

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

A Theology of Work

Scripture: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

Code: 80-362

I want to use as a text tonight in talking about the biblical view of work, 2 Thessalonians chapter 3...2 Thessalonians chapter 3. Now I will warn you, we're not going to get there for a while. We're going to be all over the place here for a few minutes. But I will eventually arrive at that text so you can kind of identify that as the main text for our message.

I think all of us who have been around at all, any of us who are mature adults, are pretty much aware of the fact that one of the virtues in our nation for years has been our work ethic from those original immigrants who came here from Europe on through our history. We have been a nation marked by a very strong work ethic.

That work ethic really came as a result of the influence of Christianity in Europe and all of western culture. We have displayed our work ethic proudly in America for all of these years in the past.

We are at this particular point, however, rapidly abandoning that traditional work ethic that grew out of Christian roots and we should expect that it will continue to die. And the reason is this, because God doesn't matter anymore in our society. In fact, God is to be left out of society. We hear that constantly under the rubric of the separation of church and state. Our culture doesn't want God involved in anything. They see that as a violation of the first amendment somehow, the government not being able to establish religion.

And when God doesn't matter, then morality doesn't matter, and that's what we're experiencing now. When God matters as God has mattered in our history, one nation under God, in God we trust on our money, when God matters then there is a transcendent authority and God is the ultimate power. God is the ultimate determiner of destinies, God is the final judge. But when God doesn't matter, then morality doesn't matter because there are really no consequences outside oneself. The worst that can happen to someone is that while you're expressing your freedom to live any way you want to live, you may have some negative results. They might come from other people. They might come from circumstances that you brought upon yourself by the choices that you've made, they might be things that happened really outside of your power and control.

But since you're on your own and you can live any way you want to live, the consequences that come really have nothing to do with God, they're just all about the way it is in life and some things go well and some don't. When God doesn't matter, then morality doesn't matter. When morality doesn't

matter, then there's a total collapse of moral commitment in a culture. Sex outside of marriage doesn't matter. Homosexual sin doesn't matter. In fact, it ought to be legalized and homosexual marriage ought to be made valid. Dishonesty doesn't matter. You can lie as much as you want to gain whatever ends you want to gain. Self-indulgence doesn't matter. Cheating doesn't matter. Stealing doesn't matter. Really no other virtue matters because there's no God. And since we reject God, the definition of God in western culture that's being rejected is the biblical definition. So in getting rid of God we have gotten rid of the Bible and the prescriptions of Scripture with regard to the will of God, the nature of God and consequently the Law of God for man's behavior.

When God doesn't matter anymore, then there is no universal, transcendent standard for behavior. And natural human corruption runs rampant to the degree that any individual person chooses to live. And one of the basic moral virtues that disappears in a culture is work...work. People once worked hard because of the influence of Scripture and because Scripture is a reflection of the will of God. God is the authority and the Bible is the revelation of His will as that authority. Work, you see, is a virtue, work is a moral behavior.

People worked hard because they believed they were accountable to God and they were accountable to the revelation of God in Scripture. They had reverence for biblical authority and they had a basic fear of God. Even those who weren't particularly evangelical Christians understood the place of God in society, understood the place of Scripture in society that it was the will of God and understood they had a transcendent responsibility before God to behave in a certain way. Now that God doesn't matter, and the Bible is ridiculed and removed, if not banned from speaking authoritatively on any subject, there is a kind of fearless immorality. And one of the things that's going to disappear is the virtue of work...the virtue of work. Sinners are happy to think that they answer to no one, but to themselves.

This even plays out in the place of work for the people who do work in the animosity that they feel toward the people who are over them, their bosses, who constrain in any measure their freedoms. And then there are those people who feel that even if they don't do anything, don't work at all, the government still owes them money because they exist, because they breathe and because in their minds they're worthy.

