

WORK! - 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Tired?*

1. How many of you are tired this morning - I don't mean sleepy but weary?
2. There's good reason for that - it's a matter of simple arithmetic.
3. There are some 260 million people in the United States
4. Of that 260 million, some 87 million are retired, leaving 173 million
5. Of that 173 million, another 94 million are still in school, leaving 79 million for the workforce
6. The Federal Government employs 27 million, so there are 52 million left
7. There are some 10,500,000 in the Armed Forces, leaving 41,500,000 for the labor force
8. Now take away the 35,576,000 employed in state and city governments, the 1,268,000 in hospitals and mental institutions and 3,457,000 bums and vagrants and you're left with 1,199,000.
9. From this we have to subtract the 1,198,999 people in jail and prison-
10. And that leaves 1 - No wonder you're weary! You're doing all the work!
11. It feels that way sometimes doesn't it.

B. *Today*

1. We're taking a look at work today.
2. The Apostle Paul has some specific and practical instructions about the role that work plays in the Christian life.

II. TEXT

A.V. 6

- 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 you can see in your Bible, Paul is drawing to the end of the letter
2. And as he does he turns to an issue he had brought up in his first letter but which the Thessalonians hadn't done a real good job of following through on
3. In 1 Thess 4:11 & 12 Paul said,

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.

4. The area in which Paul traveled and ministered was dominated by the Greek culture.
 - a. and in that culture, manual labor was considered demeaning
 - b. to work with one's hands was considered by most Greeks to be beneath

- their dignity
- c. manual labor was for slaves and mere artisans
5. You see, the Greek worldview considered the physical world to be inherently evil; matter was petty and inconsequential.
 6. And because of this most people of the Greek world distained physical labor.
 7. The elite and noble were those who remained aloof from common toil and gave themselves to things of the intellect- like philosophy and religion.
 8. Everywhere Paul went, he encountered this attitude - and when ever he planted a new church, there would be those new converts who would think that all they had to do now was argue the superiority of Christianity to their previous beliefs.
 9. Paul told them instead - get a job!
 10. Paul's point was - If you want to show the superiority of Christianity, then change the behavior dictated by your past beliefs and instead of sitting around all day sponging off others - go to work, earn a living, provide for yourself and your family and seek to participate in helping others who are in genuine need."
 11. That's why in 1 Thess 4, He tells them...

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.

- a. in the 3 short weeks Paul had spent with them, he had told them as part of their basic training as the followers of Christ, that being gainfully employed was a part of what it means to be a disciple.
 - b. when word reached him that some had ignored him in this regard, he wrote to correct them
12. Well guess what, word came back to Paul that there was a group of people that had shined him on yet again, so he closes out 2 Thessalonians with a stem rebuke - this time it's to the rest of the church about how to deal with those who are still idle...

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.

13. Paul wants them to realize that this isn't merely a nice idea, an option, or a general guideline
14. This is nothing less than a command issued by him as an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ.
 - a. Paul invokes the name of the Lord; in fact, the full title of Christ,
 - b. to add weight to authority to his words.
 - c. this is a command from God meant to regulate the lifestyle of His people
15. The command is this: The fellowship of believers is to be pulled back from those whose lifestyle is out of line from God's revealed will.
16. The tradition Paul was referring to here is what we've just looked at: that he had both taught and written them that believers ought to work!
17. Now he says that if someone consistently disregards that command, then they are to be dis-fellowshipped!

