

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

St. Paul commands the Thessalonians to withdraw from the disorderly brother. Notice that he is not talking about those outside the church. He is talking about a brother. And by “withdraw” he does not mean stop going shopping and to the movies with the brother. The Apostle is commanding the flock in Thessalonica to withdraw from Communion fellowship with those among their fellowship who are disorderly. It is a clear confession of the Apostolic practice, the Apostolic tradition, of closed Communion.

That withdrawing is intended to protect the flock, at the same time it is meant to get the attention of the erring. The Apostle desires to quell the spread of the transgression of the disorderly. For the devil works hard to cause members of the congregation to transgress, and then others to fall into sin as they deal with the fallen brother. Flesh begets flesh, sin begets sin.

Like false doctrine, disorderliness is as a cancer in the congregation, spreading to other members of the Body of Christ. St. Paul will not agree to disagree. The Apostles were no "Evangelicals". He finishes this section of his Epistle with "... 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."

And yet remarkably Paul adds "Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother." By the Spirit, the

Christian speaks the Truth in love. Inside of the church there is no room for an “us/them” mentality. We correct in love. We rebuke to evoke repentance and restoration. We seek unity, the unity a healthy body has with its Head.

When St. Paul writes that the believer should withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly, and not according to the tradition of the Apostles, he is not addressing the so-called Charismatics, nor is he addressing the polo shirt and floppy Bible, projection screen and “y’all come” open altar crowd. They have already separated from us, refusing to repent of their errors.

The Apostle is addressing those inside the fellowship who will not work, those who are able and have means but refuse to support the work of the church, and are a drain on the congregation. He is addressing the one who gossips, from whose lips shoot out unkind darts to harm the reputations of the other members.

Paul's Words could well be applied to the lazy Pastor, and to the greedy Pastor. His Words could be applied to the burdensome, high maintenance member. His Words could be applied to the busybody, who gossips and slanders others in the congregation.

For each of these is disorderly, each breaks with the tradition of the Apostles, and each is a disruption to the Body of Christ, those who gather not to be factious, but who gather to be united as members of one Body by the One Head Jesus Christ, made One by the Body and Blood of the same Lord.

But the disorderly brother is to be excluded from Communion. And the shame he experiences is designed to bring not damnation, but rather godly sorrow and repentance, that the unity of the Body of Christ be preserved as it can only be preserved - grounded in the doctrine of the Apostles and in their tradition.

But of course the Apostle's Words beg the question, as any Word of Law begs the question, "What about me?" The answer lies in a truthful response to the questions: About whom have you gossiped? Have you supported the church as you have been able? What clear Apostolic doctrine of the Biblical Confession we make as Lutherans is still a stumbling block to you? How have your word or actions created divisions in the congregation?

For when we take Paul's Words seriously, as with any Word of Law, we see ourselves by that Word, and we see that the Word is perfect, the Apostolic tradition is perfect, but we are imperfect. Each of us has done the things that Paul writes against to the Thessalonians. And if our secret thoughts were known to men, each of us would be marked and avoided.

But thanks be to God, He does not avoid us. But He does mark us. For it is not the perfect that are invited to the feast. It is not rich or the righteous. It is the poor, the lame, the maimed, the lame and the blind. You and I are invited, the imperfect, the flawed, the sinner, we who could not enter but for the Blood of Christ. It is the sick who need a doctor. It is the scattered that need to be gathered. So it is that the Gospel Word of

reconciliation and unity, the Word of forgiveness and restoration, is the best of Words. For the Gospel is nothing other than Christ, crucified and risen for you, that all your sins be forgiven. The Gospel is that He marks you, He puts His Name, the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, upon you, as He washes you clean of your sins.

Believing in Him, in repentant faith, painfully aware of your sins yet firmly believing in Christ's forgiveness, you are restored. You are restored to the fellowship with God lost in the garden. You are restored to Communion with Christ, Communion with the Apostles, Communion with one another.

For just as His Body rose perfect from the grave, just as His Body is heavenly and yet still that of a Man, so is the Church. The Church, you, dear Christian, is His united Body on earth, perfect in the sight of God the Father for Christ's sake.

And in mercy, that for which Christ worked you receive. And that which Christ gave is counted as yours. But it is not burdensome, rather it is in love that He gives it. That for which He toiled day and night is made yours, when you are declared righteous, and made one with the One who gave His Body to be pierced that you might be His Body, and that you might eat His Body.

You eat not your own bread, but the very Bread of Life. And blessed are you, for you eat Bread in the Kingdom of God, and more, you hear His Word, and indeed you eat the Body of the King. And so you are One with Him, and so you are given a place in the resurrection of the just.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13
Wednesday of Michaelmass II, 2016 A.✠ D.

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