This nation, as I said, once had a very strong work ethic driven by responsibility to God. But it also had another component in it because what the Bible also taught was that you're not only responsible to God, but you're responsible to your neighbor. The first commandment was to love God, the second was to love your neighbor. And so, what marked work in America was a sense of dignity in the fact that you dignified yourself by being obedient to God and another corresponding sense of charity. You did what you did because you gained dignity and nobility by being a person submissive to the Scripture and to God and doing what was defined as transcendentally supernaturally established as right and you worked because it was dignified, cause it was moral, and you worked because it put

you in a position to be charitable and charity is another moral virtue...another moral virtue.

Well all of that seems to be fading away as socialism takes over, as people eliminate God from their culture and determine that they don't need to do anything except what they want to do, the way they want to do it, when they want to do it.

Now this isn't new. So I just want to encourage you that this is not new. We probably are closer now to the Greeks of the era of the Apostle Paul than we've ever been in American history. If you go back and read sources like Homer, you find that the Greeks in Paul's day thought that the gods hated men, the non-existent gods, of course, that they had fabricated. They hated men and Homer says that out of their hatred for man, they condemned man to work as a kind of divine punishment based on their hatred. So their view of work was that it was a curse laid on man by the gods.

I think that may be coming back now that work is some kind of curse that's laid upon us by the God of the Bible in the past from whom we all need to escape. In the time in which we live then it's a very important thing for us to reaffirm as Christians and reestablish the role of work, the morality of work.

Now we're not here to debate whether there is God, whether God is the true God as revealed in Scripture, we know that. We're not here to debate the validity of Scripture, we affirm the validity of Scripture. So all we want to do is find out what God has said in His Word about work. I want to elevate your view of work, if I can do that. Let me help in a number of ways.

Number one, it might help you to know that God is a worker. God is a worker. The work of God is described often in the Bible. The very phrase, "the work of God," appears a number of times in Scripture. And you can categorically look at the work of God in many different facets. The work of God, for example, in creation. That is a massive, mighty work of God. You can look at the work of God in providence...providence. That is to say that God personally and by His own wisdom and His own power orchestrates all of the variables, all of the contingencies, all of the actions and reactions that happen all across the universe to perfectly accomplish His will. This is a mighty work in my judgment, equal to the work of creation.

And then there is the work of God in the area of sustaining, or we can say controlling. All things were created by God's Word and they are upheld Hebrews says by the word of His power. So the universe continues the way it continues and life continues the way it continues because of the sustaining work of God.

And then there is another category of God's work, we could call it the work of judgment. This too can be a massive work on God's part, such as the Noahic flood, or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah or other mammoth judgments that have come upon man throughout history, some of them recorded in holy Scripture, all the way down to the destruction of Jerusalem and looking forward from

the biblical record into history, we see many, many judgments that have fallen on this world that have come from the work of God. Every judgment is a work of God. And you can go in to the book of revelation and other eschatological sources and see that God has yet some massive future judgment works to do which will culminate in the final act of judgment, the Great White Throne, and then the destruction of the entire universe which is a massive and mighty work of God.

Also, another category that you want to think about is that God works in redemption. God works in redemption. The mighty work of salvation goes on all the time. You saw some examples of it tonight, right? You heard the testimonies of God's power released in some very troubled lives, some very broken families as God does His mighty redeeming work of giving life to the dead, sight to the blind, hope to the hopeless. God is a worker.

Secondly, Jesus is a worker as well. He said in John 9:4, "I must work the works of My Father. I must work the works of My Father." He says, "The One who sent Me, I must do His work." In John 4:34 He said, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me and to accomplish His work." Whatever it is that God does, Jesus does. In fact, He says that in John 5:17, "My Father is working still and I am working." And the Jews went ballistic because they said He's making Himself equal with God because He says He does the work that God does.

Jesus clearly is involved in creation. "All things were made by Him," John 1, "without Him wasn't anything made that was made." He is clearly involved in sustaining the universe. He is the one who upholds all things by the work of His power. He is clearly involved in providence. He by divine power orchestrates the divine end to all the innumerable options in the universe. It is He who is the judge. He has a work of judgment, all judgment, He says, has been committed to Me and He is Himself the One to whom God has given the work of redemption. God is a worker and Jesus is a worker.

