

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

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 had chosen 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.

Paul in an attempt to get them back to work gives to the Thessalonian church a series of incentives in **2 Thessalonians 3:6-15**.

The first incentive was the threat of church discipline in **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.”**

The second incentive was Paul’s personal example in **VV. 7-9**, **“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.”**

The third incentive was personal provision in **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.”**

The Lord expects us, if possible, to conduct ourselves in such a way that we would not become dependent upon others. And therefore the Apostle Paul makes it very clear to these Thessalonians that they needed to conduct themselves appropriately and get to work. If they were unwilling to go to work, then the church should not bring to them any assistance even if that meant these certain people would not eat.

We cannot, as a church, offer assistance to people who are capable of working if they are not actively seeking work. We cannot, as a church, offer assistance to people capable of working if they turn down work when it is offered to them. We cannot, as a church, offer assistance to people who are working but who recklessly squander their wages on personal vices or negligence.

Again I want to emphasize that past behavior is not nearly as important as present behavior. The church is not so much concerned about how a person has gotten to a place of need as much as it is concerned about what that person is presently doing about it.

Knowing people is extremely important if we are going to be able to apply biblical truths correctly. We have emphasized the importance of this when dealing with individuals locally, but what about people who are in need that we have never met or ever will meet. What about the

poor among the nations of the world?

When considering gifts to the poor in geographical areas far removed from ourselves, we need to have personal knowledge of, and confidence in the person or persons we are trusting to distribute the gifts.

Let us consider the Apostle Paul. Remember **Galatians 2:9-10**? Paul had made only his second trip to Jerusalem approximately 17 years after his conversion. In this visit he talked over doctrine with the leaders of the church and Paul found himself perfectly lined up with them. They contributed nothing to Paul in respect to any of his teachings. But they did commend Paul and Barnabas to their work among the Gentiles and gave them a very simple charge which is recorded for us by Paul in **Gal. 2:9-10**, “**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.**”

Let me ask you a question: Who did the leaders in the church in Jerusalem have in mind when they were talking about the poor? Was it the poor in China, or the poor in Bosnia or in Egypt? Who did these church leaders have in mind? Clearly it was the poor within the church in Jerusalem and Judea. They were not particularly concerned about the poor in other places around the world. They were concerned about the poor who were in the church at Jerusalem.

How do we know this? Because when Paul made the visit, which is recorded for us in **Galatians 2:9-10**, he had an offering from the church in Antioch for the needy in the church at Jerusalem and Judea with him. Look at **Acts 11:27-30**. This is an account of the events that took place shortly before Paul’s visit to Jerusalem which was recorded for us in **Galatians**. Let us read the passage, “**now at this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem** (meaning down in elevation) **to Antioch** (which was 100’s of miles north of Jerusalem in the area now known as Syria). **(28) And one of them named Agabus stood up and began to indicate by the Spirit that there would certainly be a great famine all over the world. And this took place in the reign of Claudius. (29) And in proportion that any of the disciples had means, each of them determined to send a contribution for the relief of the brethren living in Judea.** What motivated them to give to these particular people? Did these Gentile Christians know the Christians in Judea personally? No. But they had ties to the church. After the martyrdom of Stephen in Jerusalem certain Jewish Christians migrated to Antioch. And through their witness a church was born. Antioch was given birth through Jews who had close connections to Jerusalem. And in addition to this when the church at Jerusalem heard that the Gentiles were responding to the gospel they sent Barnabas, to Antioch to see what was going on. As a result of this Barnabas, on loan from the elders in Jerusalem, became heavily involved in ministering to the church there and brought in reinforcements by asking his good friend Paul to join him. Though the largely Gentile church at Antioch did not know the Christians in Jerusalem and Judea, they had close ties with them through Paul and Barnabas. We see how strategic Paul and Barnabas were to this collection in the next verse. “**(30) And this they did, sending it in charge of Barnabas and Saul to the elders.**” The need in Jerusalem and Judea must have been staggering. Because even after this gift was brought, the elders continued to encourage Paul and Barnabas to remember the

poor. Remember the poor where? In Jerusalem and Judea.

Did they do this? And the answer is of course yes. Later in the midst of his missionary journeys Paul spearheaded an even larger offering to be collected for them from the churches of Macedonia and Achaia, which we read about in **2 Corinthians 8-9**, for the poor in Jerusalem and Judea.

We at Valley Bible want to be committed to responding to the needs of the poor, and this not only means responding to the poor we know personally to be living responsibly, but also those who we do not even know who encounter hardship. But practically we must limit ourselves to those people whose leadership we have come to know and trust.

