

## 2 Thessalonians – Lesson 19

### The Warning Against Idleness – Part 2

#### Read 2 Thessalonians 3:7-15

1. What is the *problem* that Paul introduces in v. 6? How does it relate to the *whole* of the letter, and (more specifically) his request for *prayer* in 3:1-5?

Paul introduces his concerns about the issue of *idleness*, specifically, some in Thessalonica who were *failing to work* because they were anticipating the return of the Lord. Given that Paul has already answered their questions regarding the Parousia, it seems reasonable that Paul addresses *directly* those who thought that they no longer needed to earn a living since Christ's return was imminent. Since the *prerequisites* regarding Christ's return had not yet come to pass, it was fair to say that the Parousia was not *terribly* "immediate," thus everyone should "carry on" with normal daily life, with an *anticipation* of his return. This concern is also connected to his request for prayer: just as *he* was continuing to carry out the work assigned to him by Christ, and he needed their prayer for it to proceed well, so the *Thessalonians* should be hard at work too, trusting God and praying for his grace in their daily lives.

2. (a) From vv. 7-8, describe how Paul *lived* in Thessalonica. What did he *do* for a living (see Acts 18:1)?

It would appear, from Acts 18:1, that Paul was a professional *tentmaker*, a worker in leathers and durable fabrics that were fashioned into dwelling places. Given the number of *semitic peoples* living in that part of the world, such a business could be quite lucrative. So, the *assertion* in vv. 7-8 is that Paul, *like everywhere else*, set up his business in Thessalonica, earned a living during the day, and preached the gospel throughout the city at night. He was, you could say, a *bi-vocational* apostle: earning his living through normal means, and preaching and teaching "on the side."

(b) From Acts 17:1-9, how *long* do you think Paul stayed in Thessalonica? Why was this *long enough* to establish a "*tradition*" amongst them regarding work (see v. 6)?

Luke's description of Paul and Silas' visit to Thessalonica makes it appear as though it is quite short, potentially only a few weeks: the specific reference to "*three Sabbath days*" in v. 2 implies three weeks. The opposition by the Jews to Paul's ministry rose up immediately, and the missionary team departed quickly after it did (see v. 10), so it seems that the total time in the city was probably less than a month. This would be, however, fully long enough for Paul to have established a "*tradition*" amongst them: they would have seen him working as a tentmaker during that month, being taught biblical doctrine, theology, and *Christology* at night. And, the "*tradition*" was not just about his working (although that is the context here); it was *also* about the truths that he had left with them in his teaching, that would establish a *Christian worldview* amongst them.

3. (a) What "*right*" (v. 9) did Paul believe that he had before the Thessalonian believers? Why did he choose *not* to exercise it in that city?

Paul believed, by virtue of *both* his standing as an Apostle *and* his work of preaching the gospel to them, and them coming to faith, that he had the right to be *supported financially* while he was with them. Paul understood the *value* of the gospel: the message he delivered had *life-changing* value, a value which extended to a new *eternal life* within them. Thus, he believed that such a message, *given its value*, could have been "paid for" by the believers in Thessalonica supporting him while there (i.e., providing his food, shelter, etc.). However, Paul insists that he *did not* exercise this right in the city because 1) he did not want to be a "*burden*" to anyone (v. 8), maybe because the Thessalonian believers were *poor themselves*, and 2) he wanted to provide an *example* of hard work before them (v. 10), as a part of the message of the gospel.

(b) Compare v. 9 to 1 Corinthians 9:1-12a. What is Paul's point regarding *support* in the church? What do you believe 1 Corinthians 9:13-14 implies for the *modern* church?

Paul argues, both from *common sense* (vv. 3-7) and from *the law* (vv. 8-10; quoting from Deut. 25:4) that those who “labor” to bring the message of God to the people *ought to receive their support from that work*. Paul argues that the work of preaching, teaching, shepherding, counseling in doctrine, and providing an example of a lived-out biblical worldview before others is a work *valuable enough* to warrant support from those who are *receiving* it. Others had certainly done so (e.g. Peter), and the law provided for proper payment to those who work (e.g., the oxen that tread out the grain), so Paul concludes that this must *also* apply to the work of ministry; those who benefit from such labor should be willing to *compensate* those who do it! In vv. 13-14, Paul is explicit, citing an *example* from the Old Covenant: just as the priests who served in the temple *as their full-time job* drew their compensation from the work, so those who “proclaim the gospel” should make their “living” by that same work. Or, more likely in this context, the *church* (i.e., the Corinthians and Thessalonians) should *desire* to remunerate their shepherds in order to assure that these men *do the best they can in bringing the message*. The church should *want* to pay a pastor well enough that he can *fully concentrate* on delivering the message of God; they should “prevent” the pastor from focusing on other forms of work so that he can put all of his energies into delivering what they need, *spiritually*.

