

Accountability

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[0 : 0 0] Thank you very much, Jackson. Well, folks, it is wonderful to be with you again. Please do keep that passage open in front of you in 2 Thessalonians as we dive into this final section.

Now, as I was preparing for tonight, I came across a little story that I think summarizes or gets to the heart of one of the problems that Paul is addressing in 2 Thessalonians.

Now, let me take you on a journey with me. The story is about four people. It's a bit of a tongue twister, so I'm going to take my time. And their names were everybody, somebody, anybody and nobody.

Now, there was an important job to be done and everybody was asked to do it. Everybody was sure that somebody would do it. And anybody could have done it, but nobody did it.

Somebody got angry about that because it was everybody's job. Everybody thought anybody could do it, but nobody realized that everyone wouldn't do it.

[1 : 0 3] It ended up that everybody blamed somebody when nobody did what anybody could have done. Now, this story can be summarized in many different ways and you can take a different angle on it.

But the angle I want to take tonight is that there is a lack of accountability. There is something to be done and four people do nothing about it. Accountability is something that we're used to today.

It's part and parcel of every family. So parents, they hold each other accountable for the household, paying the bills, making sure money is coming in, making sure the house is fed and looked after.

Parents hold their children accountable. Are they behaving, obeying the rules of the house? Are they doing their schoolwork? Are they growing in the Lord as they have been taught about Jesus?

Children hold each other accountable when the parents aren't around, or at least they're supposed to, to make sure that they're safe and they follow the rules that their parents have put in place, or for the most part anyway.

[2 : 1 4] Accountability is part of every single family. And it makes sense with people in such close proximity to one another to keep an eye out for each other, to make sure that everyone is okay and that the family grow together.

And the same is true for the church family, isn't it? Accountability is necessary in every and any church. It ensures that we as leaders are leading well.

We're being examples of what it means to follow Jesus. As church members, it means that we're caring for one another, building each other up in the Lord. And as a whole church family, being accountable to one another means that we all continue to work together as one unit until the Lord returns or we are taken home to be with him.

It means that we all work together to ensure that the church runs smoothly and that it is not run by a small number of people. And that is precisely the problem that Paul is addressing tonight in Thessalonica.

Remember the setting of this book. There were persecutions coming from outside the church. There were false teachers in the church saying that Jesus has already returned. And this resulted in some people in the church stopping work altogether, doing nothing.

[3 : 38] It's as if they were saying, well, if Jesus has already come back, why should I bother showing up? Why should I bother doing anything? Maybe you've seen those signs or those t-shirts that are quite irreverent, but they say, look busy, Jesus is coming.

Well, the motto of some of these people was Jesus has already come, so sit back and relax. And in the context of the first century church, that would have had massive implications.

See, these Christians didn't just gather on a Sunday morning or evening for a few hours. They did everything together. They shared everything. They would have used their money to pay for meals for the whole church that they would have celebrated most days together.

They were a very close community of Christians. And so this evening, as we dive into 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, Paul gives some final exhortations to this church and some teaching on what this church and each individual within this church should be doing on a daily basis.

See, a church family has an obligation to hold each other accountable as they pursue living a life for Jesus and growing in light of his return. And in this passage, Paul outlines what this church should be holding each other accountable to.

[4 : 59] And in turn, what we should be holding each other accountable to as a church in Brunsfield. So the first thing Paul says is, don't be lazy, be proactive in verses 6 to 10.

Look at the language that Paul uses to describe just how serious a problem this was in Thessalonica. Read verse 6 with me. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive, and do not live according to the teaching you received from us.

See, Paul isn't just saying that being proactive and working is good and being idle and lazy is bad. He commands these Christians in the name of Jesus to stay away from those who have a poor work ethic because he was concerned about how that was reflecting on Jesus and their witness to the outside world and their witness to each other.

Idleness, laziness is not God glorifying. Genesis tells us that humanity was created with a pattern of work and rest, but in Thessalonica, a theological problem had turned into a practical neglect of the church.

See, all theology has practical implications. And this is a really important thing that we need to understand. Our theology, our understanding of God, shapes the way we live as Christians.

[6 : 30] Now, I've heard some Christians say, I'm not a theologian. I don't need theology. Well, if you have thoughts about God, and every single one of us do, then you are a theologian.

The important thing is to make sure that we are being the best theologians we can be. And if anyone tells you that theology doesn't matter, take them to 2 Thessalonians and show them that a wrong theology of the return of Jesus was causing division and laziness in a church family that had been a big problem, which is why Paul wrote 1 and 2 Thessalonians.

Theology matters and a theological problem can have, and very often does have, practical implications that can hurt others and can hurt the church.

And at the end of verse 6, Paul is referring to his teaching and saying that the truth of the gospel should change how you live. Look at the severity of language he's using.

