

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 | Idle Busybodies

Written by John Fox | 8.13.2023

Text: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

FCF: Idleness, disorderliness

VFT: Hard Work, encouragement, generosity

Shaft: Christians shouldn't be idle, but work hard for the benefit of others.

INTRO

Isaiah Sermon Series & Slingshot

As a church, we believe in preaching expositionally through books of the Bible. But we also preach topical sermons periodically. Sometimes, this is a short relevant series, sometimes it's more of a survey. Next week we finish our Thessalonians series and then enter into a 14 week survey of the book of Isaiah which focuses on The Messiah.

In other news, we are currently in a Lead Pastor search as a church and are aided by a search firm called Slingshot. We have an internal Pastor Search Team made up of a cross section of 7 key leaders in the church who are assisting the elders in evaluating candidates. And good news! Over the past three months Slingshot has been interviewing candidates and are nearing the interview stage. Next Sunday the PST gets 4 candidate profiles and then begins interviewing them. The leading candidate will be selected to come and visit. Prayers appreciated!

Last Week Persecution, This Week Idleness

Last week we saw that Christians will experience persecutions, but endure them through Jesus. It was encouraging! This week, however, Paul brings a stern word of correction to the Thessalonian Church related to idleness.

Paul wrote to reassure the Thessalonians that Jesus had not come yet and instructed them on how to live until he returned. Paul also wrote to provide practical instruction for how to treat believers who refused apostolic authority, meaning God's authority. After addressing this issue many times, Paul was quite blunt: Don't be around them!

In this passage we will see what we may refer to as "Tough Love." **Forewarning:** It will make many of you uncomfortable. Some of you may wholeheartedly disagree with it. I simply want to remind you as a believer in Jesus that when we run into commands in the Bible that are counter cultural it is actually evidence the instruction comes to us from a divine source. This is a Living Word, and active, if it were not our presuppositions wouldn't be challenged.

Main Point

Main Point: Keep away from idle or disorderly Christians

Points: Why? Three reasons to keep away from the idle

1. We imitate those around us
2. We will become self-centered
3. We can't help anyone else or do good

1. We imitate those around us (v.6-9)

2 Thessalonians 3:6

6 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.

1) A severe command

Paul's instruction is severe. Paul's command is for obedient believers to withdraw from, keep away, stay away, not to associate with, refuse to have anything to do with, these erring Christians. There's no possibility of a different translation.

Acts 1:4 | Jesus' commanded the apostles not to leave Jerusalem but wait for the HS.

Acts 4:18 | The rulers, elders, and scribes ordered the apostles not to speak in Jesus' name.

Paraggello | "Command" is used 4 times 3:4-12

2) Idle/disorderly | Those who do not fulfill their obligations

Again, these are professing believers in Jesus who refused to work. They reject apostolic authority in favor of their own preferences and comfort. The word often has the idea of a disorderly soldier who is marching out of order or quitting ranks. It is the job of fellow believers to help admonish this idle person.

1 Thessalonian 5:14

14 And we exhort you, brothers and sisters: warn those who are idle, comfort the discouraged, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

2 Thessalonians 3:7-9

7 For you yourselves know how you should imitate us: We were not idle among you; 8 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. 9 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.

3) Examples to imitate

Paul was not idle, a mooch, half-hearted, or a burden.

Apparently Paul and company noticed something was wrong with the Thessalonian community. So, they wisely didn't allow anyone to financially support them. Instead, they chose physical labor and evangelized and taught where they could. Being independent like this gave them a tremendous opportunity to speak against the cultural blindspots of the day.

At the same time, supporting those who minister the gospel is not wrong. Paul advocated for it strongly elsewhere (1 Cor. 9:7-14; Gal. 6:6; 1 Tim. 5:17-18). See Justin Taylor's article.¹

Question: When was the last time you told anyone to imitate you? Have you ever? Paul didn't shy away from giving a lifestyle example to follow and neither should we. We have new Christians that need to imitate someone.

2. We will become self-centered (v.10-11)

2 Thessalonians 3:10-11

10 In fact, when we were with you, this is what we commanded you: "If anyone isn't willing to work, he should not eat." **11** For we hear that there are some among you who are idle. They are not busy but busybodies.

Again, Paul reiterates the command for these idle Christians to work. But the situation is most likely tied to a system of patronage in Paul's day.

