

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

Work: A Noble Christian Duty, Part 3

Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 3:10-15

Code: 53-16

Well, it's time to turn again in the Word of God to 2 Thessalonians chapter 3, looking at verses 6 through 15, under the title, "Work: A Christian Duty." It fascinates me how practical the apostle Paul is. Here is a brief epistle of only three chapters. Up until chapter 3 and verse 5, it is lofty, it deals with the Lord Jesus Christ coming in righteous judgment and flaming fire revealed from heaven with His mighty angels. It deals with eternal retribution, eternal destruction. It deals with the coming of Christ to be glorified in His saints. It talks about the Rapture of the church, the gathering together. It talks about the day of the Lord, the career of antichrist and how his career will be broken. It talks about the gospel. It talks about sanctification. So many lofty, grandiose theological truths.

And then it comes squarely down to earth in verses 6 to 15 and it talks about work. How practical. That was Paul. No matter how elevated his theology became, it never left the ground. It never so elevated a man that he no longer had a responsibility in the routine of life. And it so happened in the Thessalonian church that there were Christians in the congregation who refused to do their job, to work, to earn a living. As we have said in the past studies here, this is our third, they perhaps have been influenced by some of the Jewish background of the scribes who thought that anything other than studying the law was an unworthy way to spend your life. They surely were affected by the general Greek attitude that work was demeaning and sordid and base and low and belonged only to slaves and not to freemen.

And they probably had had those predispositions somewhat exaggerated by virtue of the fact that someone had come along and told them that they were already in the day of the Lord and the return of Christ was imminent and there probably wasn't much use in doing anything other than evangelizing and studying the Word of God. And so they had given themselves to that happily because of their disdain for work anyway. Problem was, at least long term, if you can call several months long term for the Thessalonians in that Paul had dealt with it when he was there. Several months later, when he wrote them the first letter, he dealt with it, and here he is writing a second letter and dealing with it a third time. They didn't want to work. It was beneath them.

Homer, the famous Greek writer, had said that the gods hated man. And the way they demonstrated their hatred was to invent work and punish men by making them work. This kind of philosophy being existent in that time, it found its way into the lives of those people and thus, when they became converted, it found its way into the church. Becoming a Christian doesn't change everything immediately. We will always have residuals of our past, and we will always to one degree or another

be affected by our culture. And so here in this church in which so many good things had happened, a genuine conversion, a genuine godliness, they were not slack in spiritual service, they had a work of faith and a labor of love, and they did it with patience and endurance because they hoped in the return of Christ. They worked hard at ministry, but they didn't want to do the jobs that they had to do in the world, at least some of them.

And so Paul was dealing with a church that had its spiritual life on target and was doing well, excelling spiritually, but they had this one problem that dominates the church in terms of its conduct, and that was that there were people there who didn't work. They then became a burden on everybody else, and it wasn't that they couldn't work, it wasn't that they had a physical disability, it wasn't that there wasn't a job available, they refused to work, seeing it as beneath them or not a priority for those engaged in kingdom enterprises.

I suppose 25 years ago, a situation like this would have struggled to be relevant in our time then because America was a hard-working country 25 years ago. In fact, the American work ethic has always been hailed as sort of the supreme work ethic of the industrialized world. We have always sort of set the pace for productivity and enterprise – up until more recent years, that is. Last year, Charles Colson and Jack Eckerd, who heads the Eckerd Company, which operates drug stores in other parts of America, they wrote a book and the title of their book is *Why America Doesn't Work*. Now, that's really a new thought, a new concept for our culture, for our society. The subtitle is, "How the decline of the work ethic is hurting your family and future." The future of America is changing dramatically. There are other nations that are putting us to shame in terms of work habits and a work ethic.

In their book, they point out that we have in America declining rates of productivity, the loss of competitive position in some world markets, and workers who aren't working. And they concluded it is a bleak picture. And I suppose they ask the right question, the question we would all ask at that point: What has happened to the industry and productivity that made this country the marvel of the world at one time?

I think since the beginning of our nation, America, in terms of its social and economic perspective, has always exalted thrift and industry and diligence and perseverance and summed it all up to be hard work. And these were the qualities that have been cultivated and respected in society. Look at your parents. Look back to your grandparents and see how their life was and how they lived their life and what their priorities were, and you will see they're very different than the priorities of people today – very different approach to life. America's drive to work hard and America's drive to work well was more than simply good business. It wasn't really driven by materialism. It was rooted in a religious commitment. Whether you're talking about European Protestants or European Catholics or whether you're talking about Jewish immigrants, they all had a strong religious belief, they all had a strong belief in God, and they all believed that their work somehow mattered to God, that God was watching them and that there was a certain accountability about that.

