

“Idleness Is the Devil’s Workshop?”—2 Thessalonians 3:10-12

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Idleness Is the Devil’s Workshop?”, is 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 → *Even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

There is an old adage which says: “An idle mind is the devil’s workshop and idle hands his tools.” It is a way of saying that people, especially children in particular, should be kept busy with something so they will stay out of trouble. It is actually the mentality which drives much “parenting.” If we keep our children busy there will be no time to get into trouble. The assumption is that, if your child is kept busy in activities or work with strict requirements, s/he will not get into trouble. Thus, when he does get into trouble, the parents are surprised because they thought the chances were pretty good that it wouldn’t

happen. Even adults refer to their busy-ness many times as “keeping them out of trouble.” We can soon discover that “trouble” can be the sinner’s “middle name.”

“Idleness is the devil’s workshop” is an old adage which implies that boredom produces sin. Actually, acts of sin are produced by a heart of sin as Jesus says in Matthew 15:19 → ***Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.*** The only thing that can produce sin in our lives is our own sinful heart. This is why the devil is constantly tempting us by using the world around us, providing the catalyst to produce sin from our sinful heart. Idleness simply provides an atmosphere within which sin can be bred through temptation. Maybe it’s not an insignificant fact that along with Adam and Eve’s fall into sin came hard work.

(cf. Genesis 3:17-29)

Our text records Paul admonishing some of the Christians in Thessalonica, Greece because of their behavior within an atmosphere of idleness. According to verse 11 he and his companions had received the report *that some of their fellow Christian brothers and sisters among them were living in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.* Apparently this situation had escalated to the point where some pretty strong commands were in order, such as that in verse 10 of our text: *If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.* If any Christian

didn't follow this command they were instructed to *take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed*. At the same time, they were *not to regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother*. (cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:14-15)

What was the situation which made these instruction necessary? There were some Christians in Thessalonica who apparently made the choice to quit working. Some theologians think it was because of their focus on Jesus' return on the Last Day and their selling all their possessions, quitting work and waiting for Him to come back. This has happened with various groups throughout history who have tried to calculate His return only to see the day pass with unfulfilled expectations. However, in the meantime one has to live. Thus, they became a burden to their fellow Christians if they expected them to provide for them physically. This could explain the stern command: *If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat*.

The other burden is bound up in his description of them as walking *in idleness*, being *busybodies*. 1 Timothy 5:13 describes such people as *idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not*. The idleness provided an atmosphere within which the devil could tempt them to produce gossip, slander and other forms of sin which was destroying the church from within.

Thus, it was in light of this burden on the church for the command in verse 12 of our text: *Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.*

So what was the problem here? The fact that they weren't working? It was apparently a part of the problem rather than the solution. The problem was their focus. While they were focused on Christ, they were so focused on His 2nd Coming that they lost sight of their walk of faith as people of His 1st Coming.

Jesus instructs you in Matthew 24:41 to *be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.* How is one ready for His coming? By selling all your possessions and quitting your job to sit around looking for Him to appear in a cloud? By engrossed manipulation of the Bible in order to determine what day, time period or hour He will come back? Good luck! Jesus Himself said: *But concerning that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only.* (cf. Matthew 24:36) Do you get ready by so much focus on "end times events" that it places the 2nd Coming of the Jesus as more important than His 1st Coming for your forgiveness, life and salvation?

No! Being ready for Jesus' coming on the Last Day happens as you trust in what He did for you in His 1st incarnational coming. He came into the midst

of sinful people, unable to fulfill God's Law as His perfection demands. Jesus obeyed God's Law perfectly in your stead. He came into the midst of your sin to die on the cross, the perfect sacrifice, payment for the punishment which your sins deserved. You don't have to carry the burden and guilt of those sins along with the punishment of hell any longer because Jesus dealt with them once and for all on the cross **for you!** He rose again in order to defeat death so that you can rise again and live eternally in His presence! You are ready to meet Jesus at His 2nd Coming by repenting of your sins and simply trusting in His work at His 1st Coming **for you!**

This daily faith focus on your redemption through faith in Jesus affects how you live during this time before His 2nd Coming in a proper manner. While looking for His return, you also recognize this time as important because it displays God's patience, *not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.* (cf. 2 Peter 3:9) It is a time for us Christians to *lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.* (cf. 1 Timothy 2:2) Why? So that our living reflects Jesus and opens the doors for us to share with others the forgiveness of sins which He purchased in His 1st Coming for them! Not scare them into some kind of belief in order to avoid atrocities connected with His 2nd Coming.

A faith focused on the Person & Work of Jesus at His 1st Coming grants

you peace in the struggles of your daily life even in relation to His coming on the Last Day. There's nothing of which to be afraid. Jesus Himself says in Luke 21:28 that when the signs of the end *take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near*. This is what we are called upon to do right now!

So . . . do your *work quietly and . . . earn your own living* as one who belongs to Jesus. Do your *work quietly and . . . earn your own living* as a forgiven sinner whose focus is to bring Christ to the sinners around you. Do your *work quietly and . . . earn your own living* as one who is looking forward to Christ's return with joyful anticipation! Amen.

Now may the Lord of peace Himself

give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all.

(cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:16)

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