

SESSION 13

restoration- seeking church

SCRIPTURE FOCUS

2 Thess. 3:6–18

BUILDUP THEME



UPLIFT OTHERS

God wants churches to seek to restore sinning members to fellowship.

MEASURABLE RESPONSE

The students will learn the importance of restoring sinning church members to fellowship.

MEMORY VERSE

“And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (2 Thess. 3:14, 15).

Teacher Preparation

- ☐ Read 2 Thessalonians 3:6–18. This passage serves as a case study of sorts for dealing with unrepentant sinners in a church. We call that process church discipline. Note the language Paul used in calling for the process to take place. He made commands and expected the Thessalonians to follow them. He didn’t present his instructions, which came from Christ, as a suggested path. The Thessalonians were well aware that they needed to follow his commands.
- ☐ Read Matthew 18:15–20. When has your church practiced church discipline? What role, if any, did you play? What were your thoughts? What was the outcome?
- ☐ Encouraging your students to be diligent workers is important. That theme is certainly present in the text for this session. But the main focus is on restoring sinning church members to fellowship. All church members need to be aware of the process and purpose of church discipline. This session will help them become more familiar with God’s instructions on the important matter.

Session Summary

Some of the Thessalonian believers were using the doctrine of Christ’s return as an excuse for not working. Instead of following Paul’s previous teachings and example, they had become busybodies. Paul issued a final command for them to support themselves. He then laid out guidelines for the church to follow if some members still refused to obey God. First, they were to make clear God’s expectations in His Word. Second, they were to commit to helping the unrepentant believers. Third, they were to withdraw fellowship from the unrepentant to help them see the seriousness of their sin. Fourth, they were to depend on the Lord. Fifth, they were to respect the authority of God’s Word. Finally, they were to count on God’s grace.

Session Starters

Option 1—Church Constitution Review

Gather

- Copy of your church's constitution.

Steps

1. Before class, secure a copy of your church's constitution. Read any sections that have to do with church discipline.
2. Discuss church discipline to gauge your students' awareness of the process.

ASK: What do you know about church discipline? (Q1)

ASK: Why might a church remove a person from membership? (Q2)

3. Read sections of your church constitution that have to do with church discipline. Allow students to respond.
4. Transition to the Bible study.

Some of the church members in Thessalonica were determined not to work. They disobeyed Paul's commands and God's Word. So, Paul gave the church instructions on how to deal with a church member who refuses to repent of his or her sin. This session covers Paul's instructions, which we can apply to our church today.

Option 2—Church Covenant Review

Gather

- Copy of your church's covenant.

Steps

1. Before class, locate a copy of your church's covenant. Read it and highlight portions to read to your students. Note that your church's covenant might be part of your church's constitution.
2. Introduce your students to your church's covenant. Read portions of it to them.
3. Discuss the need for a church covenant.

ASK: Why is having a church covenant a good idea? *It shows that being a church member demands commitment to obedience to God and to caring for and helping fellow believers in their walk with God; it shows that church members have responsibilities.*

ASK: How aware were you of our church's covenant? Did you realize you had Biblical expectations and responsibilities as a church member?

4. Transition to the Bible study.

The church at Thessalonica had to address unrepentant church members. Paul gave them instructions for exercising church discipline. His instructions help us understand our responsibility to encourage each other to obey God.

Bible Study

The church at Thessalonica still had an issue with members refusing to follow Paul's instructions. Paul ended his second letter to the church by telling them what to do. The steps he laid out would help the church deal with their immediate issue and with other issues as they arose. Paul's instructions apply to our church too.

I. God's Standard for Christian Living (2 Thess. 3:6–10)

A. The guide for fellowship (3:6)

Paul mentioned in his first letter that some of the Thessalonians were disorderly and refused to work (1 Thess. 4:11; 5:14). They defended their lack of employment by stating that Christ would soon return, so working was pointless. They expected the rest of the church to pay their bills while they anticipated the Rapture. The real issue was their laziness. They liked living off of generous believers instead of working hard at a job to provide for their own needs. They selfishly took support that could have gone to help widows or those who couldn't work.

READ: 2 Thessalonians 3:6.

Paul commanded the Thessalonians to warn the lazy believers. Undoubtedly, they did, reading the first letter from Paul for all the church members to hear. Everyone, including the disorderly, would have heard Paul's clear and gracious instructions.

The lazy believers didn't get jobs. They took advantage of Paul's grace and continued to get into trouble, causing relationship problems in the church. Paul responded with new instructions concerning the disobedient and disruptive church members.

ASK: What evidence in verse 6 reveals that Paul was serious about the instructions concerning the disorderly? (Q2) *He stated his instructions in the form of a command.*

The Thessalonians would have understood the word Paul used for "command" as a military order coming from a higher-ranking officer.