There is no dissipation of energy in the work that God does, no dissipation of energy in the work that Jesus does, and we have to add that the Holy Spirit is a worker. The Holy Spirit also, you remember, was brooding over the waters of creation and the Holy Spirit was an agent by which that creation came into its original form. It is the power of the Holy Spirit that works in providence and sustaining the universe, and all that is in it, and the Spirit is even engaged in the work of judgment and, of course, in the work of redemption through the means of regeneration, being born of the Spirit.

To say that God doesn't dissipate any energy is not to say that God doesn't work. God is an eternal, everlasting, tireless, inexhaustible worker in His Trinitarian fullness. And thus work belongs within the panoply of virtues that are true of God. From that we can conclude that man being made in the image of God is to be a worker. We bear the image of God, we are made in His image and His likeness. And we are commanded to labor, Exodus chapter 20 verses 9 and 10, we are commanded to labor six days and on the seventh day...what?...to rest. This is God's design.

You say, "Well wait a minute, I thought work was a matter of the curse." No...no, the curse changed the nature of work, but the curse didn't bring about work. We know that because in Genesis at the very beginning, before man fell, it says in verse 26 God said, "Let us make man in our image according to our likeness and let them rule over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, over the cattle, over all the earth, over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female, He created them."

Then He blesses them and tells them to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, subdue it, rule over it, over the fish, the birds, every living thing that moves on the earth. That's work. That's a kind of work. Subdue the creation. Subdue the creation. I've given you every plant-yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, every tree that's yielding seed, fruit, it will be food for you. Every beast of the earth, to every bird of the sky, everything that moves on the earth which I have given, I've given every green plant for food and it was so.

Man was given the responsibility to care for this creation. He was told in chapter 2 verse 15 to cultivate the Garden of Eden and to tend it. This is work.

Now you and I have a hard time understanding what that kind of work would be because this is before there's any death. I don't know how all that was because we can only experience work in a fallen world. But the Fall did not introduce work. What the Fall did was curse work. Big difference. In Genesis 3, of course, the Scripture says that part of the curse coming on Adam, "Cursed is the ground because of you, in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life." And here's part of the problem. "Now thorns and thistles are going to grow for you and you will eat the plants of the field and by the sweat of your face, you will eat bread until you return to the ground." You're going to work yourself to death and you're going to have a lot of opposition, thorns and thistles.

Somebody made the suggestion that originally man was a gardener and the curse turned him into a farmer. Originally man was a flower arranger, and the curse turned him into a plow horse. The Fall did not introduce work, it changed its nature. And as the nature of work that is the punishment, but not work itself. Work neither began nor ceased with the Fall, it just took a different shape. It went from being a righteous blessing solely to being a righteous blessing with a curse on top.

And so, man seeks to restore the glory of work with the sweat of his brow, and all of his ingenuity he goes after this cursed earth, using the wonderful creative gifts that he's been given because he's in the image of God to abstract out of the richness of this planet everything that he can possibly extract, to provide value to his life, to provide meaning to his life, to provide provision for his life and those in his family, to provide for the needs of others and most importantly to bring dignity upon himself as one made in the image of God who demonstrates God-like creativity.

Monkeys don't write symphonies. Monkeys don't grow gardens. Only men write symphonies and grow gardens. Only men paint beautiful paintings. Only men build massive edifices that are mind-boggling achievements of engineering and brilliance and creativity. This is the dignity of what it means to work in the image of God. This is our dignity. This is part of the nobility of being a man. We have been given, according to Genesis 1:26, dominion over the earth. From the very beginning, this meant that everything that was in the garden was somehow under the control of man for his benefit, his good, to demonstrate his mobility being made in the image of God and then to redound to the glory of God Himself.

