

XVI. Be Busy, Not a Busybody

May 11/12, 2011

2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

Aim: To base our work ethic on a motivation to serve Christ in all that we do.

A. A Command against Idleness (2 Th. 3:6-15)

Problems in Thessalonica called for immediate corrective action. These problems related to a disorderly minority of church members who were refusing to work. Apparently they had ignored his teaching (cp. 1 Th. 4:11-12), and the problems connected with them had worsened. Sterner measures were needed if they were to be brought into line, measures that are outlined in directions given to the loyal majority in the congregation.

These ‘unruly,’ or idle, Christians were briefly mentioned previously in 1 Thessalonians 4:11 and 5:14. Apparently, by the time Paul comes to write 2 Thessalonians, he has heard that the problem has not improved, or even that it has grown worse.

As he so often does in his epistles, Paul returns from the lofty heights of theological instruction (chapters 1&2) to the basics of practical Christian living. For Paul, theology was not merely abstract reasoning, but practical truth to affect daily life. In this passage, he discusses the universally practical issue of work.

1. A Command to Withdraw (3:6-9)

a) *Paul’s Current Command (3:6)*

But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.

Paul introduces what he has to say about the problem of idle and disruptive church members in a distinctly military tone, as though he were a drill sergeant on the parade ground. He issues commands (3:6, 12), requires obedience (3:14), and refers to a certain element in the church at Thessalonica as ‘disorderly’ (3:6, 11), a word which actually referred to soldiers who were out of step, insubordinate and rebellious types who were not amenable to discipline.

This group of Christians is described as ‘disorderly,’ a word which may also be translated as ‘idleness’ or ‘unruliness.’ The Greek adverb in question is *ἀτάκτως* (*ataktōs*), which in a military sense refers to ‘being out of rank,’ ‘out of line,’ or ‘out of order.’ It was also used in extrabiblical Greek writings to refer to apprentices being truant from work. The adverb is also in verse 11; the verb form (*ἀτακτεῶ*, *atakteō*) is in 3:7, and the adjectival form (*ἀτάκτους*, *ataktous*) is in 1 Thessalonians 5:14. In context it is obvious that the sinning minority at Thessalonica were being unruly by being, more specifically, idle or lazy.

Paul was not offering a suggestion, but issuing a ‘command’ (*παραγγέλλομεν*, *parangellomen*). Paul is emphatically ordering the Thessalonian Christians to follow a course of action ‘in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.’ Apostolic authority is essentially the authority of Christ, received by His delegation from Him and to be exercised only in accordance with His will. The action Paul wants the congregation to take is toward those who are idle and are not following the teachings of the apostle and his missionary helpers. We need to note that the objects of this

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action are considered to be ‘brothers’ (here and in verse 15). Fellow believers are in view, but believers who are nevertheless living in a disorderly way. They have broken rank with the rest of the congregation by refusing to accept and live according to the body of teaching that has been passed on to them by the missionaries. Their fault is not one of disbelief but of disobedience.

Paul commands them to withdraw from intimate fellowship with such people. They are not to regard them as outcasts, but they are not to associate with them, either. They must hold themselves aloof from them to make their disapproval clear.

The verb ‘keep away from’ (*στέλλεσθαι, stellesthai*) is a form of the verb *stellō* (*στέλλω*), which means ‘to avoid,’ ‘to shun,’ or ‘to pull back from.’ But exactly what does Paul mean by this verb? Does it include private interaction, church groups, or worship services? Or is it limited to the Lord’s Supper? Apparently, this discipline is less severe than that prescribed in 1 Corinthians 5:1-13, which excommunicates the offender. On the other hand, it is more severe than 1 Thessalonians 5:14, which only admonishes the idle. To ‘keep away from’ cannot mean total absence of contact, as verse 15 makes clear. Also, the idle one is still considered a ‘brother.’ However, this discipline is fairly severe.

In the context of Matthew 18, this is the third step in the process of church discipline. Step one is to confront the sinning believer privately; step two is to confront him again with two or three witnesses present; step three is to tell the offense to the congregation and cut the offender off from the normal life of the church. For those who persist in sinning after the first three steps, step four is to remove them from the fellowship altogether (treat them as unbelievers; Mt. 18:17). Since a disciplined sinner was still to be regarded as a ‘brother’ (cp. 3:15), this disfellowshipping stopped short of the complete and final (barring repentance) excommunication of step four.

