

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Work: A Noble Christian Duty, Part 1

Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 3:6

Code: 53-14

This morning in our time in God's Word, we return to that wonderful little epistle we've been studying, 2 Thessalonians chapter 3. While I was away, I wanted to spend some time in study of the passage in this text because I want to complete this wonderful book, and the text before us in chapter 3 proved to be a fascinating and interesting one to me as I studied it. We're going to be looking this morning, at least initially, at verses 6 through 15 – a very, very interesting little section; in fact, quite unique in the New Testament, dealing with the subject of work – work. In fact, I suppose I could title the message, "Work: A Christian Duty."

I don't know if you think about work like that. You probably don't. Some of you think about work as a sort of a drudgery that you have to do. Whether it's your work at a job that you possess or whether it's domestic work in the home, it's just something that's necessary and you do it and it isn't particularly joyous but it's there and it has to be done. Some of you think about work in relationship to money. You think about work as a way in which you can purchase your pleasures, if you will, purchase the lifestyle that you're after. Some of you think about work as a way to fulfill your ego and achieve what you feel you need to achieve so that you can gain some accolades from the people around you. Some of you think about work as a way to fulfill your ambition, a way to fulfill your gifts and skills, a way to accomplish some meaningful purposeful thing with your life. Some of you think about work as a way to serve people, as a way to make life easier for some folks, as offering a service rendered to them that can be a source of pleasure or enjoyment to them.

There are a lot of ways you can look at work, but I guess if we were really to sort of sum them up, it might be a long time before we ever heard anybody say, "I look at my work as a way to serve God." That doesn't seem to be a fairly popular perspective on work, even among Christians, and, in fact, it should be. In spite of what most people might think, in spite of what most people might feel, work is one of the most honorable and noble things a Christian can do. In fact, in the very beginning, God established that man would earn his bread by the sweat of his brow, Genesis 3:19. Right after the fall, God said, "You're going to work. You're going to work your sustenance."

On the other hand, Scripture has a lot to say about lazy people. Proverbs says, "Poor is he who works with a negligent hand." It also says, "The soul of the lazy person craves but gets nothing." It also says, "The lazy person doesn't plow after the autumn, so he begs during the harvest and has nothing." It says, "The desire of the lazy person puts him to death for his hands refuse to work." And in Proverbs 24, the lazy person says, "A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to

rest,” and as a result, he’s destitute.

What should be the proper view of work? How are we to understand it as regards Christians? Is it a secular thing or is it a sacred thing? Well, if you go back in to the history, say, of the Jews, the Jews looked at work as a secular thing. The Jews didn’t understand the sacred duty of work; they saw it merely as a common, menial sort of human second-class effort whereas religious duties were first-class, sacred, divine, noble things. The Talmud, for example, has a very interesting prayer in it. The Talmud is the codification of Jewish tradition and law, and it has a very interesting prayer that was prayed by the scribes. A scribe, you’ll remember, was a person who devoted his entire life to studying Scripture. That’s all he did in his life and he was supported by the Jewish community to do nothing but study the law.

This is a scribal prayer, listen to it: “I thank Thee, O Lord my God, that Thou hast given me my lot with those who sit in the house of learning and not with those who sit at the street corners. For I am early to work and they are early to work. I am early to work on the words of the law, and they are early to work on things of no importance. I weary myself and they weary themselves. I weary myself and profit thereby, and they weary themselves to no profit. I run and they run. I run toward the life of the age to come and they run toward the pit,” end quote.

It’s really not a very good view of work, is it? People who get up early for no reason, who work to produce nothing, who run to the pit of death pointlessly. What a narrow and what a painful view and what a prideful view. Assuming that because you spend your time working on the law of God you’re somehow better couldn’t be further from the truth, and yet it not only pervaded Judaism, sad to say it’s even found its way in to the church. Any trip to Europe will confirm this to you if you get around to the normal tour of castles and churches – we call it smells and bells – and they introduce you to the history of these places. You inevitably intersect with monarchies and religious orders.

Eusebius started a lot of this stuff in the fourth century, he was an early church father. Listen to what he wrote. “There are two ways of life given by the law of Christ to His church. One is above nature and beyond common human living, holy and permanently separate from the common customary life of man. It devotes itself to the service of God alone. Such is the perfect form of the Christian life,” end quote. Now, what Eusebius was saying was that the first manner of life is Christian ministry, Christian service, devoting yourself to the service of God alone, and that is the perfect form of the Christian life. Then in a second paragraph he said this, “And the other, the second, more humble, more human, permits man to have minds for farming, for trade, and the other secular interests, and a kind of secondary grade of piety is attributed to them,” end quote.