We command you, verse 6, keep away from lazy believers, verse 6. And in verse 10, he says, the one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.

[7 : 44] See, the faithful members were working hard, contributing to meals, to community life, but others were being lazy with their feet up all day. They wanted all the benefits without the labor.

But the gospel should change the way Christians view their life and everything in it. A Christian should do everything to the best of their ability for God's glory.

That includes our work. It includes our gathering together as a church. And Paul then says, let the example of other Christians who live this kind of gospel-shaped life, this gospel-shaped proactivity, spur you on.

In verses 7 to 10, Paul speaks about the example that he was to this church as he spent time with them. Read verse 8 with me. We worked night and day laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.

Now in Acts 17, we read that Paul and his companions were in Thessalonica for anywhere between two to four weeks, a relatively short period of time, and yet it was enough time for them to be examples to this church of how Christians should live.

[9 : 01] So Paul is working during the day as a tent maker to earn his wages, and then he's gathering with the Lord's people in service at night, and he's teaching them the truth. Paul's life matched what he taught.

And the same should be true of every Christian. Paul details more about his time with this church in the passage that Archie read to us from 1 Thessalonians 2.

Their work went hand in hand with them, sharing the gospel and teaching the truth to this church. Paul says, Christians, don't be lazy. Be proactive. Now we're in a time post-COVID where volunteering in every church is down.

People are prioritizing other things in life. We're back to the crazy busyness that we had before. But in almost every Zoom call over lockdown, I remember people bemoaning the way they used to run their lives.

Running around doing a hundred different things, being so busy that they couldn't make sense of anything. But we've gone right back to it, haven't we? And here is a call to reprioritize, to not neglect your church family that you were created to be part of, and that you have been gifted to serve in.

[10 : 19] It should challenge the pattern that we see in the world that's easy to fall into ourselves, of working nine to five and then watching Netflix until midnight. Church is a family.

If you're a mom or dad at home, you do the dishes, you make dinner, you look after the kids. You're not volunteering, but you do it because it's your duty. It's the same in the church.

Service in the church is part of our DNA. It's not an optional, oh, I'm going to go and volunteer today. You're a Christian. You're part of the church family, Paul says, so do your duty. Be proactive in your service.

He worked night and day. Now, I don't think we should take that literally. I don't think we should do that today. We need to be wise and not tire ourselves out, not burn out. But there is an element of sacrifice that is expected as we serve the Lord.

One of the phrases I often use when I speak about serving the Lord is sustainable sacrifice. There will always be, and I think there should always be, sacrifices as we serve our church family.

[11 : 26] But we need to make sure that those sacrifices are sustainable and for God's glory, not our own. Now, Brunsfield has so many examples of people who have been wonderfully proactive for the glory of God.

I go and sit in people's homes, older members' homes, and hear the stories of all they've done over the years. And I'm astounded. But that work continues now.

Even if they can't come out to every service, if they can't be involved in all the ministries they used to be involved in, they still get on their knees every single day and pray for this church and all of its members.

Or there are other members who, like Paul, may have only been with us for a very short while, but got stuck right in from the get-go. Serving in ministries, involved in one-to-ones, sharing the gospel, encouraging the church.

The temptation might be, especially in a city-centre church like this, where there seems to be a constant flow of people coming and going, to think that there's no point really getting stuck into church if I'm only here for a few years.

[12 : 36] Well, that's wrong. And Paul would stand very strongly against that in this passage. Instead, he says, we are to get stuck in. Don't be lazy, but proactively serve one another.

Grow in your faith as we eagerly await the return of Jesus. Paul says, don't be lazy, be proactive. And the second thing Paul says is, don't be a burden, be productive.

In verses 11 to 12. I remember as a kid, you were always warned not to do things for your own good, right? Kids hate it. I hated it as well. I remember once being on a Cubs camp and we were burning our names into wooden plaques for our bedrooms at home.

And obviously the leader said, don't touch the pointed bit at the end or you'll get hurt. I was always a bit of a clown. Not much has changed. And we didn't really believe the leader.

So what do a group of lads do? Well, we egg each other on to see who breaks the rules and to see what happens. So yes, I touched the end of the wood burner and I obviously burnt the tips of my fingers.

[13 : 40] But nobody believed the leader until they saw the pain I was in and the consequences of not heeding his actions. Now the church in Thessalonica, they've been warned of these false teachers.

They've been warned of their influence. And now Paul addresses head on the root of the problem. He says, here it is. Read verses 11 to 12 with me. We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive.

They are not busy. They are busy bodies. Such people we command and urge in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat.

It's not just that people were being lazy and not proactive, but they were being a burden on the church as a whole and distracting the church from their mission of growing in faith and sharing the gospel until Jesus returns.

That's why Paul says, don't be a burden, but be productive. Because there were some, as verse 11 says, who were not busy, but were busy bodies.