One writer says, "The teaching of the Old Testament on the subject of work may be generally summed up by saying it is regarded as a necessary and indeed God-appointed function of human life. Since to labor is the common lot of mankind, it is important that men should accept it without complaining and thus fulfill with cheerful obedience the intention of the Creator for human existence. The basic assumption of the biblical viewpoint is that work is a divine ordinance for the life of man."

This invests work with dignity. Listen, how dignified is work? We are still doing what man was created to do, take the creation, tend it. Take the animal kingdom, subdue it. Extract from this creation everything that your God-given powers can extract. We're still doing that with the very difficult reality that we're fighting a curse in the creation and in ourselves as well. Work can redeem the cursed universe. It can in a measure.

In Psalm 104 we read, "He made the moon for the seasons, the sun knows the place of its setting. You appoint darkness and it becomes night in which all the beasts of the forest prowl about. The young lions roar after their prey and seek their food from God. When the sun rises, they withdraw and lie down in their dens. Man goes forth to his work and to his labor until evening." God has ordained that men work originally six days a week here. You go to work in the morning and you finish in the evening. Work is designed by God to redeem the curse in a measure. You look at the civilized world, you look at the world that has flourished, you look at the western world in particular, and now, of course, many ascending nations in Asia and other parts of the world, and you see the magnificence that is extracted out of the creation by work. Go to Africa, and you see parched lands, starving people, murderous tribal warfare...people don't work. It's a tragic reality.

Work was always God's design for us to be able to draw out all that is in this creation for the demonstration of our nobility being created in the image of God and for the glory of God and for the benefit of all man. It can be redeemed. It must be redeemed and that's why we work. You know how that works. You redeem your yard every week. And if you went away for six months and came back, you would find out what the curse would do...just no water for six months, that will do it. Or just open all the windows and doors in your house and leave for six months and come back and see what's inside. See what lives there. It's a battle and we all understand that battle. We extract goodness out

of His creation. That was Adam's job and now we have to fight against the curse to extract that goodness. We are called to that work because it is noble and because it is God-glorifying.

Now it's with that kind of thinking in mind that we sort of come in to the New Testament a little bit and in the sixth chapter of Ephesians we need to make reference to this and one passage in Colossians because they're related. Chapter 6 of Ephesians says, "Slaves, 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, not by way of eye service as men pleasers, 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, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord whether slave or free. Do your work, as if you were working for the Lord, even if you're a slave, you do your work according to what your master calls you to do. You do it sincerely. You do it with fear and trembling, realizing that you have an authority over you. But you do it as if you are doing it for the Lord because in reality it is His work that you are doing. He is your true master.

In Colossians 3 we find the same emphasis, verse 22, "Slaves, in all things 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, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve. You do your work to the Lord."

Now to the Greeks, just thinking about that slave talk there, work was beneath the dignity of a freeman. It was degrading to the free Greeks to do work. To labor was below their station in life and consequently slaves did all the work. The free people would indulge themselves in art, philosophy, sophistry, politics, these are the noble things because these, they said, were the efforts of the mind. Work, efforts of the body was for the slaves. Part of that Greek dualism, right? That physical is banal and mean and lowly and spiritual was elevated and lofty.

Well apparently this kind of thinking was pervasive enough to find its way into the minds of even people in the early churches because it was the way they were raised in their society. There may well have been an indifference toward work on the part of people who were free people.

Now when you come to Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, there is an overriding concern in the minds of the believers and Paul addresses it in both First and Second Thessalonians and it is this, that there are some who are concerned that the Day of the Lord, the returning of the Lord, has already happened. Chapter 2 verse 2, "That you not be quickly shaken from your composure, or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or letter as if from us." Somebody was circulating a phony letter from Paul to the effect that the Day of the Lord has already come, you missed the Rapture, you missed the Second Coming, you missed the return of Christ somehow. So this may have played into it. So let's just see if we can kind of create a scene here.

