

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of
May 2021

(added progressively for each Sunday)

(see following pages)

2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

How to Behave Towards Disorderly Christians

per S Olyott

2 Thessalonians 3:16a

¹⁶ Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way.

This is a subject which is rarely treated today.

We will approach this final 2 weeks of our exposition of Paul's two letters to the Thessalonians, by putting three questions, and allow the text to answer them: The first is to ask with what tone is he writing to them?

It is one of complete authority. Verse 6: *⁶ Now we command you, brothers, ... And also at verse 12: ¹² ... we command ...* . This then, straight away, is a passage to be treated seriously. Here is a man who was once a complete pagan and a blasphemer, a persecutor of the church of Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ seizes him, getting hold on to him on the Damascus road, not only making a Christian out of him, but makes him an Apostle and tells him at the moment of this conversion, that he is being sent by Jesus Christ Himself, to be a teacher of the nations. This man now writes to Christians, who were mostly Gentiles – a few Jews. He says, "We command you..." Therefore not to take this passage seriously is not to take seriously the Apostleship of Paul, which was given to him by the Lord Jesus Christ.

Again then verse 6: *⁶ Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ...* Then verse 12: *¹² Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ ...* Paul is telling us that we are to treat his teaching as if the Lord Jesus Christ, Himself, was giving it to us.

Let's pause and consider for a moment. If our blessed Lord is God in the flesh; He lived for us and bled for us; was raised from the dead for us, came here this morning. And if He gave us this teaching, which we are continuing to consider. We would all submit to it.¹ What Paul is saying: "Although the Lord is in heaven, He placed the Apostle on the earth and the teaching he is giving carries no less authority that if the Lord Jesus Christ Himself was giving the teaching. Do you love the Saviour? Do you call Jesus Christ, Lord? You admire the bleeding wounds of Jesus Christ for your sins? You believe intellectually, this morning? Are you convinced mentally that Jesus Christ is risen from the dead? Are you a Christian? You want to go Jesus Christ's way. Then this is the moment to stop and remember that the teaching we are coming to consider is to be received as if it came from the lips of your Saviour Himself. This is a passage to be taken seriously!

But that's not all to be said about the 'tone' of Paul. Look at verse 6: *⁶ Now we command you, brothers, ...* and Verse 12: *¹² Now such persons we command and en-*

¹ Note once again the 'great division' between the regenerated and the rest. Just as the 'sheep' hear and recognise the 'shepherd's' voice, the 'born again' hear and obey the voice of Christ, while the rest do not!

courage ... also verse 13: ¹³ As for you, brothers, ... So although Paul is saying, "I'm speaking to you as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although you're to receive this teaching as if from Jesus Christ. There is no reason for you to be upset or frightened or offended or 'on edge'. I'm speaking to you as brothers! I'm encouraging you!"

Look also at the end of the letter, from Verse 16: ¹⁶ *Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way.* Paul is speaking to them (and us) as someone who wants nothing but peace for them and us. *The Lord be with you all.* He wants our good. He wants Christ to be with us.

¹⁷ *I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand. This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine; it is the way I write.* ¹⁸ *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.* Here is a strange combination which we don't often see in the world. Usually, in the world, when someone is giving us commands, there's a certain sternness and distance. Here are commands – absolute commands – but no sternness and no distance!

Usually, in the world, if a person is talking to us in a 'brotherly' way, wishing us peace and grace. If it's affectionate and tender and loving there's an absence, very often, of authority. But here is Paul with great love and tenderness, speaking to us a Christian men and women and yet there is this absolute authority at the same time. We see Christ reflected here. "He was full of grace and truth." (John 1:14b) Only in Christ do we see that perfect 'marriage' of those two qualities. And here we see them in His Word coming through the Apostle.

Today's passage is to be taken seriously. It comes from the Lord. Don't be offended by what it teaches; don't be put out; don't be frightened. It comes to you with kindness. In a brotherly way. Wishing you peace, grace and to do you good. That's the tone of this letter.

Now for our second question. To what problem does Paul direct our attention? What's the passage about?

Certain members of the Thessalonian church, men and women and perhaps boys and girls like us, mostly Gentiles – few Jews. People who said they were Christians. Certain members were living in a disorderly way.² Our translation seems to have been conditioned by the specific example that Paul uses to illustrate the general fault of living in a disorderly manner: insubordinate to God's Word and hence *fruitless (unpro-*

2 The Greek in verse 6 and in verse 11 is only found in these two places in the New Testament. The word used is **ἀτάκτως** (atak-tōs), it is an adverb derived from ataktos (without the accent) meaning: disorderly.

