

A Theology of Work: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

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[0 : 00] Turn to the book of 2 Thessalonians, chapter 3. I'll tell you a little bit about the preaching plan over the coming months, just to kind of give you some bearing on where we are and what we're doing even this morning.

I am taking, starting next Monday, a sabbatical, so beginning on the 15th, and I'll be gone for four weeks. As such, Caleb is going to come and preach on Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, which is the 21st, about that very topic, defending the unborn.

And in the following three weeks, Clay Naylor is going to preach out of John 17, three weeks on the high priestly prayer. So I hope you'll anticipate that, that you'll be praying for them as they're getting ready to do that very thing.

When I come back, I'm going to do 11 weeks in Exodus chapter 20, which is where the Ten Commandments are first received and recorded for us in the Scripture, to talk about antinomianism, which means without the law.

So we need to understand as Christians what the place of the law is in our life. So it'll be 11 weeks of antinomianism, that the law does in fact still have a bearing on who we are, having been rescued by Christ.

[1 : 26] And so it kind of left us with these three in-between weeks. And we said, hmm, what should we do with three in-between weeks? And so last week, I decided to do just a sermon on resolutions, how to make resolves that are God-honoring.

And today, I'm going to preach a sermon on work. Having asked last week, do you work hard? What most about you needs to change? And one of the questions I asked was, do you work hard? And then I asked a follow-up question to that, which was, do you rest well?

And so this week, we're going to consider together work, work to the glory of God. And I've provided for you an outline on the back of your bulletin.

If you have that with you, I'll also try to give you the points very carefully so that you can write them down. If not, and then next week, so just to give you some balance and maybe ease some anxiety as we're talking about work, next week, we're going to talk about rest and how to rest to the glory of God as well.

[2 : 36] And I'm eager, I'm looking forward to continuing to prep for that and then preaching as I'm going to take some time to do some resting. So that's the game plan.

That's where we're going. Beyond that, as a church, we have typically done verse-by-verse exposition and often through larger texts of the Bible.

So if you're new with us or if you're not and you're scratching your head about why we've not been doing that, the intention is to get back to that in the summer. Be praying for us. You're welcome to suggest a book that you may want for us to preach to.

Right now I'm thinking 1 Corinthians and then possibly 2nd on beyond that, but we don't know just yet. So that'll be the plan beginning in the summer.

But for this morning, 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 in our text for this morning is verses 6 through 15. Beloved, this is God's Word to us.

[3 : 35] It was written for His glory and our good. And we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands. Beginning in verse 6.

Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you receive from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it. But with toil and labor we work night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you.

It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command, If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.

For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busy bodies. Now such a persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

[4 : 41] As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed.

Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. And so in today's text, there are a series of exhortations about work.

And I must say that this morning I couldn't possibly take the time to give you a complete doctrine of work in the Scripture. So it's going to be kind of sweeping, and we're going to pull points specifically from this text, but hopefully it'll get the pump primed and get you thinking about and studying and having a clear grasp on the biblical doctrine of work.

But in our text today, we have these exhortations that are stated in the negative, by which I mean Paul saying, do not do such and such.

But every negative exhortation has a reflexive, positive implication. So we will take the two together to better understand what Paul here is saying to the Thessalonian believers and in turn to us in the following six points.

[6 : 00] So number one, Paul exhort us to not be idle, but to work diligently. Do not be idle, but work diligently.

Paul has a concern in the closing of a second letter to the Thessalonians that some of those in the church were being lazy.

Why would this concern him? Note verse 10. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command. If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.

So a rather serious matter that people not belated. And it's concerning enough to him that it has been a repeated teaching, right?

When Paul was with the church, verse 10 tells us, the command was given, if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. Here in Paul's second letter, he reminds them of this command that was given to them.

[7 : 03] And in Paul's first letter to the church, he also commands the church to work. And here we can see why Paul has such a concern that they not be idle.

So turn back just a couple pages to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, and I'll show you what I mean. The last half of verse 11, Paul exhorts them to work with your hands as we instructed you.

Why? So that you may walk properly before outsiders. So you see, Paul is aware that God created men to work.

