

Work: A Divine Calling

Call to Worship: Psalm 24:1-6

1st Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

2nd Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-12

Hymn #22 (Supp.): *How Great Thou Art*

Hymn #50: *Praise to the Lord the Almighty*

Hymn Insert: *The Power of the Cross*

Introduction:

When we worked through 1 Thessalonians, we found that a problem existed among the brethren, which Paul had addressed in a very gentle fashion. Apparently, some who were capable of working, were unwilling to work, and this inevitably promoted a spirit of idleness, gossip, nosiness and meddling in the affairs of others. And Paul linked this "command to work," to the love of the brethren, because earning a wage not only provided for one's own needs, but it also enabled you to help others who were legitimately in need, while setting a good example for those on the outside of the church [Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 again]

Well, here in 2 Thessalonians, we find that this problem of idleness has still not been properly addressed within the body. In fact, it may have even grown worse, especially as the false teaching, concerning the return of Christ, had begun to infiltrate the church. And so, Paul addresses this matter again, only this time, with a stronger and more fervent tone. This lengthy address then, will be the main focus of our attention for this morning.

As we examine this text, I want to break it up in an unusual manner, for the sake of clarity and continuity of thought. And so, we'll divide it into the three following main headings:

- 1) The Command to the Church (vs. 6, 10 & 11)
- 2) The Example for the Church (vs. 7-9)
- 3) The Command to Those Who are Idle (vs. 12)

I. The Command to the Church [Read vs. 6]

And so, what then is the general command, which Paul here gives to the church? That they are to "withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which they received from Paul (and his co-laborers)."

Now, some in our own day might think that that is not the *loving* thing to do. But, once again, we have to consider what the Scriptures teach about love, and not the world, the modern church or even our own hearts, for that matter. And so, here we find that Paul has given these brethren strict orders concerning the lifestyle they were to live, which was to be orderly and in accordance with the will of God. We know this, because he identifies those who do not comply with this command, as being "disorderly" (contrary to God's design for mankind).

You see, God has created all things and He has determined a proper order for all that He has created. For example, contrary to today's notion that we can decide what gender we want to be, or what gender we ought to marry, God has already decided that for us, based upon the way in which He has designed us. We don't choose to be male or female or whether or not we can marry an identical gender or an animal. There is a created order, whereby God specifically designs things and people to live and function in specific ways. Certain things may be optional (what food we would like to eat for breakfast, what games we would like to play, what books we would like to read...etc) and others are predetermined.

Now, in this case, in order to determine what specific issue concerning God's order that Paul is addressing, we have to continue on with the context. For now, we know that whatever he is addressing is serious, because he commands the brethren to withdraw from those who walk disorderly and not according to the tradition (the biblical teaching) that they had received from Paul. And so, what did Paul command them, when he was among them? **[Read vs. 10-11]**

What was the command then? That those who can work, and are unwilling to do so, should not be provided for, by the brethren. Bluntly, Paul states, "If they don't work, then they don't eat." In modern language, "Don't allow them to mooch from the rest of you." It is not the loving thing to do, to enable those who are lazy, by supporting them in their laziness. Let them go hungry, until they realize that no one is going to pad them, so that they will then work, as God intended them to do, from the beginning.

Furthermore, Paul shows how living contrary to God's order in this respect (as in all respects) leads to other areas of sin. In this case, because they were not working, they were busybodies. They were gossips, who intruded upon and meddled in the business and affairs of

others. And so, they became a burden, not only by drawing from the hard earned resources of others, but also by sticking their noses in everyone else's business.

Paul's command then was that the brethren were to withdraw from such people. They were not to aid, help or enable them, and they were to avoid giving them a context where they could conduct their meddling. Again, in this way (the loving thing to do), they would not only help prevent the meddling, but they would hopefully drive those who were out of order, back to the place where they would have dealings with God, get a job, and walk orderly.

II. The Example for the Church [Read vs. 7-9]

As Paul seeks to deal with the sin of idleness that was taking place in the Thessalonian church, he is also able to set himself (and his companions) forward as an example for the church. In other words, they practiced what they preached, even by refusing privileges they could have clung to, since their ministry itself, was work and labor, in the gospel.

And so, Paul states, in essence, "We left you an example ourselves, when we were among you. We were not disorderly. In fact, we never ate anyone's food, free of charge. But rather, we worked night and day, aside from our ministry, so that we would not be a burden to any of you. Indeed, we could have required supplies from you, because of our authority and our labor in the gospel for your sakes. But, we didn't, because we wanted to ensure that we would leave you all an example and a pattern, for you to follow."

You see, the apostle Paul was consciously aware of the problem of idleness and laziness amongst the Thessalonian culture, when he was there. And so, rather than tout his privileges in the gospel, he sacrificed them for the betterment of the brethren there. He knew that his temporal, physical loss, could be their eternal, spiritual gain. And so, he embraced discomfort and additional burden, so as to adorn the gospel, by leaving them an example that would move them out of the disorderly practices of their culture, and into the design and will of God for them.

