

Introduction

To far too many people in our society, **WORK** has become “a four-letter word!” We live in a time where government programs and modern conveniences have by and large made way too many people—and here is another “four-letter word” for you—it has made them **LAZY!**

It is bad enough when we find this attitude in the secular society—Because it breeds **welfare, worthlessness, crime** and **a whole host of other societal ills!**

Let me share with you some things about work before we get started:

1. God Created Man To Work!

Some mistakenly believe that work is a part of sin’s curse!
Sin’s curse didn’t come until after man sinned in Genesis 3!
The ground was cursed in Genesis 3:17-19.
(Thorns and thistles and sweat.)

Genesis 2:8 And the LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.

Genesis 2:15 And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.

We could say that work is a part of the creation mandate!

Stars shine, trees and plants grow and produce fruit, water does what its supposed to do (hydrates), clouds do what they do, and **when we work we're doing what we've been designed to do! Work is our contribution to God’s amazing creation!**

Psalms 104:23 Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening.

2. God Commanded His People To Work!

*Exodus 20:8-9 8 Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy.
9 Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work:*

3. God Modeled Work For Man!

Exodus 20:11 For in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it.

God is the greatest worker in the universe. The Bible describes His works of creation, redemption, and judgment!

4. Work Is A Gift From God!

When we labor out of love for our Lord, we put on display the genius of God Who created each of us uniquely to reflect His beauty and glory.

When we work in concert with Him according to our giftedness and abilities, God is glorified and we’re fulfilled because that’s what He’s made us to do!

Colossians 3:17 And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

The theologian John Stott said this about work:

“Work is the expenditure of energy (manual or mental or both) in the service of others, which brings fulfillment to the worker, benefit to the community, and glory to God” (<http://pbc.org/dp/ritchie/4003.htm>).

There’s a story told about three men who were digging a foundation. When asked what he was doing, the first man replied that he was earning money to feed his family. The second man said he was working so he could go out and party on the weekend. Only the third man captured the architect’s plan for the structure when he said, “I’m building a cathedral to the glory of God.” How do you see your job? Do you see it as an avenue to promote the purposes of God?

As we come to our text today, it’s important to understand that the Thessalonian Church was inundated with at least three influences when it came to work.

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2 THESSALONIANS 3:6-18**

Some with a **Jewish background** believed that only those who studied Scripture like the scribes were doing worthy work. They separated the spiritual from the secular.

Some of those from a **Greek background** believed that work was demeaning and belonged only to slaves. They had a superior attitude!

And there were some from the Thessalonian congregation that believed work was no longer necessary because Jesus was going to return any moment. As a result, they withdrew from work and became busybodies. (“Idle hands are the devil’s workshop”)

This background is helpful in understanding Paul’s passion to exhort this young congregation to stay busy in the right things till Jesus comes!

I. PAUL EXHORTED THEM TO STAY AWAY FROM THOSE THAT WERE IDLE! (Vs 6)

Paul uses the Savior’s full title here to communicate the absolute seriousness of the problem.

This is not just Paul’s opinion or suggestion. The word translated “**command**” here comes right at the beginning of verse 6!

A general would use this word when he gave orders to his troops. The commander-in-chief of the armies of heaven is ordering us to stay away from those that walk disorderly (the context is speaking of those that were idle.)

God doesn’t want us to be loafers while we wait for the appearing of His Son. Instead, **we are to work hard, settle down, and earn our wages. We must never tire of doing what is right.**

The phrase “*withdraw yourselves*” means to abstain or avoid.

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It was used of furling the sails on a boat. When the wind would come up they would unfurl the sails, or open them up. When the wind died down, they would furl them, or pull them back in.

Likewise, we’re to pull back from believers who “*walk disorderly,*” which comes from another word from the military world that means *to be out-of-step or out of rank*. Those who are idle are disorderly and have gone AWOL from their God-given responsibilities.