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 says, "Remember that we practiced what we preached."
 2. Paul had taught that believers are to work and he had demonstrated that in his own lifestyle
 - a. while there in Thessalonica, he and his companions had worked to provide support for themselves.
 - b. they didn't mooch off anyone's table, like many of the itinerant Greek philosophers and teachers did.
 3. Paul was a tent-maker by trade,
 - a. though he was a Jewish rabbi and had received training at the feet of one of the Jewish world's finest teachers, Gamaliel,
 - b. Paul also had been taught the trade of tent-making
 - c. every Jewish rabbi was taught a practical trade
 - d. the Jews had a proverb that said, "The father that does not teach his son a trade teaches him to be a thief."
 4. Here we read that while he was busy with the task of preaching the gospel and planting churches, he was also plying his trade as a tent-maker, earning enough money to buy food and lodging and taking care of not only his own needs but the needs of those assistants with which he traveled.
 5. In v. 9, Paul reminds them that as an Apostle, he did have a right to expect support from them.
 6. In 1 Corinthians 9 and Galatians, Paul makes a solid case for why full-time Christian workers ought to be supported by those they are ministering to.
 7. But then he goes on to say that while he had a right to support, he didn't exercise that right – and for one reason - he didn't want to give his opponents any ammunition against him.
 8. If they wanted to argue, he wanted to make sure it was over the message he preached and not the preacher - so by demanding support, Paul took away one of the arguments of the enemies of Christ.
 9. Plus, his example of manual labor would provide a solid example to those who thought physical work was beneath them.
 - a. if an apostle could make tents.-
 - b. certainly they could work with their hands.
 10. So, Paul and his friends had provide the example of work - but they had also taught the imperative of work, so he says...

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.
2. But note carefully what Paul does and doesn't say here.
 - a. he doesn't say, "If a person doesn't work, neither shall he eat."
 - b. he says, "If anyone WILL not work."
3. He is speaking of those who *can*, but *won't* work - even though the command to do so had been so clear.
 - a. these are able bodied men and women who could work
 - b. but who are indolent, purposely idle
 - c. they could be gainfully employed or even work for themselves,
 - d. but they're lazy - depending on the support of others for their sustenance
4. Paul is NOT referring here to people who cannot work,
 - a. there will always be those who for whatever reason can't work
 - b. there may be physical problems and disabilities
 - c. family demands may dictate an inability to be employed for a time
 - 1) for those who can't work, the church ought to provide assistance
 - 2) in the OT we find the prophets revealing God's tender heart for the widows and orphans
 - 3) in the NT, James says that pure and undefiled religion consists, in part, in helping the widows and the orphans
 - 4) early in the book of Acts we find the church taking care of it's widows by providing for their food
 - 5) it is the local church's duty to assist the truly needy
 - 6) and that's why here at Calvary Chapel we tithe 13% of the giving to the general fund to provide assistance to other ministries and to benevolence.
 - 7) we've been able to help a lot of people.
 - d. Paul is not referring to people who can't work, but to those who can but won't
5. He says, if they won't work - they won't eat - which means that those who have been providing them food and shelter have to stop.
6. Let hunger teach the lesson the Word and Spirit of God haven't been able to.
7. There are those who would say Paul is being too harsh and not showing the kind of loving acceptance characteristic of Christ.
 - a. but Paul has just said this is all from the Lord!
 - b. it isn't Paul who's being harsh and unloving here
 - c. what's unloving is to ignore a brother's sin when it's leading to the destruction of his soul
 - d. and indolence is just that - a sin that will eventually ruin a person's character if it isn't overcome.
8. You see, God made man to work and be productive.
 - a. in Eden, before the Fall ever took place, we read that God told Adam and Eve that it was their duty to tend and keep the Garden
 - b. God Himself is a God of works, look at the creation and see his handiwork!
 - c. even now God is at work, unfolding His plan of redemption as He's gathering a bride for His Son and preparing her for the Wedding
 - d. our God is a working God!
 - e. man was created in God's image - and that means man was created to work