So those who make claim to worship the one true and living God who revealed himself in Jesus Christ ought to be the most diligent of workers.

Now, how did Paul know this? Is Paul grasping this out of the air? He's not. Turn with me to Genesis chapter 1, and I will show you why Paul believed this very important doctrine to be true.

[8 : 13] Genesis chapter 1. And I want you to see three things from the beginning of the book of Genesis.

Number one, God works. Genesis 1.1 says, In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.

Right? He did so for six days. He worked. He is the creator. He made things out of nothing. And you may say, Well, that wasn't work.

He spoke it into existence. And I agree. He did speak it into existence. But Genesis 2.2 tells us, And on the seventh day, God finished his work that he had done.

And he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. Certainly, he did that work with mighty, powerful words. Not great labor of his muscles.

[9 : 10] But they were strong words. Right? They were powerful, working words in the creation of the world. Not only that, when God finished creating the world, he did not stop working.

He set for us a model in resting a day. But then he didn't cease working altogether. He didn't sit back and now he's just letting the world play itself out. God is still at work.

Jesus said in John 5.17, My father is working until now and I am working. So Jesus, as a representative of his father on earth, also is working.

Just as a fun side note for you, if you like these types of things, Jonathan Edwards had a theory about God's creation of the world that he called progressive creationism.

And he suggested in it that God was continually speaking the world into existence. This morning, for example, would play out like a movie in scenes and God is constantly speaking what's happening into existence.

[10:19] We see it as a reality all strung together, but God sees it as a reality that has its moments that he is creating. There's no way to prove this kind of thing. And then if that makes your head explode, me too.

But just as a fun aside, Edwards was taking this idea, right, my father is working until now that he still is speaking mighty words that are progressing creation along and that if he were to cease to speak, we would cease to be.

So God works, number one. Number two, man was created in God's image to work. Genesis 2.5. When no bush of the field was yet in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land and there was no man to work the ground.

So God intended, right, from the very beginning that part of his creation process would include man. So man is an integral part of God's creation work.

[11:36] We back up to Genesis 1. Now, Genesis 1 is a stating of the creation of the world and Genesis 2 is a restating of it. So we can kind of come back and forth between the two and learn some things about each of the telling.

Genesis 1.26. Verse 26 and following, Then God said, Let us make man in our image after our likeness and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.

So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him male and female. He created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

So God intended to give to us the earth under his reign to rule over it. To make it after his likeness.

Genesis 2.15 says, The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to keep it. This mandate then in the world to protect the world and to progress the world around us.

[12:58] We're intended to be workers as bearers of God's image. And then third from Genesis. Remember, I'm trying to tie this for you.

Paul knows these things as he's exhorting the Thessalonian believers and us. Thirdly, sin made work into work.

Sin made work into work. Made it hard. Brought about great challenge in its doing. Genesis 3.17 and following.

This is after the fall. God says to Adam, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it. Cursed is the ground because of you.

In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall bring forth for you. And you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground.

[14:02] For out of it you are taken. For you are dust. And to dust you shall return. So we see that work was intended to happen but it was this joyful, this resting in the garden and working.

And sin made that immensely difficult. Right? Weeds come forth. If you have ever tried to garden, it is not an easy thing to keep weeds out of your garden.

This is a result of sin. You can curse the ground for sin when you're trying to garden. And this work has become work.

Right? It's become this challenging and difficult thing that we undertake. So we have a God who works and as image bearers of God redeemed by the blood of His Son, we work.

We work under the curse but we work that our God would be known. So it does not matter what you do. Whether you are a school teacher, a nurse, an accountant, a truck driver, a construction worker, a social service provider, a salesman, a fast food employee, a student, a housewife, a missionary, or a pastor, God intends for you to bear His image in the way you do what you do.

[15 : 26] Beloved, we ought to be the very best of workers. Our employers ought to be so pleased to have us on their team and lament the day that we move on to different work.

In all of our working, we ought to seek the betterment of the world in which we live. Like, as if, we are pushing back the effects of the curse.

And we are to do this to the glory of God. Paul wrote in Colossians 3, verse 23, whatever you do, work heartily, that is to say, with all of yourself, with every part of your being.