What I'm saying is a religious society, no matter what the form of that religion might be, if it has a high level of accountability to God, to whatever God it is that they believe in, has a determination in how people work. But now God is not a factor in our society and our culture. We have rejected God, we have rejected the Lord Jesus Christ, we have rejected the Bible. We have rejected not only the gospel in the Scriptures, but we've rejected basically the morality of the Scripture. The general societal morality of Scripture is gone. Moral values don't mean anything today. Biblical moral values are the enemy today. We have gone through a revolution, a moral revolution, a sexual revolution that has affected our work ethics.

We have an ethical malaise all the way from the jet set corporate leaders down to the person working at the bench. The whole concept of work has so dramatically changed, it no longer has a transcendent motive. There's no longer something beyond me to make me perform at a certain level. Thus, the meaning of work has been sapped from everybody from the top to the bottom, to some degree. Obviously, some people still work harder than others.

A 1980 Gallup Poll conducted for the Chamber of Commerce found that people still believed in work-ethic values, 1980, they still believed. That's over ten years ago. Eighty-eight percent said working hard and doing their best on the job was personally important. But were they doing it? They said they believed it, it was still sort of in the air in 1980, but were people working hard? 1982 survey came along. In that survey, it was reported that only 16 percent said they were doing the best job they could at work. Eighty-four percent admitted they weren't working hard – 84 percent. So you can see they were still holding on to a residual ethic that didn't translate into how they functioned, which meant that it was somebody else's transcendent value, somebody else's ethical value imposed on them externally but not truly believed.

Working hard, they said, was important but they weren't doing it, so how important was it? Eighty-four percent also said they would work harder if they could gain something from it. And now you can see that the ethic is not transcendent, the ethic is utilitarian. It's all tied in to what I get out of it, what's in it for me. And that's part of the cynicism of our society. That's part of the direct consequence of the 60s' moral revolution, which is a rejection of transcendent values.

God is not an issue in anything. He is not an issue in the way I conduct my sexual life, He is not an issue in my marriage, He is not an issue at my job, He is not an issue in education, He is not an issue anywhere. God is not an issue; therefore, there is no value beyond myself. So whatever is enough to get me what I want is enough. It is a kind of societal economic atheism. In fact, psychologist Robert Bellah calls it radical individualism. Surveying 200 middle-class Americans, this UCLA professor discovered that people seek personal advancement from work, personal development from marriage, and personal fulfillment from church. Everything, he says, their perspective on family, church, community, and work is utilitarian. It is measured by what they can get out of it, and concern for

others is only secondary.

Down to specifics, James Sheehy, an executive with a computer firm in the upper echelons of the work strata, saw first-hand how this kind of utilitarian value was affecting work. He wanted a better understanding of the expectations and psyche of younger employees. Looking at what the future held, what kind of people were going to come up in this generation to work in his company? What would they be like? So he decided the best way to find out was to spend his vacation taking a job in a fast-food restaurant. He wrote most of his coworkers were from upper income families, they didn't need to work but they wanted extra spending money. He watched and listened as his coworkers displayed poor work habits and contempt for customers. His conclusion was, "We have a new generation of workers whose habits and experiences will plague future employers for years."

He writes, "Along with their get-away-with-what-you-can attitude and indifference to the quality of performance, their basic work ethic was dominated by a type of gamesmanship that revolved around taking out of the system or milking the place dry. Theft, skimming, and baiting management were rampant and skill levels surprisingly low. The workers saw long hours and hard work as counter-productive. 'You only put in time for the big score,' one said." After recounting his experience, Sheehy concluded, "Get ready, America. There's more of this to come from the workforce of tomorrow."

Doesn't sound too good if you happen to be an employer, does it? A recent Harris Poll showed 63 percent of workers believe people don't work as hard as they used to. Seventy-eight percent say workers take less pride in their work. Sixty-nine percent think the workmanship they produce is inferior, and 73 percent believe workers are less motivated and that the whole trend is worsening and the numbers are going up. Now, our society may not have a choice but they have to accept this, but as Christians, we can't accept this. The Christian faith does not accept a utilitarian work ethic. The Christian view of work is transcendent. That is, it escapes me and my world and directs its attention toward God.