Paul used the same word in verse 4 of chapter 3. In Paul's case, the Thessalonians' higher-ranking officer was not ultimately Paul, but Christ. The "disorderly" then were those who were "out of rank" in the church. They were not following the orders of Christ, their commanding officer.

Paul called for the obedient believers to withdraw from those who walked (lived) among them in a disorderly way. The disorderly believers were consistently living out of step with their fellow believers and with God. Paul was not telling the Thessalonians to stay away from any believer who happened to sin. If that were the case, every believer would be isolated from every other believer—for every believer sins at least occasionally. Instead, Paul was referring only to the believers who were habitually living contrary to the "tradition" (instructions) that Paul had handed down to them.

READ: 1 Thessalonians 4:11. **ASK:** What instruction concerning work had Paul previously given to the Thessalonians? (Q3) *Live cooperatively, minding their own business and working with their own hands to provide for their needs.*

Paul's instruction to withdraw from disobedient believers may have included not allowing the disorderly to participate in the church services and functions. Whatever withdrawing looked like in practice in Thessalonica, the overall goal of the separation was to make the disobedient believers aware of their habitual sin and to illustrate outwardly the inward lack of spiritual fellowship between them and their fellow believers.

ASK: What might Paul say to a church today that claimed it doesn't confront believers living in sin because confrontation causes uneasiness between members? (Q4) *Letting believers continue in sin destroys the church's testimony and robs the believers of the joy of restoration to fellowship.*

The Bible must be a church's guide for fellowship. If members refuse to obey it, the church needs to withdraw from them.

B. The guide for life (3:7–10)

Paul used his own life as an illustration of what it means to work hard. When his team was with the Thessalonians, they didn't expect anyone to pay their expenses. They worked to have the money to buy their own meals and support themselves.

READ: 2 Thessalonians 3:7–9.

Paul's team supported themselves because they didn't want to be a financial burden to the new converts or to potential converts. Paul, as an apostle, had the authority to demand that his needs be met. He chose to protect the gospel witness and work instead.

The missionaries chose to work because they wanted to present themselves as examples for the Thessalonians to imitate. Paul's teachings about the Rapture and Heaven caused some of the Thessalonians to neglect their basic responsibilities on earth. By working himself, Paul demonstrated that the Thessalonians couldn't give up their responsibilities. God still wanted them to spend time working so they could earn money to buy food.

ASK: What opportunities do you have to work hard? (Q5)

ASK: How does your work ethic affect the effort you put into ministry responsibilities? (Q6)

Paul added that if the Thessalonians weren't willing to work, then they shouldn't expect others to provide their meals.

READ: 2 Thessalonians 3:10.

The principle of working to provide for one's own food was so important that Paul presented it as a command when he was in Thessalonica. Of course, the command didn't apply to those who were physically unable to work.

The Bible tells believers how to live for the Lord. As they obey God's Word, they will enjoy fellowship with each other and effective ministry.

II. God's Process for Restoration (3:11–18)

Since some of the disobedient church members didn't respond to Paul's teaching, Paul needed to instruct the young church on how to handle the situation. His instructions provide guidelines for a church's discipline of consistently unrepentant church members.

A. Make God's Word clear (3:11, 12)

A church's first step in dealing with unrepentant church members is to make God's expectations abundantly clear.

READ: 1 Thessalonians 3:11, 12.

If those who had quit working had immersed themselves in God's work, then Paul might not have been so disgusted with them. But instead, they used their time and energy to become "busybodies." They were meddling in other people's affairs and minding other people's business. They wanted to know the "dirt" on others so they could manipulate and influence the people or humiliate them in public. Busybodies are never helpful in their attempts to find out what is going on in another person's life. The Thessalonian busybodies had become a bother and a burden to the church members; they were disrupting church life.

Paul had again made himself clear. He commanded and strongly encouraged those who weren't working to get jobs. He added that his

command came through the "Lord Jesus Christ." His command was God's Word. His letter became the book of 2 Thessalonians.

ASK: To what other "authorities" might an unrepentant member appeal to excuse their sin? (Q7) *His or her own feelings or sense of personal rights; society's norms; governmental laws.*

God's Word is our highest authority because God gave it to us to direct us personally and collectively as a local church. Unrepentant church members must know they are responsible to know and do God's Word. No other authority excuses them from that responsibility.

Paul concluded his instructions to the disobedient by calling on them to do their jobs in quietness and to eat their own food. To work in quietness meant they were to stop working to cause divisions and strife in the church by uncovering "dirt" on fellow church members.

God not only calls church members to stop sinning but also to take a positive and active role in the church. Confronting unrepentant believers is just as much about getting them active as members of team church than it is about getting them to stop sinning.

ASK: Does our church make God's Word abundantly clear? How? (Q8)

B. See the process through (3:13)

After Paul admonished the disorderly to work in quietness, he told the Thessalonian church not to grow weary in confronting the unrepentant members.

READ: 2 Thessalonians 3:13.

