

Abiding Fruit

Informing the Mind & Inflaming the Heart

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Not Willing To Work 2 Thessalonians 3:10

Working is related to eating in this verse. The unwilling worker should not be allowed to eat. The Apostle Paul has just finished making some powerful statements about idleness and work (see 2 Thess. 3:6 – 9). He belabors the point that Christians are to have nothing to do with “*any brother*” whose general pattern of life is one of idleness (vs. 6). In case the Thessalonians complained that they had no role model or did not know what Paul meant, Paul uses himself as an example and calls the Thessalonians to imitate him (vs. 7, 9). Paul’s example of labor was that he was at it night and day (vs. 8). Why work so hard? He was leaving them an example to follow.

There are many Christians who think that work is a curse upon man because of Adam’s sin in the Garden of Eden. Work, however, existed before the Fall of man (see Gen. 2:15). Adam was placed in the Garden to work it and to keep it. Adam was a horticulturalist before he was a husband. The curse of Genesis 3:17 – 19 is that since Adam sinned against God, this meant that his work from that moment on, would be more difficult for him. It was not that work was a curse, but that the ground was cursed, and any production was not going to be easy (*by the sweat of your face* – see Gen. 3:17). In fact, the ground would now produce thistles and thorns (Gen. 3:18). Ever since Genesis 3:17 – 19, man has experienced this hardship with working.

This does not mean that work is wrong. In all labor there is profit (Prov. 14:23), and God gave man six days in which to work and one day in which to rest. This six and seven work/rest day cycle is patterned after creation itself. God worked for six days and then He rested. Work is therefore, good and right because God worked. Work can therefore be said to be a gift from God, and should be seen as man’s normal occupation for life in this world.

There is no question that man’s sin has degraded the concept of work, and many now regard work as something to be avoided or hated (especially Monday mornings). Man’s work is laborious to him largely because he labors for the wrong end or purpose. Instead of laboring for God, man works for himself and his own ends. A sound understanding of the concept of eternity places work in its proper place. Sinful man still possesses great gifts and abilities. He just uses them for the wrong purposes. Unless we realize that work is to be done for the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31), work will ultimately be empty and meaningless (cf. Eph. 6:5ff; 1 Tim. 6:1, 2; also Rom. 12:11).

Christians are to view their work as God’s divinely appointed task for them, in which we fulfill our calling and thus serve God. Honesty and diligence should characterize all labor either as an employer or employee. All laborers are worthy of their hire (Lev. 19:13; Deut. 24:14; Col. 4:1; James 5:4, 5). It is not a question if some type of work is better than another. All work is to be viewed as God’s calling for our lives.

So what was the problem with the Thessalonians that warranted Paul speaking to them about working? Both of Paul’s letters to the Thessalonians were deeply eschatological. They dealt with future things. Paul spoke on these subjects often with the Thessalonians during his short stay with them. In 1 Thess. 1:10, Paul speaks of waiting for God’s Son from heaven, Jesus who was raised to life and who delivers us from the coming wrath. He reminds them of how they are to walk before God (1:12) in the light of God’s kingdom

and glory. In 2:19, the Thessalonians will be Paul's joy and crown at the coming of the Lord. In 3:13, Paul speaks of the coming of Christ with all His saints. In 4:13 – 18, Paul corrects their misunderstanding concerning the resurrection and transformation of the saints when Jesus comes, and in 5: 1- 11, he encourages the believers to be watchful and to live as children of the day. He concludes in 5:23 with an exhortation to present day sanctification in view of Jesus coming.

2 Thessalonians is no different. Jesus is going to be revealed from heaven in flaming fire with his mighty angels taking vengeance on those who do not know God (1:7 – 2:12).

This background furnishes us with an understanding of some of the problems in Thessalonica. If the Day of the Lord (including the Lord's return) had come then those who had died missed the Lord's return. Paul seeks to correct this misunderstanding (see 1 Thess. 4: 13 -18). Paul's exhortation to the Thessalonians is to persevere and press on (2 Thess. 3:13).

In 1 Thess. 5:14, Paul warned those who were idle, but it is apparent that in 2 Thessalonians his warnings have gone unheeded, thus it is necessary for him to warn them again in a far more serious tone (2 Thess. 3:6). Paul says that we are to keep away from the brother who is idle. This is the word for *avoidance*. Its only other use is in 2 Cor. 8:20. It means to abstain from friendly relations. These people thought that since Jesus was coming soon, why work?

These were not people who could not work, but rather those who would not work. This means that they lived off the goodwill and kindness of others, and it is this that Paul condemns. It seems as though Paul is prepared to give them a general warning (as in 1 Thess. 5:14), but then he takes it to the next level and cuts off all ties with such people (2 Thess. 3:6). Since these Thessalonians were not working but were eating the food of others who were, Paul says that such individuals, who will not work, are not permitted to eat (3:10). Eating food is the privilege of responsibility. It is the reward of labor expended.

It is apparent that these individuals were busybodies (3:11). This seems to imply that they were interrupting others at their work whilst they did not work. They were working at being busy in the affairs of others, but not their own. They wanted a handout. Any refusal to work, Paul condemns, just as he does being a busybody.

What is Paul's solution for them? First of all, those who do not heed the general warning are subsequently to be kept away from (vs. 6). Secondly, those who walk in idleness and are not busy at work, Paul commands and encourages them in the Lord Jesus to do their own work quietly and earn their own living. There are two injunctions here. There is an emphasis on working *quietly*. This is the word for silence and for staying at home working and not meddling in other's affairs. The other injunction is to earn their own living. The KJV speaks of *eating their own bread*. Notice the connection between work and food. Earning our bread is another way of saying earning your own living.

Successful labor is productive. It is not sidetracked. It is glorifying to God and is in accordance with the commands of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus wants us occupied until he comes. There is no room for complacency or for doing nothing. The Bible does not seem to speak of retirement. Retiring from one kind of work should lead to working at another kind of work. We are to always be working. Those who cannot work are of course exempt, but they should labor at prayer. Man was made for labor and for him to cease from labor hastens decline. Work keeps the faculties sharpened. The deaths of the patriarchs, of Moses and Aaron point to dying in strength. 1 Corinthians 15:58 exhorts us to always *be* abounding in the work of the Lord. None of us are exempt ever from this command. The reason we are not to cease is because our labor is never unfruitful if done for the Lord. This applies to all labor generally in addition to spiritual labor in the church for the saints. Let us not grow weary in doing good otherwise we shall be regarded as enemies and not saints (2 Thess. 3:13 – 15).