Last week I showed you the transcendence of the Christian work ethic by giving you just a few points of which I now remind you. First, work is a command from God. Six days shall you labor. God commands us to work. Secondly, work is a model established by God for it was God who worked for six days and then rested on the seventh, and God, of course, is the worker who continually sustains the universe. Man, being created in the image of God, then, is created as a worker. Thirdly, work is a part of the creation mandate. In other words, what I mean by that is it is the role of man. Stars shine, suns shine, moons shine, on the earth plants grow, animals do what they're supposed to do, rocks do what they're to do, mountains do what they're to do, water does what it's to do, clouds do what they're to do, and we do what we're to do. As Psalm 104 says, all of creation moves in a normal course and part of it is man rises, goes to work until the setting of the sun. It is creation mandate. It is how we contribute to the processes of life in God's wondrous creation.

Work is a command. Work is established as a model by God. Work is part of the natural creation. Fourthly, work is a gift from God. It is a gift from God. It is a gift through which we glorify Him and the wonder of His creation as we produce things, putting on display the genius of God who created us, in all of our abilities. It is a means by which we can glorify our Creator. Just as the beast of the field gives me honor, as Isaiah said, and just as the heavens declare the glory of God by what they do, and we sit in awe of them, so man declares the glory of God, the wonder of His creative genius by doing what he has been given the ability to do. Work is a gift from God, not only to glorify Him but to give meaning to life. Work is a gift from God to give us something to do, which avoids the idleness that leads to sin.

And I'll tell you right now, the culture that we're living in is a classic illustration. The more and more people demand recreation and idle time, the more corrupt they will become. The two go hand-in-hand. An escalating pornographic, sinful, wicked culture is sped on, the slide is greased, by a shrinking commitment to work. And we fill up all that time with things that feed the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life.

Work is a gift from God also to provide for needs. Work is a gift from God so that we can serve each other. And lastly, in the Christian work ethic, work is to be done as if the boss was the Lord Himself. It says in Colossians chapter 3 and Ephesians 6 that we're to work as unto the Lord and not men.

So the Christian faith does not sanctify the kind of attitude we're seeing in our own country toward work. In fact, as I said, 25 years ago, this message may have seemed a bit obscure when America was working productively. Now it seems to be rather on target for we are suffering today with some of the things that Paul faced in the Thessalonian church. But as Christians, we have to establish the standard.

One of the most wonderful things that we're learning from the Commonwealth of Independence States, the former Soviet Union, is that the Christians there are setting a model for work. Seventy-five years of atheism in the former Iron Curtain countries have produced a non-working population. They don't have any reason to work. There is no God to please. There is no transcendent ethic, and there is nothing to be gained from work because you can't increase what you get anyway, it's all doled out by the government. The combination of an atheistic mentality and no personal benefit has stripped them of any motivation whatsoever. But now, as these countries emerge from the bars, as it were, of their prison, they are recognizing that the people who work and who know how to work and work diligently are Christians, and the government is setting up Christians as the model. It's even been put in print over there, "Watch Christians, they know how to work." They have a transcendent ethic.

Now, Paul faces this in Thessalonica, this group of people, whoever they are – and I'm sure he knows them probably by name but doesn't mention them – who won't work. And they're not just accepting it

for themselves; apparently, they're very evangelistic about it. I mean they're selling it. And they're a problem. And so here at the end of this great chapter, which is really the close of a great book dealing with grandiose theological concepts, he puts his feet squarely on the earth and says, "Let's talk about work. It's not the time to put your pajamas on and sit on the roof and wait for the coming of Christ, it's not the time to be indolent or indifferent toward what it is that God has skilled and gifted you to do in your vocation, it's time to go to work." And he gives them six motivations, six reasons, six incentives.

Just to review the two we've looked at, the first one is disfellowship in verse 6. "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 not according to the tradition which you received from us." What he's saying there is you need to alienate yourself from them. The first thing that's going to stimulate them to work is that they're going to get cut off from fellowship. That's what he says. Keep aloof is the key word there, stay away. I don't know what your translation might say. The idea is alienate them, stay away from them, make them know there is a price for their indolence and their laziness, and the price is they lose fellowship.