ἀτάκτως, adverb, disorderly: 2 Thessalonians 3:6 ἀτάκτως περιπατεῖν, which is explained by the added καὶ μὴ κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν ἢν παρέλαβε παρ' ἡμῶν; cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:11, where it is explained by μηδὲν ἐργαζόμενοι, ἀλλὰ περιεργαζόμενοι.

Cognate: 814 *atáktōs* – properly, *disorderly* ("breaking rank"); insubordinate to God's Word and hence *fruitless (unproductive)* – because lacking *proper order* (discipline). [See 813](#) (*ataktos*).

ductive) – because of lacking *proper order* (discipline). In verses 6, 7³ and 11, this is the literal meaning.

So what does it mean: that men and women (and boys and girls) were walking in a disorderly way. Other translations – like unruly – don't get us much closer to what is more useful. Verse 6 can be clarified: there were in the church people who said they were Christians; they were disobeying a 'crystal clear' Apostolic instruction. They were not living a life *in accord with the tradition that you received from us*.

The word 'tradition' means something handed down. Paul could say: "When I came to you, with Silas and Timothy I handed down to you certain teaching. But now for some of you your life is not in line with that clear teaching." That was the problem.

Let's define this very clearly. Sometimes with a new Christian at the beginning of their Christian life they don't understand very much, and his life isn't in line with the Gospel. But this problem is just ignorance. For any in this situation, be assured this is not what Paul is talking about here.

Sometimes in the Christian life, someone 'falls' badly. But it's a 'one off' or so, event, not a disobedience which becomes a way of life. Perhaps you or I have fallen very badly this past week. But that's not what Paul is talking about.

Sometimes, as we might know, a person may slide away from the Saviour, secretly in their heart. You can't see it happening. Still this is not what today's passage is about.

This is about clear teaching and people's disobedience to it, that could be seen! And this disobedience had become a way of life. In Verse 10 you will see the particular example that Paul was using as an instance. He had particularly taught them when he first came that every Christian was to work for his living. But some of them who could work. Wouldn't work! Although they knew that they should work, they didn't. We're not talking about people who are ill or those who couldn't find employment, but there were folk who could work and wouldn't work.⁴

The command had been very clear: ¹⁰ *For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.*

Paul had taught them that! But some were living a life which disobeyed it. It had become a way of life to them.

But it had appeared very holy! That was part of the problem. "The Lord's coming soon. The Lord might come next week! It's hardly worth getting a job and going

3 **ἡτακτήσαμεν** (ētaktēsamen) — 1 Occurrence

2 **Thessalonians 3:7 V-AIA-1P**

GRK: ὅτι οὐκ ἡτακτήσαμεν ἐν ἑαυτοῖς

NAS: because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among

KJV: not ourselves disorderly among

INT: because not we behaved disorderly among you

4 As I transcribe this sermon, I am reminded of the general nature of the society I remember from many years ago. By and large people recognised the need to be productive members of society. This seemed 'second nature' to us. But why? Was this always so? Do all societies in all cultures feel this way? We called it the Christian Work Ethic. And so it was. Our culture was based on Christian principles. Then! But how long will our culture continue when by and large the Christianity which refined it is abandoned?

through all that training, because the Lord's coming soon. He'll bring an end to it all." The attitude looked all very holy. Very sanctimonious. Very Christian. Very pious! In fact they looked like 'super Christians'. But they weren't. There was clear Apostolic teaching they were disobeying.

And they were doing worse than that: look at Verses 7,8 & 9. Paul hadn't only given them teaching. He had given them an example to follow. ⁷ *For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you,* ⁸ *nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labour we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you.* ⁹ *It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate.*

Well says Paul, "I'm an Apostle. I have a right given by the Lord Jesus Christ to demand that all those who listen to my preaching, support me materially. That is my right! But I didn't exercise that right. All the time I was in Thessalonica, morning, afternoon, evening and night-time I worked. I preached, but I also worked to support myself. It was hard to work, because I also was preaching, preparing, praying, and visiting, but I also worked to fully support myself so that you have not only an Apostolic instruction. You have an Apostolic example. You've not only disobeyed the teaching but you haven't even followed the example."

And even worse! Verse 11: ¹ *For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.* The Greek word there is very interesting: it means somebody who doesn't do his own work, but is very interested in what everybody else is doing.