Work heartily as for the Lord and not for men. You can do the most mundane of things to the glory of God.

Verse 24, Paul goes on to say in Colossians 3, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward.

[16 : 31] You are serving the Lord Christ. And it doesn't matter in what thing you do this. Martin Luther famously said, a milkmaid can milk cows to the glory of God.

Your work is not insignificant and your work rightly done has heavenly reward. Richard Baxter, who was a Puritan pastor, and if you want to read about work and work ethic, the Puritans are wonderful, wonderful people to read.

He said, and this is on the front of your bulletin, be laborious and diligent in your callings. He means your work, wherever God has placed you to do work. And if you cheerfully serve God in the labor of your hands with a heavenly and obedient mind, it will be as acceptable to him as if you had spent all that time in more spiritual exercises.

So, Paul exhorts us in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 to not be idle, but to work diligently. Secondly, do not reject apostolic teaching and example, but be doers of the Word.

Now, you may see why I gave you notes. Do not reject apostolic teaching and example, but be doers of the Word. The Lord God has spoken by the pens and the lives of the apostles, and we ought to be very careful not to reject their teaching.

[18 : 11] Some in the Thessalonian church were doing this very thing. Paul says in verse 6, we should keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and, what, not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.

And then in verse 7, he says that we ought to imitate them. Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy set an example for the Thessalonian believers and for us.

In verse 9, Paul says that they had a right to be paid for their work, but that they earned their own way. Why? To give you in ourselves an example to imitate.

Paul, as an apostle, was commissioned by Jesus himself to preach and set in writing doctrines for the church. We do well when we take up and read and obey.

So, do not reject apostolic teaching and example. Be doers of the word. This is a weighty thing that's been given to us. Third, do not be a freeloader, but pay your own way.

[19 : 33] I can think of all kinds of application in a group of college students. Do not be a freeloader, but pay your own way.

Paul exhorts that anyone who is able to work ought to work. Now, just to be clear, your schooling can be work.

You are in a place preparing, working for the next thing you're doing. But, verse 8 states, we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it.

And, verse 10, if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. And, in verse 11, the idle person is commanded and encouraged to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

And, in verse 12, the one who is earning their own living is encouraged to not grow weary in doing good. Not grow weary of doing this good thing of earning your own way.

[20 : 36] Now, Paul's concern at this point is not for the one who is unable to work. There are many varied reasons that a person may be unable to work and we won't get into those reasons.

His concern is not for those people. His concern is for those who can work but won't. In 2 Corinthians chapter 8 verses 1 through 5, Paul commends the generosity of the Macedonian churches.

Listen to verse 1 following 2 Corinthians 8. We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia. For in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. So we have the Macedonian churches who are impoverished giving generously. Verse 3, And this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

And so what Paul is referring to is the great deal of suffering that was going on in Jerusalem, the persecution that had already come upon Christians there. They were losing homes. They were jailed.

[22 : 00] people unable to work were being provided for by churches in the region. And the Macedonian churches, even out of their poverty, gave with great generosity for this.

The point I'm making is that Paul is not talking about those unable to work. He's talking about those who can but won't.

There's a general reality built into the fabric of our world that our provision comes through work. And if we enable someone by giving them a handout who can work for themselves, we're not helping them.

A couple of examples. Proverbs 12.11 says, whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense. Proverbs 13.4, the soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.

So, do not be a freeloader, but as long as you can and you're able to do so, pay your own way.

Number four, do not be burdensome, but be generous.

[23 : 18] Do not be burdensome, but be generous. Now, this point is closely related to the previous one. We could say, do not be a burdensome freeloader, but here I want to add the positive exhortation to be generous.

Work diligently to earn a living for yourself, but also to give and to give well to meet the needs of those who cannot.

Please, by all means, go and make lots and lots and lots of money and spend it on the kingdom of God. We need, in the church, people who will do this work.

The negative part of the exhortation is found in verse 8. In their setting example, they intended that we might not be a burden to any of you, so do not be burdensome.

To establish the positive part of the exhortation, we need to step outside of our text a bit and look at some of Paul's other teachings. So, it's implied there.

