

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

Some people at certain times need help in order to meet their basic needs. Certainly federal, state, county, and local governments recognize this. All kinds of assistance programs have been devised and re-devised. But what about the church? What is our role in this matter? Today we will touch on this very important area while we continue to examine **2 Thessalonians 3:6-15**.

In this particular passage of Scripture, Paul is addressing a very specific problem that had arisen in the church at Thessalonica. Apparently there were certain believers who chose to be idle. Rather than working with their hands in order to supply for themselves and the needs of their families, they were depending upon others.

These particular Thessalonians had lost their way. Rather than understanding the value of work and its importance in a holy walk, they treated work as if it served no good purpose. Paul, in an attempt to get them back to work, gives a series of incentives.

The first incentive that he gave was the threat of 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 and not according to the tradition which you received from us.”** Paul is instructing these believers to “keep aloof” or in other words to “withdraw from” any brother “who leads an unruly life” or in other words from those brothers according to **V. 11** who have chosen not to work. Why should certain Thessalonian Christians get back to work? Because if they don’t, they will be disciplined.

Today we will continue to consider other incentives that the Apostle shares with the Thessalonians that would hopefully encourage them to get back to work.

PAUL’S EXAMPLE

Paul’s own commitment to work should have been an effective incentive to stimulate these unruly, undisciplined idle believers. Other Thessalonians who had chosen to work in order to make a living might be discounted as foolish or misguided. But certainly how could these unruly undisciplined believers say that of the Apostle. Not only Paul’s message, but also his life exposed these individuals as transgressors.

Let us read **V. 6** 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 and not according to the tradition which you received from us.”**

In this verse we see the rejection of Paul’s message. What is Paul referring to when he speaks of **“the tradition?”** He is referring to his teachings! Look at **2 Thess. 2:15**, **“So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.”** But his teaching in this area of work went far beyond what he might have

said or even written. We see this in V. 7, **“For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you.”** In this verse we clearly see the rejection of Paul’s example.

How had Paul conducted himself among the Thessalonians? **1 Thess. 2:1-12** makes this very 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.”** 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 teachings powerfully illustrated by his own life.

Paul elaborates on that example 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 any of the Thessalonians 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 **V. 9**, **“not because we do not have the right to this.”** Certainly they had the right to be financially supported. We see this from **1 Cor. 9:1-18**, **Gal. 6:10** and **1 Tim. 5:17**.

But 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.”** Why did Paul labor night and day? He was providing an example of the importance and necessity of work. He was doing all that he did in order to minister to the need of the church. Paul walked the talk.

There was no “rush to judgment” on the part of Paul. He had patiently endured their idleness while seeking to reach them through instruction, admonition and example.

What does Paul give to these Thessalonians as incentives to go back to work? First of all, the threat of church discipline. And secondly, the reminder of his own example.

PERSONAL PROVISION

When should the church provide for the needy? Some people would say, “We should always provide for the needy!” And they will go to a passage such as **Matthew 5:42**, “**Give to him who asks of you, and do not turn away from him who wants to borrow from you.**” It would appear that this would be unconditional but when we take this in the context of the whole Bible we see that this is not so. Let us look at **V. 10**, “**For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone will not work, neither let him eat.**”

Let me ask you a question. Do you believe that Paul was familiar with Jesus instruction to “give to him who asks of you?” And I would say certainly this was the case. Paul understood the importance of giving to the poor. In **Galatians 2** after Paul met with the apostles for the very first time, fourteen years after his conversion, they had nothing to contribute to his theology but they did encourage him to do something. In **Galatians 2:9-10** we read, “**And recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we might go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. (10) They only asked us to remember the poor - the very thing I also was eager to do.**” How did Paul describe his feelings about helping the poor? He was “**eager**” to help the poor.

Paul was not indifferent to the poor. But the instruction that he gives in **2 Thess. 3:10** is clear. If a person does not work, then he should not eat. How then are we to understand this? It is very simple. If a person who is poor is willing to work and yet is lacking the basic necessities of life, we have a responsibility to assist him. But if a person who is poor is unwilling to work and is lacking the basic necessities of life, we have no responsibility to assist them.

