

Work: A Christian Duty
2 Thessalonians 3:6-15
Part Two

Let us take our Bibles and read **2 Thess. 3:6-15**, “**Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. (7) For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, (8) nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you; (9) not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example. (10) For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat. (11) For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. (12) Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and at their own bread. (13) But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good. (14) And if anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame.**” It is fascinating how practical Paul is. Through the first two chapters of this epistle we have been examining lofty doctrinal themes. We have considered the return of Christ and the judgments associated with that return. We have considered the Day of the Lord and events surrounding that day, but now we come to **2 Thess. 3** and find Paul eager to talk about WORK. No matter how elevated Paul’s theology, he is always dealing with very practical areas of life.

There were Christians in the Thessalonians congregation that were refusing to work, who refused to make a living. They might have been influenced by the scribes who viewed manual labor as demeaning, but more likely, they were influenced by the general Greek attitude toward work. Homer said, “The gods hated man and demonstrated their hatred by making them work.” This philosophy, apparently, had found its way into the church, and when combined with the belief in the imminent return of Christ, caused some of them to simply stop working at all.

The concept of work continues to suffer even to this very day. Charles Colson wrote a book entitled, “*Why America Does Not Work.*” The book was about America’s declining work ethic.

In 1980 a Gallop Poll found people still believed in a work ethic, but a 1982 survey came along, and people were asked if they were doing the best job that they could. Only 16% said that they were. What is even more interesting was the fact that of the remaining 84% who said that they were not working as hard as they could, also indicated that they would be working harder if they could gain something from it. In a sense, they were saying, “There is no value beyond myself.” In fact, psychologist Robert Bela described this perspective as “radical individualism.” Surveying 200 middle class Americans, this psychologist found that Americans seek personal advancement from work, personal development from marriage, and personal fulfillment from church.” “Everything,” he says, “Their perspective on family, church, community and work is utilitarian. It is measured on what they can get out of it and concern for others is only secondary.”

A man named James Seehy, an executive for a computer firm, wanting to see first hand how this utilitarian value was affecting work, decided to take a job in a fast food chain. He wrote that most of his coworkers were from upper income families. They did not need to work, but they wanted extra spending money. He watched and listened as his coworkers displayed poor work habits and contempt for customers. His conclusion was that we have a new generation of workers whose habits and experiences will plague employers for years.

The young workers basic work ethic was dominated by a kind of gamesmanship that revolved around taking out of the system, or milking the place dry. The employees saw long hours and hard work as counter productive.

Now our society may have no choice, and they may have to accept this, but as Christians we do not have to accept it. The Christian faith does not accept a utilitarian work ethic. The Christian view of work is transcendent, and needs to be given a value in and of itself. Hopefully, last week we made this very clear.

Why should we value work? We should not value work because we may be getting the big bucks for doing it, or because we can exercise power and influence, or to be recognized for our accomplishments. Even though, for some of you these things may be true, hopefully, this is not the reason why we value work. Last week we saw that we value work because ...

God values work ...

God has commanded work ...

God has given us work as a gift and through this gift we are ministered to physically, emotionally, and spiritually; others can be cared for, and the Lord can be worshipped.

Work is not something to be tolerated or endured, but rather appreciated and valued. To treat work with disdain and to figuratively cast it aside as you would any piece of garbage is a serious matter.

For certain Christians to choose not to work in Thessalonica was a serious matter, and the passage before us this weekend will clearly communicate that. This passage gives very significant reasons why those Thessalonians who had chosen not to work should change their minds.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Look at **V. 6**, **“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life.”** The word “unruly” (ATAKTOS) signifies not keeping order. It was especially a military term, denoting not keeping rank, insubordinate.

How had certain Thessalonians broken rank? It is clear from the passage that we have read, and specifically stated in **V. 11** that certain Thessalonians had chosen not to work. Apparently they had the opportunity to work and had the ability to work, but they chose not to even though, by doing so, they put themselves in need.

This breaking of rank, this choice was not to be ignored. What was the church to do in light of their choice not to work? They were to **“keep aloof”** from them. Look at the verse again. **“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life.”** Notice that this response by the church was not optional. Paul commands them to keep aloof.

“To keep aloof” means **“to draw back from or shrink back from.”** The present tense denotes that they are to make it their practice to withdraw themselves from, personally separate themselves from, the disorderly by withholding fellowship from them. These believers who were working and seeking to live righteous lives were to no longer worship with, commune with, or fellowship with those who were not working.

Paul was encouraging them to practice what we commonly refer to as church discipline. What we must appreciate as we consider this instruction is the fact that this is not the first time that these people had been warned about this behavior.

When Paul first came to Thessalonica it was very likely that he dealt with this issue, but, apparently, it had not been eradicated. How do we know this? Because of what Paul wrote in **1 Thessalonians**. In **1 Thess. 4:11-12** he said, **“And to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you; (12) so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.”** And then again later in **1 Thess. 5:14** we read this exhortation. **“And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men.”** Certainly, it is quiet clear who Paul had in mind when he said, **“admonish the unruly.”**

These individuals who had chosen not to work had been instructed and admonished on numerous occasions, not only by Paul, but certainly, also by brothers and sisters in Christ to get to work, but they continued to remain idle.

