the apostolic team “did not live in a disorderly manner among you, that is [explanatory οὐδέ], we did not eat anyone’s bread without paying for it.” In 3:11, Paul specifies the nature of the disorderly behavior, noting that some Thessalonians were “leading a disorderly life, doing no work at all, but meddling.” These clarifications suggest the more general meaning of “disorderly,” not the specific meaning of “idle.”

**Summary of Paul’s Use of the ἄτακτος Word Group**

In sum, the linguistic evidence indicates that the ἄτακτος word group in Paul’s time normally communicated the concept of “disorderliness,” a meaning which fits well in the contexts in the Thessalonian epistles where the word group is used. Proponents of the specialized, atypical nuance of “idleness” have not made a sufficient case for their proposal. It is best, therefore, to understand Paul here describing those from whom the Thessalonians were to separate as “disorderly,” and treatments and translations of the Thessalonian epistles ought to render the ἄτακτος word group accordingly. The ἄτακτος word group by itself does not lexically indicate “idleness,” even though that may be contextually the sort of disorderliness in view.

**The Seriousness of the Offense of the Disorderly**

At times, interpreters underestimate the seriousness of the offense of the disorderly, particularly in contrast to the sexual immorality addressed in 1 Corinthians 5, another Pauline disciplinary passage. This corresponding adjective (1 Thess 5:14) and verb (2 Thess 3:7), does not provide specificity by itself and requires the light of the context (“L’adverbe ataktos…comme l’adjectif [1 Th 5, 14] et le verbe [2 Th 3, 7] correspondants, n’apporte par lui-même aucune précision et requiert la lumière du contexte”).

Wallace (GGGB, p. 673) does not list οὐδὲ in his category of “explanatory conjunctions,” but does list δέ, of which οὐδὲ is merely the negative form. A. T. Robertson notes that the various uses of καί (presumably including the explanatory use) all find parallels in οὐδὲ (Grammar, p. 1185).

Richard, First and Second Thessalonians, p. 389; Malherbe, Letters to the Thessalonians, p. 453.


understatement is often tied to the prescribed response to the offenders in 3:14–15, which is seen as less severe than that of 1 Corinthians 5. Just how serious was the offense Paul addresses? Three descriptions of the offenders in 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15 help to underscore its gravity: the disorderly were “not working at all” (3:11), they were “meddlesome” (3:11), and they lived contrary to the apostolic tradition (3:6).

The Disorderly Were not Working at All

In commending manual labor to the Thessalonians, Paul differed strikingly from the prevalent attitude in Greco-Roman society, an attitude which reflected the cultural acceptability of the offenders’ lack of employment. Particularly among the elite, physical labor was disdained as dishonorable and fit only for the poor and unrefined. Plutarch, for instance, believed that even excellent workmanship by an artisan did not indicate that the workman was anything but low and sordid. A person might achieve a high level of competence in a particular occupation, but if such an occupation were intrinsically dishonorable, he thereby only proved his negligence of and indisposition toward what was really good. For Cicero, artisans and shopkeepers were the “dregs of a city,” no workshop could be considered an appropriate place for a gentleman, and manual labor was vulgar and akin to slavery. This dismissive attitude was not universal, but common.


An exception was that of the agricultural laborer, as noted in Peter Garnsey, “Non-Slave Labour in the Roman World,” in Non-Slave Labour in the Greco-Roman World (Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society, 1980), pp. 34–35. “No other type of worker is honoured in the (upper-class) literature.” The Thessalonian setting was urban, however, not rural.

Pericles 1.3–2.2.

38 Pro Flacco 18; De officiis 1.150. Cf. Plutarch, De vitando aere alieno 830D.

While the perspective of the apostolic tradition on manual labor was at odds with the widespread Greco-Roman stance, it was much closer to the prevalent attitude in Judaism. Indeed, “working with one’s hands” appears to be an idiom with a Jewish background. While recognizing that working for one’s livelihood can be an exhausting proposition as a result of the Fall (Gen 3:17–19), the OT does not portray manual labor as intrinsically demeaning, but as rooted in and reflective of God’s own creative work. Rabbinic literature reflects a positive attitude toward the necessity of manual labor, even for those devoted to the study of Torah.