As I noted before, this is step three of the Matthew 18 discipline process. You've gone to them once, you've gone to them twice, and now you're basically saying to them, "You no longer can participate. We're saying to you stay away until you get your spiritual focus right." And so disfellowship, the pain of alienation, you can't be a part of the society of Christians, you can't be there for worship, you can't be at the Lord's table or the love feast, you can't be alongside in mutual ministry, you can't be there to use your gift, to teach, to learn, to share. Cut them off, stay away, make them feel the pain of isolation if they're going to continue in the sin.

Second, the second motivating principle, example. In verses 7 to 9, he says, "You yourselves know how you ought to follow our example because we didn't act in an undisciplined manner among you" – that is, we didn't forego work. Undisciplined means they never went to work. They were unruly, they were scattered around, they never brought their life into line and worked. He says we didn't do that. "We didn't eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but rather with labor and hardship we kept working night and day." You remember Acts 18:3 says he was a tent maker, working with leather, and he had to set up his business even in the few weeks he was in Thessalonica, and he had to work and sell it so that he could get a living from it. He had to literally set up an enterprise.

"And we did it night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have the right." He did have the right. First Corinthians 9, I showed you last time, those that preach the gospel should live of the gospel. What does that mean? If you preach the gospel, you should get your living from it. First Timothy 5: "Those who labor in the Word and doctrine are worthy of double pay." Galatians 6: "The one who is taught shares with the one who teaches." He had a right to it, but he said, "We didn't use the right, in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example," end of verse 9.

He says, "Look, once I saw the condition there, we said we're going to just work because we need to set an example here." They needed to be a model to change the cultural perspective that work was sordid and demeaning and only for slaves. Paul says, "I had a right to be supported," and the fledgling church didn't have much but maybe they could have helped a little but he said, "No, I want to show you how you need to work." Here was the most elevated man they had ever met. The philosopher beyond all philosophers, the true theologian, the greatest teacher they had ever known, the godliest man they had ever met, the paragon of Christian virtue, the highest of the high, Paul, and yet he stoops to work with his hands and do his business and acquire his hides and sew them together and market them somehow. And he does his work because he wants them to know that work is honorable and God-honoring and God-glorifying – a lesson they desperately needed. In spite of all of that modeling that he had done and the price he had to pay, working night and day, they still didn't obey it. They were still being lazy, so he says, "The second motivation they should have is our example."

Let's go to the third one. The third one is very straightforward in verse 10: "For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order." Now, let me stop there for a moment. He's harking back now to one of the things that he had been teaching them. "When we were with you, back when we were there for the three Sabbaths and the two-week in-between period and then the following weeks that we stayed to get the church rolling, just a brief period of months at the most, when we were with you, we used to give you this order." In other words, we repeated it. We didn't give it once, it was a matter of course, we told you this all the time. And here it is, "If anyone won't work, don't let him eat." That's it. If anyone will not work, neither let him eat. That's an axiom, that's a maxim, that was a Pauline tradition. That was a divine, authoritative, revealed truth. If you don't work, you don't eat.

Ignorance was not their problem. They knew this. He had told it to them over and over. Wrote about it in the first letter, chapter 4 verse 11, chapter 5 verse 14. They didn't have a problem of ignorance. Secondly, they did not have a problem of inability. They could work. He's not talking about people who can't work. And neither did they have a problem of opportunity. They did have the opportunity to work. They had information, they had capability, and they had opportunity. And when you have that and you don't work, you don't eat. That's it. That's the Christian view. If someone won't work, let him go hungry.

You say, "But if he goes hungry, he'll die." That's right. And he knows that better than you. And people who are about to die, if there's food available, will eat; and if they have to work, they'll work to get it. You've read some of the stories about what people eat when they're starving to death? Some unthinkable, unimaginable things that they eat? I even heard recently about some course in which they are giving information to the homeless of their local area and what times of the day the restaurants put their garbage in the dumpsters so they can get it while it's fresh and how to sort it out to pick the best. There's even some kind of a little thing on how to get down into a dumpster and out

the easiest way. You say, "Well, it's too bad people have to eat that way." Well, I would venture to say that the majority of them don't have to eat that way, they choose to eat that way – but ultimately, they'll eat because they're not just going to die. If society provides a means for them to eat even that way rather than to work, they'll take that route, some of them.