You've got people in the church who come into the church and come to faith in Christ from a free life and consequently they disdain work to start with. Then you have people who becoming believers now take the position that what really matters is Bible study, the study of the writings of the Apostles, the study of the Old Testament scriptures and evangelistic work needs to be done, spiritual work needs to be done, and so they have a disdain for work. It can be because culturally they reject work. It can be because they establish new spiritual priorities and they think they need to give themselves to something more important than work.

Consequently, apparently in the church of Thessalonica, there were some freeloaders. There were some dead beats, as we would call them, some who made no provision for their own life. They would assume now, "Hey, I am in the church and, you know, you're supposed to take care of me." So they would land then as dependents on the church in a very presumptuous fashion.

Paul addresses these kind of wrong perspectives about work with a very strong call in chapter 3 about work. And I want you to hear what he says, starting in verse 6. "We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life 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 wouldn't be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have the right to this but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you so that you would follow our example for even when we were with you, we used to give you this order, if anyone is not willing to work, then he's not to eat either, for we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life doing no work at all but acting like busy-bodies. Now such persons we demand 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. If anyone doesn't obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person, do not associate with him so that he will be put to shame. Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother."

So perhaps they came from a free life which had a natural disdain for work, or perhaps because they now reestablish new priorities of Bible study and spiritual ministry and evangelism and all that, and in addition to that they thought that they were near the end of the age, that maybe they actually missed the Rapture, that the coming of the Lord was either just past and so they would be seeing the development of the Kingdom rapidly and they didn't even need to think about work because it was all going to come to a very abrupt end, for whatever reasons existed, apparently this congregation of Thessalonian people got caught up in serious laziness.

Now the Apostle Paul could have gone back to the Scripture and said, "Work is a command, six days shall you labor," Exodus 20 verse 11, work is modeled for us by God. We have been made in God's

image. God is a worker and we ought to work as God worked. And work, Paul could have said, is a part of the natural creation, you get up every morning and until at night comes, you work. Work, Paul could have said, is a gift from God to give man his dignity, to give man meaning in life, to avoid idleness and the sins that go along with idleness, to provide for his own needs and to serve the needs of others. And work is to be something done to the Lord because He's the true boss, as we saw in Colossians and Ephesians.

But Paul approaches this in a different way from those ways, although they're certainly embodied in the things that he says here. He wants them to view work from the standpoint that they're out of line if they don't work. Rather than take all the positives that we've just given you a list of the positive motivations for work, he lays out some pretty serious threats here. That means that this has reached a level of seriousness. And the Bible does condemn lazy people. In Proverbs we read things like this, "Poor is he who works with a negligent hand." Or, "The soul of a lazy person craves and gets nothing." Or, "The lazy person doesn't plow after the autumn so he begs during the harvest and has nothing." Or, "The desire of the lazy person puts him to death for his hands refuse to work." All kinds of warnings in Proverbs and there's a whole section of them in Proverbs chapter 24. So he could have used any of those because those are very strong negatives.

But he's going to develop some here that are really unique to this passage and very helpful to the church and to all of us. I have to add a footnote. The Jews who don't really play a prominent role in Thessalonica cause this s Gentile community, Gentile church, but the Jews didn't have a sacred view of work either. The Talmud has a prayer and I found this prayer really fascinating. Here's a Jewish prayer in the Talmud. "I thank You, O Lord, my God, that You have given me my lot with them 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 Torah and they are early to work on things of no importance. I weary myself and they weary themselves, but I weary myself and profit thereby and they weary themselves to no profit. I run and they run. I run towards the life of the age to come and they run toward the pit of destruction." That's quite an interesting prayer. What a narrow prideful view of what one does. That same view actually seeped in to the early church, fourth century, Eusebius, quote: "Two ways of life were given by the laws of Christ to His church. The one is above nature and beyond common, human living, holy and permanently separate from the common and ordinary life of man. It devotes itself to the service of God alone, such is the perfect form of the Christian life."

