

The Sanctity of Work

Call to Worship: Psalm 148

1st Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

2nd Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

Hymn Insert- *Come People of the Risen King*

Hymn #127- *Let Us Love and Sing and Wonder*

Hymn #50- *Praise to the Lord the Almighty*

Introduction:

Having moved out of the indicative (informative) section of Paul's letter (to the Thessalonians) and into the imperative (command) section, we spent two weeks considering Paul's first imperative command, which exhorted the Thessalonians to flee sexual immorality and to maintain a life of purity, by following the commands of Christ. This is in keeping with the will of God, which is our sanctification.

Following a call to continually increase in their love for one another, this morning, we will find Paul charging the Thessalonians concerning the important matter of their occupation and work. And to this end, we will discover and ponder the sanctity (the "holy calling") of work.

I. Increasing in Love (vs. 9-10)

Paul begins in verses 9-10, "But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more..."

When we had worked through chapter 1, chapter 3:6, and especially chapter 3:12-13, we had spent a good deal of time considering the meaning and relevance of these two verses. And so, I will simply, briefly, summarize what we have already gone over concerning them, and then jump into verses 11-12, where we will find an additional, relevant connection to verses 9-10.

Having highlighted the fact that the Thessalonians were excelling in their exercising of love toward one another, and toward all (and that, in the midst of persecution and tribulation), Paul here comments that he really has no need to exhort them concerning how they ought to love one another. They were already taught by God in this regard, and this was clearly manifested and evidenced in the way that they have been conducting themselves toward each other, and toward all the brethren in broader Macedonia, for that matter. And so, Paul is greatly

complimenting them when he says this. The love of God toward them has been properly processed and embraced by faith, and they were continually reflecting that love toward others.

But then, Paul exhorts/urges them to continue to improve upon what they are already doing; to "increase more and more." And having looked at this text in the past, we had drawn out a critical principle from it, namely, that we ought always to strive to improve upon our love toward others. There is never a time when we ought to allow our love to plateau, assuming that we have come to the place where our love has reached its full potential, in some respect. No, we ought always to look for new, fresh, deliberate, focused and specific ways to love others.

II. The Sanctity of Work

Well, moving on then, we find the Apostle Paul making one specific connection; one direct, relevant application, fit especially for the Thessalonian context, toward which, they ought also to further direct this love. You see, it's easy to remain in the realm of generalities, isn't it? It's easy to love and sacrifice in ways; in even a thousand ways, with which we are already comfortable. But, when the compass of conviction points right in the direction of some idol, to which we have been clinging, the rubber comes to meet the road right there, doesn't it? The rich young ruler, who wanted to know how to inherit eternal life, found it easy to agree with the Lord's charge to keep the Ten Commandments, until the Lord put His finger on the rich man's great idol. With a sense of joy, he blurted out, "I have kept those commandments from my childhood." And the Lord shifted the compass over to his coveted wealth; his great idol, and said, "You lack one thing. Go, and sell all that you have (and give the proceeds to the poor), and follow Me, and you will have riches in heaven." And, of course, we recall that the rich man walks away disheartened. He couldn't do it.

Well, here, Paul addresses one specific area of love, which the Thessalonians needed to consciously improve upon. And it dealt with their need to properly occupy themselves; with their need to work, and that, in a God honoring fashion.

And so, Paul continues on in verses 11-12, "...that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing."

Now, why in the world does Paul strap this onto his statement about increasing more and more in loving one another? What does this have to do with love? Is there a connection, or is this just another whole topic altogether? Well, I believe that there is a connection here, and I also believe that there is a very relevant issue, which, like the issue of sexual purity, Paul saw as a potential weakness amongst the Thessalonians.

Particularly, in the light of Christ's anticipated return, the temptation to view work as unnecessary or vain was present, especially in Thessalonica. Notice, how the Apostle addresses this very same issue, but in a more stern way, in 2 Thessalonians as well. We read these verses in 2 Thessalonians 3 already (in our first Scripture reading), but hear again, verses 6-15:

"But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread. But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

And so, here we find that that which Paul addresses in our text in 1 Thessalonians, was still a problem in 2 Thessalonians. And clearly, the exhortation is sterner in 2 Thessalonians, since the first exhortation was not heeded by some.

What then is Paul's charge here? Simply put, the brethren needed to work. They needed to do their job (to do it well) and to lead a quiet, respectable life. Now, what does Paul mean by "leading a quiet life," here? Is he saying, "Don't speak. Just do your job, with no intention of discussing anything at anytime? Don't make waves in any sense? Live the Gospel, but don't proclaim the Gospel?" Of course not. Well, how then are we to take this exhortation of working and living a quiet life? The answer is found in the negative aspects of the two exhortations, which define the type of noise that accompanies an idle life. Notice, Paul exhorts them to live a quiet life and to work with their own hands, and to mind their own business, in 1 Thessalonians.

And in 2 Thessalonians, he speaks of some, who are not working and who are disorderly, busybodies, who burden others for their daily needs.

And so, the ungodly noise, which the Apostle is here implicating is the noise of being a nosy busybody, who goes around trying to find out everyone's business, creating an atmosphere of gossip, like the local news reporter trying to discover the next big story. It is the noise of tale bearing, gossiping and meddling in the affairs of others. And so, the Apostle commands the Thessalonians to work, and to lead a quiet life in this respect. Clearly, the point is that those who are not busy working, will be busy meddling in the affairs of others, sparking an atmosphere of gossip and controversy with their lips. As the famous saying goes, "Idle time is the devil's playground."