The Book of Proverbs has a lot to say about those who are intentionally idle by referring to them as sluggards and slothful. *Proverbs 6:9 “How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?”*

Proverbs 10:26 “As vinegar to the teeth, and as smoke to the eyes, so is the sluggard to them that send him.”

Proverbs 19:24 “A slothful man hideth his hand in his bosom, and will not so much as bring it to his mouth again.”

Proverbs 21:25 “The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour.”

Proverbs 26:14 “As the door turneth upon his hinges, so doth the slothful upon his bed.”

It may seem a bit strong to us to sever ties with slackers! But realize that the aim of this alienation was for the wayward to get back on board. Disfellowship was to ultimately lead them back to fellowship!

So, we’re to pull back for our protection and for their restoration!

II. PAUL EXHORTED THEM TO FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF HARD WORK THAT HAD BEEN DISPLAYED TO THEM! (VS 7-9).

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Paul uses his own example along with his co-laborers Silas and Timothy! They modeled what it meant to “*labor and travail*,” which means, “*to work to the point of pain.*”

And Paul said that they did this *night and day* when they were with them. They worked hard, **not because they weren’t entitled to some support**, but because they wanted to give them a model that they could imitate.

Because they were planting a church, they did not want to be a burden to the believers of the Church. The sluggards, on the other hand, were trying to leach off the Church **when they could have been and should have been working!**

A strong work ethic was passed on to me from my parents for which I am now thankful! My parents worked with everything they had!

I’m also grateful for the hard workers in this congregation who model what it means to labor to the point of pain. Many of you understand that there really is no difference between the secular and the sacred as you live out the truth of *Colossians 3:23 And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men;*

III. PAUL EXHORTED THEM THAT WORK IS THE RESPONSIBLE THING TO DO! (Vs 10-12)

There in verse 10, Paul repeats what he had previously commanded them when he was with them: “*that if any would not work, neither should he eat.*”

Now, **this doesn’t mean that those who can’t work, for one reason or another, shouldn’t eat.** He’s referring to those who **will not work**, to those who are idle even when work is available and they are able.

We should never use this verse to hammer the poor or the unemployed because we often don’t know the whole story.

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This verse is referring to a small minority of believers who had willingly decided to just live off others and put their noses where they didn’t belong.

Having said that, the principle still applies. If we want food we must be willing to work. It’s interesting that after Jesus fed the 5,000 in John 6, the next day they showed up again for breakfast, only this time He didn’t feed them. He fed them the day before in order to teach them and reveal Himself to them, but he wasn’t interested in subsidizing slackers or providing people with an eternal welfare state!

Verse 11 describes what the idle had begun to do! A “*busybody*” is one who has so much time on his hands that he stays busy by meddling in the affairs of others.

The word translated “*busybodies*” literally means, “*to meddle.*” Someone has compared *busybodies* to mules: When they are pulling, they cannot kick; when they are kicking they cannot pull.

A person who is working hard is generally not lashing out at those around him. The individual who is inflicting pain on others is usually not pulling their load!

Proverbs 26:17 paints a vivid picture of what can happen when we meddle in matters that shouldn’t matter to us: *Proverbs 26:17 He that passeth by, and meddleth with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears.*

Busybodies often turn into *gossips* according to 1 Timothy 5:13: “*And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.*”

It’s easy to get into the habit of being idle. When that happens, being a busybody and passing along gossip can easily become a vocation!

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Paul had some strong words for those who were in the habit of being idle in **verse 12!** Notice again the use of the word **“command”** and the full title of Jesus.

He calls for the slacker to quiet down and work (i.e. mind his own business and to stop meddling around in the lives of others!)

In current day vernacular one might say, “Chill out and find a job dude where you can mind your own business and eat your own bread!”

Ephesians 4:28 provides some helpful insight: *“Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.”*

When we work we don’t have to lean on others but we can instead help OTHERS who are truly hurting!

We are to work so we can eat and! Now, Jesus may come back tomorrow but that doesn’t mean we shouldn’t go to work in the morning.