We make such an issue out of the homeless. I don't want to be indifferent to people who are genuinely in distress, and there are people like that, but I just remind you that somewhere between 90 and 95 percent of them are alcoholics. We used to call them bums. We cannot exalt that lifestyle, and you cannot continually feed people who will not work. There's got to be a balance. You may be able to – you may have to give them more than their work earns, but if they're willing to work, then they eat.

Certainly this is true of Christians. I'm waiting to see the First Church of the Homeless. I haven't seen anybody who has come up with that new religion, but if they do, they're going to have to deal with 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 because it certainly applies on the general basis as just a divine principle, if you don't work, you can't eat. In fact, the apostle Paul said if anybody doesn't provide not only for himself but his family, he's worse than an unbeliever because even unbelievers do that. What he was saying was even unbelievers work, make provision for their own.

It is an aberrant unbeliever that doesn't work. The tragedy of those people, the real tragedy, is that they are so deep in sin and so deep particularly in the sin of drunkenness and irresponsibility and immorality that they have put themselves in the position they're in. And I again say I'm not talking about people who are genuinely in despair, and I've seen those people all around the world. But there is a mass of people who shouldn't eat because they will not work.

We see them here at the church. They come by and they want money and they want food and we suggest work and they leave. I was told today by one of the gentlemen in our church, serves with the police department, that they will hold a sign – they've tracked them – they will hold a sign, "I need work, homeless, need work," and recently in one of the shopping centers just a couple of days ago they were tracking to find out what was going on. None of them got jobs but they were averaging \$15.00 an hour in donations. One policeman told me he went by and offered a lady a sandwich purchased at a fast food place and she said, "What's this?" and he said, "Well, it says 'homeless and hungry,' so I'm just giving you this to eat." She put it in a bag and he said to her, "Well, aren't you hungry?" She said, "I'll eat it when I get home."

So you need to be careful about that. Sometimes the car is parked around the block and the stash is growing in the back of the car. Just have to be careful because there are people who don't work because they won't work, not because they can't work. And if you don't work and won't work, then you don't eat, that's what the Bible says. There needs to be an opportunity for you to earn your own food and you need to take that opportunity, and again I want to say this: It may be that in some

cultures there is not enough work to go around and that a person couldn't do enough work to really make the whole living, then in generosity and charity and love, we make up the lack, but we don't feed the indolence.

Jesus, you remember, in John chapter 6, fed the multitude and it was a large crowd. We talk about feeding the 5,000 but it says 5,000 men, so wherever there are 5,000 men, there have to be 5,000 women, at least, and throw in a few thousand mother-in-laws and grandmas, sisters and aunts, and throw in 15,000 kids, at least, and you've got a crowd somewhere between 20 and 50 thousand. It could have been a massive crowd and Jesus fed them all. You remember He had those five little cakes, five loaves, they're actually little barley cakes, and two pickled fish and He just created food. And I'll promise you, it was the best lunch they'd ever had because it bypassed the world.

The barley cakes never came from barley that grew in the ground, so they were never touched by the curse. I don't know what an uncursed piece of cake tastes like. Just plain cursed cake tastes pretty good. Uncursed cake would be beyond, you know, imagination. And I don't know what an uncursed pickled fish tastes like, either. The fish that never came from any mom and daddy fish, a fish that just got instantly created out of the hands of Jesus would be something like a pre-fall fish, and so I don't know what pre-fall fish and pre-cursed cake tastes like, but, man, they had some feast that day. In fact, it was so good that the next morning, they all showed up for breakfast. You remember? The next morning they were all on the hill again and they wanted breakfast and Jesus said no and He left.

Now, do you realize when He said no to breakfast, I really believe that their anger was turned on Him because in an agrarian society like that, they had to work with the sweat of their brow to produce their own food. They didn't go down to some market and flip out food stamps or a check or a credit card or whatever it is, they didn't go to a fast food restaurant. If they didn't work that day, they didn't have the food to eat. And not only a matter of preparation, but a matter of provision. And so when Jesus – when they saw Jesus make food, they thought they had just found the Messiah who would bring the ultimate and eternal welfare state. “We don't even need food stamps, just show up and He passes it out. And you don't even have to get in line to collect it, they serve it.” And when time for breakfast came, they were there and he left, and I think their anger and hostility turned on Him because they knew then what He could do but He refused to do it. He could have done it for us as well, but He knows the value and the benefit and the purpose of work.

So here were these Thessalonians and they wouldn't work. And so he says if they don't work, don't let them eat. That will help them get the message. That's survival.