What Eusebius said is first-class Christians are those who serve God alone; the second-class Christians are those who have secular employment. So if you want to be a first-class Christian, then you must devote your life to serving God alone, and it was that kind of teaching that led to

monasticism, that kind of teaching that bred all of those abbeys with all of those monks, all of those monasteries with all of those priests who were in there for decades of their life, contemplating their spiritual navel, as it were, looking inward and constantly asserting their own humility before God and spending time in this continual study of Scripture like the scribes had in Judaism before them.

A visit to a monastery yields some very interesting things. I visited a number of them and again even on this trip visited more of them. A typical day for a monk was up at 3:00 a.m. for the first service. You say, "Why at 3:00 a.m.?" Just to make you miserable because there was certain penance in misery. You didn't want to sleep more than two or three hours – you might be thought to be carnal – so they roused them all at 3:00 a.m. and they had their first Mass, they put them back at 4:00, and they got them up at 5:00. They had their second Mass, and before the day was over, they had five more of them. In between they spent their time in prayer and reading the Scripture, and they did that for the years and the decades of their life, believing that that in and of itself made them a perfect Christian or an elevated Christian, whereas anyone outside farming or doing a trade or working in a business was a second-class Christian.

The idea that work somehow made you second-class, that secular, useless, lower employment put you beneath the religious order found its way into the church so formidably that it never really got rooted out or even began to be rooted out until the time of the Reformation in the 16th century with Martin Luther and John Calvin attacking it. It's still around in Catholicism, but the Reformation dealt some pretty heavy blows against it. Martin Luther said there is absolutely no difference before God, though there may be before men, between one who preaches the Word of God and one who washes dishes. There's no such thing, he said, as the sacred and the secular in terms of employment. We understand the difference between preaching and washing dishes as it affects men, but in terms of service before God, there's no difference for one could preach the truth of God from an impure motive and God would be displeased and one could wash dishes with a motive of glorifying Christ and God would be highly pleased.

Paul faces a wrong attitude toward work in this text. I don't know whether it was because there was Jewish influence in this young church. I don't know whether some of these people had been converted out of Judaism and they were saying, "Look, in Judaism the highest level of spiritual life was to be a scribe and spend all your time studying the law, and so I imagine that's the highest kind of Christianity, so I'm just going to spend all my time studying the law and I'm not going to work." It may have been not so much the Jewish influence as the Greek influence. I don't know if you remember this – you surely do – but all of the menial labor in the Roman Empire was done by whom? Slaves.

The whole Greek world operated on the basis of slaves, and that mentality had found its way into the church, no doubt, and maybe there were some freemen who now had a problem because before they were Christians, they operated in some philosophical school or they taught in some place or maybe

they were associated in some business where they did all the dreaming and the scheming and everybody did all the labor, and now they became a Christian and they lost their job and they lost their position as teacher or philosopher, and now they're on their own, but it's beneath them to work. They've never worked and now, when they don't have the income that came from their prior occupation, they're thrust into the situation where they need to work and they're just above that, they're not about to work. They've always been freemen, "Freemen don't do labor, slaves do labor, we won't work."

And then you had another problem, as if that wasn't enough, coming from the Jewish culture and the Gentile culture. Somebody had come to the Thessalonian church, according to chapter 2 verse 2, and told them they were in the day of the Lord which is the very end time and Jesus was coming very soon, and it may have been that some of them were saying, "Look, if Jesus is coming, if we're in the day of the Lord and God's fury is about to fall and the Lord is about to return, we don't want to get involved in work, we need to evangelize. We need to do spiritual ministry. Work will just take up our hours, and a perishing world on the brink of a returning Christ, we can't be fussing with that, we need to be evangelizing."

