

2 Thessalonians (5): We Were Not Idle

(2 Thessalonians 3:6-16)

I. Introduction

- A. Twenty years ago, I was discussing the subject of salvation by grace in a class
1. That might not sound controversial now, but believe me—back then it was
 - a. We were comfortable seeing salvation tied to what we did... and how
 - b. Truth was correctly crossing theological T's and dotting ecclesiastical I's
 - 1) What if someone loves God but is imperfect in theology or obedience
 - 2) Well, there's no if here—we are imperfect in theology or obedience
 - c. We better believe God's salves the theologically flawed—our only hope!
 2. I vividly remember a conversation I had after one class (*on Galatians, Darryl*)
 - a. Member stopped me in the back of auditorium—not upset, but puzzled
But if you teach this grace stuff, then how will you get people to ever do anything?
 - b. If people don't HAVE to do stuff to get to heaven, then why will they?
 - 1) We won't get teachers or get people to give if we can't threaten hell!
 - 2) Good luck getting a host for Jr. High lock-in if it's not ticket to heaven
 - 3) **Joke:** Cheer goes up in line at heaven, *"They not counting Wed nite"*
- B. **Fact:** Some grace-centered churches seem to have a lower involvement rate
1. People do seem to reason, "Well, if I don't have to do this, then I won't"
 - a. What if the teacher says, *"This part of the lecture won't be on the test?"*
 - b. What if your boss tells you, *"Coming to work next Friday is optional?"*
 - c. And if Lynn says, *"You can go to store with me or stay and watch game?"*
 2. Making everything a matter of salvation can be effective way to motivate
 - a. Friend's church had 85% of morning service back for Sunday evening
 - 1) That is amazing, so I asked him what was the secret of his success
 - 2) He said, *"Guy before preached 30 years they'd go to hell if didn't."*
 - b. Of course, they might also never feel secure in God's love or forgiveness
 - 1) They may not feel comfortable with others who aren't as spiritual
 - 2) Make heaven-n-hell ride on everything → schizophrenic Christians
 - c. Can we totally rest in God's grace and totally be driven to serve God?

C. Paul seemed to think that not only was this possible—it was normal for disciples

1. In **1 Cor 15**, Paul discusses his transformation from persecutor to apostle
 - a. He attributes that to God’s grace and points to his response (**1 Cor 15:10**)

But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me

- 1) Paul as apostolic Popeye says it’s by grace that “*I yam what I yam*”
 - 2) But that grace drove him to work harder... and it was grace at work
- b. Paul promises Corinth that God grace would work in them (**2 Cor 9:8**)

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work

2. When grace is properly understood, there is no conflict with motive to work

- a. Paul knew God rescued him when he absolutely deserved punishment
 - 1) Attitude of gratitude drove him to work for the God whose grace saved
 - 2) When we understand grace, we will be driven to service & involvement
- b. Grace is not an excuse to get lazy or lax concerning working for God
- c. Grace is really a reason to get busy because we are so indebted to our God

D. This morning, we continue our march through the book of **2 Thessalonians**

1. Paul planted a church in Thessalonica, but then had to leave due to persecution
 - a. He stayed there only 3 weeks, so there were a few things he needed to clarify
 - b. He wrote **1 & 2 Thessalonians** to encourage and instruct this new church
 - 1) These letters seem to have been written not long after Paul left
 - 2) They are among the earliest and most personal of Paul’s writings
 - c. Do we need to be taught and encouraged? There’s something here for us!
2. You would expect that these new Christians had some misunderstandings
 - a. We’ve seen one— feared Jesus may have already returned (**2 Thess 2:1ff**)
 - b. Today it’s a related misunderstanding, with surprising result (**2 Thess 3:6**)

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us

- 1) Some were so convinced Jesus was coming, they were sitting around
 - 2) They checked out of life, quit their jobs and were gazing up at heaven
- c. Their faith in second coming was good; how they were waiting was not
3. We wait for Jesus not by sitting look at sky but “*work for the night is coming*”