Can you imagine! Mr Christian goes off from home to work. He returns at lunch time and there are several members of the Church who refuse to work, sitting around his table, talking to his wife about everybody. He then has to go off to work again, while these professing Christians are in his house eating his bread – the fruit of his labour, and talking about the things of God and of everyone else. Disobeying a clear Apostolic instruction. Ignoring a striking Apostolic example. And making a nuisance of themselves by gossiping with one another.

Living in a disorderly way is any disobedience to the Law of God, which has become a way of life.

So Paul has introduced a principle of correct Christian living with a specific example. At this stage we take each of the 10 Commandments of the Law of God and use examples which apply this principle to each.

1. The first commandment tells us that we should only worship the Lord. If I were to participate in a Roman Catholic Mass, that would be bad enough. But if going to the Mass became a way of life, then I would become 'disorderly' as defined so far today. Because there would be a professing Christian participating in a non-Christian Act of Worship.

If one of us went to a Service where the Word of God was not believed, and falsely acknowledges that they were engaged in Christian Worship that would be bad enough, but if going to a Church where the Bible was not believed to be the

Word of God became a way of life, that person would be disorderly. Because it would be a way of life that was in direct disobedience to the revealed will of God. It would be going time and time again to a non-Christian Act of Worship.

2. What does the second Commandment teach us? Not to have idols! Actually it teaches a lot more than that. When God says we're not to have any graven image, what He means is, that He is the One who decides how He is to be worshipped. We don't decide how He is to be worshipped! Which means that if someone brings into Christian Worship something that God has not expressly commanded, then this is a terrible thing. But if someone brings into Christian Worship, repeatedly to the point where it becomes a way of life, things that God has not commanded, then that person is disorderly.
3. The third Commandment tells us that any use of the Lord's Name, which is 'light' and non-worshipful, is condemned by God. So if there is a professing Christian who uses the Name of God 'lightly' – cheaply – and it's become part of his life. It's something he does habitually and characteristically – that is a disorderly Christian.
4. And so to the fourth Commandment, which is at issue in our reading. The fourth Commandment says we should labour. And we should do that six days out of seven. But these folk would not labour. They would not earn their living. That's why in their case they were called disorderly. However we won't forget. Will we, that's only half of the fourth Commandment? The other half of the Commandment is that one day in seven is for God. As long as the Old Covenant was in operation: do this and live! There were six days of work and one of rest. The rest followed the six days of work and so every week they lived the symbol of the Old Covenant. Do this and live. But from Christ's resurrection to the end of the world, the week starts with rest – because we are saved by the person and work of Christ, and the six days of work follows. That symbolises the New Covenant. That we are saved, not by anything that we have done – by the work of Christ alone – and then we live in such and such a way to please Him. As a result of our salvation. Not to be saved, but as the fruit of our salvation.

Any Christian who uses Sunday for any reason other than the reason that Sunday was given – and it becomes habitual, a habit – is a disorderly Christian! Sunday is given: for the worship of God; for the gathering of Christians; for, in a special way, proclaiming the Gospel to the lost.
5. The fifth Commandment shows to us that anybody who is undermining family life; children disrespectful to parents; each is condemned by God. If undermining family life and disrespect for parents – even when we no longer live with them – becomes a way of life, then we have further examples of disorderly Christians. We are back to this passage about how we are to behave towards disorderly Christians.

6. The sixth Commandment tells us not to kill. Anything which endangers my own life. Anything which endangers the life of another human being. That's breaking the sixth Commandment! When that becomes habitual – becomes a manner of life; a way of living – then ...

It would be terrible for a nurse to be present at an abortion. Perhaps circumstances make this unavoidable, but for a Christian to choose this work of their own will, that would indicate a disorderly Christian.

All of us have made mistakes on the road. But to drive like a madman, so that my own life is at danger and the lives of other people are in danger. For this to be your pattern of driving ... This is what the passage is about!

In the passage we have clear Apostolic instruction. Here is clear Biblical example. When there is a way of life which isn't in line with the instruction or the example ...

We can go through the rest of Ten Commandments in the same way. That is what we will do next week and then move to the third question to ask Paul to answer via the current passage.

[2670]

Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today.

Amen

How to Behave Towards Disorderly Christians – Pt 2

per S Olyott

2 Thessalonians 3:18

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

Last week we began consideration of this passage: 2 Thessalonians 3:6 to the end of the letter.

We were able to recognise that our modern translations had focused on the specific examples evident in Thessalonica, without making it clear that Paul was making a wider and more general principle. The Greek words he used (found nowhere else in the New Testament) and more appropriately used in the KJV, described the main sin he was addressing as one being **disorderly** (breaking rank) – further defined as: *in-subordinate to God's Word and hence fruitless (unproductive)*.