And there may have just flatly been some folks who said, "I don't like to work." Just plain old lazy. So it may have been the Jewish influence that the really elevated religious people study the Scriptures and they're supported for that or it may have been the Gentile mentality that says freemen don't work or it may have been the eschatological end times mentality that says, "Jesus is coming, we can't be doing work, we've got to be doing evangelism" or it may have been some folks who just said, "Hey, we're lazy. Why, we don't want to work." Furthermore, these people who were just flat-out lazy would know that the Bible taught that the people who had were supposed to give it to the people who didn't have, and they classified themselves as the self-appointed poor and said, "We are now your charity cases and you'll take care of us because that's what Jesus instructed you to do."

Whatever the reason, there were people who weren't working. It fascinates me that Paul doesn't tell us the reason. You want to know why? It doesn't matter what the reason is. None of it is valid. I mean we would immediately reject the reason "Well, I'm lazy, I don't want to work, so meet my needs, you're supposed to take care of the poor." We would reject that immediately. Yes, we know you're supposed to take care of the poor, but that's the poor who are poor because they can't help but be poor. The people who would work but can't find work or who can't work because they're infirm or disabled and we are to meet their needs but not the people who can work and have opportunity to work. So we would discount that, and we would discount probably the Gentile mentality that says "I'm too good to work." We would say those are ignoble excuses. We'll push those aside.

We might think a little longer about the other two and say, "Well, it would be a lofty way to spend your life to just do nothing but study the law, and we are living in the return of Jesus Christ potentially, and maybe it is right that we ought to just dump our job and run out and evangelize." We would give that a

little more credence and say, “Well, that’s a little more noble excuse for not working,” but it fascinates me that Paul doesn’t tell us the reason. Do you know why? Because it doesn’t matter; they’re all invalid. The very fact that he makes no comment is a comment. We don’t know why they wouldn’t work. We don’t know whether it was just flat laziness or eschatology. We don’t know whether it was some lofty desire to spend all their time in Bible study or whether it was some passionate zeal to do all their time in evangelism. It didn’t matter. These people were a problem.

So starting in verse 6, look what he says to them. “Now, we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you keep aloof from every brother who leads a disorderly or unruly life” – and in this context, it means “who won’t work” – “and not according to the tradition which you received from us, for you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example because we didn’t act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone’s bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you. Not because we do not have the right to this but in order to offer to offer ourselves as a model for you that you might follow our example. For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: If anyone will not work, neither let him eat. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all but acting like busybodies. Now, such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread, but as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good, and if anyone doesn’t obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that man and do not associate with him so that he may be put to shame, and yet do not regard him as an enemy but admonish him as a brother.”

Now, it becomes obvious that there’s some people living an unruly, undisciplined, disorderly life and what it comes down to is they’re not working and they’re meddling busybodies fussing around and not working and then casting themselves on everybody else to have their food need met, and the apostle is directing this passage at these people who won’t work. It is a very unique passage, directed for folks and for the church in which folks exist who will not work.

You see, our Christian faith has sanctified every occupation. There isn’t any difference between the secular and the sacred, there isn’t any at all. The church should remember that Jesus was a preacher for three years but a carpenter for at least 20. That sanctifies work. All of life is God’s. All of it is for His glory.

Look for a moment with me at Ephesians chapter 6, and I can illustrate this to you in the inspired text. Ephesians chapter 6 tells us every job, every occupation, every work falls within a believer’s sacred duty. There’s no such thing as a secular job for a Christian. There’s no such thing as a secular anything because everything is to be done to the glory of God, but look at Ephesians 6 verse 5: “Slaves” – or servants, it could be employees – “be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh with fear and trembling in the sincerity of your heart as to Christ.” Okay? Work under your employer with fear – that’s reverence – trembling, understanding that he controls your destiny,

sincerity as if you were serving Christ. Verse 6: “Not with eye service” – that is, just working because he’s watching – “not as a men-pleaser” – not just pleasing him – “but as slaves of Christ doing the Will of God from the heart. With good will render service as to the Lord and not to men.”

In other words, in your job you’re serving the Lord with your attitude and your effort. Verse 8, “Knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.” Whether you’re an employee who is a slave, whether you’re a worker who is a freeman, the work you give rendered to the Lord, the Lord will repay. Your service is to Him, not your boss. In Colossians 3, parallel passage, verse 22, we read the same thing. “Employees” – or slaves – “in all things” – Colossians 3:22 – “obey those who are your masters on earth, not with external service as those who merely please men, but with sincerity of heart fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, do your work heartily as for the Lord rather than for men.” Now, follow verse 24: “Knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance.” The Lord will reward you. Here’s the sum of it: “It is the Lord Christ whom you serve.” Your job is not a secular job, it is a spiritual duty. You are serving the Lord with your attitude and your diligence. You’re serving the Lord. You’re doing it unto His honor and to His glory. You’re even serving mankind for what you do provides a service to man. It helps them in their life.