Discipline by separation is never easy, and is certainly not something widely practiced in western churches today. Paul is in no way hinting that the loyal members in the congregation are in any sense superior. He wants them to keep free from fault and put corrective pressure on those who are erring. Discipline never aims to destroy, but to restore.

The ‘tradition’ (*παράδοσιν, paradosin*) which had been delivered to them orally (v. 10) and in writing (1 Th. 4:9b-12), covered matters of faith and conduct alike (cp. 2:15).

In the next verses, Paul gives two reasons why the Thessalonians should have known that idleness was sin. The two reasons are introduced by ‘for’ (3:7, 10). The first reason is Paul’s example (3:7-9); the second is Paul’s command (3:10).

b) Paul’s Previous Example (3:7-9)

(1) Paul’s Method (3:7-8a)

For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day...

Paul’s readers really did not need any more teaching on this subject of idleness. They had been shown how to live by the apostle and his associates while they had been with them. Paul, Silas, and Timothy had been both messengers of the gospel and models of how Christians were to live. And their example had not been one of idleness.

Paul brackets this section (3:7-9) with the phrase ‘you...follow our example.’ The Greek verb used in both verse 7 and verse 9 is a form of the verb *μιμῆσθαι (mimeisthai)*; the related noun is

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the source of the English word ‘mimic.’ Paul was an example for the Thessalonians to imitate because he imitated the Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 11:1). The ‘imitation of Paul’ is a recurring theme in his letters (cp. 1 Th. 1:6; 1 Cor. 4:16; 11:1; Phil. 4:9).

Paul contrasts his own ‘orderly’ behavior while he was there in person with the ‘disorderly’ conduct of this faction in the church. The Greek verb translated ‘act in an undisciplined manner’ (*ἡτακτήσαμεν, ētaktēsamen*) is related to the word translated ‘unruly’ in verse 6 and ‘undisciplined’ in verse 11. The missionaries’ industriousness was in sharp contrast to the lazy indolence of the idle members of the congregation. The apostle had been willing to earn his keep, to pay his own way, whereas this segment of the church membership was not.

Paul states his example in both the negative and the positive. First he gives the negative. He was ‘not unruly’ or lazy, and ‘neither did [he] eat bread from anyone without paying.’ The expression ‘eat bread’ was a common Old Testament idiom for to eat a meal, or meals (e.g., 1 Sam. 20:34; 28:20; 1 Kgs. 21:5; 2 Kgs. 4:8; Ps. 41:9; 102:9; Ez. 12:18), or to make a living (e.g., Gen. 3:19; Amos 7:12). Here the idiom refers to making a living. Paul was not sponging off people.

The positive aspect of Paul’s example of not being idle is that he ‘worked with labor and toil night and day.’ This is virtually identical to what had been said previously in 1 Thessalonians 2:9. Paul cites his hard work in that earlier passage as evidence of how much he loved the Thessalonians. Here he uses it to confirm that the idle had no excuse for being idle—they had his example to follow.

(2) Paul’s Motivation (3:8b-9)

...that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

They had worked day and night to avoid being burdensome. Though entitled to material support as ambassadors of the Lord Jesus, the three men had foregone this right in the interests of the gospel. Paul, Silas, and Timothy had the authority (*ἐξουσίαν, exousian*) and the right to receive support for their intense work of preaching and teaching (cp. 2 Cor. 11:8-9). They made a policy of refusing to eat anyone’s food without paying for it (see v. 7). His hard toil was essentially to shame the idlers in the church. He had far more right to eat the food from other people’s tables than they! After all, he worked hard as a preacher of the gospel and had the right to live by it (1 Cor. 9:14).

But not being a burden was only part of the reason for working. In part, too, it was to provide a model for new believers to follow. Paul did not want new believers adopting a dependent or lazy lifestyle, but wanted them to work quietly and productively with their own hands (cp. 1 Th. 4:11-12). Not content simply to tell them this – something that he obviously did repeatedly (see v. 10) – the apostle set out to show them by his own actions how it was to be done. Paul’s personal example, then, adds weight to his demand that the church withdraw from those who were being disobedient.

Paul’s tells these unruly Christians ‘to imitate (*μιμεῖσθαι, mimeisthai*) us’. If those who were entitled to be support by others chose rather to support themselves, how much more should those who had no such entitlement earn their own living!

