

**While I'm Waiting**  
**(Week 18 - Final Week)**  
**2 Thessalonians 3:6-18**  
**"A Father's Advice"**

**Introduction**

**Now we command you, brothers and sisters, in the Name of our LORD Jesus Christ, to keep away from every brother or sister who is idle and does not live according to the tradition received from us.** **2 Thessalonians 3:6**

Just this past week, I decided that we needed a picnic table in our back yard. When all of our kids come over for a visit, we like to cook out and sit outside together. So, we needed a pretty good sized table to accommodate all of us. Rather than purchase so a large table, I decided to build it myself. That way I would be ensured of getting the exact dimensions that I wanted. I found some pictures online that were similar to what I wanted, but, of course, no plans. So I had to figure up all of the particulars on my own.

Now, I know that you are probably expecting a story about a disastrous adventure that ended in dismal failure, but that is not the case. The table turned out just like I had envisioned it would. I worked all day long sawing lumber and putting it all together. I mashed a few fingers and got more than a few splinters in the process, and it seemed that every muscle in my tired old body was in pain, but the table looked great to me. And even more important, Sandi liked it! Which is the ultimate quality control inspection for all my projects. After I finished the table, I sat down on one of the benches and had myself and ice cold Diet Pepsi. And I have to say in that moment, I was very tired, but it was a "good tired". Those of you who have ever built something with your own two hands know exactly what I mean by that. It is always a blessing to work hard, and at the end of the day, to have something to show for your labor.

When Paul closes out his second letter to the Thessalonians, he reminds them of the value of an honest day's labor. In Greek culture, working with one's hands was considered "demeaning" and the work of servants. But according to *The Bible*, work is not a "four-letter word". It is, in fact, a gift from God Himself.

**Here is what I have seen to be good: It is appropriate to eat, drink, and experience good in all the labor one does under the sun during the few days of his life God has given him, because that is his reward. Furthermore, everyone to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also allowed him to enjoy them, take his reward, and rejoice in his labor. This is a gift of God, for he does not often consider the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with the joy of his heart.**

**Ecclesiastes 5:18-20**

Did you catch that? Working for what you earn is not meant to be a toilsome burden, but rather, a privilege and a gift from God! When we work hard, we enjoy more than ever the fruits of that labor. In fact, according to Solomon, it takes our mind off the brevity of life and helps us to find joy in the moment! In short, hard work... is a GOOD thing! Would to God the people living in our world today could get a grasp on this reality. We live in a culture that thinks it is good to sit around doing nothing, all the while depending upon others to provide their daily bread. Apparently, this was the same mentality that had started to creep in to the church at Thessalonica. Some, who weren't overly fond of hard work, were using the return of Christ as an excuse to cease from their labor and sponge off of their brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul warned them to stop this wickedness immediately.

As I studied the final words of the Apostle Paul to the Thessalonians, I was struck by how familiar his message sounded to me. And then it hit me! This sounds like something that my dad would say. I don't know why I was so surprised by this, for all Scripture is a message from our Heavenly Father to His children. So, Paul's final words to the Thessalonians are, in fact, "Fatherly advice." And this is what He says: *Work Hard, Mind Your Own Business, and Be Careful Who Your Friends Are.* Sounds a lot like the words of wisdom I received from my dad, when I headed off to college. Let's study them together.

**Work Hard (vs. 6-10)**

**Now we command you, brothers and sisters, in the Name of our LORD Jesus Christ, to keep away from every brother or sister who is idle and does not live according to the tradition received from us. For you yourselves know how you should imitate us: We were not idle among you; we did not eat anyone's food free of charge; instead, we labored and toiled, working night and day, so that we would not be a burden to any of you. It is not that we don't have the right to support, but we did it to make ourselves an example to you so that you would imitate us. In fact, when we were with you, this is what we commanded you: "If anyone isn't willing to work, he should not eat."**

**2 Thessalonians 3:6-10**

As stated earlier, some in the church at Thessalonica were using the second coming of Christ as an excuse to be lazy. The Scriptures command us to work. This is not an option for us. It is a command. Now, let me be clear, I am not saying that if you are unable to work you should not be provided for. *The Bible* also commands us to care for those who cannot care for themselves. However, most people can do "something". We may slow down and start to fall apart when we get older, but there are still things that we can do. Truth?