Paul had already commanded the Thessalonians to work with their hands (1 Thess 4:11) and would later give a similar injunction to the Ephesians in the context of basic ethical instruction (Eph 4:28). In 2 Thessalonians 3:6–15, he highlights the gravity of the intentional unemployment of the disorderly by contrasting it with his direct instruction (3:6, 10) and purposeful example (3:7–9). Part of the ethical teaching of the apostolic tradition was encapsulated in Paul’s teaching, “If anyone will not work, neither let him eat.” Clearly, the offenders’ refusal to work was a serious problem, not to be taken lightly.

The Disorderly Were Meddlesome

The participle of περιεργάζοµαι (“be intrusively busy”) in 3:11 is typically translated “busybody,” but is better rendered “meddler.”


41 As in 1 Cor 4:12; 1 Thess 4:11. So Trilling, Der zweite Brief an die Thessalonicher, p. 148.

42 So Richard, First and Second Thessalonians, p. 220; Witherington, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, p. 123. Cf., e.g., Deut 16:15; Job 1:10; Ps 90:17. OT authors use this sort of language for God himself, which could not help but dignify the notion of manual labor in the eyes of pious Jews. Cf. Job 34:19; Ps 8:6; 19:1; 28:5; 92:4; 102:25; 138:8; 143:3; Isa 5:12; 19:25.

43 Menken ("Paradise Regained," pp. 275–80) plausibly proposes that the “tradition” being flouted is rooted in the OT, particularly in the divine institution of Gen 3:17–19 where hard work is presented as necessary for one’s sustenance in a post-Fall world.


46 Refusing to work for one’s livelihood would be at least akin to the failure to provide for one’s own family, which for Paul constituted denial of the faith (1 Tim 5:8). As well, it is probably fair to categorize the disorderly as πλεονέκτης (“greedy”) one of the categories listed in 1 Cor 6:9–10 as characteristic of one who would not inherit the kingdom of God. πλεονέκτης is “one who desires to have more than is due” (BDAG, s.v. “πλεονέξια,” 824c).

While “busybody” might have a rather innocuous connotation in the twenty-first century, the same did not hold true for the term περιεργάζομαι in Paul’s day. “Meddling” was considered “abhorrent” and “a weighty social transgression in the first-century world” and was a standard topic of consideration and condemnation in Greco-Roman writings. Because περιεργάζομαι and related terms tend to be fairly general and occur in a wide range of contexts, it is impossible to determine from a purely lexical standpoint the precise nuance of περιεργάζομαι in the present passage. All the same, it is clear that in Paul’s culture, it was no small matter. Further, Paul himself categorizes the sort of meddling in question as disorderly behavior (3:11); it was therefore not merely contrary to prevailing Greco-Roman mores, but to the established norm for Christian conduct (3:6).

The Disorderly Lived Contrary to the Apostolic Tradition

In 3:6, Paul describes the Thessalonian disorderliness as not in accord with the “tradition” received from the apostolic team (3:6).50

48 Brown, “Busybody?” pp. 555, 561. She also speaks of “the serious nature of meddling in the ancient context” as “no small transgression” (p. 562), suggesting that it was “an activity that caused serious opposition and may have even evoked revolutionary overtones” (p. 549). “Standard topic”: Brown (“Busybody,” pp. 552–58) demonstrates this aptly. Note e.g., Epictetus, Diatribai 3.22.81–99; Theophrastus, Characteres 105; Plutarch, De curiositate 516, 519; Plato, Republica 434, 551–52. Philo, De specialibus legibus 3.171. Malherbe (Thessalonians, p. 453) notes that περιεργάζομαι was a “well-known term of opprobrium” and notes that “the emphatic position and sharpness of periergazesthai show the importance that this offensive behavior has for Paul.”