What he's talking about is a monastic kind of life where one does nothing but contemplate his spiritual navel twenty-four hours a day if he's awake that long. On the other hand, Eusebius writes, "More humble, more human permits men to have minds for farming, for trade and other secular interests and a kind of secondary grade of piety is therefore attributed to them."

So the high and the holy were those who had only to do with the intellectual pursuits and the lowly were the ones who fed them, clothed them, provided everything they needed. The idea among even those folks was that work was a second-class, secular, useless lower kind of life than the elevated life of monastic ascetic devotion to the church and to study.

Paul wouldn't have liked that. I don't like it. We shouldn't like it. That reflects more of that Greek viewpoint, not a biblical viewpoint at all. And this is what launched in one way Martin Luther. There were a lot of things that Luther didn't like and one of them that he hated was the laity-clergy division, the idea that priests and nuns and monks were engaged in holier work than housewives and farmers appalled him and he attacked that. And William Tyndale said, "If we look externally, there is difference between washing dishes and preaching the Word of God, but as touching to please God, there is no difference at all. That's a biblical view of work, that there's no difference when done to the honor of the Lord between preaching and washing the dishes.

The church needed to remember that Jesus was a preacher for three years of His life and a carpenter for probably at least twenty. Thus did He sanctify all occupations. Our Christian faith sanctifies work, all of work is designed to demonstrate the nobility of man to show that he is created in the image of God, that such a terrible thing to put man at the end of an evolutionary chain, to make people think that he's nothing but a glorified ape which is an absolute absurdity scientifically and even philosophically because nothing lower than man produces anything...anything. Once you get to man, you see the glory of God displayed in what He can do with the creation, even fighting the curse.

Every job, every occupation, every kind of work falls within the believer's duty. It is a moral calling. It is a spiritual responsibility that we have to honor the Lord and to put His image on display. It's a beautiful thing.

Paul gives six motivations here, six motivations. I'm not going to be able to give them all to you or for that matter, any detail about them, but I think you get the picture. The first motive is dis-fellowship...dis-fellowship, verse 6. "We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life, not according to the tradition which you received from us." We command you, *parangello*, emphatic, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is speaking with authority based on the person at work and will of the sovereign Lord of the church. And this, by the way, is the third time he has addressed this issue of work, the third time in his two epistles. And he is saying, "Stay away from, cease fellowshiping with brothers who lead an unruly life...unruly life."

What is he meaning by that? *Ataktos*, out of step, out of sync, disorderly, the offense here that is out of order is laziness and it was flagrant, and it was not according to the tradition which you received from us. And he's going back to what he himself had taught them.

For example, back in the first letter he wrote, chapter 4 verse 11, "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and tend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you." So he's saying here, you have to follow the tradition. And you go back to the tradition meaning what he wrote in the first letter, and in the first letter he goes back to something previous to that that he says he commanded them. So we have at least three times, once when he was there, once when he wrote 1 Thessalonians, and once again when he writes the second epistle. Paul is saying, "I'm telling you things that I have already told you and you distance yourselves from these people."

This would be a call, in effect, for church discipline. That's right, the idea is to cease fellowship. The verb, to stay away from, or to keep aloof from, or to keep away from, is used to refer to furling up the sails. The idea is to cease the operation, the fellowship, the involvement with dead beat persons who won't work. That's a sin. That's immoral. That's an unacceptable behavior as he has pointed out on all those previous occasions.

There's a second motivation and this one from a positive standpoint is the motivation of example. Verse 7, "You yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We didn't act in an undisciplined manner among you." What are you talking about? "We didn't eat anyone's bread without paying for it." Even in the church, you work and you earn and you pay. It's a moral behavior. It's a spiritual virtue to work. If you don't work, you're going to be cut off from the life of the church in a disciplinary process and you're failing to follow our example.

