

Getting to Work • 2 Thess. 3:6-15

I. INTRODUCTION • Read vs.

A. Tired?

1. How many of you are **tired** this morning; not sleepy so much as **weary**?
2. There's good reason for that: Rounding off, there are some 311 million people in the US.
 - 87 million – Retired
 - 94 million – School
 - 64 million – Local, State & Federal government
 - 2.2 million – Military
 - 1.7 million – Hospitals & Asylums
 - 4.2 million – Homeless
 - 29.6 million – Unemployed
 - 2.7 million – Incarcerated
3. Add that up & it leaves 1 person to do all the work: **No wonder you're tired!**
4. Now, obviously, I made up those numbers; but it does feel that way sometimes, doesn't it—like you're doing all the work?

B. Today

1. What makes it difficult to bear is when you see others who seem to be **skating by without a care**.
 - a. They have it **made in the shade** but **never break a sweat**,
 - b. And you're **burning the candle at both ends**, with your **nose to the grindstone**.
2. Okay, I'll stop with the clichés. But just know being weary & frustrated is nothing new.
3. Paul speaks to it here in 2 Thessalonians.
4. As he does, we learn some important things about the Christian perspective on work.

II. TEXT

A. V. 6

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.

1. As Paul puts the finishing touches on this letter, he turns to something he'd mentioned in his previous message to them.
2. In 1 Thess 4:11-12 he wrote -
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.
3. There were some in the church at Thess who failed to heed this & the rest had not responded to the situation properly.
4. So Paul tells them when someone who **claims** to be a Christian demonstrates **no evidence** of being born again, **but on the contrary**, has a lifestyle **inconsistent** with Jesus,
 - a. The church needs to engage in a kind of **intervention** with them so they'll realize the seriousness of their error.
 - b. The erring person is to be **dis-fellowshipped**. Paul says, "**Withdraw from**" them.
5. He had a **specific problem** in mind. What that was becomes clear as we read on . . .

B. Vs. 7-9

⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; ⁸ 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, ⁹ not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

1. Paul taught that believers are to work & had demonstrated that in his own lifestyle.
 - a. While in Thessalonica, Paul & his team hadn't mooched off anyone.
 - b. They'd provided for themselves by finding work.
2. Paul split his time between church-planting & plying his trade as a tent-maker.
 - a. His partners Silas & Timothy found employment as day-laborers.
 - b. Their wages were enough to pay for food & lodging.
3. In v. 9, Paul reminds them that as an Apostle, he had a **right** to receive support.
 - a. But he'd not claimed that right so he could be an example of what a faithful life looks like.

- b. You see, when Paul arrived in this part of the world, he knew he faced a unique challenge.
 - c. It came from **the Greek attitude toward work**.
4. In the Greek way of thinking, manual labor was **demeaning**.
 - a. Only **slaves toiled**; it was the **lower class** who worked with their hands.
 - b. It was a sign of higher status to have **soft**, as opposed to **rough** or **calloused hands**.
 - c. Sweat was despised.
 5. Among the Greeks & Romans, the good life was wearing a clean, white toga, sitting in a cool room on a marble seat, talking philosophy.
 6. "Work" was **both** literally & figuratively a **dirty** word.
 7. Thessalonica was a **center** of Greco-Roman culture & this kind of thing.
 - a. The further **West** Paul travelled, the more prevalent this attitude became.
 - b. And it exerted a powerful influence among new believers.
 - c. The problem was It was a thoroughly worldly way of thinking.
 8. So **both** by teaching & example, Paul **refuted** it.
 - a. Work isn't demeaning, it's ennobling. **Man was created to work**.
 - b. Even before the Fall, God told Adam & Eve to **tend & keep** their Garden home.
 - c. Contrary to popular thought, work is **not** a result of the curse.
 - d. What sin brought was **fruitless** & unproductive work.
 9. Even though Paul both taught & modeled the need to work, there were believers who allowed the culture to **dictate** their behavior.
 - a. They considered work beneath them & instead of providing for themselves, sponged off others.
 - b. In no uncertain terms, Paul tells them to get to work.
 10. Word reached Paul some had shined him on. So he finishes with a stern rebuke.
 11. It's time the rest of the fellowship deal with those who reject this call to work & remained idle.