There's a fourth principle that he uses to motivate them. We'll call it harmony – we'll call it harmony. And it comes in verse 11 and following, “For we hear” – and we don't know how he heard, so there's no sense in speculating. I mean – could have been Timothy coming back with a report, could have been some people on the road from Thessalonica to Corinth. The Christian communication, which we

call the “gracevine” – we don’t know how – we don’t know how it came but it came. He says, “We hear that some among you” – and it must have been a fairly good group – “some are leading an undisciplined life.” There’s that same term used back in verse 6 and over in 1 Thessalonians 5:14 translated “unruly.” They just – they were undisciplined, they didn’t have their life together. They were not working. “We hear that they’re leading an undisciplined life” – here’s its definition – “doing no work at all but acting like busybodies.” Literally, in the Greek it says – it’s a play on words actually, it says, “Not busy but busybodies.” They are not busy, they are busybodies.

It uses the word erga, from which we get ergo, which has to do with energy, even talk about ergs, which is a component of energy. They were not ergazomenous they were periergazomenous, which means they were all over the place. Peri-, around, use it for the periphery of something. They were just moving around all over the place to no particular good. They had nothing to do. They just wandered around, interfering in the lives of others, meddling, probably trying to get other Christians to stop working, telling them Jesus was coming, they’re in the day of the Lord, work is beneath us, whatever their message was. They were an irritant. They were creating disunity and discord. People were getting tired of these deadbeats. They’d show up on Sunday and they’d say, “Oh-oh, let’s get out of here, here he comes – he’s going to want food, he’s going to want some money.” And it was beginning to affect the loving harmony and the effective witness of the community of faith.

With no job to do, they were taxing others, and they were making the ones they taxed resent them, and they were fiddling in people’s lives. It’s reminiscent of those in 1 Timothy 5:13 that the apostle Paul talks about, those young women who were widowed. He says they learn to be idle, they go around from house to house, not merely idle but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention. “Therefore, I want younger widows to get married.” When a young girl is widowed, she’s still young, she’s got nothing to occupy herself, she needs to get married because she doesn’t need to just be flitting around gossiping, involving herself in things she shouldn’t be involved in, talking about things she shouldn’t be talking about, and falling into the sins of idleness.

Well, that’s what these people were doing. The definition of what happens when you’ve got nothing to do in 1 Timothy 5:13 fits these people. They were just busybodies – you know what that means, it’s a very graphic term. So Paul reiterates in verse 12: “Such persons now we command” – that’s very strong – “and exhort” – that’s more compassionate, parakale, the paraclete, the comforter. So it’s both commanding and comforting, it’s a command with some warmth in it. “We command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ” – that is, those of you who are in Christ, within the family of God, the idea being emphasized here “in Christ.” Some versions have “in the name of Christ,” but that doesn’t appear in the older manuscripts. It’s best to see the idea emphasizing our unity in Him because of the importance of our unity, because we all belong to Christ. “We command and we exhort not only in His name but in the unity of Christ those people to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.” Settle down, he says. That’s what work in quiet fashion means. Stop running around, meddling, moving uselessly, go to work. Begin an ordered life of quiet, consistent work.

This is really amazing to me because you would think on the one hand that if Jesus was coming, if you really believed He was coming, and if the end of the world was near, people were on the edge of damnation and judgment, and since we believe the Bible is the absolute priority and the most wonderful thing you can do to occupy your time, you would think the apostle would say, "I certainly want to commend you for just saying no to work. I just want to commend you for pouring your life in to ministry. I just want to commend you for studying Scripture. I want to commend you for not wasting your time in some job. I just want to commend you for being out there, zealous and proclaiming Christ and studying Scripture because that's really what you ought to do with all your time and energy." But he doesn't say that. He says, "Go to work, shut your mouth, and do your work." I don't even think he sees the job as an evangelistic field, particularly. I think what you have to say on the job by how you work is the platform on which your individual witness will begin to have some credibility. He just says, "Quietly get your life in line and go to work."

And somebody is going to say, "But it's not as spiritual." It is. It's a command. It's a way to glorify God. It's why you were placed where you were placed in the flow of the creative mandate. It's all a part of God's plan, and it will affect your witness, believe me. It also makes for unity in the church, which affects the church's corporate witness. Just keep your mouth shut and go to work. Calm down, settle down. Get some discipline in your life. Be productive. You don't need idle time and you don't need to be doing these kinds of enterprises which assume you don't need to work. God says work. That's all part of the very, very basic command of God for us. Why? So you can earn the bread you eat and you won't be a burden to the community and you won't be a burden to the church.

