

Congregational Discipline

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 01 November 1983

Preacher: Harry Robinson

[0 : 0 0] So, let your word make your work in our hearts and minds as to accomplish your purpose in our lives.

Page 194, the Blue Bibles, looking at chapter 3 of Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians and verse 6 at the top of the page.

That's where the passage begins. The passage which I'd like just to bring forcibly to your attention is to pass on to you.

Paul's recommendation is that if you will not work, you will not be allowed to eat. That just suggests a lot of possibilities, doesn't it, is a text for these days.

And let me say that all the possibilities that may be going through your mind come from you, because I haven't said anything yet about it. And you can spend the whole afternoon, if you want, in meditation on it.

[1 : 1 5] But Paul is very clear to deal with one problem in the church. If you will not work, you will not be allowed to eat. Well, what I want just to do with this passage and what my real desire for you, as I know some of you, I know the stress under which you're living in these days, and know this kind of experience of a pit which has no bottom, and uncertainty about the future, and despair about what to believe or who to believe, and the breakdown of long-term relationships, and the passing of a kind of prosperity with which many of you have grown up and have never known anything else.

I would dearly love to be a great comfort and strength to you all, but I can commend you one who will, whose invitation to you, turning to the word this morning is, Come unto me, All you who labor and are heavy laden, Thy will and the present.

I want you, just as we think about these words, your hearts will be open to answer the invitation of the person of the Lord Jesus, but in these units, you will indeed come unto him, and by his spirit stands among us, and risen far.

You will come unto him, and he will, that because you labor and are heavy laden, he will give you renewal and regret.

Looking then at the passage in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, beginning at verse 6, I want to ask you first a question. Could we, as a congregation, be disciplined?

[3 : 4 4] If I, on the authority of two or three people, heard that you were misbehaving, went to tell you so, would you be glad to see me? Ready to hear anything that I had to say?

or one of the other leaders in our congregation? Is it possible, in a church that is structured the way ours is, for members of this congregation to be disciplined?

look how the passage begins. Paul says, we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It is very much like a regimental sergeant major standing on the parade square saying, hear this! Now, just supposing that our church had certain factors among the congregation that were not getting along well with each other.

Just supposing that some in our congregation were speaking against too rigid, too fundamentalist, too evangelical, too this, too that, too something else.

[5 : 03] And saying terrible things like that about the message of the gospel. Supposing somebody had suddenly discovered that the church committee and the trustees of the church and the ministers especially were primarily interested in money and getting money as much as possible for the many as well.

supposing that happening. Supposing that people living in the emancipation of the 20th century considered our pattern of Christian sexual morality to be very badly behind the times and were calling on Christians to catch up with the times to practice new liberated sexual morality.

Supposing there was confusion about the person of Jesus Christ about his promise to come again. Supposing some of you were going around being very spiritual because you found that if you were spiritual people would tend to invite you out to suffer fairly often and when times are hard an invitation to suffer means quite a lot.

Supposing that that kind of thing was happening in this congregation. Supposing some of you were sure that the Holy Spirit worked in this way and that you were being guided by the Holy Spirit in a quite unique and different way that nobody else in the congregation was being guided by the Holy Spirit.

I read a story an article about Martin Luther and he had this problem in his day when people went around smacking stained glass windows and desecrating churches in their new found reformation and instead of them got up very often said they think they've swallowed the Holy Spirit feathers and all well I mean that is a recurring problem if we had all those problems in our congregation and I'm not basically denying that we have but I'm not saying that we have either because we have to work that truth but if we had them all then we wouldn't be unlike this church in Thessalonica to whom Paul is addressing these words and upon whom he is trying to bring some order and some discipline discipline and I wonder how much as a church we are willing to accept discipline he apparently in modern terminology fired off two letters to them and the two letters he fired off are first

[8 : 20] Thessalonians and because they didn't pay enough attention to that he fired off a second one which is second Thessalonians and the problems that he tried to deal with graciously in one Thessalonians didn't seem to work so he sent them second Thessalonians to reinforce what he was saying particularly about this problem that is in the middle of our text today the people were being idle and were dishonoring the well in the way it was read this morning from the J.B.