49 Trilling (Der zweite Brief an die Thessalonicher, pp. 150–51) considers περιεργάζομαι to be so general in nature that it supplies nothing in particular about the disorderliness in view; see also Best, First and Second Thessalonians, p. 340; Furnish, 1 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians, p. 178. A scholar’s reconstruction of the Thessalonian Sitz im Leben typically drives his understanding of the particular “meddling” in view, whether spreading false teaching (e.g., Beale, 1–2 Thessalonians, p. 257), supporting the causes of one’s patron (Green, Letters to the Thessalonians, p. 351), or merely keeping others from their work by useless chatter (Marshall, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, pp. 224–25).

What is the nature of the apostolic tradition to which Paul refers, and how broadly should his particular reference to it in 3:6 be understood?

The Nature of the Apostolic Tradition

Παράδοσις is used in the New Testament as a technical term referring to the content of instruction that has been handed down authoritatively.51 The verbs παραδίδω (“deliver”) and παραλαβώ (“receive”) are used technically in the NT for the deliverance and reception of the παράδοσις.52 Passages with any of these three technical terms may help to illuminate the NT idea of tradition.53

In his ministry, Jesus used strong words against the “tradition of the elders”—the oral law of Judaism—which had in practice been vested with an authority equal to or greater than the canonical law of Moses.54 Christ spoke against the very thing that Saul the Pharisee held dear: “I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my peers among my people, because I was more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions” (Gal 1:14). When Paul the Christian uses the language of tradition in regard to his own teaching, however, he has something other than this Jewish practice in mind.


52BDAG, s.v. “παραδίδω,” and “παραλαβώ,” pp. 762d–763a; 768ab. Note also L&N §33.237–39; Cullman, “Tradition,” pp. 63, 65; Bruce, Tradition, pp. 20–21. Although used more generally in antiquity (Plato, Philebus 16c; see EDNT, s.v. “παράδοσις,” 3:16–17), this terminology in Paul almost certainly reflects more specifically its use and his background in Judaism. Cf. m. Abot 1:1–3; Josephus, Antiquities 13.297; Mark 7:4; Acts 6:14. At the same time, as Bauckham notes, “These Greek words were used for formal transmission of tradition in the Hellenistic schools and so would have been familiar in this sense to Paul’s Gentile readers” (“Transmitting the Jesus Traditions,” p. 264).

53The words are used technically in the following passages: παράδοσις: Matt 15:2–3, 6; Mark 7:3; 5, 8–9, 13; 1 Cor 11:2; Gal 1:14; Col 2:8; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6; παραδίδω: Matt 11:27 (?); Mark 7:13; Luke 1:2; 10:22 (?); Acts 6:14; 16:4; Rom 6:17 (?); 1 Cor 11:2, 23; 15:3; Gal 1:14; Col 2:8; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6; 2 Pet 2:21; Jude 3; παραλαβών: Mark 7:4; 1 Cor 11:23; 15:1, 3; Gal 1:9, 12; Phil 4:9; Col 2:6; 1 Thess 2:13; 4:1; 2 Thess 3:6. Of course, passages which have reference to the apostolic tradition are not limited to those with this technical terminology. See Bruce, Tradition, p. 38; Cullman, “Tradition,” p. 63; Gerhardsson, Memory, p. 290.

