

WAITING

2 THESSALONIANS 3:6-18

(Prepared by Gene Thompson)

1. Where do you hate to wait the most? (Stoplight; Dr.'s office; Wal-Mart; gas station; for Christ's return.)
2. What makes waiting a challenge? (We are geared to go-go-go and when we can't because of someone else's incompetence it really gets under our skin. That is basically a selfish attitude.)

As for me: I have too many things on my "to do" list to stand here or sit here waiting for my turn!

3. What do you do while you are waiting your turn? (Think critical thoughts about the slowpokes ahead of you. Play on your phone. Quote Scripture silently. Work for God's kingdom. Etc.)

Why not visit with the person closest to you about church? You might even meet someone who is looking for a church or has a need for God in their life.

4. How do you feel about waiting for Christ's return? (We all look around and say, "Even so come Lord Jesus!")

Last week Paul prayed for the Christians in Thessalonica and asked them to pray for him. Today we are going to discuss what we should be doing while we wait for Jesus to come back and claim His own!

Paul concluded his second letter to the church at Thessalonica by being an example of what it means to live in obedience to God's commands while waiting on Christ's return.

ESTABLISH STANDARDS! Read 2 Thess. 3:6-9

1. How did Paul describe his and his fellow missionaries' lifestyle while they were in Thessalonica concerning work? (As they shared the Gospel they also worked "night and day" to be an example to the Christians there.)

2. What are the advantages and disadvantages of living in a fishbowl where everyone is watching you? (It helps keep you aware that others are watching. Sometimes your actions can be misunderstood.)

We should all live as if someone was watching because they are!

3. How might the low standards being carried by some of the believers there become a problem? (People have a tendency to sink to the lowest level tolerated. Other members would begin to imitate the slackers.)

4. Why is idle living unbecoming for Christians? (The "idle" were a lazy faction in the church who caused disorder and disruption. The commands Paul gave them regarding work were not his own; they came under the authority of Jesus Christ.)

To live an unchristian lifestyle consistently mars the power of the gospel and the reputation of the Christian faith.

5. What does dissociating ourselves from those who are idle look like in practice? (Spending time and associating with like-minded believers builds community, accountability, and Christian maturity.)

1 Cor. 15:33: "Bad company corrupts good morals." It also associates you with the idle ones in other people's eyes.

6. What behaviors do hard-working believers display? (Humility, commitment, willingness to share in the work wherever needed whenever needed and dependence on God.)

7. How do they inspire others to follow their example? (They are an encouragement to others and spread joy as they work because it is for the Lord.)

Paul and his companions had lived before them to demonstrate what consistent labor looked like, and yet there were some within the fellowship that were simply unwilling to work.

PROVIDE! Read 2 Thess. 3:10-12

Evidently there were some who were working hard and getting discouraged because some others were sitting on their “blessed assurance.” These were able but unwilling to work, not those willing but unable to work.

1. How did Paul describe those not willing to work? (They weren’t busy but were busybodies. The indication is that they were stirring up trouble.)

We have heard that idle hands are the Devil’s workshop. Another way to put it is, “an idle mind is the Devil’s playground.” It may not be in the Bible but the idea is certainly there.

These busybodies were meddling in other people’s business and standing in the way of progress. In essence, their lack of activity was leading them into sin.

It is interesting that in Scripture, the people God called to serve Him were often busy with their own work when that call came. Consider Moses, Joshua, Gideon, David, the disciples, etc. Work is divinely intended to give us a sense of self-worth; it gives a sense of meaning to life. Idle people get easily depressed.

2. How is the consequence for not working both a rebuke and a motivator? (It should embarrass them to be called out. Being able but unwilling to work is ungodly, unproductive, and undisciplined conduct. They are a burden to the church. Our natural need for food drives us to work. Believers must not take advantage of others.)

Waiting for Christ to return, contempt for material possessions, and exploiting church resources have been posed as reasons some of them displayed idle behavior.

3. How is calling out a believer who is disobedient an act of love? (Our motive must always be restoration of the wayward brother or sister. And we must let them know we love them.)

4. How can the way we conduct our business be a tool for sharing the gospel? (As we live and work among the lost we can be a bright light for the gospel in a dark universe. People are drawn to the light in a dark world. We must live and conduct our business in a manner that is above reproach or we will become an obstacle to the lost coming to know Christ.)

Verse 13 marks a transition. Paul addressed those who were faithfully working and providing for their families.

DISCIPLINE! Read 2 Thess. 3:13-15

1. In contrast to the “idle,” what instructions did Paul give to the faithful? (He encouraged them to keep living obedient, productive lives.)

He also reminded them to dissociate from the disobedient. Hopefully separation from the fellowship is intended to produce reflection and repentance. Discipline requires balance. Love is the motive for and should always accompany correction.

I learned this week that there are two types of shame: toxic and healthy. Toxic shame communicates the message “you are bad.” Healthy shame communicates the message “what you are doing is bad.” Discipline is necessary to produce the pain of shame. If there isn’t enough pain with the shame, there will be no motivation to make a character change. “Correcting someone using healthy shame is couched in relationship. When I use shame in a healthy way, I always affirm the relationship above the problem.”—Jim Wilder

2. What does it mean to hold others accountable? (The church is charged with disciplining its members, when necessary. Accountability doesn’t mean judgment and criticism. Ultimately, Christlike discipline promotes repentance and seeks to draw the offenders into right fellowship with Jesus.)

3. Why is verse 15 so important? (Our objective is restoration not the discipline itself.)

4. Why is church discipline not practiced more frequently in the church today? (We must be sure our lives are circumspect and above reproach before we try to take a splinter out of someone else’s eye. Many don’t know the standard for a Christian life.)

5. How can a person not associate with someone and yet not view him or her as an enemy as well? (You don’t treat them like your best buddy. When we hang-out with carnal Christians we tend to become like them—we sink to the lowest common denominator.)

Read Paul’s final greetings: 2 Thess. 3:16-18

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE!

1. What actions or standards do you need to start to be more obedient until Christ returns?

To wait well for Christ's return is to honor Him daily by carrying out His commands, shunning evil, and spreading the gospel.

2. Is there anything in your life that hinders your walk with Christ?

Prayer.