- in partnership with God, being used by Him to work out in the material universe the priorities and plans of the spiritual realm
- f. we are God's hands and feet- the Body of Christ!
 - g. and because we believe this is God's good creation, unlike the Greeks, we embrace this world and rejoice in it's potential to glorify God
 - h. that potential is realized as we faithfully use what God has given us and take dominion of it in His name.
9. If we understand that Jesus' work on the cross not only saves sinners souls from hell but also undoes the curse of the Fall, then we realize that for the Christian there is no secular and sacred distinction -
 - a. everything belongs to God –
 - b. and we can worship and serve Him as excellently changing a tire at the local garage as preaching a message from behind a pulpit.
 10. The ironing board is as sacred a place of service as the mission field.
 11. And the little death of daily dishes is as glorious in God's eyes as the martyr's sacrifice.
 12. You see, the Christian is one who realizes he or she is not his or her own - they have been bought at a price, the precious blood of Jesus Christ
 13. And they are called to live their lives FOR Him.
 14. Work is no longer merely about providing for my needs or the needs of my family, as honorable as that may be.
 15. No, we are called to something higher - we are called to Work for the Glory of God
 16. Our job, whether it be for a paycheck at a business or for the at-home support of our family, as in the case of many of the ladies here; that job is for the Lord.
 17. We don't work for ourselves, we work for Him.
 18. Maybe you've seen that bumper sticker - "My Boss is a Jewish Carpenter"
 19. The Bottom line is this - God wants you to work & be productive!
 20. And if you can work and earn a living and provide for your needs, then get to it!
 21. Don't sit around and make excuses.
 22. Your idleness provides the enemy ready instruments to cause trouble
 23. Notice what Paul goes on to say...

D. 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. You see, word had come back to Paul after all he had said and written about before, that there were those who were still avoiding it
2. Besides those who just plain didn't want to work, there may have been some who thought that since Jesus was coming back so soon, what was the point in working?
3. In the mid-19th Century, William Miller, a Baptist preacher, began to teach that Jesus was Christ was coming in 1848.
 - a. he convinced a lot of people and as a result, many sold their homes and farms, which had been in their family for generations,

- b. and gathered for constant meetings to prepare for the big event.
 - c. on the appointed day, they dressed in white sheets and climbed up on to the roof of their churches
 - d. what the white sheets and being on the roof was about I have no idea – but the point is, the day came and went, and they didn't!
 - e. these people, which would have been considered quite prosperous before because of their estates, were now in dire poverty and ended up having to depend on the charity of others who were more measured and wise in their reaction to this novel teaching.
4. In the early 70's there was a wave of speculation about the end times and the soon coming of Christ.
 - a. some people got so excited and were so sure Jesus was coming back any day,
 - b. they quit their jobs, cashed out their savings, sold their houses and went on a road trip
 - c. others charged up their credit cards to the maximum because they thought Jesus would come back and they wouldn't have to repay
 5. This is all foolishness!
 6. When Jesus comes back, I want Him to find me busy doing His business
 7. I think that when Jesus comes back if he found me standing on a hilltop dressed in a white robe with my hands outstretched toward the heavens, He say, "What are you doing here? Why aren't you at your station?"
 8. When Jesus comes, I hope it's while I'm preaching, or studying, or visiting someone in the hospital, or counseling, or in a staff or elder meeting, or reading to my daughter, or round the dining room table with my family, looking across the table at my gorgeous wife!
 9. In the church at Thessalonica, there was a group of people who were out of line and causing trouble.
 - a. while they wouldn't work - they were staying busy
 - b. problem is, they were busy with everyone's business but their own
 - c. Paul calls them–busybodies meddlers -"
 - d. inserting their nose in the affairs of others
 - e. and by doing this, they were creating trouble
 10. One of the reasons why God wants us to be gainfully employed is because when we're idle, we can fall prey to the enemy's temptation to sin
 11. Idle hands are the devil's workshop.
 12. This is one of the reasons why a curse came on work in the Fall
 - a. God said that our toil would be inefficient and hard
 - b. why? So that we'd have to work longer and harder for meager results
 - c. all to keep us busy so that we'd stay out of trouble!
 13. Where do we find the highest crime rates today?
 - a. in those communities where idleness is rewarded with public welfare
 - b. where work is not a value and people, specially young people, have too much time on their hands