54Matt 15:1–9; Mark 7:1–13.
than the oral law of Judaism in view, as shown in Galatians 1:9–14.\footnote{In Gal 1:9–14 the true gospel of Christ “received” by the Galatians (v. 9) is indirectly contrasted to the “traditions” (v. 14) in which Paul had been trained. For discussion on Paul’s claim there that he did not “receive” his gospel as tradition from men, as contrasted with language elsewhere which seems to indicate the opposite (cf. 1 Cor 15:1–8), see Knox Chamblin, “Revelation and Tradition in the Pauline Evangelion,” 

A survey of the relevant technical terminology in his epistles, as well as in the remainder of the NT, indicates that Paul delivered to his converts a new collection of tradition, consisting of certain interrelated categories of material centered in the gospel: (1) a summary of the gospel message; (2) sayings and accounts of Jesus; (3) teachings of Christian doctrine; and (4) moral and ethical guidelines for believers.\footnote{(1) 1 Cor 15:1–8; Gal 1:9–12; 1 Thess 2:13. (2) Luke 1:1–4; 1 Cor 11:23–25; cf. 1 Cor 7:10–11. (3) 2 Thess 2:15; Jude 1:3; cf. 2 Tim 1:13–14; 2:2. (4) Acts 16:4; Rom 6:17 (?); 1 Cor 11:2; Phil 4:9; 1 Thess 4:1–2. See Bauckham, “Transmitting the Jesus Traditions,” p. 265; Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, pp. 9–10; Cullman, “Tradition,” p. 64; Gerhardsson, *Memory*, pp. 303–6; R. P. C. Hanson, *Tradition in the Early Church* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962), p. 11; James I. H. McDonald, *Kerygma and Didache* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 101–25.} To these categories might be added Jesus’ divine interpretation of OT Scripture referring to himself, recorded in Luke-Acts as having been explained to his followers.\footnote{Although the technical language of tradition noted above is not used, see Luke 24:27, 44–48; Acts 1:3. With two of his followers, “beginning with Moses and the prophets, he explained (διερεύνων) to them in all the Scriptures that which concerned himself.” Later, he appeared to the Eleven and their companions, referenced the fulfillment of the OT regarding himself, and “opened their minds to understand (συνίησαν) the Scriptures.” Before his ascension, he spent a period of forty days speaking to his apostles “about the things concerning the kingdom of God” (Acts 1:1–3). This authoritative interpretation of Jesus is doubtless behind much of the use of the OT in the NT, and almost certainly referenced in 1 Cor 15:3–4 (“according to the Scriptures”). See especially Gerhardsson, *Memory*, pp. 228–31. For the general idea of specific interpretations of OT Scripture as part of the received tradition, see also Congar, *Tradition and Traditions*, p. 8; Cullman, “Tradition,” p. 69; E. Earle Ellis, “Traditions in 1 Corinthians,” *New Testament Studies* 32 (1986): 482.}

By using the language of tradition, Paul points to the authority for his teaching; such authority was external to himself and ultimately could be traced back to Jesus as its originator.\footnote{This is made explicit with ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου in 1 Cor 11:23. Cf. J. B. Lightfoot, *Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul* (London: Macmillan, 1895), p. 121; Ralph P. Martin, “Authority in the Light of the Apostolate, Tradition and the Canon,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 40 (1968): 72–73.} It should be emphasized that Paul and the other apostles (using the term narrowly) held a unique position in regard to the Christian παράδοσις.\footnote{Gerhardsson, *Memory*, pp. 220–25; *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, s.v. “Tradition,” by Rainer Riesner, pp. 824–25.} They were the authoritative representatives of Jesus and had received from him his teaching, the promise of the guidance of his Spirit in bringing to their
minds all that he had said (John 14:26; 16:13–15), and his direct commission to deliver his teaching to other believers (Matt 28:18–20). “Apostolic authority was not innovative authority,” Belleville reminds us; instead, it “resided in a common core of traditions about the life and teaching of Jesus,” and therefore, “the apostolic task was that of faithful transmission of these traditions to new congregations, rather than origination.”

