

WORK AND EMPLOYMENT

2 THESSALONIANS 3:6–18

Introduction

This passage concludes the letter of Second Thessalonians. It deals with a very significant subject for our day and time: work and employment. The workplace is full of disorderly workers, workers who slack off and do as little as possible; workers who are eye-watchers, who work only when they see the boss coming. In addition to these, there are many in our society who could be working, but they choose not to work because of laziness and slothfulness; and they have found a way to sponge off the government, social services, churches and neighbours. The result is that a tragic dullness and a spirit of give me has pervaded the workplace and nation. As stated, this is the subject of this passage, a much needed subject.

- I. Keep away from every brother who is idle — who does not work (vv. 6-11).
- II. Work — every one of you (vv. 12-13).
- III. Discipline the idler, disassociate from him (vv. 14-15).
- IV. The conclusion: the believer receives three possessions in Christ (vv. 16-18).

I. 2 Thessalonians 3:6–11 *Keep Away from Idle Workers*

Keep away from every brother who lives in idleness, that is, who does not work. Note: this is a very strong command. It has the force of a military command: it is given “in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ,” the supreme commander. There is to be no discussion about the matter. What is being said is to be obeyed.

“Keep away from every brother who is idle” (v. 6). Who are the idle? Those who do not work. A strange thing had happened in the Thessalonian church. Some of the believers had become excited over the return of the Lord and the promise of being with Him forever in the new heavens and earth. They became so excited that they began to sacrifice all they could to meet the needs of people. But some went too far. They ignored the Lord’s words that only God knew when He would be returning, and they began to project dates and declare that His return was about to take place. Therefore, some quit their jobs in order to have more time to minister, and in an act of sacrificial commitment they gave away *all they had*. The result was catastrophic. They were now having to sponge off the other believers in order to survive. Their action had been most unwise — unwise because believers are to *live life* as it should be lived so long as they are upon earth. Believers are to set the example as to how life is to be lived, and work is certainly one of the duties of men. Therefore, of all people believers are to set an example in work. They are to be the very best workmen possible. Quitting work and not working is idle behaviour; it is totally unacceptable for a true believer. It is so unacceptable that believers are commanded to keep away from non-workers.

=> What does the Lord mean by “keep away” (stellesthai)? The word means to stay away from the idle worker; to have no fellowship with him. His behaviour is not to be indulged or condoned. We are not to put our stamp of approval upon him, nor are we to run the risk of becoming identified with him.

=> Who are the idle? They are the slothful, the lazy. They are the persons who refuse to work or who shirk their work or are slack in their work.

There are four reasons why we are to withdraw from the idle worker.

1. The idle worker disobeys the instructions of God (v. 6). Note the word “teaching” (paradosin). It means all the Word of God, whether taught or written (2 Th. 2:15). Paul says that he had taught the believers the commandments of God that deal with work; therefore, they are without excuse. They know better than to sit around idle. If they continue to be idle, slothful and lazy, the other believers are to keep away from them. They are deliberately disobeying the instructions of God.

Mat 24:45-46 *“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.”*

Rom 12:11 *Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord.*

Eph 4:28 *He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.*

Eph 6:5 *Slaves [workmen], obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ.*

Col 3:22 *Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.*

1 Th 4:11 *Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you.*

2 Th 3:12 *Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.*

Titus 2:9 *Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them.*

Heb 6:12 *We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.*

1 Pet 2:18 *Slaves, [employees] submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh.*

Gen 2:15 *The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.*

Gen 3:19 “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

Eccl 9:10 *Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.*

2. The idle worker has the example of committed workers. The believers of Thessalonica had the example of Paul; we have the example of committed workers in our day. Paul worked *day and night* so that he would not owe any man anything (v. 7-8). As a minister of the gospel, he had the right to be supported by believers so that he could be free to minister more. But he refused to exercise that right. Why? So that he could set a dynamic example of a diligent worker for the believers (v. 9). Note: Paul says “follow our example” in being a diligent worker:

=> You “yourselves know how you ought to follow our example” (v. 7).

=> We have set an example “for you to follow” (v. 9).

Thought 1. There is absolutely no excuse for a Christian to be idle, slothful or lazy at his work. Paul set a dynamic example for us, and there are examples of other dynamic Christian workers who surround us. And if by chance there are no examples around us, then we should be following the example of Christ (the carpenter) and Paul (the tent-maker). We should be setting an example for other believers in diligent work.

Acts 18:1-3 *After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. There he met a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, and because he was a tent-maker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.*

Acts 20:34-35 “You yourselves know that these hands of mine have supplied my own needs and the needs of my companions. In everything I did, I showed you that by this kind of hard work we must help the weak, remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

2 Cor 11:9 *And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so.*

1 Th 2:9 *Surely you remember, brothers, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you.*

2 Th 3:8 *Nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, labouring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.*

3. The idle worker must work or lose his right to eat (v. 10). This fact is stated as clearly as it can be: “If a man will not work, he shall not eat.” Note that this is a command, a command that Paul had preached when he was with the church. Note this fact as well:

the commandment deals with those who choose to be idle and refuse to work. It is not dealing with those who are honestly unable to work due to disability or being unable to find employment. If a person is able to work, he is to work. If he refuses, he is not to be fed; he is not to be allowed to sponge off the church, community or society. There is no excuse for a person not working if he is able to work — not in the sight of God. Too many in the world — millions — are desperate and destitute, dying within and without from loneliness, emptiness, starvation, disease and sin. Almost every church or social service can put us to work in reaching a world of desperate and dying people who need our help and attention. In God's words: "We gave you this rule: If a man will not work, he shall not eat. "