Clearly the context here is work, imitate, mimic, *mimetes* is the verb here, because we didn't act in an undisciplined manner, out of order, out of rank, unruly manner. You know that, he says. You saw it. You know how you ought to follow our example. You know what that example is, we didn't eat anyone's bread without paying for it. We don't take advantage of people.

How did he pay for it? How did he pay for it? Verse 8 says, "With labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we wouldn't be a burden to any of you." To eat bread, by the way, is a Hebraic expression referring to all physical support and supply. Very likely he lived in the house of Jason, as we look at Acts 17, but he worked for his food and he paid Jason for everything he ate. He doesn't mean he didn't receive acts of kindness, he did. He doesn't mean that the servant of the Lord isn't worthy of his hire. He said that. He doesn't mean that those who are blessed by the teacher shouldn't share with the teacher in all good things, cause he wrote that to the Galatians. But what he does mean is that he worked in order to provide for himself and to not be a drain on the people who were kind enough to care for him. With labor, *kopos*, strong word, and hardship, *mochthos*, travail, struggle. We worked. First Corinthians 4:12, "We toil working with our hands." He worked with his hands, he was a leather worker, a tent maker. He would have had scissors in his hand and strong needles in his hand, and cords and threads to make tents. He didn't want to be a burden to this little church and he would never allow himself to be a burden.

Now he says in verse 9, “Not because we don’t have the right to this,” as I said. “The one who labors in the Word and doctrine should be double supported,” Paul says to Timothy. The worker is worthy of his wages. Feed the ox that treads, he said to the Corinthians. He had a right to that.

“But in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example, that’s why we live this way.” You need to make sure you work and earn your own bread.

There’s a third motivation that comes in verse 10, tied in, I guess you could call it survival, “Even when we were with you, we used to give you this order. If anyone isn’t willing to work, then he’s not to eat either.” You better work, or you’re going to die. Survival, a reminder that he had regularly laid out this maxim, “When we were with you we used to give you this order.” So here is something he kept saying to them, this again reflects on the fact that apparently they had a big problem with this, going back all the way to the initial experience that he had in establishing the church in Thessalonica. They were caught up in this perhaps this philosophical, disdainful work that was part of the elite. They were caught up in perhaps being indifferent toward things material because they were swept up in the spiritual realities and even thinking they were living close to the end. Paul says, “How many times do I have to tell you what I’ve constantly told you? If anyone isn’t willing to work, he’s not to eat either.” That is an axiom, a maxim, that is a spiritual law. You eat because you work.

First Timothy 5 says that no one is to be unfaithful in the support of his family or if he is unfaithful in supporting his family, he is worse than an infidel...worse than an unbeliever. I always think about John 6 where Jesus did create dinner but refused to create breakfast. He put his power on display but He didn’t create a welfare state with permanent free food. You want to eat? You work. The Puritan, Richard Baxter, one of my favorites said in their typical rather strong language, “It is swinish and sinful not to work.” And Robert Bolton, another Puritan said, “Idleness is the rust and canker of the soul.”

So, dis-fellowship is a motivation, example is a motivation, survival is a motivation. Harmony is a motivation..harmony, verse 11, and we’ll run through these quickly. “We hear that some of you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all but acting like busybodies.” That seems to be the alternative, right? When you don’t have any work to do, you just become a problem. Some of you are idle. Word had come, Paul says that, we hear, telling him that in spite of his teaching, in spite of how many times he had said to them, “If you don’t work, you don’t eat,” some were still not willing to work. Perhaps Timothy has brought this report, or others traveling through those busy areas, trade areas. And the message came back to Paul, “There are people in that church who won’t work.” And consequently they are busybodies, you’re not busy, you’re busybodies. You’re not *ergazomanus*, you are *periergazomanus*, you’re busybodies with nothing to do, just wander around and make trouble. People who don’t have anything to do for themselves wind up sticking their faces into things that other people are trying to do, meddling, peddling and he says this is unacceptable, this is destructive

of harmony. It's destructive of harmony. It's irritating. It produces disunity. It produces discord, verse 12, "Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread." You need a job just to keep you out of people's businesses. You need a job to keep you out of other people's lives. You need work so that people can get a break from your presence. You understand that. You need some space. Settle down, he says, like we commanded you. Work in quiet fashion. Eat your own bread.