(c) How does 1 Corinthians 9:12b explain *why* Paul took no remuneration from the Thessalonians (or the Corinthians)?

Paul wanted *not* to put any “obstacle” in the way of them hearing and obeying the gospel of Christ, so he chose *not* to accept any remuneration from them. Although the principle remains (i.e., he had the *right* to take such support), he *chose not to* in order to keep any “distractions” away, *especially* during their initial formation as a church. In other words, Paul didn’t want “money” to become a “sore spot” with them, as though his *only reason* for preaching was to get paid; he desired from them to hear the gospel, come to faith, and join together as a church without any issues of money, and *only then* to see the importance of money *within the framework of a biblical, Christian worldview*.

4. (a) List some *principles* from vv. 10-11 that the church should employ in regards to *benevolence*.

Benevolence, from a Christian standpoint, is *typically* understood in relation to the proper recognition of the value of both money and work *through a biblical worldview*: the church *is* to be generous towards others when it comes to their monetary needs. But, the church is *also* to connect that benevolence to the *advancement of the cause of Christ*. The one who comes for a “hand out” without a *central* understanding of a Christian perspective is *not* to receive help; i.e., anyone not willing to work should not eat, *at the expense of the church*. In other words, Paul’s theology of work (built upon a biblical worldview) demands that each man should work to support his family, and the church should only help *beyond* what the man can do, or in situations that are beyond the power of the man to help. Benevolence is *not* to be a substitute for hard work; Christians should understand the importance of “pulling their weight” and the church should not “reward” the lazy.

(b) How does Paul *clarify* these principles in 1 Timothy 5:1-16?

In 1 Timothy 5, Paul outlines a benevolence program established in Ephesus under Timothy's watch-care: a fund to help *widows* in the church. Given that widows were at the *lowest end* of the economic spectrum in that culture and time, the Widow's Fund would be a means employed by the church to help such women to survive, given that they were without husbands, their *primary* line of support. However, in establishing the Fund, Paul makes it clear that only those *unable* to find another line of support were to be included: in v. 9 he identifies such as those over 60, who had been the wife of a *single husband*, who had a reputation for good works (i.e., was generous herself), raised her children well, and devoted herself to a life of compassion towards others. Younger widows, Paul insisted, were to seek *other* means of support, namely, to find a husband and marry, and not to rely upon the generosity of the church. In other words, Paul's qualifications of the Widows Fund clarifies his view of benevolence: only those *unable to support themselves* should be included; those who could work or find a husband to support themselves should seek those things out instead.

(c) What does Paul mean by some being "*busybodies*" (v. 11; 1 Timothy 5:13)? What is the *difference* between being "*busy at work*" and being a busybody?

A busybody is someone who "*sticks their nose*" into other people's business, looking to "*influence*" others by regularly "*commenting*" on what others ought to be doing or thinking. Paul connects this term to the unmarried, younger widows of the church (1 Tim. 5:13): having no "*cares*" (i.e., being "*idlers*") they go from house to house, gossiping and wasting time on frivolous matters, rather than supporting themselves. A busybody is not "*busy*" in a *productive* sense; one who is "*busy at work*" is productive, and the contrast is obvious.

5. (a) From v. 13 (in context), what do you think Paul means by "*doing good*?" How can Christians "*grow weary*" in doing so?

"*Doing good*," in this context is *undoubtedly* about working for a living, earning what is needed for life, and supporting yourself and your family. However, Christians can "*grow weary*" in this because, *like everything else under the sun*, work can become monotonous and unsatisfying. The Curse placed over Adam, where he would toil and sweat to bring forth food from the ground, transferred itself to every aspect of work: the day-to-day grind of being an adult and working to pay the bills can become deeply discouraging at times. However, Paul intimates that Christians *have a reason* to work that should bring them joy: the work they are doing is part of what it means to be *redeemed*, as Christ is working to redeem *all things* to himself. Thus, the *follower of Jesus* is to understand work *biblically*; to see it as simply a means of support *that gives us the freedom to do the more important work of preaching and teaching the gospel*. The secular man sees work as the "*end*" in itself; the Christian man sees work as a "*means*" to a greater goal, one of leading his family in the things of Christ.

(b) What *imperative* does Paul put before the Thessalonian believers in v. 14? Why does Paul insist on such a *harsh* treatment of the idle?

Paul insists that faithful believers *should not even associate* with the idle person, but to "*shun*" them in order to *shame them*. This is consistent with John's view in 2 John 10-11: don't allow *anyone* who would attempt to lead you astray from the truth of the gospel into your life, either *directly* through sinful temptations or *indirectly* through idleness. Such harsh treatment is *necessary*: idleness is catching (like all other temptations)! True believers are to surround themselves *only* with those who have embraced a biblical worldview, and to "*put out*" of their lives any other sinful influences. One's soul is at stake, and the deceiver would have the Christian to destroy his own fate (if possible).