Matt. 18:15-17 very carefully outlines the steps that should be taken by believers when they see their brother or sister in Christ in sin. It would appear that these steps, most likely, had been taken by Paul and the Thessalonian church. These unruly believers had, most likely, already been approached individually, and by groups of two or three. The disciplinary steps are now coming to a conclusion. Paul now commands the whole of the church to prepare themselves to take this final action and separate themselves from these undisciplined idle Christians who have refused to work.

I would like to remind you, once again, that our church practices church discipline. It has been a number of years now since we have had to come before the whole of this congregation and command you such as Paul commanded the Thessalonians to separate from a particular brother

or sister in Christ because of persistent unrepentant sin. Though it has been years since the last time we have done this, it is very probable that it will happen again.

Hopefully, when that call goes out to this church from the leaders of this fellowship, you will obey. Why? First of all, for the welfare of the person who has chosen to walk in sin. I hope, that by taking the extreme measure of “holding ourselves aloof”, or, in other words, separating ourselves from them, the Lord will use this to break them and cause them to repent, but also for the welfare of the church. **1 Cor. 5:6** tells us that “a little leaven,” referring to active rebellion on the part of an individual “leavens the whole lump.” We must deal with overt, unrepentant sin for the sake of the individual as well as for the sake of the church. If we do not, the church will be of no account in the world and will be no different in moral conduct than the Elks Club.

Someone might say people may not want to associate with a church that insists on a certain level of moral excellence. Certainly this is true! But, this is not bad. Remember the story of Ananias and Saphira. They had sinned in a public way at the very beginning of the early church, and do you remember the consequences for their sin? They were struck dead by God. What was the result of that? **Acts 5:11** tells us: Great fear amongst the church and even upon those outside of the church.

Discipline is necessary. Certainly, we are not going to be going about putting people to death, but God is telling us that the final step of church discipline needs to be a willingness, on our part, to separate ourselves from our unrepentant brother or sister in Christ.

This behooves us to be very close to each other. The church is designed to be intimately connected to each other. This allows not only for the encouragement of one another in righteousness and holiness, but, also, it facilitates more effective discipline. Why? Holding ourselves aloof from a sinning brother or sister is usually only effective when a local church is close to one another. If we are close to one another, we will be shaken by the removal of fellowship from those that have been so much a part of our lives.

Why should idle believers get back to work? They should get back to work because they will very likely be cut off from the church and be isolated as a professing believer in the world.

PAUL’S EXAMPLE

There is more than the pain of isolation if they continue in their idleness. There is also the challenge of rejecting Paul’s example. Let us continue to read, beginning at the end of **V. 6**, **“and not according to the tradition which you received from us. (7) For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you.”** Why should the Thessalonians take such an extreme measure in separating themselves from those who have chosen to be idle? Because those individuals had rejected Paul’s example. Paul walked the talk. He insisted on the Thessalonians working, and he worked.

How had Paul conducted himself among the Thessalonians? **1 Thess. 2:1-12** makes it

clear, **“For you yourselves know, brethren, that our coming to you was not in vain, (2) but after we had already suffered and been mistreated in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you the gospel of God amid much opposition. (3) For our exhortation does not come from error or impurity or by way of deceit; (4) but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not as pleasing men but God, who examines our hearts. (5) For we never came with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed - God is witness. (6) Nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. (7) But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. (8) Having thus a fond affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God but also our own lives, because you had become very dear to us. (9) For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. (10) You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; (11) just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, (12) so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”** This example, that the Thessalonians were all aware of, is now used to support the demand to discipline those who are refusing to follow this example. Why should they **“keep aloof”** from those leading an unruly life? What does **V. 7** say? **“For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you.”** Then he expands on what he means in **VV. 8-9**, **“Nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it.”** Paul does not mean that they never accepted a friendly invitation to a meal, but they did refuse to be dependent upon them for a living. This is clear from the rest of the verse. **“But with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you.”** Why? Was it because they did not have the right to be supported? Of course not! Look at **verse 9**, **“not because we do not have the right to this.”** Certainly, they had the right to do this. **1 Cor. 9:1-18, Gal. 6:10, and 1 Tim. 5:17** makes this very clear.

Why did they not exercise this right? Let us continue to read **V. 9**, **“but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example.”**

Paul had, in every possible way, tried to impress upon the Thessalonians the importance of work. He had done so through repeated instruction; he had done so by repeated admonitions. He had done so through his own powerful example, but there just was not any turning certain of these Thessalonians who had chosen to be idle.

So, once again Paul, in this letter, is trying to change their action. The first incentive was the prospect of imminent church discipline, and the second incentive was to remind them of their own example.

I would hope that we are personally being challenged. I hope that we are beginning to appreciate the value of work. As I result of this, I would hope that you would be making a commitment, not only not to be idle, but that you might even be an example. This is where I want to be, and, by the grace of God, this is what I will be.