



Warning Against Idleness

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13 In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.

If you are in the workforce, chances are that from time to time you catch yourself dreaming of that magical day when you will finally retire. We imagine that in retirement we will have unlimited freedom and ample funds, with no schedules, no bosses, just endless vacation. However, if you talk to many retirees, they will tell you that the euphoria only lasts a couple weeks, then the boredom sets in.

Truth is much as we complain about work, we all need something to do. Although all our physical and intellectual labors are now frustrated by sin, work is nonetheless a blessing and gift of God just as it was in the beginning (cf. Eccl. 5:19). Since the Garden of Eden God has desired and hardwired humanity to be actively and productively engaged with his creation, and so long as we are physically and cognitively able, God would have us remain active for several reasons. For one, work allows us to produce something good and beneficial for others. As Martin Luther wrote, "We are all God's masks." Through our labor the Lord provides for and cares for the needs of others. Work is also necessary to maintain this fallen world that is in constant need of upkeep and repair. Lastly, (and this is the focus God's Word today) work keeps us from idleness and the many temptations it arouses. Reflect on your own life and you'll find it's true what they say, "Idle hands are the devil's playmate." Having extended periods of time with nothing at all to do is not healthy for us physically, mentally, or spiritually. The temptations of body, mouth, and mind that accompany empty time are many: laziness, gluttony, drunkenness, lust, despair, and the list goes on. In these verses Paul chose to focus on sins of the mouth, in particular, being a busybody, that is one who puts their nose into everyone else's business. Such unwanted inquiries lead to resentment, anger, and gossip, which poison the life and fellowship of the church.

Rather, insofar as we're able, God would have us strive for self-sufficiency so that we can supply for ourselves and help those in need. Elsewhere Paul tells Timothy that the church should only care for those widows who are truly in need and otherwise their families should take care of them themselves (cf. 1 Timothy 5). Once again Paul and his missionary companions set the tone by their godly example. While Paul insists they had every right to expect material compensation in return for their ministry among the Thessalonians, they made a point of working on the side so that they would not be a burden to anyone, and they passed on the simple dictum that anyone who chooses not to work shouldn't eat either. Paul advises believers to avoid any fellow-Christian who is idle, in the hopes that they will repent while simultaneously focusing our energy and attention and filling up our time with doing what is good and right.

Prayer: *Lord God, whatever tasks and responsibilities you lay before me today, let me perform my work vigorously and cheerfully, to your glory and the good of my neighbor. Amen.*