Because of the apostles’ unique position as the proxies of Christ and their direct reception of Christ’s teachings, “the apostle cannot...have any successor who can replace him as bearer of the revelation for future generations, but he must continue himself to fulfill his function in the Church of today: in the Church, not by the Church, but by his word, διὰ τοῦ λόγου (John 17:20), in other words, by his writings.” Due to the singular position of the apostles, their own words regarding the Christian tradition are as binding upon the church as those handed down from Christ himself.

The Apostle’s Tradition and the Thessalonians

The language of tradition is highlighted in both letters to the

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61 Belleville, “Authority,” p. 57. Cf. 2 Tim 2:2. While the apostles retained the tradition handed down to them, however, they did add to it as authoritative representatives of Christ, enlarging upon what they had received. These additions might include events which happened after the ascension (e.g., 1 Cor 15:8, grammatically part of the sequence beginning with 15:3), ethical instructions on matters to which Christ had not spoken directly (e.g., Acts 16:4 in reference to Acts 15; 1 Cor 7:12 as contrasted with 7:10), and what Paul characterizes as “mystery”—previously unrevealed aspects of God’s redemptive plan (e.g., 1 Cor 15:51–52; Eph 3:4–7). “The tradition is both a fixed and growing tradition; that is, the tradition cannot be changed, but it can be enlarged.... The Spirit can add to the tradition by granting through the apostles and prophets an unfolding and outworking of the redemptive purpose of God which is already implicit in the redemptive work of Christ” (Ladd, “Revelation,” p. 228). Cf. Congar, Tradition and Traditions, p. 6 (although he extends the privilege of expanding the apostolic tradition beyond the apostles); D. H. Williams, Tradition, Scripture, and Interpretation: A Sourcebook of the Ancient Church (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006), pp. 20–21. Apostolic expansion of the tradition was accomplished by the work of the Spirit, whom Jesus had promised would guide the disciples “into all the truth” and would declare to them “the things to come” (John 16:13).


63 Contra Congar, who distinguishes two categories of tradition: the “fundamental” core of the gospel message, which has “an absolute and immutable character,” vs. the apostles’ rules of conduct which are “open to modification, or at least growth, according to the needs of the historical life of the Church” (Tradition and Traditions, p. 11).
Thessalonians.\textsuperscript{64} In the first letter, Paul notes that when he had preached the gospel to them, they had received (παραλαβόντω) it not as the word of men, but as what it really was, the word of God (1 Thess 2:13).\textsuperscript{65} Later in the letter, Paul indicates that they had received (παραλαβόντω) ethical instruction from the apostolic team: they were taught how to live so as to please God (1 Thess 4:1).\textsuperscript{66} The instruction which Paul goes on to detail includes—significantly—admonitions to aspire to live quietly, to attend to one’s own affairs, and to work with one’s own hands (1 Thess 4:11). Paul clearly considers these three admonitions to be part of the apostolic tradition delivered to the Thessalonians.\textsuperscript{67}

In the second letter, after Paul corrects eschatological error regarding the coming of the Lord (2:1–12) and gives thanks for the Thessalonians’ election to salvation (2:13–14), he instructs them to “stand firm and hold fast to the traditions which you were taught, either by word or by letter from us” (2:15). Two vehicles for transmitting tradition are contrasted here, “word” (λόγος) and “letter” (ἐπιστολή), which were “both equally authoritative and binding.”\textsuperscript{68} The latter clearly refers to written correspondence, and the meaning of the contrasted λόγος is thus limited to the spoken “word.”\textsuperscript{69} While the reference to the “traditions” in 2:15 doubtless includes Paul’s teaching regarding the coming of the Lord, it seems best to understand the entire

\textsuperscript{64}Most notably, two of the three major technical terms used vis-à-vis tradition are found in 1 Thess 2:13; 4:1; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6. Note the treatment in Caroline Vander Stichele, “The Concept of Tradition and 1 and 2 Thessalonians,” in The Thessalonian Correspondence, ed. Raymond F. Collins (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 1990), pp. 499–504.