Paul wanted the church to carry out his instructions concerning the unruly. Adopting an attitude of "just let them be" would have been a lot easier than confronting them. But the church needed to do what God called them to do. If they had refused, then they would have been sinning against God. A church that lets sin fester will be ineffective in its community and destructive toward its own members.

READ: 2 Thessalonians 3:13. **ASK:** What is destructive about refusing to confront a sinning church member? (Q9) *The sinning member continues to experience the personal, destructive consequences of living in sin and misses out on the current and future blessing of living obediently; the church sends the message to other members that sin isn't that serious; the church's testimony before the world is destroyed.*

C. Withdraw fellowship (3:14)

Paul didn't assume that the unrepentant church members would all

confess their sins and seek restoration with God and the rest of the church. So, he instructed the church on how to deal with those who persisted in their sin.

READ: 2 Thessalonians 3:14.

Paul commanded the Thessalonians to “note” those who refused to repent of their sin. To “note” someone was to distinguish the person. The church leaders were to make known to the church those individuals who persisted in their disobedience. Paul instructed the church not to keep company with the unrepentant church members. Breaking off fellowship with them would cause the unrepentant to be ashamed of their sinful attitude and behavior.

Paul probably had all the Thessalonians in mind when he wrote verse 14. Those who were refusing to work needed to obey God’s Word by getting jobs. Those who were already working needed to obey God’s Word by responding properly to the disorderly. Choosing to ignore God’s Word on dealing with the unrepentant would be sinful. Disciplining unrepentant believers in a church isn’t an option to consider; it is the way of obedience to God.

ASK: What are some sinful ways the Thessalonians could have responded to the disorderly? (Q10) *They could have welcomed them into the church and ignored their sin; they could have gone too far and made permanent their withdrawal from the unrepentant; they could have abused the unrepentant or tried to shame them among unbelievers outside the church.*

When a member of team church persists in sin and refuses to respond to calls to repent, the rest of the church must respond by breaking off fellowship with the person. Such actions might sound unfair or mean, but God can use the actions to draw the individual back to Himself and back into fellowship with the church.

D. Seek restoration (3:15)

READ: 2 Thessalonians 3:15.

Freeloaders are more prone to make enemies than friends because they thrive by taking money and goods from others. No one likes to be used. Paul commanded the Thessalonians not to treat the unrepentant church members as their enemies, which would have been the natural reaction, but as their brothers.

ASK: What is the difference between treating someone who has hurt us as an enemy and treating that person as a brother or sister in Christ? (Q11) *We would seek to strike back at an enemy but seek to renew a relationship with a brother or sister in Christ.*

To admonish (warn) doesn't mean to "put down" or "belittle." The attitude behind admonition is one of care and concern. It is one of tough love. The Thessalonians were characterized by their love for one another (1:3), so Paul wasn't asking them to do something that the Spirit had not already developed them to do.

Church members should leave the door open to the disciplined members to repent and ask for forgiveness and restoration. The church should welcome repentant members back with open arms.

E. Depend on the Lord (3:16)

Paul turned from instruction to intercession as he concluded his teaching on the Biblical response to unrepentant church members.

READ: 2 Thessalonians 3:16.

Paul prayed that the Lord of peace might give the Thessalonians peace. His request was relevant, considering the problems with the freeloaders and Paul's commands to confront them. The Lord's peace-making presence in the church and with the unrepentant makes restoration possible no matter the issue.

F. Respect God's Word (3:17)

READ: 2 Thessalonians 3:17.

Paul closed his letter by writing the salutation with his own hand, which indicated that the letter was genuine. Those who stopped working did so because of false teaching about Christ's return. The false teachers and the disobedient believers ignored the instructions Paul received from God. Churches that respect God's Word as their authority on sin and restoration will have peace and will impact the world for Christ.

G. Count on God's grace (3:18)

READ: 2 Thessalonians 3:18.

Paul concluded by stating that God's grace would be with all the Thessalonians. Grace is God's undeserved favor and enabling. All the Thessalonians, both the working and the nonworking, could depend on God's grace as they dealt with the sin problems in their church. God's enabling grace means we can obey all God asks us to do.

Session Application

Steps

1. Encourage your class members to become more aware of each other's spiritual needs.

Paul said to note those who don't obey God's Word. In a sense, he means to "take notice" of others. Those who refused to work in Thessalonica noticed all that was wrong with their fellow believers so they might use the information against them. That isn't what Paul had in mind. He wanted the Thessalonians to take notice of each other with the goal of helping each other grow in the Lord. Our class meets for that purpose. You come here to be part of a group that cares for its members' spiritual well-being.

ASK: What could we do as a class to make us more aware of our spiritual needs? (Q12)

ASK: What actions could we take to help meet those needs? (Q13)

2. Have students pray for each other. They can either share requests or simply thank God for their classmates and commit to helping them grow in the Lord. (Q14)