Let me warn you, folks. There are people who are still running around saying, "You know, I need to be in the ministry, I need to be studying the Bible all the time" or "I need to be preaching or evangelizing all the time" or "I need to be a missionary," and they're maybe ungifted, unauthorized, unordained, unassociated, unaccountable, but they're getting support from people. Be very careful of that because it may well be that they just don't want to work and the greatest ministry they might have is effectively working. You say, "What about evangelism?" You be a good worker where you are, believe me, the Lord will bring the people across your path He wants to come, and you'll have the opportunity to share why it is that you live the life you live and the way you live it.

Then, verse 13, there's a word to the rest of the folks. It's obvious, I think, if you think about it. When I first read it, I thought, "Well, what does this have to do with anything?" and then as I thought, I saw it. "But as for you, brethren" – that's the rest, those of you that are working, those of you that are having to pay for these people, having to pass out your money and give them food – "the rest of you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good." You see, the potential was they would become so tired of these deadbeats, they'd become so fed up with giving this money and this charity to these lazy people, that they would become very weary of the whole process, and then when somebody came with a real need, they would be indifferent to it. So he's saying, "Look, don't you grow weary of doing

what is really good.” The assumption is they were weary of taking care of these people who should have been taking care of themselves, and he says don’t let your weariness translate over to weariness in doing what you really should do, doing what is good. Kalos is the term that’s attached to the verb there. It means what is perceived by others to be noble, so says Milligan in his lexicon. What is perceived to be noble. Do what is noble.

You go back to the Psalms and you’re going to find out over and over again that we’re to take care of the poor and that when you take care of the poor, God will bless you. Go back to Proverbs, you’re going to find the same thing. Go back to Isaiah, go to Luke chapter 14 verses 12 to 14, and what does Jesus say? When you have a dinner, when you have a reception, don’t invite the wealthy people who are going to reciprocate, invite the blind and the lame and the halt and the maimed and the poor who can never pay you back, and God will pay you back in eternity in the resurrection. Take care of the poor.

In Acts chapter 20 and verse 35, the apostle Paul says, “You saw me work and labor and I showed you how that you ought to do that in order to give to people who have need based on what our Lord said, ‘It is more blessed to give than receive.’” And even in the letter to the Galatians chapter 2 and verse 10, he says, “They only asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I also was eager to do.” Who asked him? The church at Jerusalem, the leaders there, John, Peter, James, Barnabas. We remember the poor. Paul went around collecting an offering for the poor, the really poor, the truly poor, who want to work and maybe work a little but can’t earn enough. You’ve still got to make up what they can’t earn if they’re willing to work.

There’s still going to be people that can’t make up enough. There are people in our community, there are people in our church, who try hard. Their skill level keeps them at a low income level and they can’t support their family maybe in all the areas they need to and we help them. There may be single parents who do everything they can, who try hard, and they work as hard as they can but they still come up short. There may be people who have physical disabilities and consequently they have needs, and I applaud that our society will meet those needs. That’s a right thing to do and certainly it’s a right thing for Christians to do. So he says, “Don’t you get weary in doing what is really good for people who genuinely have need,” and that’s a very important balancing point.

Now, these things will keep our harmony together, our unity together. All this discord that’s coming into the church, people are so weary of these people, they’re so sick of them that they want to – the tendency is to stop doing good to people who really have need. You can see it was fracturing the fellowship and discord and animosity was coming in. He says, “You people go to work, on the one hand, and the rest of you who can supply the lack for those who genuinely have need, you do that and that’ll keep the harmony of the church.” Maintain the unity – that’s essential to the testimony.

Fifthly: shame. Not only does disfellowship, example, survival, and harmony constitute a motive for going to work, but shame. Look at verse 14. "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." If anybody doesn't obey the instruction in this letter, I'm telling you, they are really obstinate. He said it over and over again when he was there. He wrote it a couple of times in the first letter. He's now saying it again, and if these people don't obey this instruction, you take special note of that man. Mark him out. Give him serious attention. Keep on noticing that person. Keep your eye on that person for the purpose of not associating with him. Watch him so that you can avoid him. Stay away from him.