C. V. 10

For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

1. There it is, as simple as can be. But note what Paul **doesn't** say here.
 - a. It's not, "If a person **doesn't** work," It's, "If anyone **WILL** not work."
 - b. There's a big difference there.
2. He's speaking of those who **can** work but **won't** - even when the command to do so has been so clear.
 - a. These are able-bodied men & women who **could** work but who are **indolent, purposely idle**.
 - b. They could be gainfully employed but they're **lazy** Depending on others for support;
 - c. Really, they take the attitude that others **ought** to support them.
3. Paul does **NOT** refer to the unemployed who **can't** work.
 - a. There will always be those who for whatever reason **can't** work. / They may be **disabled**.
 - b. Their life situation may require a **season or kind** of work for which they aren't paid.
 - c. Paul doesn't refer to people who **can't** work in v. 10. He means those who **can** but **won't**.
4. If they won't work, then they won't eat.
 - a. Their indolence isn't to be subsidized by others.
 - b. Those who've provided for them must stop.
 - c. Let **hunger** teach them what the Word & Spirit of God haven't.
5. Some think Paul is being harsh here; that he's not showing the kind of love Jesus did.
 - a. They forget while Paul **penned** this, the Holy Spirit **inspired** it.
 - b. Paul **isn't** being loveless. What's unloving is to **ignore a brother's sin** when it's destroying his soul.
 - c. The Proverbs make it clear that laziness is a **moral** problem; It's sin.
 - d. Like any sin, it will lead to the ruin if not overcome.

D. A Theology of Work

1. Being born again means embarking on the great adventure of being **restored** to the image of God.
 - a. We won't see that journey **complete** until we stand in heaven, but the process has begun.
 - b. Our God is a **working** God. // He calls us to **join Him** in the work of redemption.
 - c. Paul understood that. It's what propelled him to go everywhere he could with the Gospel.
2. Think of this: Just before Jesus ascended into heaven, He told the disciples to wait for the HS to empower them to be witnesses of Him, from Jerusalem to the ends of the Earth.
 - a. Jesus **turned His mission over** to His followers.

- b. The NT repeatedly calls the Church the Body of Christ!
 - 1) He is the Head, we are the hands & feet.
 - 2) He gives **direction**, but **we are the parts** that go & do.
- c. And just as a body has different parts with differing roles & functions,
- d. We're **all** called to play different roles in the work of God.
- e. Really, we're **all** called to full-time ministry!
 - 1) It's **ministry** whether it's at a church, office, school, factory, route, or house.
 - 2) It's ministry because it's what **God** has called you to do.
 - 3) As you grow in your walk with God on your job, you're **showing** Jesus to those around you.
 - 4) It the task of others to preach; but **you're the illustration**.
3. In Christ, there's no divide between secular & sacred **Everything** belongs to God.
4. We can worship & serve Him as excellently by fixing a car as preaching a sermon.
 - a. The ironing board is as sacred a place of service as the mission field.
 - b. And the **little death** of **daily dishes** is as glorious in God's eyes as a martyr's sacrifice.
5. This was the truth Brother Lawrence discovered.
 - a. He lived many years ago when people thought the only life that counted was being a priest.
 - b. Lawrence wasn't smart enough to be a priest, so he became a **monk**.
 - c. But he struggled even there; he just wasn't cut out to do anything complicated.
 - d. The leaders of his monastery finally found a safe place for him as the dishwasher.
 - e. It was the lowliest task there & used as a form of discipline.
 - f. Dishwashing became Brother Lawrence's **regular** job.
 - g. At first he despised the humility of his role.
 - h. But one day while washing his fellow monks' bowls, he began to pray over each one, for the monk that had just eaten from it, & the monk who would eat from it next.
 - i. He was filled with supernatural joy & it became his **delight** to wash dishes.
 - j. His sink became as sacred to Brother Lawrence as the monastery's altar.
 - k. He **worshipped** there. He **prayed** there, rejoicing in God so passionately a couple other monks began joining him, drawn by his infectious delight.
 - l. More monks came & the services they had in the kitchen were more full of life than those in the chapel.
 - m. The monks began taking the joy they learned at Lawrence's sink with them to **their** tasks around the monastery, & in their visits to the village.
 - n. Soon, hundreds of people were making the trek to Lawrence's altar-sink to see & hear the holy dishwasher.
6. Brother Lawrence wrote a book on the lessons he learned at that sink that's become one of the great Christian classics – **Practicing the Presence of God**.
7. The essence of what Brother Lawrence discovered is this –
 - a. We are not our own; we've been redeemed, bought at a price—the blood of Christ.
 - b. We're called to live FOR Him.
 - c. Work is no longer **just** about paying bills & providing for our needs & those of our family, as right as that is.
 - d. We're called to something higher; nobler. We're called to Live & Work for the Glory of God.
8. While the paycheck may come from “Haas – Exxon -- US Navy” or whatever – our **boss** is a Jewish Carpenter named “Jesus.”
9. God wants us to work & be productive. // If you **can** work, get to it! Don't sit around & make excuses.
10. Because idleness is a resource just waiting to be used by the devil - - -

E. V. 11

For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.