Our approach to the passage was to propose 3 questions, and relied on Paul's own words to answer them. The first was to ask: What was the tone of the letter: Complete authority as if coming from Christ Himself, but with brotherly encouragement. The second: What was the problem that Paul was directing to our attention: The existence in the Christian church, then and now, of disorderly Christians. Professing Christians whose way of life denies God's Word – specifically the Gospel. Then we began to apply this to God's Word as revealed in the 10 Commandments and we now complete that with a brief comment on the last four Commandments.

7. The seventh Commandment forbids adultery. Any form of impure practice – habit. Whatever it may be, which is not in line with God's word. It becomes a way of life!
8. The eighth Commandment tells me that anything that hinders my own enrichment, or the enrichment of others is forbidden.
9. The ninth Commandment forbids anything that deforms the truth; is less than the truth; exaggerates the truth; dilutes the truth. Especially anything at all that blackens the reputation of a fellow human. Which is part of the specific problem at Thessalonica, because there they were breaking the 4th Commandment and by breaking the 4th they were quickly into the 9th!) They were sitting around table gossiping about people. Busybodies talking about what everybody else was talking about and said. They were disorderly. Disorderly Christians!
10. The tenth commandment says that any sign of discontent about my own condition or station in life is forbidden by God.

Is it possible, this morning that you are living in a disorderly way? We're not talking about the ignorance of a young (that is a new) Christian. We're not talking about the occasional falls that we all make – to our shame. We're talking about chosen beha-

viour which is clearly contrary to the teaching of God. We're not talking about 'differences of conscience' – because there were such differences in the early Church, such as what meat should be eaten, if at all; what days to be observed, if at all. And differences today about alcohol, and so on.

We're not talking about these things. We talking about chosen disobedience to the Word of God, which has become a way of life. That is the problem to which Paul is directing our attention.

We now come to our third question: We've seen the tone in which he speaks; and we've seen the problem which is at stake. The question now is: What remedy does he prescribe?

The simple remedy is that the people concerned put things right. Verse 12. ¹² *Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. (or eat their own bread)*

You're not working: so you must do your own work. You're eating other people's bread: stop it – eat your own. Your gossiping: keep quiet.

The simple remedy is that we put our lives right. And by the way notice how firmly the Apostle commands, but at the same time gently with encouragement.

Whatever your circumstances, this morning, there is always a way back to God from the dark places of sin. "There's an open door and you may go in. At Calvary's Cross is where you begin, when you come as a sinner to Jesus." If there is sin to confess: do that first. There is mercy to all persons who confess their sins. *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.* (1 John 1:9,10)

The question isn't: How deeply ingrained is the habit? His question will never be: How long have you been doing it? His question will never be: How far have you gone? When you are 'still a long way off, He will run to meet you, to embrace and kiss you'.⁵ Put a ring on your finger, shoes on your feet and the best of robes and set all heaven singing: "he's lost and is found, he was away and now has come back." (cf. Luke 15:20ff)

There is a way back! That's further glory of the Gospel. Sins can be forgiven – forgotten, wiped away. That's the Gospel – because of Jesus Christ's Cross. "Shouldn't I pay for it?" Yes, you should! "Shouldn't I 'bleed' for it, for years to come?" Yes, you should, in fact – for ever! But the infinite Son of God bled. He's forgiven us for every sin. You don't have to live another day in the sense of failure. You don't have to live another day in sin. You can come back today! It doesn't matter how stained the old robe is, He takes it off and covers you with another one – His perfect 'robe', of righteousness!

⁵ Note that this paraphrase from Luke 15, shows the father coming to the 'prodigal' BEFORE he confesses. It is not the confession that brings the father's response. The confession is in response to the father's acceptance.

And when the sin is confessed – then it must be forsaken. But the Lord who gave you the Holy Spirit – bringing you to be ashamed of your sin and to confess it, will He not give you that Holy Spirit to sustain you now in the spiritual warfare ahead? Against that sin which has held you for so long. Can't you count on that same grace, that **is** sovereign? Powerful, kingly grace! Can't you count on that to carry you through the pilgrimage now and to the end of your life? The simple and best remedy is that the people concerned, have it put right! Put it right.

But what if they won't? ¹³ *As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.* ¹⁴ *If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed.* ¹⁵ *Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.* If they won't! The Church must act. Must help.

If the sin of a brother or sister is visible, obvious and therefore evident – clearly not in line with the Gospel. And nothing, so far is being done about it. The Church must do something about it. Not to be a punishment – although it will 'hurt' – but as a restorative. To be therapeutic. To hurt: yes. To ruin: no! To make ashamed: yes. But to 'kill': No! This is the surgeon's knife, not the enemy's dagger.