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2. A Command to Work (3:10-12)

a) Paul's Negative Command (3:10)

For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

Paul's second reason for knowing that idleness was sin was the command that he had given while he was with them. This command has the effect of exhorting them not to give alms to the able-bodied who are 'not willing to work.' By using 'not willing,' Paul's proverbial command places a stress on the ethical component of work. Paul is not speaking of the situations in which someone is willing to work, but cannot find a job; or someone does have a job, but it is very low-paying; or a person is physically not able to work. These situations may require alms. He is speaking of those who intentionally decide not to 'work' (*ἐργάζεσθαι, ergazesthai*); in that case, they have no right to 'eat' (*ἐσθιέτω, esthietō*).

This command, with its strong, clear work ethic, has positively influence the church throughout her history.

Both individual believers and the church as a whole have a responsibility to care for the poor (Mt. 6:2, 3; Gal. 2:10; 1 Tim. 5:4; Heb. 13:16; James 2:15-16; 1 Jn. 3:17). But neither the world nor the church owes a living to those too lazy to work. We are used to 'entitlements' in our society. This is the idea that those who will not work hard are entitled to be paid money taken from those who do. The results of the welfare culture are visible for all to see—family breakups, immorality, crime, hopelessness, meaninglessness, and bitterness.

b) Paul's Inside Knowledge (3:11)

For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.

News had reached Paul – though he did not let on to the source of his information – that idle members were indeed troubling the congregation. The offenders appear to be only a minority group in the church, but they are a troublesome group just the same.

Paul finally gives an explicit description of those who 'walk in unruliness.' 'Undisciplined' (*ἀτάκτως, ataktōs*) is the same word translated 'unruly' in verse 6. They are described as idle because they apparently were unwilling to work to provide for their daily needs. The reasons that some of the Christians did not want to work and the motivations for their behavior are not stated. In most cases, the reasons do not materially affect the interpretation of this passage because Paul's argument that Christians are to work applies no matter what reason one might have for not wanting to do so.

As to the motivations of those who did not want to work, scholars may be put in two basic camps. One view is that they did not want to work as a result of various Greco-Roman social forces, or simply because of the sin of laziness. More likely, they were not working because they thought that Jesus' return was so near at hand that it was not only unnecessary but wrong to be immersed in such mundane concerns as earning money to put food on one's plate. If Christ were coming very soon, or if He had already come in a secret way, they thought that Christians did not need to work. It seemed that they excused their behavior by pointing to the imminent return of the Lord Jesus: 'What's the point of working ourselves to the bone if Jesus is coming in a day or two?' Whatever the cause, they were not actively engaged in working for their keep.

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This did not mean that they were totally inactive. In a neat play on words the apostle describes them as not (*ἐργαζομένωνς, ergazomenous*), but (*περιεργαζομένωνς, periergazomenous*): ‘not busy, but busybodies.’ Not content with refusing to work productively, they used their unoccupied time to wander around interfering in the lives of others in the church. With time on their hands, they occupied themselves meddling in other people’s affairs (cp. 1 Tim. 5:13). The term suggests they would not leave other people alone. They would poke their noses into other people’s affairs and interfere in such a way as to make thorough nuisances of themselves. The non-workers were an irritant, creating disunity and discord by being a burden on those who did work. They may well have considered themselves the more spiritual members of the church and seen it their duty to reproach others for their lack of zeal. The worst of it was that these people then took to sponging their meals from their brothers and sisters. While happy to live off the charity of their diligent brothers and sisters, they did their best to keep the very hands that fed them from working.

The idle are making two mistakes. They are not working for a living and, in addition to that, they are bothering other Christians who are working for a living. The phrase ‘not [busy] working’ (*ergazomai*) ‘but being busybodies’ (*periergazomai*) is a clear play on words in Greek. In Greek *ergazomai* is the traditional verb for ‘work,’ and *periergazomai* is a verb well translated as ‘being busybodies’ (‘around work’ would be an etymological translation).

c) Paul’s Positive Command (3:12)

Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

Turning ‘now’ to these people, the apostle addresses them directly yet impersonally. It is as though he were saying, ‘If the cap fits, wear it.’ Nobody could claim they had been humiliated, but equally, none could escape what he was saying. The guilty would know they were being spoken to.