What then is the connection to "love" then? Why does Paul strap this onto his call for the Thessalonians to increase more and more in loving one another? Well, there are at least two reasons for this. First, when one is unwilling to work, he makes himself a burden to others. He puts others in the position of having to supply his basic needs, and becomes a leech to the brethren. And so, not only does he, by his unwillingness to work, fail to contribute to the body in any material sense, but he further draws from it, and that, unnecessarily (unlike those who are truly in need, such as widows...etc). And then, secondly, because he refuses to work, he fills his time with being a busybody, a gossip and a meddler, all of which foster division in the body. Rather than edify, by such actions, the idle person tears down. And so, in at least these two key ways, the idle person fails to love his brethren and contradicts the blessed unity and peace, which the Holy Spirit calls for, in the body. And, in this way, his testimony is tarnished before those on the outside, as well.

Notice again, Paul adds in verse 12, "...that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing." Leading a quiet and peaceable life and working hard, leave those on the outside with an honorable testimony to behold, so that they cannot accuse Christians of being lazy or using Christianity as a means of taking from others. Rather, the Christian ought to work, so as to have enough to provide for himself, and if possible, to sacrificially offer help to others, who might have a legitimate need. And to this end, we find that working is itself a respectable and holy calling.

III. Closing Thoughts and Applications

Having worked through the text then brethren, let us now conclude our time, by considering a few closing thoughts and applications:

1) Recognize the sanctity of work, brethren. Work is a good, honorable and holy calling, and those who faithfully fulfill their job responsibilities, fulfill a holy calling from the Lord. You see, brethren, it can be all too easy to view secular work as some worldly thing, or at the least, a consequence of the fall. But, right from the beginning, man was ordained to work, the moment God had commanded Adam to work and care for the garden. God did not need Adam to do anything, did He? He could have had the garden take care of itself, but He designed His image bearers to reflect His glory, in a finite sense, by calling man to work hard, even as God Himself worked in creation, and continued to work in the unfolding of His providence. Work is a good and holy calling. It precedes the fall and is no consequence of it.

To that end then, brethren, whatever God has called you to do, do it heartily and with all your might, unto the Lord. If you are an accountant, a contractor, a lawyer, an architect, a garbage man, a mailman, a stay at home mom, a nuclear physicist, a secretary, a police officer...etc, whatever it is that you do, do it heartily unto the Lord, and don't suppose for a moment that what you do, is any less spiritual than a pastor or a missionary. If God has called you to do something, do it, and know for sure, that in your service, and in your doing your service well, you are fulfilling a good and holy calling from the Lord. It is critical that you see this, brethren. Recognizing this, will drive you to work hard and with great joy, because you understand that your good and hard work, means something even much more than the pay check. It is all part of your service unto the Lord. It carries a significant purpose in the sight of God, and God is well pleased with your faithful labors in Christ. Your 9-5, is as important as your devotional time and your Sunday worship. In fact, I would further suggest that the attitude behind and the quality of your work is a form of worship.

2) Men of a working age, are you working? If not, why not? Now, especially with our struggling economy, some of you may be seeking a job, but are just having a hard time getting one. Certainly, that is understandable. And so, let me rephrase the question this way: Men of a working age, are you diligently seeking to work? Understand men, that God has especially

called you to work. Now, some have legitimate reasons for not working, such as health issues that might prevent you from doing so. But, even in that respect, we need to make sure that we are truly incapable of working. If you can work, you ought to work, men. There are many, many in our country, who are receiving some form of government compensation, who probably ought not to be receiving that compensation. But, let it not be in the church, brethren. Because God is greater than the government, and the calling to work is a holy calling from the Lord. All manner of people can milk the system, but that is not an option for you, Christian. Perhaps, you have suffered some type of injury, which has kept you from working. Are you looking to return to work, when you are capable of doing so, again? Let us be among those, who are honest in this regard, not seeking to ride the system as long as possible, but rather, looking to return to the calling to which God has called you, as you are able.

3) Work is a significant portion of a man's testimony. Let us make sure that we are doing it honorably before the Lord. That means, working on the books and paying the appropriate taxes, in accordance with our Federal and State laws. That means, not collecting benefits to which you have no right. That means, not taking extra breaks or skimping out on the clock. That means, giving it your best, and seeking to prosper the cause of whomever you work for, even though they are ungodly or greedy (without doing anything unethical yourself, of course). It means doing your work, as a service, and as a form of worship unto the Lord.

It's so easy to brush things under the carpet in these regards, brethren, and to rest our Christianity on doing everything else well. But, perhaps the compass of conviction is pointing right here for some of you. And God wants you to deal with the "one thing" in this area of your sanctification, because He wants to be the "One Thing" that matters most to you. He wants to be Lord over every area of your life, including the sphere of your work, which happens to use a lot of time in our lives.

4) While no system is perfect (because all systems involve sinful men), recognize the biblical problem with Communism and Socialism. Both of these systems discourage hard work, encourage laziness and promote a form of theft. The government ought not to force the more affluent to give to others. Giving should be voluntary, and there is no way that the federal government can properly assess and manage who the truly needy really are. Churches and local

services would be better equipped to do this at the local level. There, true needs can be assessed and met accordingly, and that, on a voluntary basis. This will further compel those who can work, to work, and it will also make allowances for those who are "down and out" for a time, while motivating them to be diligent in their pursuit of new work.

5) We were meant to be busy, brethren, and when we are not busy in accordance with God's will, we will find a way to be busy, contrary to His will. Note again, the contrast to working, described as being disorderly (contrary to proper God-honoring order). Idleness, breeds schism and disorder in the church, while diminishing the ability to effectively minister unto others.

6) At the cross, Christ has redeemed man, and in redeeming man, He has redeemed every honorable purpose of God for man, which would most certainly include good, honest work. Let us walk worthy of His gracious and glorious calling!

Amen!!!

Benediction: Ephesians 3:14-21