

by the mouth of two or three witnesses every fact may be confirmed. 17 "And if he refuses to listen to them, [3]tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, [4]let him be to you as a **Gentile and a tax-gatherer**. NASB

MacArthur lists these in his commentary on 2 Thessalonians 3:6.

- **Step 1** – to confront the sinning believer privately and for specific sin
- **Step 2** – to confront them a second time with witnesses present
- **Step 3** – to tell the congregation publically and to cut them off from normal fellowship and publically ostracize them
- **Step 4** – officially remove them from the fellowship altogether and publically, and treat them as an unbeliever [if they have persisted in sinning after the first three steps]

Each step in this process is designed by God to **restore the sinning person to repentance**.

Church discipline is a loving and restorative process which is vital to the life of the church. We cannot condone the sin of believers publically in the church, because this would be a denouncing of the essential human response required as the means of salvation, which are repentance and faith. The vital step of the human response is *repentance*, a genuine contrition motivated by saving faith which results in the turning from sin to Christ in obedience. Repentance and faith are the result of regeneration. Therefore the church publically preaches, upholds, urges and admonishes all people to repent from their sin and publically confess their faith and obedience to Christ in baptism. Flagrant, continued and public disobedience to the faith, is to ultimately and publically be dealt with in the church, after many private attempts to help an erring believer. If a person remains obstinate after many attempts to restore them to repentance, the church simply recognizes what is the obvious conclusion of their actions, that they are not truly saved (at least by all outward appearance), and are to be regarded **“as a Gentile or a tax-collector.”** Persistent and willfully sinful activity from a once professing believer is treated in the New Testament as a forsaking of the faith which results in damnation, the same condemnation of the devil and unbelievers (Rom 2:8, Heb 6:4-6, 10:26-31, 39, 2 Pet 2:20-22) .

Nevertheless, when Paul says **“If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him,”** he has an expressed purpose in mind. That purpose is **“so that he will be put to shame.”** Sin is a shameful thing, and it is to be recognized as such. Make no mistake here, Paul expects the church to unite together to **“put to shame”** a stubbornly sinful member. This they are to do by ostracizing and admonishing them which is clearly seen by the statements **“do not associate with them,”** and **“admonish them as a brother.”** And of course the obvious goal of this action is to restore them to repentance and obedience to the faith, which in this case is **“our instruction in this letter.”** See here further clarification that both Christ and Paul expect obedience from Christians, and that if they persist in disobedience, both Christ and Paul expect the church to respond publically to correct the misbehavior and restore the erring person. It is important to see here, that **this is only the third step** in the process of Church discipline, as Paul is exhorting the church to **“take special note of that person and do not associate with him.”** We know this is the third step and NOT the fourth because he goes on to say **“Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”** This obvious statement of the fact that he is still to be regarded as a brother shows clearly that it is NOT the fourth step, for that is to regard them as an unbeliever, to **“be regarded as a Gentile or a tax-collector.”** See here then the loving and gracious way we are to treat erring believers, with much patience, giving them ample opportunity to consider their ways and repent, and yet firmly admonishing them to the fear of the Lord and obedience to the faith. All of this we do, because we love their eternal soul more than their earthly comfort.

Hebrews 12:11 - 11 **All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful;** yet to those who have been trained by it, **afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.** NASB

2 Thessalonians 3:16-18 - 16 Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all! 17 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. NASU

A.16 Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all! 17 I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all –Here now is Paul’s conclusion to this wonderful letter. As is often the case with Paul, he wishes God’s peace upon and His presence with his beloved fellow believers when he says, **“Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!”** And see here his desire for **“peace in every circumstance.”** He undoubtedly longs to see them at peace, and the situation with the **“busybodies”** has him concerned that this can disrupt their peace. Learn here that persistently sinning members in the church present the opportunity to disrupt the church’s peace, and the church needs to be careful not to allow this to happen, and to seek God for His presence and His peace to continue.

Paul has written many instructions in this letter designed to help the Thessalonians deal with the waving and tossing of many toilsome and trying circumstances that have come upon them and that will come upon the world. He has exhorted them how to deal with the trails of the persecution, as well as clarified the massive implications of lawlessness at work in the world and the culmination of God’s dealings with man in this present age, ending with the worldwide deception of the **“lawless one”** and his certain success and pending demise. In all of these stormy waters, Paul longs for their well-being saying, **“Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all!”** Paul now asks by way of prayer to the Lord that the Thessalonians may have God’s peace and His presence in order to remain steadfast in the faith. In this he asks that **Christ Himself** would be with them and give them His peace when he says **“may the Lord of peace Himself continually grant you peace.”**

He assures them that these instructions have come from when he says **“I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write.”** Here he is obviously pointing to his writing style as a way of authenticating his letters. Undoubtedly he says this because of the false letter which had been given them which had stirred up their unrest which he referred to earlier (2 Thess 2:2). He means here to reassure and comfort them concerning the many unsettling things they are facing.

And so he gives them this benediction, which is common with Paul, **“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.”** See here Paul wishing that **“all”** these Thessalonians might stand in the unmerited favor of God, His grace which is granted to us through **“our Lord Jesus Christ.”** It is in this grace and only in this grace, that anyone can withstand the tumultuous things which are going on the world and are yet to come. May we all look to Him for His **“grace”** and rely heavily upon it.