[14 : 44] A play on words that show that they weren't being productive or busy themselves. They were instead busying themselves with other people's work and other people's productivity.

Meddling, sticking their noses in where others were trying to live the life that Paul commanded them to. And you can imagine the disunity that these people were causing, can't you?

Always wanting to say how the church should be run. Always wanting to be in the important meetings to be seen as the one serving to get recognition. But without doing any of the work.

And sowing disunity and discouraging people as they went. And they're a distraction because they expect to be fed and cared for whilst they do nothing.

That's why Paul says in verse 12, we command you and urge you in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food you eat. The way to correct an unproductive life, Paul says, is to get to work.

[15 : 49] Nobody should be unnecessarily dependent on others. Now, don't get me wrong. Christian charity is important. We need to care for one another. But the problem here is that the people weren't in genuine need.

They were in need because of their own irresponsibility. So Paul says, if you're able, go and work. Earn your keep. Earn your food with your own wages. And stop using the time that God has given you, that God has gifted you.

To meddle in the lives of other faithful believers and distract them from Christ. Paul is building on the command that he gave these Christians in 1 Thessalonians 4 verses 11 to 12.

Where it says, make it your ambition to lead a quiet life. You should mind your own business and work with your hands just as we told you. So that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders.

And so that you will not be dependent on anyone. Paul says, don't be a burden. But be productive. What are we busy ourselves with?

[16 : 55] How much time do we waste on things that we don't need to do? A quick Google search will come up with hundreds upon hundreds of articles about being less busy and more productive.

We're a generation that feels we're the busiest we've ever been. But we aren't necessarily the most productive. Because looking busy and being busy is the in thing at the moment.

Constantly getting pings on our phone. Phone calls, floods of emails, text messages. One social event after the other. But busyness isn't a sign of productivity.

It's easy to think that we are busy. But are we busy bodies? Busy bodies genuinely think that they are busy and productive. But this is where accountability in the church is so important.

Listening to the voices of other wise brothers and sisters in Christ who help you see whether you're using your time wisely or not. And how you're using your time in the church as we serve one another.

[17 : 57] Now are we doing this? Or when we hear about serving in church during the notices in a service do we switch off? Do we come to church and sit back and expect to be served?

Or are we actively thinking how we can serve others? That may be on a rota on a Sunday morning or evening. It may be with a conversation over the pew. As you encourage someone else and you point them to Jesus.

It may be simply asking someone how you can pray for them and doing it right there and then. Being productive in our faith for the upbuilding of others and for the church.

It doesn't always have to involve the seemingly important things. The upfront things. But holding each other accountable and pointing each other to Jesus as we live is key.

So Paul says don't be a burden but be productive. And the third thing Paul says is don't grow weary. Do good in verse 13. Now in this context of persecution of false teachers and then lazy believers.

[19 : 02] Who are irresponsible and causing division. It is understandable that the faithful believers in this church were discouraged. A bit like a piece of glass that's thrown into the sea.

Initially it looks fine. And nothing seems to be happening to it. But as time goes on. The constant move of the current brushing the glass against the sand. The glass starts to get less and less sharp.

It loses its vibrant color. And one day it's found on a beach. And it looks like a piece of see-through glass. A pebble. That's not sharp at all.

Well just like a piece of glass that's been worn down by the sea. These Christians it seems have been worn down by the discouragement going on around them. They were the ones doing all the work.

But with the constant meddling of the lazy wayward believers. They could have become disheartened and thought that they should just give up. They're tired. Paul acknowledges that this is a danger.

[20 : 05] And so he doesn't admonish them. He doesn't say just man up and get over it. But in verse 13 he says, As for you brothers and sisters never tire of doing what is good.

Paul recognizes that for a church to be healthy its members must never tire of doing good. He's encouraging the faithful members who are serving diligently to keep on serving in the church for the glory of God.

Encouraging them to hold those accountable who've chosen to be a burden and lazy. And he's admonishing the lazy member to start doing good.

He says, don't grow weary but do good. Now as a church family here at Brunsfield, are we doing good? Are we holding each other accountable to serve the Lord? To serve this church?

To serve this community? Paul is primarily speaking to the church here. And how they interact with each other. Especially at this time of year, which can be a burden and a hard time for so many people.

[21 : 11] How can we do good for one another? We can draw alongside those who are struggling. Invite those who would otherwise be by themselves at Christmas into our family life.

To join our celebrations. Then thinking of the new year, could we start a one-to-one with a fellow church member to read the Bible together? To pray for one another? To encourage one another?

And hold each other accountable to this passage? In many churches today, the sad reality is that you'll find roughly 20% of the members doing 80% of the work.

That's super discouraging for those who are working hard. And if you're here and that's you, I know that's discouraging. If you're part of the 20% that's working hard, I hope you're encouraged to know that you're doing exactly what God asks you to do.