1) Patronage

Patronage is an odd thing to us. It's a system that much of the ancient and modern world works on outside of the West. The system essentially operates with a wealthy benefactor (Patron) who provides for the needs of the benefactee (Client) who in turn provides honor to the benefactor, which increases the person's status.

Gene L. Green Quote 1

Clients depended on their rich patrons, receiving benefits from them such as food, money, and representation, while the patrons enjoyed the public honor that accrued to their account for having so many clients. In this relationship the patron was under social obligation to continue the economic and social support of his or her clients. To cut a client off would place the patron in a relationship of enmity with the client.²

Counter cultural as always, Paul sniffs out something wicked in the culture and tells Christians they can't be a part of it. Paul taught Christian clients that they should not depend on their patrons

¹

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/do-not-muzzle-the-ox-does-paul-quote-moses-out-of-context/>

² Gene L. Green. The Pillar New Testament Commentary. The Letters to the Thessalonians. Pg. 342.

regardless of them being believers or not themselves. He also taught patrons that they were not obligated to continue supporting believers who did not want to work. This undoubtedly had economic consequences, certainly social consequences.

This isn't to say any form of patronage is bad. God is seen as the patron of believers. But the Christians Paul is saying stay away from are those who could work, but refused to.

2) Willing Busybodies

The reality is these believers weren't "willing" to work. The problem wasn't that they *didn't* want to work, it's that they *refused* to work.³ We might say they were living off the system. And this caused busybody activity instead of fruitfulness.

Gene L Green Quote 2

The idea is not that these people had too much time on their hands.... The problem is rather the involvement of clients in public assembly where they supported the causes of their patrons, entangling themselves in issues that were properly none of their concern. At issue is their political participation in favor of their patron"⁴

Examples:

- Welfare | Patreon | Twitch

Do you see how this environment creates an opportunity for favoritism, political intrigue, and disorder? This kind of situation would make anyone obsequious, self-centered, and therefore unfruitful as a believer.

3. We can't help anyone else or do good

2 Thessalonians 3:12-13

12 Now we command and exhort such people by the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and provide for themselves. 13 But as for you, brothers and sisters, do not grow weary in doing good.

The real shame of not keeping away from the idle is we end up hurting our brothers and sisters and become ineffective in gospel work.

- We only care about ourselves, so we pass on opportunities to serve others.
- We don't have money so we can't be generous to others.
- We are "bought" by a benefactor so we never speak up about something that's wrong.

The solution? Work quietly. Paul's simple instruction is for these clients to find a job, and work quietly. As he has already said,

³ Ibid, 351.

⁴ Ibid.

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

11 to seek to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, 12 so that you may behave properly in the presence of outsiders and not be dependent on anyone.

What better picture do we have than Jesus Christ

Lee Lewis Quote (Jesus' Admonishment)

Some of the very first words of Jesus' ministry were an admonishment. "Repent," He said, "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." Praise the Lord that Jesus did not say something culturally sensitive like, "You do you," as our culture likes to say. We would be in the worst danger possible had God's admonishment to repent not been delivered to our hearts. Had God not intervened, we would be hopelessly unable and unwavering in our descent to destruction.⁵

Jesus wasn't idle but perfectly embodied working hard as a carpenter (Mark 6:3)

Jesus' did the Father's work, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work" (Jn. 4:34).

Jesus refused to become self-centered and bought by the powerful. Think of his temptation when the Devil offered all the kingdoms of the world if He would only bow down and worship him (Matt. 4:8-10).

Jesus did more good than anyone has ever done by his life, death, and resurrection. Further, he is seated now at the right hand of the Father and lives to make intercession for those who believe in him for the forgiveness of their sins (Heb. 7:25). It makes me think of a hymn.

*Not what these hands have done
can save this guilty soul;
not what this toiling flesh has borne
can make my spirit whole ...
Thy work alone, O Christ,
can ease this weight of sin;
Thy blood alone, O Lamb of God,
can give me peace within.⁶*

CONCLUSION

Main Point: Keep away from idle or disorderly Christians

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<https://www.biblicalcounselingcoalition.org/2023/03/29/faithful-admonishing-in-a-culture-of-tolerance-according-to-1-thessalonians-514/>

⁶ https://hymnary.org/text/not_what_these_hands_have_done