What **MUST** the Church do? Verse 6: ⁶ *Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness (disorderly) and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.* And verse 14: ⁴ *If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed.* "The only thing you can do now", says Paul, "if he won't put it right himself, is that you must suspend him. You must break social contact. Don't sit in the same cafe; travel on the same bus; sit on the same park bench. Certainly not sit at the same table. You break social contact.

But does that mean that if I see him coming down the footpath you should change to the other side of the street? No. With that opportunity you stop (verse 15) and you talk to him. Not as an enemy. He's not an enemy, but as a brother. However you don't just talk about the 'time of day' or the 'state of the Nation'

¹⁵ *Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.* Speak 'straight' to him about the issue.

"I don't know what to say", you might think. But you should know what to say.

We believe in the final perseverance of the saints! (We've had enough of the 'Eternal security of the believer': there they say that if you've made a confession of faith, however you've lived since, you're saved, and you're heaven bound. That's 'not in the Book'!)

Everybody God saves, He sanctifies! And the only true proof that you have: that you are a Christian, is that you are persevering, in the Christian faith – right to the end. When God changes someone He changes them forever. And if the change isn't for ever – it's not God that did the changing! Therefore if you're no longer living in a changed way, you can't know you're a Christian.

So I've got to come to you when I meet you on the footpath and I've got to say, "Listen to me brother. As far as things seem to be at the moment you are a brother, but if you live like you're living and you keep on disobeying you're going to be lost. You can't be sure of salvation while you're nursing sin. You can't be sure of being a 'child of God' while you're deliberately tolerating and nurturing sin in your life. God refuses to give assurance to wilful sinners". (And we are the worst of sinners if we assure people that they are Christians, when we also know, that at the same time, they are nursing sin.)

So we've got to speak 'straight' to him! Why? Verse 14b: ¹⁴ ..., *that he may be ashamed*. We've got to wound his conscience. He might respond that you've hurt him. We'll respond, "Thank God!" That's what it was all about. Where did we ever get the idea that it's a sin to hurt people? It's a sin to wish their ruin! It's a sin to want them down. A sin to put them down! If it's a sin to hurt people then every surgeon would be a wicked man. Every dentist and every parent. We have to hurt people sometimes in order to help them. So he has to be told, that if he continues to live like that, he's a lost man. He must turn (repent) from it.

He might say, "Why won't you have anything to do with me? Why won't you get on the same bus? Why won't you welcome me to your home anymore?"

To which we must say, "Because your life is visibly not in line with the Gospel. You say you're a Christian, but you live like a non-Christian."

Well might we ask, "How can we possibly follow Paul's command's in today's world and circumstances?" Can we stop people coming to our church? No. Public Worship is open to all – unless a person 'disturbs the peace'. What can we do to apply what is in effect a 'suspension' of Membership?

When a person is visibly living, 'out of tune with the Gospel', we can remove them from all positions of responsibility and participation. Suspend attendance at the Lord's Table. And break social contact. Not on our own individual initiative, but as a church. Not to 'bring him down', but to bring home to him the danger of his position. Not to ruin him, but to use this 'pain' as a therapy. We dare to do all this because of our spiritual concern for him. Our Elder's lead us to do it and we follow them. Our unanimous desire is to see our brother repent. To see our sister, come back.

Question: Do you love your fellow Christian enough to do that? You love your children enough to punish them. Do you love your brothers and sisters in Christ, enough, to do that?

"Well", we might ask, "if even that doesn't work, what next?" He won't put it right himself. The weeks and months go by, and the church prays for him and pleads for him. Christians speak to him about his soul, but he still won't put it right. He's suspended

and admonished (warned). But he really doesn't want to change! Well, at that point we need to leave this passage of the Bible and go to other places in the New Testament.⁶ We then need to excommunicate.

[When we welcome someone into formal membership, we're not saying that for certain you're a Christian, therefore join us. We're saying that as far as human 'eyes' can 'see', you're a Christian, therefore join us. So when we excommunicate someone, we're not saying that you're a non-Christian, therefore go out. We're saying that as far as human 'eyes' can 'see', your life is the life of a non-Christian and therefore from now on (as long this persists) we'll treat you as we would any other non-Christian. We don't hate you. We shall be polite to you. We welcome non-Christians into our homes. So also you. We join non-Christians on buses, in sitting rooms and on park benches. So also you. In fact excommunication is in some ways easier than suspension. Easier to apply and easier for us to bear.]