IV. PAUL EXHORTED THEM TO NOT GET WEARY DOING RIGHT! (Vs 13)

We are to do the right thing even when others don’t! It’s easy to get discouraged when we are doing right and see others that are not!

We are to keep our eyes on Jesus and keep doing what we know to be right! Don’t get tired of doing what is right. Regardless of what others may be doing, just hang in there! Jesus is coming and you’ll be glad you just kept on keeping on!

Specifically, Paul is encouraging those who are hard workers to not get bummed out when they see those who are not working.

Galatians 6:9 *And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.*

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We should not withhold financial help from those who legitimately need it and we should not let the busybodies bother us.

V. PAUL EXHORTED THEM NOT TO COMPANY WITH SLACKERS, BUT TO ADMONISH THEM AS BRETHREN! (Vs 14-15)

This verse deals with the matter of Church discipline, a subject that we should strive to take seriously as a Church!

These idlers had refused to obey orders and were clearly exhibiting a rebellious spirit. As a result, specific and tough measures were needed. The Bible gives us several other passages that have to do with disciplining a straying disciple (Matthew 18:15-18; Galatians 6:1-3; Titus 3:10; 1 Corinthians 5:1-3).

For our purposes, and for the sake of time, let’s look at three steps we should take with those who fit within the parameters of our passage for today.

A. The Plan: Take “note” of those who are disobeying.

This means that the whole Church is to take this seriously by keeping an eye on the person who persists in going down a wrong path.

B. The Process: Do not company with him.

This verb translated *“have no company”* means *“not to get mixed up with”* or have close associations with a slacker.

We must be careful to not endorse or enable self-destructive behavior. Sometimes we need to pull back in order for people to fall down so they will look up!

C. The Purpose: The goal of Church discipline must always be restoration. The hope was that the idle individuals would be isolated to the point that they would feel ashamed of their actions. This should then lead them to repentance.

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Many have lost the element of being *ashamed* today! The word itself is distasteful. Literally the word translated “*ashamed*” here means to “*turn on yourself, to feel what you really are.*”

While I certainly don’t want to “shame” people when I preach, because many of us are already paralyzed by false shame and guilt, the Bible does declare that we should feel some shame about our sins.

Jeremiah 6:15 “Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? nay, they were not at all ashamed, neither could they blush: therefore they shall fall among them that fall: at the time *that* I visit them they shall be cast down, saith the LORD.”

Properly understood, shame should always lead us back to the Savior and obedience to him! *Psalm 83:16 Fill their faces with shame; that they may seek thy name, O LORD.*

Verse 15 provides us with a much-needed reminder to not be too harsh with those who are messing up.

Unfortunately our default setting is to get angry with those who sin differently than we do.

Realize that the offenders are not enemies but fellow believers in the Lord. They are brothers to be admonished, not enemies to be abused. At the same time, we’re not to excuse behavior; but we’re to “*admonish*” in a “*tough-love*” kind of way. To *admonish* someone is literally to put sense or biblical wisdom into the mind so that it changes behavior.

Conclusion

Paul concludes with some final words that are very comforting in verse 16!

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This life is loaded with trouble and circumstances that can easily unsettle us.

No matter what you are going through right now, you can have this peace from the Lord of peace Himself Who can give you His peace always by all means!

The peace that Jesus gives is not the absence of trouble, but is rather the confidence that He is there with you always. Notice again how peace and His presence are linked together in verse 16!

Friends, Jesus came to give us peace. This peace first involves coming into a relationship with God the Father. The Bible says that by our nature we are at war with Him. It’s only through the sacrificial death of the Savior that you and I can have peace with Him. *Romans 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:*

The only way to experience internal peace and to be truly at peace with others is to make sure you are first at peace with God.

The final salutation of this book draws our attention to the only thing that makes our peace even possible! **(Vs 18)**

Once you have been saved from your sins by grace and have been born again, the Bible declares that you will be at peace. In other words, you cannot have the peace of God until you know the God of peace! Do you know Him? If not, why not let us help you get to know him right now!