Having considered then the "command to the church," and Paul's "example for the church," finally, we look at the "command to those who were being idle."

2) Paul is not referring to those who have lost jobs for valid reasons, as idle. Sometimes, people are laid off because of the economy, or for moral reasons they must leave their job...etc. Paul is not commanding the brethren to withdraw from such people. In fact, it is right and proper to help people, who have legitimately suffered some type of misfortune. However, again, if you are without a job, and you can work, then your full time job, in the present, ought to be to find work. Again, that is where self-examination comes in. You have to ask yourself, "Am I doing everything on my part to find another job?" And so, Paul does not have such people in mind here. He is speaking about those who are capable of working, but refuse to do so.

3) When Paul speaks of not being a busybody and living a quiet life, he is not relinquishing the responsibility that we all have to, "be our brother's keeper." This is where the balance in such commands must be recognized, because people often write off half of the Bible, while alleging to claim to honor the other half. Case in point, the thorough abuse of the, "Do not judge others" texts. Well here, we must be able to draw the proper line between being nosy and meddling, and being willing to confront one another (for their good, the good of the church and the glory of God), when someone is ensnared in unrepentant sin. We do have a responsibility to look out for one another and to encourage, exhort and rebuke one another (particularly, when we are dealing with moral issues), but we don't have a responsibility to intrude upon the lives of others, treating their lives like some novel that we want to read unto the satisfaction of our own curiosities, and to offer commentary on everything they do. There is a big difference.

And so, brethren, these are just a few footnotes that I wanted to add to the process of pulling out Paul's meaning from the text.

IV. Closing thoughts and Applications

Brethren, in closing, let me just leave you with a few additional concluding thoughts and applications that we can take out of this text:

1) While Paul is definitely addressing a theological issue, more than likely, this is also a cultural issue, as well. In other words, not working, and burdening others for aid and support was probably also a cultural problem in Thessalonica. The false teaching concerning the return of Christ, was probably also a means of condoning and permitting this sin. It's a sad reality, but

at times, Christians can self-deceivingly misuse even the Word of God to alleviate or excuse their consciences for some particular sin. The "God is love" abuse, is one common example of this in our own day.

You might recall Paul's words to Titus in Titus 1:12-13, "One of them, a prophet of their own, said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.' This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith..." Here, Paul brings up a stereotype concerning the people of Crete, and he agrees with the accusation, based on what he has witnessed and experience among them. You see, there are cultural sins, which are perhaps more common in various cultures. I say all of this, brethren, to say that for the Christian, part of our sanctification is being cleansed of any cultural sins we may have, so that, together, we may meet and be better fitted for the culture of Christ. Many cultural practices may be acceptable, but we must never allow our ethnic culture or upbringing (things that are even ingrained in us) to supersede the culture of Christ. Indeed, we must carry all of our habits, traditions and cultural practices to the Scriptures, being prepared to put off whatever is contrary to the design and will of God (How different genders are treated, the relationships between parents and children, celebrated traditions...etc).

2) Recognize that sins of omission (not doing what we ought to do), often lead to sins of commission (doing what we ought not to do). When we don't work, we will be prone to becoming a busybody and a gossip. [David's sin of not going out to war, led to his adultery]. In general, often times, sin is reproductive. Sin often breeds more sin.

3) Let us embrace Paul's mindset of being willing to suffer inconvenience, and being willing to forgo certain privileges or liberties, if it can benefit the spiritual/physical well being of others. Paul, by right, could have taken food or a wage for his gospel labors. But, so as to provide them with an example, in dealing with an apparent sin of idleness, he worked with his own hands to avoid being a burden for anyone. He went above and beyond to help serve their spiritual and physical good. He willingly forsook his Christian liberties and prerogatives, when he knew that, doing so, would benefit others. And that, brethren, is true "agape" love! Love is most apparent when it is given on the heels of sacrifice and inconvenience. That is why the

greatest expression of love is to lay down one's life for others. And that is why our Lord Jesus Christ's love is the example of love par excellence!

4) Finally, brethren, let us recognize that working is a good thing. It is a divine calling, given to Adam *before the fall*, when he was to cultivate the garden, which God could have easily caused to cultivate itself, if He so desired. God worked, when He created all things, and it is His desire that, in bearing His image, we likewise work, less a Sabbath rest. It is a good thing! Indeed, in some respect, the fall of man has served to contaminate the pleasure of working, but working, in and of itself, is a good thing...a divine calling. And so, as you work, whatever job that might be, do so unto the Lord, and know that He is well pleased with that. He is glorified when you work faithfully, as unto Him, and that is as holy a calling, as being a pastor or a missionary.

Amen!!!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25