Phillips people who whose life is undisciplined and who despise the teaching of the Christian faith so Paul got these letters off to establish some principles of order which he expected to see worked out in the life of that congregation and the principle that he focuses on in verse 10 is people aren't going to work they shouldn't eat well there you see a pattern of discipline applied to a church whose problems are not unlike the kind of garden variety problems that we can produce in this congregation fairly easily they're not different it may be different to the extent that some kind of order and discipline can be imposed there that we're not able to impose because of our modern sophisticated way well let me show you what seems to be at the focus of Paul's disciplining activity for the congregation first he has a very strong and authoritative command for them when he says we command you brethren secondly he calls them brethren in other words they're not excommunicated they're not cut off but they are misbehaving they are not living up to all that they have in Christ but still he calls them brethren thirdly the thing he does as he seeks to discipline them is appeal to the authority of the head of the church we command you brethren in the name of our

Lord Jesus Christ that it is the headship of Christ that he appeals to and this is the basis of his appeal that Christ is the head of the church so he is authoritative he recognizes them as brethren and he commands them in the name of the Lord Jesus what he suggested to them was this that they practice disassociation from those who lived non-disciplined lives and were despising the teaching didn't want them to have anything to do with those people now that seems rather crude to us I'm sure but there is a certain infection to idleness and unbelief which goes from one person to another and can corrupt the whole of a congregation if idle and unbelieving people get into positions of prominence and so

Paul is asking them to guard against the infection which idleness and gossip create in the church by dissociating themselves from the people who were the source of it third thing that Paul does in terms of disciplining is to establish a pattern himself if you look at it you will see in verse seven you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us we were not idle we were with you we did not eat anyone's bread without paying but with toil and labor we worked night and day that we might not burden any of you it was not because we have not the right but to give you in our conduct an example to imitate so Paul said I want you to dissociate I want you to imitate the example that we have given you we've given it to you at some cost because we didn't have to do that but we did it in order that you might understand how you are to live the

Christian life responsibly then Paul suggests that there should be a therapy for them and the therapy was that they were to work they had become so entranced it seems with the Christian faith and with all that God was doing that they thought that their job was to wait and let him do it and lots of us become as they say so spiritually minded that we're no earthly good and that that was the kind of condition that was accepted there that lots of people thought well God is busy and I'll keep busy at my work and let him keep busy at his and they didn't do that they didn't keep busy at their work and so Paul said to them such persons we command and exhort in the

[14 : 11] Lord Jesus to do their work in quietness to earn their own living and not to be weary in well doing well Paul generally I think recognizes here that the Christian faith is to be lived out by working quietly by earning your living and by being occupied with well doing and so work is very much a spiritual therapy the Christian life is not to be lived primarily in sitting under a tree contemplating or locked in some ivory tower reading a book the normal Christian life involves getting to work on time riding on public transit driving on public highways using pencils typewriters filing systems telephones airplanes buses trains and being involved in the whole milieu of life which is to be done quietly to earn your own living and in that way living out the Christian faith

I think the confusion we have that Christians somehow step aside from the workaday world is wrong people who live lives like mine where we just sit around all the time are not really very effective Christians Christians Christians who are in the world working in offices day by day maintaining their communion and fellowship with the Lord who is the head of the church and seeking to witness to Christ seeking to find fellowship with other workers seeking to bear witness to justice and the truth in the place where they are from day to day and doing it by the grace and help of God and by the indwelling of his Holy Spirit are in the place where the Christian life is meant to be lived and being caught up in some kind of world aside is not really

Christianity and it becomes terribly twisted very often when that happens and so when Paul says we command and exhort you in the Lord Jesus Christ do your work live in quietness earn your own living don't be weary in well doing that's what he means and he means that that's how we're to live our Christian life I long that this should really be interpreted by saying teach Sunday school sing in the choir help on the church committee and help with the books but it doesn't mean that it means that you are to live your Christian life in the circumstances of your daily work in the circumstances of earning your living but with the additional circumstance that you don't grow weary of well doing which is perhaps over and above the work that you're required to do every day that provides you with the necessity in order to do that work which is which concerns

Christ and his kingdom and your involvement in that so that's the thing that happens now the church has had terrible record of exercising discipline most of the people when they start criticizing the church start criticizing the church at the point at which it seeks to discipline its members to say that you can do this and you can't do this you must do this and you must not do this and the whole thing becomes chaotic and very confused and I don't think you have Paul's authority for doing this I don't think that you can take literally what Paul says here to dissociate from people to refuse to feed people so you might find that if you're not getting invited out to dinner as much as you used to you should look at yourself and see whether or not you're being an effective