We are obligated biblically to apply this principle. In fact we are just as responsible to apply this principle as we are to apply the principle found in **Matthew 5:42** which is “**give to him who asks of you.**”

Have you ever been at the AM/PM mini mart pumping gas and some apparently needy person asks you for a quarter or a dollar or whatever. How do you respond? I will tell you how I have responded. I tell them, “no.” Why would I do this? I do this because I *feel* that I would be violating this principle. Notice that I am saying to you that I *feel* that I would be violating this principle. I don’t know that I would violating this principle but I feel that I would. In **Romans 14:22-23** it says, “**The faith which you have, have as your own conviction before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. (23) But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith; and whatever is not from faith is sin.**” I believe before the Lord that I am willing to respond to those who are in genuine need through no fault of their own. I am not willing, nor should I be willing to respond to those in need if that need has been created or I believe has been created by their own irresponsible and reckless lifestyle and that irresponsible and reckless lifestyle is a continuing problem which was the case here in Thessalonica.

There have been many people who have approached our church over the years who have asked

for gas money. They have told me that they left some area down below and are on their way to Bakersfield but have become stranded. Do I give them money for gas? No! In fact I also will not take them to a gas station and fill up their gas tank. Why? Because even if this story is true they should never have left Long Beach to go to Bakersfield without sufficient resources to complete the trip. If I were to “help” them I would be perpetuating their reckless thinking.

Let me share with you the kind of individual that I will respond to in a positive way. It is a person who is seeking to live responsibly; a person who is doing what they need to do in order to take care of their needs.

There was a young man, who was I believe slightly retarded, who would go up and down our street which Lynn and I lived on with a bucket, some rags and a bottle of soap and would ask to wash our cars. What did he charge? He didn't have a fee. We were free to give him whatever we felt like. I had no problem giving to him and giving to him generously. Why? Because he was living responsibly. He was willing to do the things necessary to supply for himself.

We have, I am sure, seen people standing on the corner with a sign that says, “Will work for food.” I have never given to them and I will never give to them. It is my opinion that they are not pursuing work but rather money. If they were truly willing to work, then let them walk up and down the street on which I live with a bucket, some rags and offer to wash my car. But rather than doing that, they make it as difficult as possible to provide work for them. This behavior for me is not responsible.

The Scripture has never indicated that people should be given a free ride. Even as we look at the Old Testament and the way the poor were provided for we see the emphasis on people taking personal responsibility for meeting their own needs wherever possible.

Exodus 23:10-11 states, “**And you shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield, (11) but on the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the needy of your people may eat; and whatever they leave the best of the field may eat. You are to do the same with you vineyard and your olive grove.**” What do these instructions mean? It meant that if this instruction was followed there would always be in the fields and vineyards throughout Palestine a certain amount of food that would be available for the poor. How would that happen? Because those fields and vineyards would continue to produce at a certain level even if there was no further cultivating or sowing.

Not only do we see the fields that were being rested every seven years being a source of food, but even the fields that were being actively cultivated and harvested.

Deut. 24:19-21 says, “**When you reap your harvest in your field and have forgotten a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow, in order that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. (20) When you beat your olive tree, you shall not go over the boughs again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the widow. (21) When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, you shall not go over it again; it shall be for the alien, for the orphan, and for the**

widow.”

Lev. 19:9 also says, “**Now when you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very corners of your field, neither shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. (10) Nor shall you glean your vineyard, nor shall you gather the fallen fruit of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the needy and for the stranger. I am the Lord your God.**”

Those who were able to work were expected to work in order to meet their needs. The poor of Israel who were able to get into the fields were expected to go to the fields. The food would not be brought to them.

When we know people are able to work but who have chosen to be idle we have no responsibility to feed them. But someone might say, “but they may die!” And how would Paul respond to that comment. “If they die that is their choice.” What did Paul say, “**If anyone will not work neither let him eat.**”

CONCLUSION

Paul is dealing with certain Thessalonians who had chosen not to work. He has given them incentives to get them to go back to work.

The first incentive was church discipline.

The second incentive was Paul’s own example.

The third incentive is their personal provision. You had better go back to work because the church will not feed you.