow them to join the Rainbow Girls, the Masonic girls youth organization. I took some flak for that.

We can be co-belligerents with other groups that are resisting cultural evil. But even then we are careful to define the limits of our associations so there isn't confusion. Christians and Mormons and Catholics can join together in one voice against abortion for instance, or same sex marriage. But even that is dicey. We proceed with caution.

Let's look carefully at what Paul says here.

6 Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Stop right there. The first thing we want to unpack is the severity of what Paul is saying. There are levels of authority when Paul asks for obedience of his hearers.

He might say, I urge you brothers, or I entreat you, or some other different forms of requesting consideration of what Paul is telling them. But here the full force of command is brought out. There is no stronger compelling than what Paul unloads right here.

We command you, brothers. This isn't a suggestion, it's a command. That

would be enough for me. Jesus' chosen apostle is making a demand, that's enough for me. Whatever it is, I'll comply. But Paul doesn't stop at that level which would be enough, he says;

6 Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

As an apostle of the church, Paul has the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ to back up his commands. Christ gave him that authority. Paul says I command your obedience and if you disobey, you haven't disobeyed me, you've disobeyed the Lord, Jesus Christ.

That's as forceful as it gets. Do this, or stand in direct disobedience to Jesus, who is God Almighty. That's the authority behind Paul's demand. This isn't a suggestion people. This is an order with the authority of the Creator of the worlds backing it up. Get it? Does that seem pretty clear? If we are in that group that Paul just addressed as brothers, we must obey this command.

that you keep away from every brother who walks in an unruly manner and not according to the tradition which they received from us.

There is a most unusual word here. Translated to keep away from. It is ***stellesthai*** and what it means in the greek is to store something away safely for later. To shelve something carefully for later use. You leave it alone until the set time. If it is stellesthai, it is **hands off**.

Most of the translations have either "keep away from" or "withdraw from". But understanding the other uses of the word cast new light on this for me. You haven't discarded this person, you are shelfing him for a time.

That's why vss 14 and 15 are careful to tell us; *14 And if anyone does not obey our word in this letter, take special note of that person to not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. 15 And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*

This is church discipline people. Pure and simple. If a so-called brother walks in an unruly manner, we are commanded to dis-associate ourselves from them. Period. Temporarily. That's important, and we'll see that in this passage. We don't shut people out of fellowship forever. This practice must always be restorative. The end game here is restoration. Always.

We dis-associate from people who are doing things that christians are taught not to do and who do not do things that christians are compelled to do. Unruly means unlawful.

OK, if this seems shocking and you need a refresher course . . .where did this idea originate from. The very idea seems completely bafflingly crazy to our culture. Excommunication. Baffling until they cancel us which they feel perfectly righteous to do. The hypocrisy of cancel culture. They are horrified that we would obey this command and discriminate against some sinning brother. So horrified that they cancel us electronically. It's OK for the culture to excommunicate the christians, but it's shocking if christians obediently engage in church discipline.

Let's look at the baseline command that Paul is requiring of the Thessalonians in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord is the one who made the original command. Paul's just the enforcer.

In the words of Jesus, Matthew chapter 18:
15 "*Now if your brother sins, go and show him his fault, between you and him alone; if he listens to you, you have won your brother. 16 But if he does not listen to you, take one or two more with you, so that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. 17 And if he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as the Gentile and the tax collector*.

This rule is from Jesus. And it isn't about getting rid of people, it's about restoring people who by sinning are actually removed from Christ by their actions. Jesus says, you need to come along side of that person and help them. Love motivates this. The end game is restoration ***to*** full fellowship

from sin.

But the process is tough love. And there's a progression. You see your brother in a sinful lifestyle. This isn't gray areas where you might think I'm sinning but, hopefully I'm not.

Don't come to me and say, you know Jim, it's kind of unruly of you to have a junky old truck in your front yard. That's a particularly hard sell in Tonopah Nevada. You might get some traction in Beverly Hills if I have a '39 Ford 1 Ton truck out front. The sin might be purposely aggravating my neighbors. But in Tonopah, kind of a hard sell. That truck runs and I use it. This isn't for gray areas.

When Jesus says; Now if your brother sins, He's referring to the moral law of God. If I'm cheating on my wife you better love me enough to come on over. If I quit coming to church and go off to la la land you probably need to come on over and confront me. Real sin. Sin that puts me in harms way. We're responsible to one another. Dangerous sin that requires rescue.