[24 : 27] We don't want to be a burden to any of you. We could then give instead, but let's look at some other places where Paul teaches this. So, Acts chapter 20, verse 34 and 35, Paul is saying his farewell to the Ephesian elders and says, you yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me.

Paul was a maker of tents, so he did this along his missionary journeying. Verse 35, in all these things, I have shown you that by working hard in this way, we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, it is more blessed to give than to receive.

Another place, in Ephesians 4, 28, Paul exhorts, let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor.

Now, there's a lot of conjecture about who is specifically being referred to here, the general thief, but many understand, believe, that who Paul is addressing are those within the church that were being idle and receiving benefit from the church financially, but they could work.

They were getting welfare checked from the church, but they could offer something to God's society. So let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, and I love the why, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

[26 : 06] So Paul exhorts here, the Thessalonian believers and us, to not be burdensome, but to be generous. Fifth, do not be a busybody, but build up others.

Do not be a busybody, but build up others. Not busying themselves with work, some of the Thessalonians were becoming meddling.

Verse 11 states, for we hear that some among you walk in idleness. It's a way of life for you. Not busy at work, but busy bodies. The original language could be translated, not busy, but busy bodies.

I think the ESV translators are trying to help us understand what they're supposed to be busy with, right? In the context, they're supposed to be busy with work rather than with other things.

But in the Greek, not busy, but busy bodies, and it's a play on words, and Paul is clever and likes to do these types of things. So he's saying, not ergo zomenos, but peri ergo zomenos.

[27 : 18] That's what he's saying to them. He's playing with two words that are similar, but twisted on them. So you're not being busy. Rather than that, you're being busy bodies. These busy bodies were becoming troublesome.

They were not building up the church, but busying themselves in other people's business. In 1 Timothy 5, Paul instructs Timothy not to enroll young widows in the financial care of the church. And I kind of love that it's anyone under 60. So the young widows should not be enrolled in the financial care of the church because, he says in 1 Timothy 5, 13, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busy bodies, saying what they should not.

He's saying if you free up their time by providing for them, rather than them being remarried, having a livelihood in that way, you free up all their time by just writing the checks for their bills for them. This is what they're learning how to do. We're seeing this as a pattern of a thing that's happening. Ladies, this is not an indictment on you particularly. This is for all of us. Don't be idle because you're going to become a busybody.

[28 : 35] So, work. make yourself too busy to trouble yourself with the matters that are not yours to be troubled with. I have seen time and time again in this fellowship people with way too much time on their hands causing so much trouble.

If you're having a difficult time busying yourself, let me know. I have work that you can be busy with. People will come to me with troubles and I say, what do you want me to do about that?

And I have no answer for that kind of thing, but they just want to share this is what's going on. Okay, well let's pray for this person and if you think you have a responsibility you can act. I don't think you do though.

We need to be busier very often. We are meant to build each other up, not tear each other down. So, do not be a busy body, but build up others.

And sixth, do not tolerate what dishonors God, but admonish the idol. Do not tolerate what dishonors God, but admonish the idol.

[29 : 53] And this is Paul's primary exhortation in this text. It's really the big picture of what he's trying to say here to the Thessalonians believers. He is concerned that those who claim to follow Christ are not living in a way that is honoring to him and he takes this matter very seriously.

So, a couple of verses kind of in cap our text. Verse 6 and then verses 14 and 15. Verse 6 he says, Now we command you brothers in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us.

So, here's a person not obeying the command. Keep away from them. In verse 14 and 15, if anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, again, not obeying the command, take note of that person and have nothing to do with him that he may be ashamed.

Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. And the church should discipline the idol for the sake of the!

the church in the world. Out of fear that someone here does not know what proper discipline looks like. Maybe church discipline is a distant concept for you.

[31 : 10] It's likely in our current church culture that it is. Or possibly you've been part of a church that's really tried but handled it so poorly. I want to talk you through the proper process of church discipline which is found in Matthew chapter 18 verses 15 through 17 so please join me there.

Here's a Paul's exhortation do not tolerate what dishonors God but admonish the idol. This is how we do that. Jesus instructs us how it is that we're meant to discipline one another in the church for the sake of holiness and it's a multi step process it's a four step process in fact.