We don't know if you're a non-Christian or not, only that you're living like one. So as a Church we'll treat you like one. In the hope that being treated like a non-Christian – if you really are a Christian – you'll be so ashamed, to be so treated, that you'll come back to the Lord!

The message of this passage is that no disobedience is safe. If you nourish a sin in your life, your conscience will become dull. So that sin won't trouble you after a little while. That behaviour will become part of your life.

Then your conscience will become dull in another area as was happening in Thessalonica: they began by not working – the fourth Commandment – and moved on to breaking the ninth Commandment. Bearing false witness – becoming a busybody! Then your conscience will become dull in that area. And so on, as one after the other these things become part of your life.

Eventually your conscience will not work at all. And return to God will fail.

If you persist in sin, it becomes bigger sin, and if you further persist it becomes apostasy. That's why we have to 'watch out' for one another. It's not the Elder's job, only, to watch out for the flock. They are specially charged to that, but it's not only their job. We have to look out for one another. If we recognise visible evidence and obvious signs of spiritual decay. We've got to speak to each other about it and not to take offence, when others do it or it is necessarily done to us.

When the Apostle wrote to the Hebrews, (Hebrews 12:12-14) he said that some people were slowing down in the race; their hands are beginning to fall; and their knees are beginning to shake. Hold them up. Help them along.

You've got to be firm to do that! Then he went on to say: ¹⁴ *Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which **no one will see the Lord.***

6 <https://www.christianity.com/wiki/church/what-is-excommunication-is-excommunication-biblical-or-just-mean.html>

[2583]

Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today.

Amen

1 Corinthians 1:1-17

Things to Remember & Things to Put Right

per S Olyott

1 Corinthians 1:3

³ *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Consider the position of Corinth on the map. On an isthmus (like an island connected to a mainland by a narrow strip of land), this city as a consequence had two ports – one to the east and the other to the west. In New Testament times it was a large, commercially prosperous city, trading to the East and the West. Like all sea ports its population was ‘cosmopolitan’. According to Olyott, T C Edwards wrote: “It was a city where Greeks, Latins, Syrians, Asiatics, Egyptians, Jews, bought and sold, laboured and revelled, quarrelled and hobnobbed, in the city and its ports as nowhere else in Greece”⁷ On the major population groups of this city (perhaps the size of Hobart) which was rebuilt and colonised by the Romans on the Greek mainland, Edwards also said: “Of Greek cities the least Greek, it was at this time the least Roman of Roman colonies.”

In this city was a Church. That’s not all that was there. There was a great centre of worship of Aphrodite – with all its immorality, a thousand cult prostitutes. The city – like most contemporary seaports was exceedingly immoral. If you were to study Greek you would come across a verb, **Κορινθιάζεσθαι** (*Korinthiazesthai*) which means ‘to be sexually promiscuous’ or in English ‘play the Corinthian’. In classical theatre, whenever a Corinthian appeared on stage in a Greek play an actor – wearing a mask denoting a female character – was always portraying a drunken woman. That is the reputation that this city had!

Nevertheless the city had great prestige. They held the Isthmian Games there.⁸ There was also lots of intellectual activity, there were many colleges and universities, but basically it was a profligate and immoral and Godless place.

Into this city the grace of God had reached, through the Ministry of the Apostle Paul. If you were to read the first 18 verses of chapter 18 of the Acts of the Apostles, you would see how a Gospel Church had been founded in this large and dissolute city. Things had been very discouraging to begin with. Paul had thought like giving up. But then the Lord had stood by him, and although there had only been a trickle of converts. God had assured him that He had many people in the city. Paul was invigorated by the doctrine of election, to go and preach the Gospel. It wasn’t very long before a large church was gathered by this means. Almost all the converts were Gentiles, but there were a few Jews as well.

⁷ East – West Shipping trade went through Corinth rather than around the treacherous southern coast of Greece: Small ships were carried across on a wooden railway, while larger ones deposited their goods at one port to be land transported through Corinth to be reloaded on ships on the other side.

⁸ These games were named for the Isthmus of Corinth. They were held in honour of the sea god Poseidon.

Paul stayed there an exceptionally long time for Paul – 2 years! Preaching in the church and continuing the work of evangelism. Eventually he left. And when He left, although the church was founded by an Apostle, things began to go very seriously wrong. These days folk may have an idealistic view of the early church. The church was fine while Paul was there, but when he left things went very wrong indeed. As we go through this letter we get a clue of the sort of things that had happened.