They are addressed both authoritatively and persuasively: ‘command’ (*παραγγέλλομεν parangellomen*) and ‘exhort’ (*παρακαλοῦμεν, parakaloumen*). His appeal is made on the basis of their being in the Lord Jesus together. Because they are now in the Lord Jesus Christ, they must live in ways that are in keeping with their new position. This, more than any simple claim to authority, provides a powerful motive for their obedience.

What does the apostle want them to do? They are to settle down and earn their bread. They are to stop their disruptive interfering in the lives of other people and take care of their own affairs. If they have become overexcited about the second coming of Jesus, they are to calm down. They are to ‘work with inner calm’ (*ἡσυχίας ἐργαζόμενοι, hēsychias ergazoumenoi*). If Paul is simply contrasting this with ‘bushbodies’ in the previous verse, then ‘with quietness’ is probably a better translation. And especially, as Paul had written earlier, they are to get their hands busy at some productive work and earn enough to feed themselves and meet their other daily needs (1 Th. 4:11-12).

Straight talk of this sort is needed at times in the life of the church. Stubborn rebellion, such as was the case in Thessalonica, calls for strong correction in the plainest of words. Failure to deal as boldly with disorder as Paul did in this case lies behind many of the problems crippling churches today.

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Most Christians today do work hard. But why do they work hard? Is it in order to get more money? Or because their parents taught them to work hard? Or because they feel fulfilled? One key to having a proper work ethic is to separate ultimate motivations from secondary ones. In Colossians 3:22-25, a classical text on the work ethic, Paul notes several times that a Christian is *ultimately serving Christ* even though on the surface, he or she is a servant to a human master. Any work that we do should ultimately be done to serve Christ.

A work ethic for a Christian should *ultimately* be based on a motivation to serve Christ. This includes a grateful understanding of Christ's work on our behalf and the knowledge that the ability to work hard is ultimately a gift anyway. On the other hand, there are many good *secondary* motivations. Loving one's child, wanting to provide financially for one's family, and self-fulfillment are all good secondary motivations. These secondary motivations are often proper, but need to be set within the context of the ultimate motivation to serve Christ in all that we do.

3. A Command to Warn (3:13-15)

a) Paul Encourages the Busy (3:13)

But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.

As opposed to the idle ('but'), most of Paul's readers did not need these stiff words of correction. He had something else to say to this larger group. They did not need correction so much as encouragement. In contrast to the idlers, the majority were doing what was right, quietly working to supply their needs and minding their own affairs. They were not to let those who were failing in their duty hinder them from doing theirs. They must not grow weary in well doing (cp. virtually the same language in Gal. 6:9). As the study notes to the Geneva Bible put it, 'We must take heed that some men's unworthiness causes us not to be slack in well-doing.'

Few things can be so debilitating in the life of a local congregation as the sense that you are surrounded by people who do not share your level of loyal commitment. This is why Paul also encouraged the believers in Thessalonica not to 'grow weary in doing good.' The Greek word for 'well-doing' (*καλοποιούντες, kalopoiountes*) is a fairly generally term that could be translated as 'doing what is right.' The Hellenistic verb *ἐγκακήσητε (egkakēsēte)* which means 'give up' or 'slacken' is preceded by a negative in all its NT occurrences (cp. Luke 18:1; 2 Cor. 4:1, 16; Eph. 3:13).

It is easy to imagine the sense of frustration that would have sapped the energies of conscientious church members who could see the idlers pursuing their policy of deliberate and sustained laziness. The danger was that they would 'grow weary' of the deadbeats and become indifferent to real needs. In such situations it is always tempting to give way to the 'Why should I bother?' syndrome. It is easy to feel disheartened by people who let everyone else do the work and leave you feeling that you have to bear a disproportionate share of the load. We must not let the wayward behavior of other Christians discourage us from doing what we know to be right. Delinquency on their part is no excuse for unfaithfulness on ours.

But what good works are they to continue to perform? In context, this general language applies in some way to the situation created by the idle Christians. The good work that Paul has in mind is for the church to continue to give material help to the non-idle poor. In other words, they are not to let the idleness of some of the poor diminish their enthusiasm for helping both the deserving poor and those who have repented of their idleness but are still in need. Some believe

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that Paul is (also) referring to the discipline mentioned in the next verses. The faithful brothers are to continue the good works of church discipline upon the idle. Others see Paul's 'well-doing' as primarily referring to generally doing what is right in all times and in all places.

