

2 Thessalonians 3:10-12**PREFACE**

Sometimes the apostle Paul addresses deep spiritual matters, topics of belief, faith, wisdom, or doctrine. At other times, as he does elsewhere in these two letters, Paul speaks of future, sometimes cataclysmic events in God's economy. But at still other times he gets very practical, exhorting his readers to conduct themselves righteously in their more mundane, everyday lives. In our text for this session we find ourselves still looking at this last.

Back in the 1980s, in another place and time, there was a talented woman who took the role of Mary in a production of mine. She had a lovely soprano voice and wasn't a bad actor. She did a good job with her role on stage, which involved playing the younger Mary at the time of Christ's birth, as well as the older Mary at His crucifixion. I had no complaints about her performance.

After it was all over she came up to me and expressed her willingness, should I ever need her for a part again. And I hadn't one moment of doubt: I would *never* ask her to work with us again.

You see, this woman always arrived for rehearsals just on time—never early. She always dragged herself in, with a pained expression on her face—as if she was always *down* with something, and was making the ultimate sacrifice and doing us all a huge favor by just showing up. Once the rehearsal was over, she immediately left—never helping to put back the platform furniture, close windows, etc. She was also in the bell choir with Linda and me. Anyone involved in a bell choir knows that it requires lots of preparation before, and lots of putting away after each practice. Tables must be set up, pads laid down, bells removed from their cases and arranged on the tables. After practice every bell has to be wiped of fingerprints, then be put back into its case, and then the tables taken down and stored.

This woman—an admittedly fine musician—invariably showed up for practice only *after* everything had been set up, and once the practice was over she invariably had a ready excuse for why she had to leave immediately, not helping to put everything away.

There were quite a few individuals in our acting company that were not as good on stage as this woman, but they were hard workers, doing everything they could to ensure the success of each production; they were committed to the work—and they were not prima donnas. Even though they may not have been as good at acting, I would have taken just a few of them over an entire company of individuals like her.

In our passage today, the apostle completes his remarks aimed at the slackers in Thessalonica, saying that if they would not pull their own weight, they should not be permitted to share in the bounty of others.

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12.

v10

Let's refresh our memories about what the early church was like.

Read Acts 2:44-47.

This is a picture not of communism, but of *community*. Kindred souls serving and worshiping the same Master in authentic *koinonia*—fellowship: Sharing their lives with each other, helping each other and working together to understand and obey this new faith in Christ. At that time this fellowship extended even to the taking of meals together (“bread,” here, is a Semitic idiom for any kind of food). This was a true, intimate community of believers—at that time almost a necessity for their mutual encouragement, and protection from those wishing them harm.

Today we may not take *all* of our meals together, but we have continued the tradition of coming together to meet the needs of those who, for whatever reason, are passing through bad straits, such as helping the older widow who is without family (1 Timothy 5). But that same passage makes it clear that if the widow *does* have blood family, it is *their* responsibility to take care of her, not the church’s.

We have a wonderful ministry in our church of men helping out other members with odd jobs. I was most appreciative when one of them came to my aid by replacing a few shingles on the roof of our house. Now, I can shingle a roof, and if the problem had been on the first or second floor, I would have done it myself. But this was on the *third* floor, and I needed the help of someone younger, more agile and less fearful of that height. The job was too small for a professional to consider it, so, instead, my brother in Christ took care of it for me.

One of the wonderful aspects of God’s word is its practicality. It is more than just a collection of high-minded, ethereal Thees and Thous, but, as here, includes common-sense exhortations. The church is a family; it is to be based on love—not just the love of Christ for us, and our love for Him, but our love for each other. It is not to be a blind, indulgent love, however, a soft and syrupy love that facilitates sloth and idleness, but one that encourages good character and responsibility. Like Jesus Himself, who wasn’t afraid to call a spade a spade, we are not to love someone into complacency, but to hold them accountable for their lives—and their sustenance.

Paul puts this in the form of a command, not a suggestion. “If anyone is not willing to work”—and I take this to mean both working in a domestic, paying-your-own-way sense, and contributing to the welfare of others in the church—“then he is not to eat.” I like what Calvin has to say about this.

It is the inactive drones whom Paul is berating—those who live by the sweat of others while they themselves do nothing for the common good to help the human race, such as our monks and priests who acquire ample dimensions by their inactivity.

v11

Read v11.