Some ‘false teachers’ had come, but they weren’t the main cause of the trouble. The main cause, was that most of the Christians there, still had a great deal of the ‘world’ in their thinking. They hadn’t learnt to think ‘Biblically’. They still had a lot of cultural and pagan ideas, in their minds, side by side with their “Biblical” thinking. Some of them had been trained in the schools of the philosophers. When they heard the plain, uncomplicated teaching of the Gospel, they thought it was beneath their dignity. They liked their ‘highbrow’ waffle! They couldn’t stand the plain, uncomplicated Gospel teaching.

There were other people who were so rich, that their riches became all that mattered to them. So that when they came to the Lord’s table they debauched themselves and ignored the poor. Others had no idea of the moral demands of the Gospel. There was an outbreak of lust in the church – but nobody said anything! Causing others to be tempted to the same thing.

Worst of all they had forgotten the need for Christian, brotherly love (*agape*⁹). It wasn’t long before there were cliques and suspicion. When there was an argument in the church, they were actually going to the city courts and taking out lawsuits against each other – all this in a Christian church.

Paul heard about this, after he left, and he wrote a letter. However that letter is not preserved for us. It’s referred to in 1 Corinthians chapter 5. That previous letter was apparently greatly misunderstood. So a little later he heard from the household of Chloe and from 3 persons who are mentioned in 16:17, just what the situation was in Corinth. So he wrote again. He was in Ephesus and the year was AD 57 as he did so. This is the letter we are reading at present. It’s a letter correcting the disorders; it’s a letter answering questions that the delegates which came from Corinth had asked him; it’s a letter which clearly sets out important Gospel doctrines, which had been misunderstood. A letter written 20 years after Calvary is our subject. A practical letter from a pastor, teacher, Apostle to a local church. We’re going to spend Sunday mornings as a local church in a largely immoral city looking at a letter which Paul wrote to a church in a similar environment.

In verse 1-17 the Apostle does two things:

1. In the first 9 verses he gives the church 4 things to remember. The reader must understand these otherwise they will get the rest of the letter all wrong.
2. Then, having giving 4 things to remember, in verses 10-17 the Apostle focuses on one thing that must be put right in the Church straight away – immediately without delay!

⁹ **Agape** (Ancient Greek ἀγάπη, agapē) is a Greco-Christian term referring to unconditional love, "the highest form of love, charity" and "the love of God for man and of man for God".

Verse 1-9: What are the 4 things the Corinthians had to remember when the letter first arrived? Because these are equally what we must remember!

1. Remember from whom the letter comes. ¹ *Paul, called by the will of God to be an apostle of Christ Jesus, and our brother Sosthenes,* “Now this letter” he says, “Is from me Paul, – Sosthenes is with me but I write it to you.” He reminds them he is an Apostle: an inspired interpreter and teacher of the Christian faith. Being a witness of the resurrected Lord. It is not just a dedicated missionary who is stating his opinion, it’s a divinely appointed Apostle. “What you are reading”, says Paul, “is the authoritative utterance of a mouth-piece of Christ.” It’s from an Apostle.

It’s true that some had questioned if his Apostleship was genuine. Some ‘threw mud’ at Paul throughout his life for claiming to be an Apostle. But he states it clearly and says here in verse 1 that he hasn’t appointed himself to this great office. He stands as an Apostle because of the will of God! And Sothenes is with him.

As we read this letter, we must be careful to note that we are not merely reading a treatise from two Christian ministers. Such could not have any form of absolute authority in the sense that this letter has. This is from an Apostle, who with a ‘brother’ – closely associated with him in his Apostolic ministry – write a letter which is to be received, therefore, as the Word of God.

If we forget that we shall ‘play fast and loose’ with this letter. There are things in this letter which ‘hit hard’ in the situation of every Church. And the situation of the 21st Century Churches in particular. When we hear what Paul has to say later on, about the place of women in the Church, for instance, which is debated by those who think they know about these things, pretending that they know better than the Apostle Paul. But the Apostle Paul will speak on this subject as an Apostle! So if we remember that. We will be preserved from playing ‘fast & loose’ with what he says.

He’s going to speak on how the Lord’s Supper is to be observed; spiritual gifts and their cessation. If we forget that he is an Apostle, we will tend to treat his words less seriously that they deserve. But once we remember that he is the divinely appointed mouthpiece of Christ, we must give ourselves to the serious study and ‘weighing up’ of every word and sentence.