Notice the progression. First you go alone, privately, no one else needs to know what's going on, and you confront your brother about the danger that you see for him because of some sin, and if he agrees and confesses and turns away from the sin, you've gained your brother. Simple restoration by someone who cared enough to confront the problem. That's as good as it gets.

But if I'm in danger because of real dangerous sin and you confront me and I tell you to go pound sand . . . that escalates things. Or you could just say, you know this Jim guy is more trouble than he's worth and I think I'll just let him go over the cliff. Then we both go over different cliff's.

According to Jesus, if I refuse to hear you about the danger I'm in, you are to go get two or three other brothers and confront me again, with witnesses for back up. Hopefully I'll be sensible enough to repent, and if that's the outcome, I'm fully restored, that's the end of it.

But in the final scenario, if I tell all 3 of you to go pound sand, I've made up my mind, I'm gonna continue in my sin, then it get's escalated. Tell it to the church.

Is that so the church can shun me? No. Not yet. Tell it to the church and everybody comes and tries to restore me. The whole church puts pressure on me to quit the danger. Quit the sin.

Then finally if I won't listen to the whole church, it's time to remove me from the fellowship. *and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as the Gentile and the tax collector*

Even at this point there's hope. What do we do with gentiles and tax collector's? Those folks are our mission field. We witness to them as unbelievers in the hope that God will grant to them repentence.

In the last stage the guy is unchurched. He's no longer a member of the body. But the hope is the same for him as any other unbeliever. We witness and pray for him and try to persuade him to come to Christ. Just like any other unbeliever.

That's the process. And in our text this morning Paul sort of gives the abbreviated version. Apparently Paul and others had worked with him while they were there and his unruliness did not change.

If a brother is living in an unruly way, we don't just continue fellowshiping with him as if there was nothing wrong. We stand apart. Otherwise confusion can set in.

Confusion can look like this; "Well Paul continued sweet fellowship with this guy who won't work and mooches everybody else's food, so I guess that's OK. It must be OK to quit your job and eat other peoples food."

No. That's not OK. It must be OK to not believe in the inspiration and

innerrancy and authority of the crystal clear Word of God and just do as you see fit in order to please the culture, because our pastor fellowships with those folks and treats them like fellow believers. No. That's not OK.

Sometimes you need to stand aloof while you're working through this process of restoration for the sake of confusion. And sometimes we just stand aloof because those folks make no claim to be part of our fellowship and we don't feel compelled to argue with them.

The rule we have in this text we're looking at this morning is that we are to stand aloof from someone who claims to be a part of our fellowship, but whose lifestyle is unruly. Unruly? What does that mean?

6 Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who walks in an unruly manner and not according to the tradition which they received from us.

Notice first the word "walks". This is the term for a continuous recurring lifestyle that embraces something christians shouldn't be doing. It isn't a one time offense, it is continual. That's what "walks" indicates.

Paul defines ***unruly*** for us. *not according to the tradition which they received from us.*

What was the tradition they received from Paul. It's the same thing that I say every time we have a communion service. Paul says simply; *For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you*:

Paul saw himself very simply as an information conduit. To the Galatians, Paul says; *I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ*. Galatians 1:12

To the Corinthians Paul says; *For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance*: 1 Cor. 15:3a

Paul had received his gospel, his doctrine, his complete theology, directly from Jesus in the desert for 3 years. He passed those traditions on to the believers in the churches he founded. And he lived those traditions before their eyes, as we will see shortly.

So to be unruly is to ignore the traditions that Paul received directly from Jesus. To be unruly is to live in defiance of the Lord, Jesus. To be unruly is to be antinomian. OK, that's a big word. Antinomian. dictionary definition; (relating to the view that Christians are released by grace from the obligation of observing the moral law.)

So called christians who feel no need to obey God's moral law are antinomian. Anti-law. Unruly christians. Christians who ignore not only morality, but anything else that Paul defined as traditions given to him to pass on to us by Jesus Himself. (So-called) Christians who by their very life style can bring confusion at best and dis-credit at worst to the body of Christ.

"Hey, maybe I'll become a christian and quit working and just mooch off of everybody else, eat food that other people worked for. Yogi Bear christians

The greek word translated unruly is ataktós. It's the word for dis-orderly. A soldier who won't march in rank with the other soldiers. You guys go ahead and march to the commander but I think I'm going to just sit down over here and have a smoke if that's OK with everyone. Well, NO. It's Not OK.