Withdraw your fellowship, a double compound verb meaning do not get mixed up with. Put the pressure of isolation. Only this time, you're pushing him further. This continues to be that third step of discipline where you're isolating him but your isolation is keeping him at a distance. You take note, you watch the pattern, and you avoid the man in order that he may be put to shame. Now you've gone beyond just his isolation, you're trying to make him feel shame. That's a distasteful word. Literally in the Greek it means to turn on yourself, to feel what you really are. Let him see what he really is, a wicked, disobedient, recalcitrant sinner. Shame him because he won't work.

But there's one final incentive left and that's love. And I'm so glad Paul put this last statement in verse 15. "And yet do not regard him as an enemy but admonish him as a brother." Don't treat him yet like a tax collector or a heathen, don't treat him like an enemy of God, an enemy of Christ, an enemy of the church, an enemy of a believer, don't treat him that way. You haven't yet totally thrown him to Satan, turning him over to Satan that he'll learn not to blaspheme as is discussed in 1 Corinthians 5 for the unrepentant adulterer. He doesn't so far yet. You're still at the third stage. You're still admonishing him; that is, warning him about his behavior and calling him to obedience, and you're regarding him not yet as the tax collector, not yet as the outcast – the tax collector being the most outcast person in Jewish culture, that's why that illustration is used by our Lord in Matthew 18. You're not throwing him out yet, you're not alienating him as an enemy, you're still calling to him as a brother.

He is still in the family of God. Treat him with love like you would a brother. Treat him with affection like you would a brother or sister, like Proverbs 27:6 says, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend." Show him tenderness, understand that you need to lift him up, "considering yourself lest you also be tempted," as Galatians 6 says. Restore such a one in love.

You know, the interesting thing about this little list I've given you – disfellowship, example, survival, harmony, shame, and love – those motivations to the person who won't work should also motivate anyone in any sinful behavior. It's very generic in that sense. No matter what the sin is, it's the same things that should motivate. The threat of losing the fellowship with other believers, the fact that you have not followed the holy example of those who have walked before you, even the issue of survival – because you can die from continued sin, some Corinthians did – and certainly the idea of harmony, you're disrupting and ripping and tearing the unity of the church, and certainly shame, you should feel

guilt and shame, and certainly love should call you back as those who are in the body of Christ and are your brothers and sisters woo you. And so this is how we deal with any believer in any pattern of sin.

And if they resist this, then you can treat them like an enemy. Then you can turn them over to Satan. Then Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5, "I don't want you to have any fellowship with them, I don't even want you to eat with them." I want you to turn them out totally. But here, Paul, one more time, for the third time in three steps, is pleading with the church to call them back.

The American work ethic has eroded. That's where we started; that's a good place to end. But the Christian work ethic hasn't changed one bit. May I suggest to you that you were saved and called to a vocation so that you might honor God in your job? When you go to work, that's a divine vocation. God has given you the skill and the opportunity to do what you do, and you're to work for His glory.

Father, we thank You that Your Word again has been so down-to-earth and clear. Make us faithful as we do the tasks that You give us to do at home and at our job and just the general work that is all around us as we subdue this cursed world. Help us to know that as we do it, we please You, we honor You. And we pray, Lord, for those who are in our midst this morning who have never come to Christ, who are still in their sins, who have never known forgiveness, who have never repented and turned from their sin to embrace the Savior and receive eternal life, and thus have had no transcendent ethic for anything in life, who have been victims of a satanic pattern of control and of a selfish, utilitarian view of life. And with it comes fear and unfulfillment, dissatisfaction, confusion, darkness. Father, I pray that You would move in the heart of such a person and that You would open their spiritual eyes, as it were, open them to the reality of Christ and the fact that He came into this world as God in human flesh to die on a cross and rise again for their sin, to pay the penalty for their sin and to give them eternal life if they will turn from their sin and embrace Him as Lord and Savior. Father, we ask that You would save some today and put them on the path of righteousness that they might work even their work with a new commitment to Your glory, something they've never known. And to Christians who are here, Lord, give all of us a fresh, new joy and exhilaration about what we do and how You view it. And may in this church, Lord, any who are sinning by not being willing to work hear the message and be faithful to turn from that sin and find a productive pursuit. For those, Lord, in our congregation who can't work and who need our help and who will receive the noble deeds, may we not ever be weary in ministering to their needs. Give us this wonderful balance that we find in this passage as we live as Your people in this world for Your glory. In Christ's name, amen.

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