So Paul is saying to the Ephesians and saying to the Colossians, work is a sacred duty not a secular one. Work is sacred in the sense that it is done to the Lord whether you’re washing dishes, scrubbing floors, taking care of children at home and maintaining the house, or whether you’re in the financial marketplace doing accounting and bookkeeping for a company, or whether you’re delivering mail or teaching school or driving a truck, or whether you’re operating a business, or whether you’re working in sales, whether you’re developing strategy for marketing, or whether you’re some kind of an expert who acts as a consultant in a unique field – whatever it is that you’re doing, it is a service rendered to the Lord. He has gifted you. He has granted you talent. He has given you the power to get wealth, as it says in Deuteronomy, through means of that, and He has allowed you the opportunity to provide your sustenance through that talent, ability, and experience and capability that you have, but it is to be done as if you were serving Him, the one who gave you that as the means by which you can earn your living – particularly, is this not true for Christians? Everything you do is a sacred trust.

You say, “You mean to tell me that what I do is as important before God as what you do?” Yes. You say, “You mean washing dishes in my house as unto the Lord is the same as you preaching as unto the Lord?” Yes, not in its impact for evangelism on men, not in its certain instructiveness in regards to Scripture, not before men is it necessarily the same in kind but before God it is the same for it is your service rendered to His glory. That’s the point and the Thessalonians didn’t grasp it. Now, frankly they should have. I mean go back to 1 Thessalonians for a moment, chapter 4.

First Thessalonians chapter 4 and verse 10, at the very end of verse 10, he says, “We urge you, brethren, to excel still more.” You’re doing well but you need to do better. And then in verse 11 he

says why. “Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life” – quit running around all over the place, settle down – “attend to your own business” – stay out of other people’s business – “and work with your hands.” Now, what he’s talking about here is work. In verse 12, he says, “So that you may behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.” Work, don’t be a meddler, don’t be a busybody, don’t be fussing around with other people’s business, get your life ordered, get it brought into control, attend to your own business and do your own work so that – verse 12 – you don’t have any needs. That is very important to the unity of the church, and it is important to see your work as honoring to God.

So he says that in 1 Thessalonians 4, so he’s already told this to them, but would you notice what else he says at the end of verse 11? “Just as we commanded you.” So in the first letter, this isn’t the first time they’ve heard this. When he was there he must have confronted it and commanded them about it. When he came into town and he founded the church, obviously it was a problem from the beginning, which leads me to think that they carried in this Gentile freeman mentality and then somehow compounded it by the anticipation of the return of Christ. “It’s beneath me and it’s not the priority as we’re near the return of Christ,” and Paul had instructed them when he was there, “Work, go to work. This is a command from God.”

They apparently didn’t obey it, and now a few weeks later, he writes this letter back – 1 Thessalonians – and he says again, “You must do this as we commanded you.” Now you come to 2 Thessalonians and he has to repeat it a third time because apparently they are stubborn, they are obstinate, and they’re not about to go to work. It doesn’t seem to matter what he says, they’re not going to work.

This kind of stubbornness needs to be dealt with, and so as he writes here, he writes in a disciplinary way. Verse 6 is really discipline. He is commanding the church to keep aloof from these people who won’t work. You say, “Well, now wait a minute, doesn’t the Scripture tell us we’re to help those people who are poor?” Again I say to you, people who would work but can’t find work, people who would work but don’t have the physical ability to work, people who are ill and can’t do their work, their needs must be met. He’s not talking about those kinds of people, he’s talking about able-bodied people with opportunity. Obviously, Acts 4, Acts 2 even, and Acts 4, Acts 5, Acts 6, the early church, there was a sharing with the poor saints in Jerusalem, and Paul spent months collecting an offering from Gentile churches to take back to poor saints in Jerusalem who would have worked if they could have. We’re not talking about that. What we’re talking about is the deadbeats, the people who could but won’t.