So beginning in verse 15 Jesus says if your brother sins against you now I believe that that he's he's referring to both sins that are directly against you right it would be my responsibility to handle somebody's sin against me somebody gets angry with me and yells at me that I should be the one that goes to them and is restorative and corrective but I also think that includes in a broader sense those sins that are just egregious to the Lord right that we are we're brothers we're part of this family fellowship and if there are things that are happening in somebody's life that are tearing at my witness then that's a sin against me you could disagree with me on that point but I do think that Jesus means to include those with the particular situation so if your brother sins against you step one go and tell him his fault between you and him alone if he listens to you you have gained your brother right so this step in discipline in a healthy church happens all the time all the time we're going to one another we're helping each other check our own blind spots so often we don't see our own!

so in our text today maybe you've found yourself being a bit lackadaisical and maybe that's because somebody pointed it out somebody said hey man we're working together and I just think

that you're stealing from the company you're on Facebook all the time when you're supposed to be making sales calls and you're corrected in this way and if you're a follower of Jesus Christ we hope that you repent you're telling me about this thing so you've gained your brother verse 15 Paul says in our text sorry not Matthew 18 but back in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 he says do not regard him as an enemy but warn him as a brother warn him tell him that his error may mean that he's not in Christ so he needs to repent he needs to see this in his life 1 Thessalonians 5 14

Paul wrote and we urge you brothers admonish the idle encourage the faint hearted help the weak be patient with them all so this is a restorative thing right we do it out of love and concern for one another we come alongside people people want to get so uptight about this kind of stuff don't judge unless you be judged they take scripture out of context when Jesus goes on there to say be sure to remove the plank from your own eyes so that you see clearly you remove the speck from your brothers right there's a process by which we are meant to be encouraging each other along in holiness so that's step one if your brother sins against you go tell him his fault secondly!

[35 : 17] Jude says if he refuses to listen to them we come to the third step which is to tell it to the church and

Paul is talking about a local congregation covenanted together members of a fellowship together that take the word of God seriously and take sin seriously and want to see people restored! in the process. They may not receive well the things that we say to them, but we want to seek their restoration. And then if he refuses to listen even to the church, Jesus says, even this institution that I've created that has authority to do this work, if he refuses to listen even to the church, this is the fourth and final step, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. And Jesus there is saying, let him be to you as one outside of the faith. Paul says the same, right? So this is what Paul means in verse six, when he says, we command you brothers in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you receive from us. And in verse 14, if anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. And the point is that the church says to this person, we take your sin very seriously. And as such, we cannot associate with you as the church. We can't allow you to bear the name of Jesus Christ any longer because we have concern for your soul. And so this process is an extremely healthy thing for the life of a church, right? I hope I'm speaking to you and you're a member of our church and you can say, yeah, it is. If you're not, you need to be part of a local fellowship, if not here, someplace else that practices church discipline. It's an extremely important part of what even defines a local church. This particular sin that Paul is addressing, this one that needs to be corrected, it's not to be tolerated, right? It's so dishonoring to God, this form of idleness, right?

This mooching off of others, the burdensome freeloading, this lack of generosity, this self-serving attitude, that it needs admonishment. He writes in 1 Timothy 5.8, to give you an idea of the seriousness of this. He says there, if anyone does not provide for his relatives and especially for members of his household. So here we have a person, he's speaking now of a man who is idle, not providing for his own household, right? Not providing for his own household or those that need help. So maybe an aged grandmother that needs his help. He's not providing for them. He says here, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever, right? Oh, he's got emotions about an idle man who doesn't provide for his family. And so it's a serious matter. And so we ought not tolerate what dishonors God, but admonish the idle. We ought not be idle, but work diligently. We ought not reject apostolic teaching and example, but be doers of the word. We ought not be freeloaders, but pay our own ways. We ought not be burdensome, but rather be generous. We ought not be busybodies, but we ought to build up others. Beloved by God's grace, he is at work in our working, whatever that work may be.

Let us be a people who work diligently to the glory of God. Let's pray together.