E. 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.

13 But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary *in* doing good.

1. Again Paul says to the indolent - stop meddling in the affairs of others, get a job, and provide for yourself- stop sponging off others.
2. Then he adds a word to those who were diligent in their work - don't be discouraged by the indolent!
3. It's easy when you're working hard and playing by the rules to get discouraged and want to chuck it all when you see cheaters getting away with it.
4. We think, "Hey, what's the point in working so hard and putting up with the daily hassle when my neighbor is a lazy bum and gets welfare?"
5. Maybe you haven't thought this - but I confess I have:
 - a. I'll be driving down the street in my '86 Volkswagen Fox, with the oxidized paint and smashed fender
 - b. and I'll look over and there is someone in a brand new luxury car, and it's seems pretty clear from their dress and hair style that their income is from less than honest means, I won't say more than that
 - c. I look over and find myself thinking - Hey, what gives?
 - 1) I work long, hard hours.
 - 2) And I know there are times when my family suffers for it.
 - 3) And I look over and I think - What's the use in being honest and playing by the rules?
 - 4) What's it get me and my family?
6. This verse reminds me what it gets me - a reward in heaven, not only for me, but my family members who make the sacrifice with me, they too are building up a glorious reward in heaven.
7. And as that guy drives away in his luxury car and I trail along behind him in my beat up Fox, I'm the one who's content and satisfied while he's still looking.

F. Vs. 14.15

1. Patti began in v. 6 telling the Thessalonians what to do with those who were out of line because they refused to work.
 2. He adds to that now in 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.**
3. Paul tells them they are to note, or "mark" those who refuse to comply with his instructions
 4. Once identified, they are to withdraw Christian fellowship from them;
 - a. meaning they were to draw a line and halt communication at the very point the marked person is marked for
 - b. if they were indolent and refused to work, then besides not feeding them –
 - c. they were also to cease communication beyond the question - "Are you working yet?"
 5. It's like this; If the Holy Spirit shows me something I need to repent of and

- change. If I reject the Spirit's work, does He ignore that and continue on in fellowship with me?
- a. no!
 - b. our relationship is the same; I am still a child of God and He is my Father
 - c. but our fellowship is now hindered by my disobedience.
6. I am stuck at the point of the Spirit's last direction and I will stay there till I obey!
 7. You and I are called to be a living expression of the Lord to one another.
 - a. so if one of us is clearly disobeying the Lord
 - b. it is the duty of the rest of us to identify that rebellion and require repentance and obedience.
 - c. just as the Spirit waits at that point, so must you and I.
 8. The hope is that by stalling fellowship at the point of disobedience, the person will become ashamed by his or her resistance and repent.
 9. But in all of this, we must not treat the person as an enemy - the relationship is the same, they are still a brother, it's only the fellowship between us that's been altered.

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Housekeeping*

1. Paul's words here at the conclusion of the letter are a kind of "house-keeping"
2. Though he had begun with such stirring words of praise at the outset of the letter, he ends on this rather stern note.
3. This reminds us that every church, no matter how healthy it is, is imperfect
4. There will always be those who are out of line, whether it's a church of a dozen or 12,000.
5. Correction, rebuke, warning, and a certain amount of house-cleaning is a sign of health, not that something is wrong.
6. What's wrong is when we ignore the problems and just blindly go on, smiling as though everything is perfect.
7. The Church is a group of imperfect people being loved by a perfect God, and being changed by His Spirit to perfection.
8. That change is often messy
9. And that's why mercy and grace have to be in abundant supply as we live and work together

B. *Get A Job!*

1. Finally...
 - a. If you can work, but don't - get a job.
 - b. If you depend on others for your income; regardless of your circumstance, pray for wisdom in ways you can work at home or in some other capacity to provide for yourself and your family