Many boards of deacons, or individual ministers, have given money in good faith to individuals in need and found out later that it had been misused. To avoid this problem, many churches do not give money directly, but instead give vouchers to be exchanged in restaurants and shops. These churches have not grown weary in well-doing, but they have changed their strategy of 'well-doing.' The fact that others abuse our good deeds should not be that surprising. Sin is real. Because of sin, some people, including Christians, will abuse our good deeds. The Scripture is commanding us here that, despite this, we are not to be discouraged from continuing to do good deeds.

b) Paul Admonishes the Busybodies (3:14-15)

And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

However, we should not endlessly accommodate those who do 'not obey' (*ὑπακούει, hypakouei*). Persistent rebellion calls for sterner measures than words. Paul outlines in this 'epistle' (*ἐπιστολής, epistolēs*) the actions the church must take should there be anyone who does not obey these instructions. In the case of such a person, the church is required to do three things.

It must first take special 'note' (*σημειοῦσθε, sēmeiousthe*) of them. Paul does not say how this is to be done. Whatever is in view, the apostle intends something more than cursory recognition. He wants offenders to be noted as offenders and marked as people that must be dealt with in a definite way. They cannot be overlooked.

Secondly, the church must not associate with such a person, so that he might feel ashamed. Here the apostle repeats and elaborates his earlier command (v. 6). The strong double compound verb *συναναμίγνυσθαι (synanamignusthai, 'associate with')* literally means, 'to mix up together with.' The church individually and collectively was to withdraw fellowship from such persons and avoid them. This non-association order is again a call to withdrawal from intimate fellowship. The action contemplated is not excommunication and falls short of it; rather, it is correction brought about by social ostracism. It cannot be an absolute prohibition, because verse 15 implies some level of interaction with the offenders, as others in the church (possibly the leaders) are to 'admonish' them. Through exclusion from close personal fellowship, the erring brother is to be made to think deeply about what he is doing. When that happens, he will perhaps come to his senses, repent of his sin, and enjoy the restoration of relationships within the church.

The verb translated 'be put to shame' is *ἐντραπή (entrapē)*, which literally means, 'to turn in on oneself.' The idea is that isolation from the fellowship would cause the sinning believers to reflect on their condition, see themselves for the wicked, recalcitrant sinners that they were, be ashamed, and change their behavior.

Finally, the church is to go about this act of discipline in the right spirit. Since this is not yet the fourth and final stage of the discipline process, they are not to treat the erring person as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. Paul clearly thought of the people concerned as 'brothers.' Nevertheless, they were brothers who had caused grave distress to the rest of the brotherhood.

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Perhaps it would bring them to their senses if the fellowship at large made its disapproval plain by maintaining a certain measure of reserve. The situation is different from that envisaged at Corinth, where ‘someone who is *called* a brother’ lives and acts in such a way as to give the lie to his Christian profession; that person is to be treated as an unbeliever, with no entitlement to the privileges of Christian fellowship (1 Cor. 5:11).

There are many goals of church discipline, but here the goal is the repentance of the idle Christians. There is no place for harshness or hostility when trying to correct fellow Christians. We must aim at their reformation and not their humiliation.

What would Paul have advised if even this drastic step met with no response after a reasonable period of time? We can only conclude that a further step would be necessary, this time the complete exclusion of the person in question from all fellowship (cp. 1 Cor. 5:9-11).

It is worth noting the spirit which animated Paul’s approach, a remarkable blend of firmness and gentleness. Christian standards must not be sacrificed, but at the same time, as long as some hope remained that brothers in Christ could be reclaimed for a position of usefulness and their credibility re-established, this should be kept in view.

B. A Farewell to Thessalonians (2 Th. 3:16-18)

Paul has completed his task. He has encouraged his suffering readers, corrected their wrong ideas about the day of the Lord, and given instructions to and about idlers in the congregation. His pastoral obligations have been fulfilled, at least for the moment, and his heart concerns put to rest. All that remains for him to do is to say farewell.

1. A Peace Benediction (3:16)

Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all.

Many of Paul’s letters end with a peace benediction. This prayer signals the approaching end of the letter, but it also flows out of the instructions that precede it. He wants the disruption the offenders are causing to be brought to a speedy end. But in this case, as always, he knows that unaided human effort cannot rectify spiritual problems. Unless the Lord Jesus strengthens the readers, his words will be wasted.