Christian but what Paul is telling us is that there is to be discipline and working out how that discipline works has been part of the long history of the church and I think lots of churches who start from zero and say we are two and three met together in Christ's name to establish the new community church and they start preaching the gospel and they have a tremendous response and people say we're not burdened with a whole lot of history and a whole lot of tradition we are the here and now Christians and they are very effective and extraordinarily effective in our particular part of the world the place they run into trouble is the place that we've been in trouble for a long time and that is when they start trying to discipline Christians it's not an easy thing to do it's not an easy thing to do because disciplining has to be self disciplining

[20 : 12] I think most of the time you have to live with freedom of conscience you're required to live in a world where there is a pluralistic society that advocates freedom of religion people are very much looking for authority and authoritative religions that tell you what to do and what not to do tend to be popular in uncertain times but you and I I think are called to be obedient to Jesus Christ as the head of the church we are to be subject to the fellowship of the saints one with another and we're to have a conscience to direct us which is informed by the word of God that's the way we are to be disciplined that's the way we are to work out in practical ways what it means to be a Christian in our society that's how we're to do it in the business of working quietly earning our living and not growing weary of well doing we're to do that in the fellowship of the saints the teaching of the

New Testament and a conscience informed by the New Testament what Paul says to Thessalonians in effect he says to you and to me I command you brothers in the name of the Lord Jesus do this don't do that and he is the one who speaks to us with authority we by the indwelling spirit and in the exercise of our freedom of conscience informed by the word of God are to respond to that now I tell you this because we're living at a time when unions have tremendous disciplinary power and some of you in this congregation are now or will be suffering from the disciplinary powers of unions and if you belong to the Vancouver club or the yacht club or the

Arbutus club or if you belong to the rotary club or whatever they all have their disciplinary groups and they have to exercise this discipline on their members on a regular basis churches are at least churches like this seem to me to be wonderfully free of discipline that can be read two ways I hope you know but it's because of this responsibility we have as Christians to be obedient to Christ in the fellowship of Christ's church and to do the work that we are called to do in the faith of Christ not not living undisciplined lives but lives which are disciplined by the indwelling of the spirit the fellowship of the Christian church the reading of the word of God and that discipline has got to be ours so that we can be what we are called to be witnesses to

Jesus Christ in the world in which we live there's something fairly heavy which I want to show you but it's helpful too when it tells you about how we are to do our work as Christians and five of the articles and the articles of religion at the close of the prayer book are about this and there are articles 10 to 15 and they're on page 702 and I just want to point you to them quickly because they're far too much to go through but let me just try and highlight them for you article 10 on page 702 remember the rich young ruler who came to Christ and said what shall I do to inherit eternal life and Jesus virtually said you can't do anything the only thing you can do article 10 says is to respond to the grace of

God and the leading of Jesus Christ that's all you can do and then in you know because it's God's work it's not you that does it it's God that does it and then in the next article of justification it says that the basis of our relationship to God again is something that God does and not us it is God's work and then in the next three articles we have what our work is the good work which is the response to what God has done for us in Christ that is it's not something we do to deserve God's blessing but something we do in response to God's blessing in in the next article article 13 it says something very hard and that is that our work which is done with the wrong motive the wrong relationship to

[25 : 44] God not only is it of no value it has about it the nature of sin and so we have to work in relationship and in fellowship with Jesus Christ then the final one is for those who think that they're working so hard for Christ that they're building up a credit balance and it says you're not and that after you've done all that you can do you remain an unprofitable servant well Paul says to us commands us as brethren to do this thing if you look back in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5 and verse 14 you get the statement be at peace among yourselves we exhort you brethren admonish the idlers encourage the faint hearted help the weak be patient with them all in order that we might encourage one another as brethren to do the work that we have to do and the unique work that we have to do in the troubled times in which we live is something in which we need the order and discipline of the fellowship of

Christ's church and the instruction of God's word I pray that we may each live our lives under this in the days that lie ahead for us here in British Columbia going to sing now hymn number 268 do yeah it I have to as come Thank you.