

# 5. Fit Families



Weddings days are great occasions. Part of their 'specialness' is that they become times for families to be reunited. You get to reminisce about old times and catch up with relatives you haven't seen for ages. Unfortunately, wedding days can also highlight problems within families. Uncle A does not want to sit with Aunt B and late into the evening fisty cuffs nearly break out between cousin X and cousin Y! Along with all the goodness in families, there can be problems. This last section of 2 Thessalonians makes us think about how the Christian church (or family) should conduct itself. This passage can help us to think how we can be a 'fit family'.

## **Read 2 Thessalonians 3:4-6 (over the page).**

a) As you go, underline/circle the words that keep popping up. This will give you clues to what this whole section is about. Afterwards, discuss what you came up with.

b) What is the problem in the Thessalonian church family that Paul is addressing?

It's interesting to note that the passage does not give us the reason for this laziness in the Thessalonian church. It certainly isn't because they all of a sudden got television! Some have suggested that the Christians in Thessalonica were being influenced by a Greek way of thinking which regarded physical labor as demeaning. Others have suggested that given that some believed that Jesus had already returned (2:4) and they would soon be gathered to him, then work was considered an unimportant and irrelevant thing. In the end, we're just not sure what the underlying reasons were.

<sup>4</sup>We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. <sup>5</sup>May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

<sup>6</sup>In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. <sup>7</sup>For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, <sup>8</sup>nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. <sup>9</sup>We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. <sup>10</sup>For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."

<sup>11</sup>We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. <sup>12</sup>Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. <sup>13</sup>And as for, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.

<sup>14</sup>If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. <sup>15</sup>Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

<sup>16</sup>Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.

<sup>17</sup>I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write.

<sup>18</sup>The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

c) Is this problem of idleness an issue for us here in 2005? Why / Why not?

d) What are the different ways Paul seeks to address this issue in the Thessalonian church family?

It seems that Paul has three approaches for dealing with the problem of laziness in the church. Firstly, he commands his brothers not to be idle. Did you notice the repetition of the word 'command' throughout? Secondly, in v7-9 he points to his own time with them as a positive example of not being lazy. And thirdly Paul instructs them that tough action is required for those who refuse to be obedient to his commands. In verses 6 & 14-15 he talks about 'keeping away' from such brothers. We'll now spend a bit of time looking at these three approaches.

e) To 'command' does not sound very politically correct. What is it about Paul's commands that shows us that it is not an abuse of power or bullyboy tactics?

f) From v7-9 what is so special about the example that Paul sets while he was in Thessalonica?

g) What sort of picture of leadership do we gather from Paul in this passage? How does this shape the way we should think about Christian leadership?

h) In terms of thinking about application, v6 and v14-15 are difficult. How do you react to these verses about discipline?

i) What are the dangers that churches can fall into when trying to be a church that disciplines?

j) What are some principles we can gather from these verses that can help us to avoid these dangers? Note: Paul has already sought to deal with the laziness problem. See 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12.

Spend time praying for leaders at MPC in light of this passage. Pray that together we would all be a church that acts as a fit family – even in tough situations.