II. We Were Not Idle (Reading: 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13)

A. Disciples of William Miller reportedly donned ascension robes on Oct 22, 1843

1. Why? Because that was the day that Jesus was supposed to return to earth
 - a. Would you go to work if you knew Jesus was coming next week?
 - b. **Professor:** Students put off term paper; Jesus could return this semester...
2. Paul begins by saying church to “*keep away*” from these idle, lazy people
 - a. KJV “*withdraw*” makes it sound like excommunication (“*withdraw fellowship*”)
 - b. Word is simply “*avoid*” (see 2 Cor 8:20, “*We want to avoid any criticism*”)
3. There is danger in hanging around the idle (*Idle hands are the devil’s workshop*)
 - a. Young widows were to remarry rather than supported by church (1 Tim 5:13)
Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to.
 - b. Paul ends by restating warning not to be associate with lazy idlers (3:14-15)

⁴ *If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed.* ¹⁵ *Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.*

B. This laziness and refusal to work was wrong for **two different reasons**—

1. **First**, refusing to work was contrary to “*teaching you received from us*” (v. 6)
 - a. “*Teaching*” (NIV) is literally the word “*tradition.*” “*Something handed over*”
 - b. Paul might not have covered everything while there, but he covered this
 - 1) Working to provide for needs is part of the Christian tradition
 - 2) Paul told slaves to work for master is if they worked for God (Eph 6:7)
Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men
2. **Second**, this laziness also contradicted Paul’s example while in Thessalonica
 - a. Paul was a tentmaker who often supported himself while preaching
 - b. He received financial support from Philippi during his mission work
 - 1) Paul did have the right to receive support for preaching (3:9, 1 Cor 9:14)
The Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should receive their living from the gospel.
 - 2) He supported himself in Thessalonica to model the importance of work
 - 3) Paul said he worked “*night and day*” to support himself and teach them

C. **Unique Problem:** So focused on Christ’s return that they sat around to wait

1. Paul wants us focused on Jesus’ return— he just wants us to wait differently
2. We wait best when we’re busy— taking care of our needs and needs of others

III. Conclusion

- A. The church really has **two responsibilities** when it comes to helping others
1. **First**, we must help people in need, especially other Christians (**Gal 6:10**)
¹⁰Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.
 - a. Someone has summarized this as —“*Help all you can when you can*”
 - b. John uses caring for brothers and sisters as acid test of love (**1 Jn 3:17**)
If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?
 - c. Part of the reason we work is so we can care for others (**Eph 4:28**)
He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.
 2. **Second**, we can't allow our compassion to enable idle people (**2 Thess 3:10**)
 - a. A willingness to work was seen as a requirement for those the church helps
 - b. **Example:** Widows helped by the church to be known for work (**1 Tim 5:10**)
well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the saints, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds.
 3. It can be complex balancing these commands of compassion & responsibility
- B. Paul says “never tire of doing what is right” (**3:13**) See **Gal 6:9** and **1 Cor 15:58**
1. It is easy to get discouraged in doing good... for a number of reasons
 - a. Seems it doesn't matter (“*Sometimes I get discouraged and think my work's in vain*”)
 - b. We seem inadequate and unprepared for the task (*the “grasshopper complex”*)
 - c. Job is so big, we don't know where to start (*eat an elephant one bite at a time*)
 - d. No one else seems to care (*Martha was frustrated because Mary wasn't working*)
 2. But Paul encourages us, command us, to never tire of doing what's right
- C. Dan is leaving tomorrow and I'm bummed—for a lot of personal reasons
1. But there is a ministry reason too—who will do all the things that Dan does?
 - a. Forget the elder, missionary, teacher—who will cut grass and bake muffin?
 - b. What if we apply what Paul said about being idle to work of the church?
 - 1) Do we expect others to work so that we can come and enjoy benefits?
 - 2) The 80-20 principle really is true—20% of people do 80% of the work
 2. Paul's challenge is “never tire of doing what's right”
 - a. Dad's saying, “*Make hay while sun shines*” and “*Trading daylight for dark*”
 - b. The song we're about to sing puts it “*Work for the Night is Coming*” Are we?