Consistent with this, he prays that the Lord would give them peace. True spiritual ‘peace’ is completely different from the superficial, ephemeral, fragile human peace. It is the deep, settled confidence that all is well between the soul and God because of His loving, sovereign control of one’s life both in time and eternity. He recognizes that peace, in the broad sense of spiritual health and wholeness, is what the congregation needs. If they have the peace with God that comes through the cross of Christ, and enjoy the grace of God that flows from being in fellowship with Him, their disorders will be put right and their strained relationships restored. The source of this peace is the Lord of peace Himself, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In classical Greek, ‘peace’ (*εἰρήνης, eirēnes*) implies an emphasis on the absence of conflict or war. However, the background for ‘peace’ in the New Testament is primarily found in the Old Testament concept of *shalom*, which is summarized as ‘well-being’ or ‘material and/or spiritual prosperity.’ In the New Testament, ‘peace,’ in a theological sense, is centered on the peace we have with God through the work of Christ (Rom. 5:1, 11; Eph. 2:13-17; Col. 1:20). This

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includes all types of benefits associated with *shalom*, both in this life and in the life to come. This ‘peace’ certainly refers to the core of the gospel and the spiritual peace we have with God because our sins are forgiven. But it also includes other material and spiritual benefits.

Paul prays that his readers would experience that peace abundantly. He asks the Lord to give it to them at all times and in every way. This phrase points to a peace that covers more than just the problem with the idle. Indeed, Paul sums up his desire for the Thessalonians in the prayer, ‘The Lord be with all of you.’ This phrase echoes the Aaronic benediction (Num. 6:24-26). Paul did not have some benign sense of God’s presence in mind, but rather His presence to empower believers to live for His glory. The Lord’s peace and all His other blessings come through His presence. This presence is wonderful, and it has many advantages for the believer. In context, the advantages are especially related to ‘peace’ (cp. Num. 6:24-26, which is echoed here). To pray that the Lord would be with us is to pray that we would be filled with every spiritual blessing through Him.

2. A Personal Signature (3:17)

The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write.

Paul interrupts his benediction for the church, which resumes in verse 18, to deal with another vital issue. He was deeply concerned that they have God’s truth. Since he was the agent of that truth, he did not want them confused about which were his authentic writings; therefore, he decided to write this closing greeting with his own hand.

The apostle draws attention to the fact that he is writing his greeting with his own hand. Letter writers in his day commonly dictated their letters to a professional scribe and added the final greeting in their own writing as the equivalent of our personal signature. Paul apparently did this in all his letters, although he does not always make reference to the fact (cp. Col. 4:18; Gal. 6:11; Eph. 6:21).

Discoveries of ancient Greco-Roman letters have shown that often an amanuensis, or secretary, wrote the majority of a letter and then the sender of the letter wrote the final greeting in his own handwriting. In Paul’s case, an amanuensis is explicitly mentioned in Romans 16:22, and Paul refers to his handwriting in 1 Corinthians 16:21; Colossians 4:18; Galatians 6:11; Philemon 19; and here in 2 Thessalonians 3:17. Although Paul used a secretary, the similarities between the letters at the grammatical level show that these letters were dictated word for word and were thus composed by Paul and not the secretary.

That he should mention it here and add the explanation that it is a distinguishing mark in all his letters, was probably on account of the circumstances of his readers. Paul knew that the rebellious faction in the congregation might want to dispute the genuineness of the letter when it was read to them. These final words in his handwriting would silence them. They were indisputable proof of the genuineness of the letter.

Furthermore, forged letters supposedly from Paul had already troubled the congregation (2:2). The apostle did not want that to happen again and provides a way in which his readers can recognize letters that do come from him. His signature guarantees that he was indeed the author of this epistle.

3. A Grace Benediction (3:18)

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

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In words almost identical to those with which he ended his first letter (1 Th. 5:28), the apostle bids farewell to his readers with the blessing, ‘The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you.’ Possibly the word ‘all’ was added here (not present in 1 Th. 5:28) to clarify that it includes the unruly/idle (cp. 3:16). He knows that the supreme need of all Christians is the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul acknowledges this at the beginning of the letter (1:2) and ends it on the same note. ‘Grace’ is God’s undeserved goodness and benevolence granted to those who in no way deserve it. The promised grace of their all-powerful and all-loving Lord and Savior offered hope in their difficult circumstances. In Him they could find all that they needed to continue their work, their labor, and their patient endurance as they waiting for His coming.

For next time: End of Study on 1 & 2 Thessalonians!