2. The second thing we must remember as we read this letter is to whom it comes. Remember for whom the letter is intended. Look at verses 2 & 3:
² *To the church of God that is in Corinth,...* Now the word ‘Church’ is used in the Bible for the whole number of the redeemed in every part of the world and every nation. But the word ‘church’ is also used for a local gathering of redeemed people. It’s to such a gathering – a church – that the Apostle writes. And he reminds them that they are the Church of God. We will see why, a little later on. Some thought they were the church of God and of Apollos. Some thought they were the church of God and Paul. But the church doesn’t belong to Apollos, Paul or Cephas or any man! The church is the Church of God.

So none of us, as we study this letter, when we come to a difficult passage, can say, “This is not for ‘the likes’ of me.” How often when Christians read a New Testament epistle, finding something difficult there, they think that this is something to be left to the experts – for the academics! Just for those trained for the ministry. I can’t understand it so it can’t be for me. But in that local church were men and women, boys and girls. Paul insists that his letter is to the local church.

If you don’t understand it you need to be reminded that it is your duty to understand it. Ignorance is sin. It’s your duty to understand. Since this letter announces itself as an Apostolic word to a local church, it is necessary that we apply effort and prayer to ensure that it is understood.

Look now, how he describes this local church: ² ... *to those sanctified¹⁰ in Christ Jesus, called to be saints ...*

The word ‘sanctified’ deserves a sermon to itself, but for now we observe: It is used in the Bible in four different ways: preparatory sanctification, where God ‘sets us apart’ for Himself, by His decree of election; positional sanctification, where God sets us apart for himself, in reality, by the call of the Gospel; then there’s progressive sanctification, whereby in practical terms we are more and more set apart for God in holy living; and then prospective sanctification, by which we will be set apart for God, finally and perfectly, at the coming of the Lord and there will be the great final separation of the human race.¹¹

In which sense is the Apostle using the word here? Olyott is unable to give a decisive opinion, but he concludes that all 4 can be implicated.

This is what the church is: a group of elect people; called by the Gospel; progressing in holiness; and bound to go home with God. Therefore they can be called saints! The word “saint” never occurs in the singular in the New Testament (nor the Old) except once – where in Philippians 4:21 we get, “greet every saint”. In every other occasion (81 in the whole Bible) it is “saints”! It’s unthinkable that I should announce to you: “A reading from Saint (anybody) ... “

Every true believer is a ‘saint’, because he is someone who is ‘set apart’ to God. It’s contrary to the whole spirit of the New Testament to give anybody the title of Saint this or Saint that, unless of course you did it for every Christian. We are saints! Not because we are always saintly – (and if not more saintly today than last Sabbath, we might ask are we saintly at all!) However this is whom the letter is for. And these people in Corinth (and here) are not to think that they are just members of a little local church here or wherever. They are people who have been called by the Gospel and are saints.

10 «ἡγιασμένοις (hēgiasmenois) in the Perfect tense, “having been sanctified”.

11 The following links give some parallel detail of these four applications of the various Greek words translated as Sanctification (or holiness):

<https://scripturethoughts.wordpress.com/2012/09/06/the-bibles-four-types-of-sanctification-getting-our-vocabulary-right/>

<https://roadpastor.wordpress.com/2015/12/03/sanctification-101-the-different-kinds/>

In addition you are referred to the two articles from the Reformation Study Bible reprinted at the end of the sermons on the following dates”

25th April 2021. Sanctification

11th April 2021. Perseverance & Preservation.

This now goes on to remind them that they are members of a world wide family whose members have the same qualifications: ² ... *called to be saints together with all those who in every place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours:*

True you are a local church, but there are other local churches. True you are individual Christians, but there are other individual Christians. This letter is direct to you, but as a representative of the whole body of Christ. That's why we can preach this letter, with authority, to the Christian Church today! Since while it's to a local church, that local church is representative of all local churches. The grace of God has preserved this letter for all local churches.

Now lest we misunderstand the spirit with which this letter comes note verse 3: a friendly greeting and amicable salutation. ³ *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

It's important that we keep the spirit of the letter as expressed here, because the letter is basically a letter of censure! The Apostle is taking them and us to task, but the spirit with which he takes churches to task is the longing that they will experience the blessing and favour of God resting on each individual church, resulting from spiritual health in that church.

He writes not as an enemy, but with a large and warm heart.

So there are two things to remember: We must remember from whom the letter comes and for whom the letter is intended.

Next week we will continue with verses 4-9 as the first part of the passage and then consider 10- 17.

[2353]

**Pray for God's grace, through the Spirit of Christ to live in us all, that we may live the new life made possible by the Spirit, for all the saints present today.
Amen**

Delivered Sunday 23rd May, 2021
Delivered Sunday 30th May, 2021