1. While not working, these folk stayed busy – with everyone's business but their own.
 - a. Paul calls them **busybodies**. They were **meddlers** – sticking their nose in the affairs of others.
 - b. They did so as a **diversion**.
 - c. They knew they ought to be working but didn't want to so they ran around looking for **anything** they could stir up to keep attention off themselves.

2. One of the reasons we need to work is because when we're idle, we can fall prey to the enemy's temptation to sin. It's not for nothing we have the saying Idle hands are the devil's workshop.
3. This is one of the reasons a curse came on work in the Fall.
 - a. We have to work long & hard for *meager* results.
 - b. To keep us busy so we stay out of trouble.
4. Throughout history, *technology* has been aimed largely at one thing – making work more efficient.
5. Today, awash in technology we have more leisure time than ever.
6. **Question:** How has man *used* that leisure time – to a good end?
7. Consider this: Where do we find the *highest crime rates*?
 - a. In communities where idleness is subsidized by public assistance.
 - b. Where work is despised & people, especially youth, have *too much time* on their hands.

F. Vs. 12-13

¹² Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

1. To the indolent Paul says—“Stop meddling in the affairs of others, get a job, & stop mooching.”
2. Then he adds a word to those who *were* diligent in their work –
- ¹³ But *as for* you, brethren, do not grow weary *in* doing good.
3. Don't be discouraged by slackers!
4. It's easy when you're working hard & playing by the rules to get discouraged by the shenanigans of the shenanigans.
5. “What's the point in working hard & putting up with the daily hassle when my neighbor is able-bodied but scams the system & gets public assistance?”
6. Remember that you work for Jesus – & He's going to reward you well for your faithfulness!
7. Can I show you something really cool? Turn to Numbers 7:12 [read though v. 23a]
 - a. Sound familiar? That's because it's the *exact same offering*.
 - b. It's recorded in detail **12 times** in ch. 7, the 2nd longest chapter in the Bible!
 - c. Why not just describe it once then list the guys who brought it?
 - d. The HS inspired Moses to record it *this way* to teach us an important lesson:
God knows & notes the work we do for Him.
 - e. You & I read that list & say, “Boring!”
 - f. But Nathaniel, Eliab, Elizur, Shelumiel & the rest They aren't bored!
 - g. They're walking up to angels in heaven going, “Hey, did you know I'm in the Bible? Yeah, look. It's right here in Numbers.”
8. ***Whatever you do*** for God's glory will ***not be forgotten***.
 - a. Others may not see or care but the Lord does.
 - b. As Jesus said in Matt 6:4, He who sees in secret will reward you openly

G. Vs. 14.15

¹⁴ 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. ¹⁵ Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

1. The Thessalonians were to *identify* those who refused to comply with Paul's instructions because they weren't just arbitrary rules he'd made up.
2. These were expressions of a life changed by the Gospel of Christ.
3. Once the errant were identified, believers were to *withdraw fellowship* from them.
 - a. They were to halt communication at the error they were marked for.
 - b. If they were indolent the only conversation they could have with them was something along the lines of, “I've been praying for you. Are you working yet?”
4. It's like this—If the Holy Spirit convicts me of something, I need to comply.
 - a. If I balk or resist, does God ignore that resistance & continue on in fellowship with me?
Stop lying Lance. No Lord, I like lying. Okay, never mind – sorry to put the squeeze on you there.
- b. No! My fellowship with the Lord, halts right at the point of my resistance.
5. We're called to be a *living expression* of the Lord to one another.

- a. So if one of us is in rebellion -
 - b. It's the duty of the rest to **identify** it & urge repentance.
 - c. Just as the Spirit waits at that point to renew fellowship, so must we with those in error.
6. But as we take this hard step of discipline we mustn't treat the person as an enemy.
 7. They're a brother we want to see restored to fellowship.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Housekeeping

1. Paul's strong words here at the conclusion of the letter stand in contrast to the swelling words of commendation at the beginning.
2. Though overall, the church at Thessalonica was a healthy, loyal & loving group, there were some problems that needed to be dealt with.
3. Paul was giving them a nudge in the right direction.
4. This reminds us that every church, no matter how healthy, is imperfect.
 - a. There will always be those who are **out of line**, whether it's a church of a 12 or 1,200.
 - b. An occasional house-cleaning is a sign of health, not that something is wrong.
5. What's wrong is when we **ignore** problems & go blindly on.
6. The Church is imperfect people being loved by a perfect God into perfection.
7. But the path is often messy.
8. That's why mercy & grace have to be in abundant supply as we live & work together.