\textsuperscript{65}The term παραλαβόντω is almost certainly used technically here, as noted by, e.g., BDAG, s.v. “παραλαβόντω,” p. 768a; Best, First and Second Thessalonians, p. 110; Wanamaker, Epistles to the Thessalonians, pp. 110–11.

\textsuperscript{66}To refer to what they had received as tradition, Paul goes on to speak of the “commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus” (1 Thess 4:2). This language is quite similar to that used in 2 Thess 3:6: “We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

\textsuperscript{67}Regarding these admonitions, Paul says “we commanded you” (4:11, ὑμῖν παραγγείλαμεν); this statement forms an inclusio with the earlier “what commands we gave you” (4:2, τίνας παραγγελίας ἔδωκαμεν ὑμῖν), which in turn is used in reference to what the Thessalonians had “received as tradition” (4:1, παραλαβόντω). Cf. Collins, Birth, p. 64. Of course, anything that was formally “commanded” of a church by an apostle would qualify as part of the apostolic παράδοσις. Cf. Gerhardsson, Memory, p. 293.

\textsuperscript{68}Wanamaker, Epistles to the Thessalonians, p. 269.

\textsuperscript{69}BDAG, s.v. “ἐπιστολή,” p. 381c; “λόγος,” p. 599a. Since Paul later uses ἐπιστολή in reference to the letter he was currently writing (3:14), it is likely that this reference in 2:15 to a previous “letter” has 1 Thessalonians in view, while διὰ λογού points to the oral catechesis of Paul and company when present at Thessalonica. So, e.g., Best, First and Second Thessalonians, p. 318; Marshall, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, pp. 209–10.
In 2 Thessalonians 3:4, Paul expresses his confidence that the church is doing and will do what he commands, apparently a reference to keeping the traditions (plural) they had been taught (2:15). This expression of confidence anticipates his further command two verses later to withdraw from the disorderly, those who were not living according to the tradition (singular) which they had received (3:6). This singular “tradition” stands in contradistinction to the plural “traditions” of 2:15, suggesting a particular aspect of the apostolic tradition as a whole. The chiastic structure of 3:6–12 in turn indicates a corresponding of “the tradition” of 3:6 with Paul’s command in 3:10: “If anyone will not work, neither let him eat.” Given its characterization as “tradition,” it may possibly be that this command preserves a saying of Christ unknown in the canonical gospels (cf. Acts 20:35). Even if the command originated with Paul, however, his apostleship makes its authoritative nature indisputable. Given the significance of the apostolic tradition for the Christian faith, any clear disobedience thereto surely would have been a grave matter.

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70In the preceding context (2:10–12), Paul speaks of those who are perishing (τοῖς ἀπολλυµένοις) as having neither loved nor believed the truth, but having had pleasure in unrighteousness, and thus having been condemned. In contrast, the Thessalonians had been called to salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, through the gospel message they had heard (2:13–14). Therefore, they were to continue both to stand fast (στήκετε) and hold fast (κρατεῖτε) to the traditions. Based on the contrast of the Thessalonians with both the beliefs and behavior of τοῖς ἀπολλυµένοις, and on the proximity of the reference to the gospel (2:14), it seems likely that the reference to the “traditions” (plural!) here would be fairly broad, and not merely a reference to the portion of the apostolic tradition which served as a corrective to the false eschatological teaching addressed in 2 Thess 2. So Best, First and Second Thesalanions, p. 317; Calvin on 2:15; Malherbe, Letters to the Thessalonians, p. 440; Richard, First and Second Thesalanions, p. 366. This seems to be the way the plural is to be understood in 1 Cor 11:2 as well. At the same time, the specific teachings which the Thessalonians had received about the coming of the Lord would be included, as indicated by 2:5 and implied by the inclusio formed by 2:2 and 2:15 (as suggested by the repeated λόγος and ἐπιστολή, as well as the contrast between “be not shaken” [2:2, σαλεύω] and “stand fast” [2:15, στήκω]; see Witherington, 1 and 2 Thesalanions, p. 234).