So in this , Paul is really going to motivate them. You can imagine when this letter was read in the Thessalonian church, everybody knew who they were talking about – everybody knew. When Paul said, “We command you, brethren,” and so forth, they knew who was the target of this. In fact, I think Paul knew who they were, he just doesn’t say. So they were exposed to the whole church when the letter was read, and they would have heard this read and its inherent motivation. Paul lays out in

verses 6 to 15 six incentives to go to work. Six motivations, six compulsions to get these believers who won't work to go to work. Here are the six – disfellowship – disfellowship – example, survival, harmony, shame, and love. Disfellowship, example, survival, harmony, shame, and love. Now, this morning, we're just going to look at the first one, disfellowship, and then next week we'll see the rest, and they are absolutely fascinating insights.

First one, incentive number one, disfellowship. Verse 6, "Now, we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you keep aloof from every brother who leads an unruly life," and the obvious interpretation of that is they don't work and, therefore, they're these busybodies all over the place, "and not according to the tradition which you received from us."

Now, the verse is very strong, and what it calls for is the church to separate itself from these Christians who won't work – separate yourself from them. This is tough. If they're the lazy ones who won't work just because they're lazy, they depend on these people. If they're the people who have this sort of noble view that they should be studying the Bible and evangelizing and, therefore, they won't work, they're going to be expecting these people to look at them as if they're heroes and support them. And what he says is, "Cut yourself off." That verb, keep aloof, is a very unusual word and it was used in secular Greek to speak of furling the sails. You unfurl the sail, you open it up. You furl it, you roll it back in. Pull yourselves in from them. It came to mean that and it is a good translation in the NAS, "Keep aloof, keep your distance, keep separate." And the words are very strong. He's not saying, "You know, it might be a really good strategy if you guys just kind of cut them off a little bit so they can feel the alienation and isolation." No, no, he doesn't say it's a good idea. In verse 6 he says, "We command you," and he uses a military term.

If there is somebody who doesn't work, we command you, and here he's sort of scooping up Silas and Timothy with himself as noted in the first verse of the first chapter, they were there when he wrote. "We command you, brethren," and then he adds another heavy-duty shot to this, "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ," the full name of the Lord, the Son of God, saying, "I am standing on Christ's authority, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, consistent with His person and work and Will, the Will of the sovereign Lord, we give you a military command not to be disobeyed that carries all the authority of the living Lord Jesus Christ in it and we tell you: keep separate from these people." It's very stern. Cut them off. Disfellowship.

It's amazing. No doubt the apostle Paul had gotten word that they had not responded to the teaching when he was there, and they hadn't responded to the first letter, and now he's got to tell them the third time to do this, and now it's time for discipline. I mean the first time it's instruction, the second time it's exhortation, but the third time it's discipline. Maybe he had heard from Timothy who had made a visit there and Timothy had come back and say, "Those people still aren't working, Paul. You better say something to them, they're still not working, and the rest of the folks are getting a little upset about it." And it's also affecting the testimony of the church because they've got these people

who aren't producing and they're just sponging, and maybe it was somebody who traveled along those trade routes that ran from Thessalonica to Corinth, where Paul was when he wrote this, and some of them have told him, "Paul, those people in the Thessalonian church have a problem. There are some folks there who won't work."

And so now it's discipline. "I mean I told you once when I was there, and I told you again, and now it's discipline time," and he says, "I want drastic action. I want you to cut yourselves off from them. I want you to alienate yourself, keep aloof from" – notice this, comprehensive, every brother who leads an unruly – that's an out-of-step life, disorderly, *ataktos* in Greek. It's a military term, means you're out of rank, out of line, out of order, and what was their out-of-order behavior? Laziness, they were loafers, and it was flagrant because they'd been told. "And I have given you," what he calls at the end of verse 6, "the tradition which you received from us" tradition simply being a term to sum up apostolic teaching. It was teaching and it became a body of truth, tradition to be passed on. Tradition doesn't have to be unscriptural.

Sometimes we talk about the Scripture plus tradition, but there is a scriptural tradition. There is a biblical tradition. There is an apostolic tradition that was passed on. They had received the word from Paul when he came at first, 1 Thessalonians 2:13, he says, "You received from us the word of God's message and you accepted it, not as the word of men but for what it really is, the Word of God." When we first came and we taught, you took it as the Word of God, you received the tradition and you held it and you believed it, and we gave you instruction – in chapter 4 of the first letter – as how you ought to walk and please God and you received it, and now this you haven't received. You've got some people who won't take this, so if they haven't received this tradition that we gave about work, separate from them – separate from them. No more Lord's table, no more worship, no more home Bible study, no more fellowship – separate.