We have this kind of relationship with the church in Hamadera, Japan. These Japanese Christians are on the other side of the world, and yet we have ties with them. We don't all of them. In fact, there are very few of us here that would be able to name very many at all. But we as a church do know the leadership of Hamadera and we trust them. Not to many years ago there was a very large quake in Japan called the Kobe earthquake. This quake was not far from Hamadera. If that quake had been more closely centered in Hamadera, it would have been our duty to respond to a relief offering. As it worked out we sent a fairly large offering to the Hamadera church to be distributed to Christians in Kobe.

It is very important for us to understand, not only our responsibility to give and to give generously to people who are in need but it is also important for us to understand the importance of giving responsibly. The only good way of giving responsibly in light of the teachings of **2 Thessalonians 3:10** is to be knowledgeable of the people that are receiving our assistance. This not only applies to our giving to individuals but also to a group of individuals.

In the months ahead we hope at Valley Bible to bring a lot more help to those in need in our fellowship who are willing to work and to act responsibly. And we also hope at Valley to be more forthright with individuals in our fellowship who may be struggling to live responsibly.

Why should a certain few Thessalonians choose to go back to work? Because of the threat of church discipline, the example of Paul and his companions, and the possibility that the food supply would be cut off. What else might prove to be an incentive?

The fourth incentive is preserving the health of the church? Look at **VV. 11-13**, **“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 eat their own bread. (13) But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good.”** The key verse here is V. 13. The faithful Christians were being tempted to become discouraged by the conduct of the careless saints who refused to work. “If they don't have to work, why should we?” This could very well be their argument, but Paul nipped it in the bud.

Sin in the life of a believer always affects the rest of the church. As members of His body, we

belong to each other and we affect each other. The bad example of a few saints can destroy the devotion and hinder the service of the rest of the church.

If you have chosen to attend this church you need to know that we consider you a part of us. And it is very important for the health and welfare of this church that you prosper. It does not take many people who are not getting with the program to bring a church to a screeching halt.

I am not talking about a church coming to a screeching halt in terms of numerical growth. But rather about a church coming to a screeching halt in terms of a vibrant dynamic commitment to doing good. If we are going to be a people who are seeking to know the Word, apply the Word, live the Word, we need each of you to be seeking to know the Word, apply the Word, and live the Word. These few Thessalonians were failing to do this and it was threatening the health and welfare of the Thessalonian church.

Paul named the sins of this group. Look at **V. 11**, “**For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all.**” Paul is once again alluding to what he mentioned in **V. 6**. The word translated “undisciplined” in **V. 11** is the same word translated “unruly” in **V. 6**. But there is more. Look at the rest of **V. 11**, “**but acting like busybodies.**” Rather than being “busy workers” they had become “busy bodies.” The Greek word for “busybodies” literally means “to be working around” or in other words “fooling around.” They were not accomplishing anything.

Instead of running around not accomplishing anything they needed to quietly settle down and work. Look at **V. 12**, “**Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.**” If you have a lot of idle time on your hands, what will you choose to do? Hopefully you will work and become productive. Certainly for these individuals that Paul has in mind it was not an option. But these individuals were not only idle, going about doing nothing, but they had also become dependent upon the church to care for them. And it was not going to be tolerated.

So once more after encouraging the hard working Christians in Thessalonica to continue working in **V. 13** he goes back to where he began and again shares the same thought. “**If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter (and get to work), take special note of that man and do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame.**” Let him see himself for who he truly is. Let him see that what he has chosen to do is, from the standpoint of the church, fellowship that is totally unacceptable.

But then we read these words of caution in **V. 15**, “**yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.**” Any form of discipline that is exercised, whether that is in the church or in our homes must be motivated by loving concern.

CONCLUSION

Work is not something to be endured or to be put up with. Work is something to be valued. Valued because the Lord values it, and has therefore commanded it, but not to be a burden to our life but rather to be a blessing.

Through work we are not only able to meet our basic needs, but also the needs of others. And through work we have the opportunity to glorify and magnify God by offering up our labor as a sweet smelling sacrifice well pleasing to Him.

Because work is so important it is a serious thing when a Christian chooses to be idle and become dependent upon another. Because of this, Paul has given four different incentives for the idle of Thessalonica to get back to work.

First incentive: If you don't go back to work, you face church discipline.

Second incentive: If you don't go back to work, you have rejected our very personally costly example of hard labor.

Third incentive: If you don't go back to work, don't expect the church to supply for you when you become hungry.

Fourth incentive: If you don't go back to work, the health of the church could very well suffer.

May the Lord grant us the grace to be hard workers. May the Lord bless our lives with fruitful labor that will be a blessing to ourselves, our families, church, community, and most of all to the Lord.