71The nature of and near reference to “the traditions” in 2:15, along with the general nature of both “the traditions which you were taught” (2:15) and “the things we command you” (3:4), makes it likely that “the things we command you” refer at least to “the traditions.” So Richard, First and Second Thesalanions, p. 376. Cf. also the connection between the language of tradition and the language of command in 1 Thess 4:1–2.


73See figure 1 above.
Summary of the Seriousness of the Offense

Rather than consisting of a minor infraction, the offense of the disorderly was grave and significant. Both their lack of work and their meddlesome behavior were intrinsically blameworthy in that they contradicted the apostolic tradition which Paul had delivered to the Thessalonians with the authority of the Lord Jesus. Moreover, the dual offense appears to have demonstrated a lack of Christian love (cf. 1 Thess 4:9–10). Further, while their willful unemployment might not have met with disapproval from their pagan neighbors, their meddling behavior would certainly have given needless offense, thus harming the testimony of Christ (cf. 1 Thess 4:12). The seriousness of the situation is highlighted by its placement at the end of the letter for emphasis and by the bluntly authoritative language which Paul uses in the passage.

Further, the offenders were not guilty of merely a single incident of disorderliness, nor were they acting in ignorance. They had been clearly instructed as to working for a living, and they persisted in their disorderly behavior in the face of repeated admonition by both the apostle (2 Thess 3:10) and (presumably) the congregation (cf. 1 Thess 5:14 and 2 Thess 3:4). It is evident that the infraction of the disorderly had gone beyond intentional unemployment and involved a rebellious unwillingness to submit to apostolic authority. One would expect Paul to respond strongly to the disorderly, and he does just that.

74Fee, First and Second Thessalonians, p. 333.
75Some see Paul as moderating his language with the use of παρακαλέω (“exhort”) alongside παραγγέλλω (“command”) in 3:12 (Frame, Epistles to the Thessalonians, p. 306; Morris, First and Second Thessalonians, p. 256). This is an inaccurate reading, however, for as several recent commentators note, the work of Bjerkelund shows that Paul is using a stereotypical Hellenistic Greek formula which requested or commanded some particular action, and that Paul’s use of the formula “conforms most closely to the pattern used by a ruler to his subjects” (Carl J. Bjerkelund, Parakalô: Form, Funktion und Sinn der parakalô-Sätze in den paulinischen Briefen [Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 1967]; see Wanamaker, Epistles to the Thessalonians, p. 148; Green, Letters to the Thessalonians, p. 183). Malherbe notes that when παρακαλέω is used, it is frequently “interpreted or given precision by an accompanying word or words from the moral philosophers’ vocabulary” (Letters to the Thessalonians, p. 139). Παρακαλέω should be seen as a general term of exhortation which is taking its nuance from παραγγέλλω, not moderating the forcefulness of παραγγέλλω.

76It is difficult to understand the suggestion of Wanamaker that the disorderly were not intentionally resisting authority or acting in disobedience, but merely acting irresponsibly (Epistles to the Thessalonians, pp. 281–82). This line of thinking is also seen in Nicholl: “The view that ‘Paul’ is confronting active rebellion on the part of the ἄτακτοι is irreconcilable with the sentiment expressed in verse 15” (Hope to Despair, p. 168). Note also John Cassian, Institutes 10.7; Jerry L. Sumney, “Studying Paul’s Opponents: Advances and Challenges,” in Paul and His Opponents, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Leiden: Brill, 2005), p. 38. But the view that Paul is not confronting active rebellion is irreconcilable with the previous apostolic instruction, both personal (1 Thess 4:11; 2 Thess 3:10), and written (1 Thess 4:10–11). Contra Wanamaker and Nicholl, see Robert Jewett, The Thessalonian Correspondence (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), pp. 104–5.