To fit this into Matthew 18, the pattern of discipline, this would be the third step. Matthew 18:15 says if your brother sins, go to him, if he repents, you've gained your brother – that's step one, one-to-one, you go to the person who sins. If he doesn't, step two, take two or three witnesses with you, go to him, confront him again, hoping he'll repent. If he doesn't, tell the church, step three. Step three is to tell the church. What does the church do? Separate, alienate, still step three. Look down at verse 15. Step four, treat him like a tax collector and a pagan. This isn't step four because in verse 15 you admonish him as a what? As a brother. He's still in the fellowship, but the whole church is going to cut him off from normal life in the church and only confront him about his sin – or her if it happens to be a lazy woman.

So he's saying you're at step three, really. It's time for you to cut these people off from the life of the church if they don't obey, cut them off from fellowship, disfellowship them, and when you see them, warn them, admonish them as brothers to repent, and then, of course, if they don't hear that, if they don't respond to this, then you go to step four, which is to treat them like a pagan and a tax collector

and alienate them all together and turn them over to the Lord.

Disfellowship – you don't work? Make them feel it, make them feel the alienation. You say, "You know, if I was going to write an epistle and it was only three chapters long, I think I could think of a more important issue to deal with. I mean you mean this is a big deal?" It is. God has commanded us to work. It keeps people from being busybodies. It keeps people from being unnecessary burdens to the rest of the church community. It's a serious issue. Furthermore, God has given to us capacity for work by which we are designed to give Him glory and honor and by which we are designed to serve the needs of man in the name of Christ.

Serious issue with him. He commands it. He commands it with all the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, and he says I'm commanding you to stay away from these people so they feel the pain of alienation when they don't work. God is serious about work. It is a means by which man does an honorable task to the glory of God and the benefit of his fellow man. Now, since normal true believers are going to cherish the fellowship, this kind of command to the rest of the congregation to disfellowship them should effect a change. It should be enough pain to make them say, "I think I'd better get a job. I think I'd better go to work." God wants us to obey that command.

I don't care how close we are to the second coming of Christ, there's no premium on indolence and laziness. We don't know when He's coming. I don't care how serious you might be about Bible study, you can't be off in a corner studying the Bible to your own pleasure and having other people feed you and provide your sustenance. You earn your bread by the sweat of your brow.

So the Scripture says work. It's honorable, and there's no such thing as a secular job, it's all sacred because you do it to the Lord, to His glory, to His honor and for the benefit of mankind, and if you don't do it and the church has gone to you once, like Paul did, and gone to you twice, like Paul did, it's now time for the third step, which is tell the whole church to cut them off. No more fellowship. That's serious.

Well, there are five more incentives that are absolutely amazingly practical. We'll have to wait until next time to see those.

Father, thank You for this wonderful little section of Scripture which reminds us of the happy privilege and duty of work and gives us clear understanding that there's no secular, sacred dichotomy but whatever we do, we really do to Your glory. Father, thank You for reminding us that we're not to be unnecessarily a burden on Your people. We're to work and provide for our own needs because this is honorable, because this is right, because You've equipped us to do that, because it's a good testimony. We thank You, too, Father, that for those in our fellowship who would work but can't, either because there's no opportunity for them at all to do anything or there's no ability there or there's illness. Lord, thank You that we can help meet their needs, and we do that joyfully. We thank You for

the special joy of Christian fellowship. Thank You for the fact that we have each other and that we're so rich because we do. We certainly would never want to be in a situation where we were cut off from each other because we wouldn't work. I thank You, too, Lord, for the fact that You allow us to work for many years and because we have much provision by Your grace, there comes a time when we no longer need to work the way we once did but we can then do things in ministry and never be a burden to Your church because we have provision that You have granted us through the years of our labors. Give us the sense of the honorable character of work and help us to even go there tomorrow as we do the tasks around us, whether it be at home or whether it be at a job somewhere, with a new commitment that this is a sacred task we do and one that brings You glory and honor and helps others. And no matter how urgent might be the spiritual thing, help us to do our work for which You have given us the ability and the opportunity and to do it heartily as unto You. We thank You for that privilege which keeps our otherwise sinful lives occupied. In Christ's name, amen.

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