There's also a word to the rest in verse 13, "As for you, brethren, don't grow weary of doing good." That's a comment to the good guys. The implication is obvious. They were sick of the deadbeats. They were sick of the people who wouldn't work. They were weary with the lazy. They were in danger, I guess, of coming to the brink of being indifferent toward people who had real needs, that's why he says that. Don't grow weary of doing good. There are always going to be people who would work if they could but they can't. They don't have opportunity, they don't have ability. They're always going to be people in profound need, always going to be widows, orphans, those who are sick and don't become so weary of having to take care of the dead beats that you lose your compassion and your care for those who need it. Don't grow weary in doing good, always be eager to do good, do what is honorable. Don't give up on the folks who do need you.

So dis-fellowship, example, survival, harmony, a fifth motivation is shame. This is very strong, verse 14. "If anyone doesn't obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person, do not associate with him so that he will be put to shame." Again you're back to this concept of being thrown out, dis-fellowshipped. Isolate the person in order to bring shame. Literally it is a shame on a person who will not work.

One more compulsion to work, we could call it love. "Yet do not regard him as an enemy but admonish him as a brother." Remember, you're dealing with a fellow believer and don't regard him as an enemy to God, he's not. Don't regard him as an enemy to Christ, he's not. Don't regard him as an enemy of the church, he's not. Simply admonish or warn him as a fellow brother. Like Proverbs 27, "Faithful are the wounds of a friend. He is precious, he belongs to Christ. Christ dwells in him. He's a temple of the Holy Spirit. You want to treat him as a brother.

Here are Paul's strong motivations for work, fulfilling the responsibility we have as Christians to do what is virtuous and moral and that is to work. It is a privilege by which we can use the talents and opportunities that God has given us to put on display the very image of God that is in us. Christians ought to be the best workers of all workers, right? We ought to be the highly motivated because we're serving not men but God. We ought to be motivated because in serving Him we will be rewarded by Him whatever may come to us by the earth, maybe good, maybe not. Maybe it's just, maybe it's unjust. But there is perfect justice and grace and generosity to come from the one whom we genuinely serve, and that's our Lord.

Now, a footnote. Retirement. You can change what you do but there's no retirement in the Kingdom. You do the work of the Kingdom when your earthly work has reached its end, you are now able to do the work of the Kingdom with the same passion and zeal that you did your work in the world and the Lord will honor that in great ways. I hope that's how you look at whatever transitions come in your lives in the future, that's how I look at it. I just want to keep doing the Lord's work until I can't do it any longer and then they can haul me off wherever they want to haul me and lock me up. As long as the Lord gives us the strength and the opportunity, we want to get as close to doing the work that our Lord does as we can possibly get. And He's doing the work that His Father does. How great it is to be a part of that in addition to the work that we do in the world around us.

Well I hope this is helpful to you. A lot could be said beyond this, but this is a good foundation for us.

Father, again we have a great, great calling here, sweeping calling that touches every aspect of our lives. We thank You that You've given us this high and holy privilege to work so that we can demonstrate the image of God created in us, and that we can demonstrate love for Christ, we can fulfill the original commission to subdue the earth and extract out of it all its riches for the benefit of our own lives and the people we're committed to care for and for the help of others around us even to the elevation of the culture and the civilizations of the world. Help us by the hard work that we do, by the diligent work that we do to raise the level of others spiritually even in terms of their life in this world. May we be a part of those who work hard enough to draw out of the wonder of this earth the abundant riches that are here for the blessing and the benediction of many others. May all of our efforts, all of our work be a common grace extended, even to unbelievers, as well as a sweet grace that extended to fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Thank You for this great calling. Thank You for the joy of serving You in this way in Christ's name. Amen.

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