Again, how practical God’s word is. What invariably happens when we are not up to good? We are up to no-good. When we have time on our hands, we invariably spend that time poorly.

Guzik: There is a play on words between the ancient Greek phrasing in the lines not working at all and but are busybodies. The idea is something like “busybodies who do no business.”

The ESV captures it nicely:

For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.

or the NIV:

We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies.

Robertson: Literally, doing nothing but doing around. These theological dead-beats were too pious to work, but perfectly willing to eat at the hands of their neighbours while they piddled and frittered away the time in idleness.

an undisciplined life

This word is used only twice in the NT—both in this chapter (v6 and v11).

undisciplined^{nasb}, **disorderly**^{kjvs}, **idle**, **idleness**^{niv,esv} = *atak'tos* = adverb from <G813> (*ataktos*); **irregularly** (moral) :- disorderly; **undisciplined** (military term for out of ranks).

doing no work at all

And Paul is explicit about what he means by “undisciplined”; YLT translates this “nothing working.” Zip. Zero. Nada.

but acting like busybodies

busybodies = *periergazomai* = from <G4012> (*peri*) and <G2038> (*ergazomai*); **to work all around, i.e. bustle about (meddle)** :- be a busybody; **to waste one’s labor about a thing.** [only here]

v12

Read v12.

Now such persons...

Paul takes the diplomatic approach. If I were writing this letter and, for the second time had to address this situation ([less direct in the first letter \[4:11\]](#)), I would probably begin v12 with something like, “Now you clowns...” or “Now you worthless slugs...” But Paul takes the high road.

we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ

Nonetheless, the apostle’s correction of them is robust—but you might get the wrong idea if you are using an earlier version of the NIV (1970s), which translates this verse

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command...

The later NIV version translates this verse more accurately with

Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ...

Question: Aside from the word order, did you catch the difference?

In v6 Paul commanded the church “in the *name* of our Lord Jesus Christ” to “keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life...” But in v12 he commands and exhorts “in the Lord Jesus Christ,” or your translation may be “in our Lord Jesus Christ.” In the first instance (v6), he commanded by his *authority in Christ*: “in the *name* of our Lord Jesus Christ.” In the second (v12), he bases his command in the *common union of believers with Christ*. This might be translated, “by virtue of our union with the Lord Jesus Christ, we as fellow members of Christ command and urge such people...” (Hendricksen).

We get a sense, from these two verses (v6 and v12), of how important this is to the apostle—and how important it should be to us. He both commands and pleads with the church from the basis of his authority in the name of Christ, and from the basis of their family relationship in Christ Himself, that they not permit these individuals to live this way. (In the next passage Paul will issue explicit instructions for their discipline.)

to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.

And here is the exhortation: get a job and work for your food.

Lange: Here the Apostle states the principles of a sound Christian support of the poor. The rule in 2 Thessalonians 3:10—“if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either”—goes back to the primary command in Genesis 3:19—“By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread”—that curse which yet is equally a blessing, and which is not to be nastily set aside under a pretense of spirituality, but in fact through fleshly indulgence and sloth. An excitement that does not go deep easily brings with it such disdain of outward activity, that a person fancies himself raised in heavenly rapture above labor, almost as if it were dishonorable. Here, then, the test is very soberly applied: Art thou raised also above eating?

Paul tells them not just to work, but to work quietly.

quietness, quietly, quiet fashion = *hesychia* (hay-soo-khee'-ah) feminine of <G2272> (hesuchios); (as noun) **stillness, i.e. desistance from bustle or language** :- quietness, silence.

I have already employed two illustrations from the stage; might as well round it off with three. There is a common phrase for someone who is flagrantly over-acting; they are said to be “chewing the scenery.” Paul says, *Don't make a big deal out of it; just shut up and do your job*. This is in line with the exhortation from Jesus in His sermon on the mount.

Read Matthew 6:1-6.

This business of paying our own way so long as one is physically able was not just a matter of right and wrong, of morality, but also of *public relations*. In the first century—as, some might say, even now—the church was surrounded by those wishing it harm, looking for any excuse to bad-mouth it and bring public scorn down upon it. If you doubt this should still be a concern, look at how the press reports even the slightest moral indiscretion by spiritual leaders and compare that to how it reports moral indiscretions by public figures of its own ilk—i.e., liberal democrats.

If we claim to subscribe to the higher standard of God's word, then we must live it.