When Paul came to Thessalonica, or to any place where he planted a church, He refused to accept support from the new converts. As a preacher of the gospel, he was most certainly entitled to receive fair compensation, but he chose not to, because he didn't want people to think that he was in it for the money. Now after churches had been established for some time, he would often allow them to send him support for his missionary journeys. But never from a newly started church. He worked hard by day to preach and made tents at night to earn his way. I'm sure he was exhausted from all that labor, but I also believe that it was a "good kind of tired."

Paul, in every way, tried to set an example for those he led to Christ. The Thessalonians had seen for themselves what a hard worker he was. So why in the world would they think it should have been any different for them? Answer: it wasn't. But there are always some people in this world who are quick to take advantage of others, even in the church. If you do not agree with this statement, then you haven't been too involved in the ministry. Trust me, there are always those who take all that they can and give back very little. But this is not the way that God wants it to be. God expects us to contribute.

Paul had told the Thessalonians while he was among them, and he reiterated again in his letters to them: **"If anyone isn't willing to work, he should not eat"**. It really doesn't get much plainer than that. Work is a good thing. Adam was always supposed to work in the Garden of Eden. Work wasn't part of the curse. The curse simply made his work more difficult, but to work was always part of the plan. Just as Solomon has so eloquently stated, our working is God's gift to us. To accomplish something by the work of our hands will make us tired. But it is a good tired!

You may then ask, "So what about retirement? Is it ever good for a person to retire from his labors?" I do not believe that there is anything inherently wrong with a person retiring from their secular job, if they are financially able to so. But I do not believe that we are to never stop working altogether. When the Christian is through making his living, then this should be an opportune time to work all the more in the spreading of the gospel. After retirement, a person should have even more "free time" to serve in the church. One thing I have noticed about people who retire from work and do nothing: They don't live very long. Have you ever noticed this? You see, we were created to be in motion, and when we stop the motion, we stop altogether. So being busy is a good thing my friends. Just look at what happened to a certain guy in *The Scriptures* who thought he could take it easy after amassing so much wealth for himself:

**"...A rich man's land was very productive. He thought to himself, 'What should I do, since I don't have anywhere to store my crops? I will do this,' he said. 'I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones and store all my grain and my goods there. Then I'll say to myself, 'You have many goods stored up for many years. Take it easy; eat, drink, and enjoy yourself.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is demanded of you. And the things you have prepared — whose will they be?' That's how it is with the one who stores up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."**

**Luke 12:16b-21**

So not only are we to work to provide for our own living, but we had better be busy about the work of the kingdom as well. Paul knew what it meant to do both. He had his priorities straight. We have been called to work to provide for our own living, and we have also been called to do the work of making disciples. We may be tired at the end of the day, but it will be a good kind of tired. So don't be idle. Keep up the good work, and work hard.

### **Mind Your Own Business (vs. 11-13)**

**For we hear that there are some among you who are idle. They are not busy but busybodies. Now we command and exhort such people by The LORD Jesus Christ to work quietly and provide for themselves. But as for you, brothers and sisters, do not grow weary in doing good.** **2 Thessalonians 3:11-13**

There is a word that Paul uses three times in this passage. It is "Ataktos" in the Greek (pronounced at-ak'toce), and it has been translated here as "idle" in **verses 6,7,11**. The word is actually most used as a military word for someone who has broken ranks or has gotten out of formation. In short, Paul is referring to someone who is "out of step" with sound Christian principles. To be unwilling to work to provide for oneself is antithetical to Christian living. As far back as *The Old Testament*, we are commanded **"Six days you shall labor..." (Exodus 34:21)**. So we know that it is God's will for us to labor in this life and to work both hard and diligently in all that we do. For in fact, no matter what the job is, we are to do it as a service for God Himself.

**Whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for The LORD and not for people, knowing that you will receive the reward of an inheritance from The LORD. You serve The LORD Christ.** **Colossians 3:23-24**

One of the things that accompanies an honest day's work is the inability to spend inordinate amounts of time and energy worrying about what your neighbor is doing. In other words, those who keep themselves busy have very little time be busybodies! This is exactly what Paul told the Thessalonians in this passage, as well as, in his first letter.

**...But we encourage you, brothers and sisters, to do this even more, to seek to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we command you, so that you may behave properly in the presence of outsiders and not be dependent on anyone.** **1 Thessalonians 4:10b-12**

In all my years of ministry, I have found nothing to be more counterproductive within the body of Christ than someone who does very little, but seems to have ample time to critique the work of others. As my dad would say, "Mind your own business son." These are words to live by. If I am busy doing the work that I have been called to do, then I won't have time to look over your shoulder to see what you are doing. I am reminded here of the time when Jesus told Peter that one day he would be lead away as a martyr for his work of preaching the gospel. Peter looked over at John and said, "Well what about him?" Jesus' answer was priceless:

**"If I want him to remain until I come", Jesus answered, "What is that to you?"** **John 21:22a**

Simply put, he was saying, "Simon, mind your own business!" And that is exactly what we are called to do as believers. We are to be so busy working, that we do not have time to judge anyone else's work. For:

**Who are you to judge another's household servant? Before his own LORD he stand or falls. And he will stand, because The LORD is able to make him stand.** **Romans 14:4**

So if you want some good “Fatherly advice” in this world, work hard and mind your own business. In fact, work so hard that the only business that you have time to notice is your own. And do not grow weary in doing good (**vs.13**).

**Be Careful Who Your Friends Are (vs. 14-15)**

***If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take note of that person; don't associate with him, so that he may be ashamed. Yet don't consider him an enemy, but warn him as a brother.*** **2 Thessalonians 3:14-15**

Church discipline. No one really seems to want to do that anymore. What happens now when you try and discipline a person in the church is they leave in a huff and go cause problems in someone else's church. Can I get a witness? Paul commanded the Thessalonians not to associate with those who refused to obey the commands of Christ. The reason for this “silent treatment” was so that the person would be convicted of their sin and long to repent in order to return to the fellowship that they had once enjoyed.

As believers, we are to be intolerant of sin, not only in our own lives, but also within the church. We all are commanded to live according to the lofty standards set forth for us in The Scriptures. We are to live out what we have been taught. And we are also commanded to police ourselves corporately so that we are united in this way of living. This is why we are to choose our “friends” wisely. While our desire is that everyone live according to God's Word, we are not to associate with those who know the truth, and yet, refuse to obey. In other words, we do not enjoin ourselves with those in open rebellion. We all make mistakes, but there is a difference between falling short and choosing to live in opposition to God's commands. Listen to what The LORD says about open rebellion.

***...Does The LORD take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying The LORD? Look: to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination (witchcraft), and defiance is like wickedness and idolatry.*** **1 Samuel 15:22b-23a**

So, I believe that it is safe to assume that God places a pretty high value on obedience. So much so, that we are called to shun the disobedient, until they are willing to repent. We don't ever give up on them, but we cannot align ourselves with them in their sin. This is the very purpose of church discipline, to hold sinful people at arms length, until they are willing to repent. So, if you want some good Fatherly advice this morning, be very careful who your friends are!

Paul closes out his letter in the most gracious of blessings to the church that he loved so well:

***May The LORD of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The LORD be with all of you. I, Paul, am writing this greeting with my own hand, which is an authenticating mark in every letter; this is how I write. The Grace of our LORD Jesus Christ be with you all.*** **2 Thessalonians 3:16-18**

Couldn't have said it any better than that.

So let all of God's faithful workers say... TRUTH!!!