To serve Him faithfully. You are honoring and glorifying God in your service. But you need to remember to rest. And if you're part of the 80% who isn't serving, please do grab one of the elders.

[22 : 17] Ask them how you can serve. Speak to Jill about where there are gaps in the rotors and other things that need doing. Because God has gifted you to serve this church and you are here.

So get stuck in. And then thinking wider than that, we need to ask ourselves if this church disappeared overnight. Would it be noticed?

And would we be missed in the community? The Bible makes the clear application that Christians should be sharing Jesus with the world. And that goes beyond the invite to a Christmas service as good as that is.

But it means that we need to actively and intentionally get into our community. And in the communities that you live in to share the gospel and tell people about the hope that is found in Jesus.

Don't grow weary, Paul says, but do good. And the fourth thing he says, and these final two points will be much shorter. Don't be naive.

[23 : 18] Take note in verses 14 to 15. See, bad theology has negative implications for the church. And enticing people to sin is a serious matter in every church.

And that's what was happening here in Thessalonica. It was spreading like gangrene. It started off as a small imperfection in the flesh. But then very, very quickly developed into a serious problem that neither dealt with or it could have put this whole church family in jeopardy.

And I think that's why Paul wrote 1st and 2nd Thessalonians so closely together. And why these books stress the importance of holding correct doctrine and living out the Christian life until Jesus returns.

Paul recognizes the importance of that, which is why he says in verse 6, keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive. Now why is he so strong?

Because the problem of sin and enticing others to sin in the church is very serious. If sin is allowed to exist in the church, if sin is known about and tolerated, then there is no difference between the church and the world.

[24 : 28] So Paul says in verses 14 to 15, read those with me. Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instruction in this letter.

Do not associate with them in order that they may feel ashamed. Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer. Paul says, hold fast to the truth in this letter.

To recognize the authority of God's word. And that needs to be the basis for church accountability. See, we don't hold each other accountable to our own standards because they change.

But we hold each other accountable to the word of God and his plan and desire for his people. Paul says, take special note of those who disregard God's word.

Now I'm not exactly sure what that looked like. But I imagine it meant recognizing those who are living contrary to God's word and knowing the danger of having fellowship with them. This is first century church discipline.

[25 : 29] Where people are removed from fellowship for a time so that they can see the seriousness of not following God's word. But also with the hope and prayer that they would be reconciled.

See, it's important that Paul says in verse 15, He doesn't say, treat them as if you never knew them. But he says, warn them as you would a fellow believer. Church discipline is never punitive, but always redemptive.

Paul says, don't be naive. Be wise about who you associate with and the impact that that is going to have on your whole church family. And he highlights the danger of surrounding yourself with people who can say the right things, but never get anything done.

Church discipline is good and necessary to ensure that we're serving God as he wants us to. Don't be naive, Paul says. Take note. And the final thing Paul says is, don't forget grace and peace in verses 16 to 18.

So way back five weeks ago, we began this letter thinking about the first few verses where Paul begins by speaking about the grace and peace of Jesus. And he ends this letter with a prayer for those same things.

[26 : 45] Read verse 16 with me. Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you. This is the fourth prayer in this very short letter.

And each of them perfectly worded to highlight the needs following what he's just taught them. So it makes sense here, doesn't it? That Paul prays for God to enable them by his divine power to have peace as they put this church accountability at its best into practice.

And then the final words of the letter in verse 18 are the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Now how can a church be transformed from a mixed bag of laziness, of false teaching and genuine faith into a healthy church?

Only by the grace of God. People are transformed as God does a work in their hearts by his spirit and calls them to be the believers he wants them to be. The grace and peace of God keeps you rooted in him.

They enable you to hold fast to his teaching and to strive to grow in light of his return. Paul says, don't forget the gospel. Be mindful of the change that Jesus can bring about in people's lives as you live as a church family.

[28 : 10] As you hold each other accountable, as you spur each other on in peace and grace to be the church God wants you to be. And we started off this evening with a story of four people named everybody, somebody, anybody and nobody.

And an important job that never got done. It's a silly example, but it highlights the reality of chaos that the lack of accountability can bring. We are all called as a whole church family to hold each other accountable.

To be an encouragement to one another and to remind each other to be proactive. To be productive, to be productive, to do good, to take note and to not forget grace and peace, all for the glory of God and the upbuilding of his church.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your words. And Lord, I pray that you would challenge us where we need to be challenged.

Help us to live the Christian life that you want us to. Help us to live for your glory and to give you all the honor and praise. Father, would you give us the strength to continue to do good and to serve you?

[29 : 21] And would you give us the humility to always point people to Jesus and the wonder of the gospel that we know and we love. And that we would and give us opportunities to proclaim that gospel to those around us.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.