Paul wrote to Titus in chapter 2 verses 11,12 *For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us that, denying ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age*, Titus 2:11

Here's how we march according to the traditions of Christ delivered to us by Paul. We deny ourselves *ungodliness and worldly desires*. And we *live sensibly, righteously and godly* in this present culture.

Those are pretty sensible wide categories. To dismiss any of those things is to be unruly. I don't feel drawn to women so if it's OK with everybody I think I'll just marry a man. Not OK. Or how about; I don't think I'll bother with the whole marriage thing at all. Very constraining and it's an expensive commitment that could cost me money later when I decide to exit. So if it's just the same to the rest of you christians I'd rather just live with the person I'm sleeping with but not bother with the married thing. Not OK.

denying ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age,

Are you starting to get a feel for this word, unruly. Someone who claims to be a christian but breaks rank from the traditions, the law of love taught first by Jesus and then by Paul. Someone who decides to live in an onging, continual lifestyle of sin, no matter what the sin may be.

We'll learn in a few verses that this particular guy Paul is addressing has decided he doesn't need to work, he'll just eat everyone else's bread and do nothing, or worse yet, be a busybody while he's mooching and cause problems.

Where did this person or person's get an idea like that? Well, in vs. 7 we'll find out where the idea didn't come from! Paul was marching in rank right along with all of the other chrisitians, marching according to the commander, Jesus Christ. *living sensibly, righteously, and godly*

7 For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we did ***not*** *act in an unruly manner among you,*

Paul lived among these new christians as an example of all of the things we listed in the verse from Titus. *denying ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age*,

That was Paul's example as he dwelt in their midst. That's how we march.

We are witnessing christianity coming apart at the seams. Most of what calls itself christian in our culture, probably isn't. We've lowered the bar and lowered the bar until what is considered chistianity at this point may be more like what Paul would have called unruly.

We may be quickly approaching a point where the so-called christians will point at us who desire to live according to the traditions delivered to us by Paul from Christ, and we therfore will be considered as some kind of break away cult.

Our tradition, that's Paul's word, is to *live sensibly, righteously, and godly* and the world seems quick to point at us if and when we don't. They don't hold themselves to any standard but they seem to know what a godly standard of conduct might look like. Double standard. They quicky point the finger at us if we aren't living up to our own standards, even though they've abandoned God's moral laws themselves.

Is Paul pushing us towards legalism here, defining christian conduct as some sort of code, something he simply calls the traditions. What would our base line be? What are the traditions that if I step outside of them, you might come calling on me.

The answer is God's moral law. The ten commandments. God's defined morality given in those laws. Does keeping those laws save us? No. But if we are saved, if we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God, tell me which one of those laws I can set aside and ignore.

The idwelling Christ, the Holy Spirit is like a marriage partner living inside of me. When I do things that displease the Lord, it's rather like doing things on purpose that I know will displease my wife. That's a good example. My beloved wife has ways of making it crystal clear that we are not walking together in unison.

The Spirit likewise has ways of making me miserable in my sin. I don't keep the law to gain my salvation. That transaction is finished. Forever. But when I dis-regard God's laws and choose sin, the indwelling Holy Spirit knows how to make me miserable in my sin.

Because that's how it works with me, I'm too quick to question the salvation of folks who can live in a continuous lifestyle of sin against God's moral law. How is it that you can put fellowship with Christ on a shelf and just live in continuous sin? The indwelling Spirit lets me know every time I step over that line, and honestly there's no rest until I confess my sin and fellowship with the Spirit is restored.

And Paul indicates that there are traditions that normal christian existence lives within. It's like christians, real ones, live inside these lines, and when we get outside the lines, that's what Paul calls living in an unruly manner.

If we have standards. If we live according to the traditions of God's moral laws, the 10 commandments, in this culture that has abandoned God, and His laws, and His morality, we quickly expose this culture.

Wait a minute, you mean to tell me you actually believe in a God, some sky God who has a book that says the way I choose to live my life is something called sin. Astonishing. How dare you! Culture war 101.

And the church wants to be acceptable to this culture, so we wiggle around with obvious sin, and figure out how to dis-obey Paul's forceful command, Jesus forceful command, and lower the bar so that this culture is not offended. And pretty soon, the church and the culture are indistinguishable. No one can tell the difference.

Beloved, that's the perfect storm. That is the lukewarm church that Jesus will spew out of His mouth when He comes to call His real church out of this world. We need to be careful to live Godly lives in a culture that is getting increasingly angry with us for doing just that.