***Heb 6:11-12** We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure. We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.*

***Rom 12:11** Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord. (cp. Mt. 25:24-27)*

***Rom 13:8** Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellow-man has fulfilled the law.*

***1 Cor 15:34** Come back to your senses as you ought, and stop sinning; for there are some who are ignorant of God — I say this to your shame.*

***Eph 5:14** For it is light that makes everything visible. This is why it is said: "Wake up, O sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."*

***Prov 6:4** Allow no sleep to your eyes, no slumber to your eyelids.*

***Prov 6:6-11** Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest. How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest — and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.*

***Prov 10:5** He who gathers crops in summer is a wise son, but he who sleeps during harvest is a disgraceful son.*

***Prov 12:11** He who works his land will have abundant food, but he who chases fantasies lacks judgment.*

***Prov 18:9** One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys.*

***Prov 19:15** Laziness brings on deep sleep, and the shiftless man goes hungry.*

***Prov 21:25-26** The sluggard's craving will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work. All day long he craves for more, but the righteous give without sparing.*

***Prov 23:21** For drunkards and gluttons become poor, and drowsiness clothes them in rags.*

4. The idle worker tends to be a busybody. The mind of man is an active thing. What we tend to overlook is this: the mind is *always active*; it is never still. It is either thinking positive thoughts or negative and evil thoughts. The point is this: an idle person has an idle mind. His mind is not set upon positive thoughts, but negative and evil thoughts. An idle mind is the devil's playground. This is the reason why so many idle persons — regardless of their age — get into trouble. The trouble can range all the way from becoming a busybody to murder.

The present passage is dealing with Christians and the trouble caused by being a busybody. Too many believers are busybodies, that is, poking themselves into other people's affairs, tattling, gossiping, and spreading all kinds of talk and rumours. They just go about speaking all kinds of things that they should not. Why? Because they do not stay busy for the Lord by helping and ministering to the needs of those within the community who are hurting, lonely, desperate, dying and lost.

2 Th 3:11 We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies.

1 Tim 5:13 Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to.

1 Pet 4:15 If you suffer, it should not be as a murderer or thief or any other kind of criminal, or even as a meddler.

Lev 19:16 "Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbour's life. I am the LORD."

II. 2 Thessalonians 3:12–13 The Command to Work

Work — every one of you. Again, this is a forceful command, a command that comes from the Lord Jesus Christ. But note: it is also an exhortation, a stirring challenge that comes from the Lord. The Lord is not cold or hard about the matter. If a believer has been mistaken about how he should work — if he has been slothful and slack in his work — the Lord will forgive. But the believer must confess his wrong and repent. He must repent by beginning to work and earn his own living. And note how we are to go about earning our living: "to *settle down*." This is in contrast to being a busybody. We are to work with a quiet spirit and mind our own business; we are not to poke ourselves in other people's business. We are to settle down and be efficient workers, not inefficient busybodies who are always walking about gabbing about other people and their affairs.

Note one other point: do not be weary in well-doing — never tire of doing what is right. Do not let the idlers discourage you, but stick to your job: be diligent and persevere. Do not slack off no matter what others do. Be a dynamic example for the Lord.

Rom 12:11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord.

Mat 24:45-46 *“Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.”*

Eph 4:28 *He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.*

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1 Th 4:11 *Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you,*

2 Th 3:12 *Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.*

III. **2 Thessalonians 3:14–15** *Discipline the Idler*

Discipline the idler, have no company with him. Keep away from him and have no fellowship with him. Note why: that he may feel ashamed. The hope is that his shame will motivate him to get up and get to work.

However, the idle person is not to be disciplined as an enemy, but as a brother. The discipline is not to be done in a spirit of some superior, but in the spirit of a fellow believer, admonishing and warning him of what the Lord has to say about the matter.

The importance of the discipline is seen in the exactness of the words of Paul. Paul says, “take special note of him”; that is, mark him out and disapprove of his behaviour. Let him know that his refusal to work is not acceptable. Do not condone and indulge his idleness. Keep away and have no fellowship with him. Also warn him: warning is essential. He must be admonished. Warning and letting him experience shame are his only hope of changing. Being warned and feeling shame might stir him to repent, to get up and get to work.

1 Th 5:14 *And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*

Gen 3:10 *He [Adam] answered, “I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.”*

Ezra 9:6 *And [Ezra] prayed, “O my God, I am too ashamed and disgraced, my God, to lift up my face to you, because our sins are higher than our heads and our guilt has reached to the heavens.”*

Psa 44:15 *I live in disgrace all day long, and my face is covered with shame.*

IV. 2 Thessalonians 3:16–18 Conclusion

The believer has three great possessions in Christ. Note: this is a prayer of Paul for all the believers of the church.

1. The believer receives peace from “the Lord of peace Himself.” Note the phrase “At all times and in every way.” The believer receives peace “at all times and in all ways — under all circumstances and conditions, whatever comes” (Amplified New Testament). (See note, *Peace*, 1 Th. 1:1.)
2. The believer receives fellowship, a very special and personal fellowship. The church was dear to Paul. He sensed ever so deeply a close tie, a spiritual fellowship that bound his heart to the believers. Thus, he became concerned and was aroused to write and deal with the problems that had infiltrated the church. He wrote because of the special bond of fellowship between him and the church. (See *Fellowship*, Acts 2:42.)

Note: it was Paul’s practice to dictate his letters to a secretary and then to sign them. This is what he means by the statement, “I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write” (v. 17).

3. The believer receives grace — the undeserved favour and strength of Jesus Christ (see note, *Grace*, 1 Th. 1:1). ■