

Idleness

2 Thessalonians: 3:1-18

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2 Thessalonians 3:1-5 – Prayer requested & given (NIV)

As for other matters, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you. ² And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people, for not everyone has faith. ³ But the Lord is faithful, and he will strengthen you and protect you from the evil one. ⁴ We have confidence in the Lord that you are doing and will continue to do the things we command. ⁵ May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

v1 – Why did Paul ask for prayer?

Finally, brethren, pray for us: Paul constantly asked other Christians to pray for him (Romans 15:30, 2 Corinthians 1:11, Ephesians 6:18-19, Philippians 1:19, Colossians 4:3, 1 Thessalonians 5:25, and Philemon 1:22). Paul knew that the success of his ministry in some measure depended on the prayers of God's people.

That the word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified:

Paul's great concern — what he first asked the Thessalonian Christians to pray for — was that God's Word be **free** to do its work among others, even as it had among the Thessalonians (**just as it is with you**).

What does it tell us that Paul wanted God's message to be without any hindrance?

Paul's prayer request makes us wonder how often the work of God's Word is hindered by our prayerlessness.

Why is it important that the message of the Lord not be hindered?

Isaiah 55:11 – *So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.*

God's Word is powerful and can change lives when it is not hindered.

v2 – Who might hinder God's message from whom Paul sought deliverance?

unreasonable and wicked men: Paul wanted God to either deliver him from such men, or change them into reasonable and godly men.

What characterized the wicked and evil people?

They did not have faith in God.

The NKJV says unreasonable and wicked... the faithless are not rational; People without God have a diminished reasoning capacity – no Holy Spirit.

v3 – Who is the evil one?

Satan, or any of his fallen angel proxies.

- God promised to keep Satan on a leash. He will not allow any temptation to become too great for us (1 Corinthians 10:13), and will not allow Satan to do whatever he wants with us (Luke 22:31-32).

Why was Paul confident in God's protection from the evil one?

the Lord is faithful: Even if not *all* men have faith, the **Lord is faithful**. This was the basis of Paul's confidence in God's ability to **establish** and **guard** us from the **evil one**.

v4 – Why was Paul confident that the Thessalonians would obey God's plans?

Paul was confident (**in the Lord**) regarding the Thessalonians themselves, that they would follow through and be obedient to God's Word (**that you do and will do the things we command you**).

- This shows that God's work of establishing and guarding us is done, in part, through His appeal to our will in obeying His Word.
- God doesn't just pour spiritual maturity and stability into us. He works it in us through our cooperation with His will.

v5 – Why is God's love and Christ's perseverance important?

These were two qualities essential for the kind of spiritual stability and strength the Thessalonians needed.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-18 – Instructions for the strength and purity of the church (NIV)

⁶ In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ nor did we eat anyone's food

without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. ⁹ We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.”

¹¹ We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. ¹² Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat. ¹³ And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good.

¹⁴ Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instruction in this letter. Do not associate with them, in order that they may feel ashamed. ¹⁵ Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer.

¹⁶ Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.

¹⁷ I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write.

¹⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

v6 – What command did Paul relate to the Thessalonians here?

That you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly: Paul defined the **disorderly** as those who did not walk **according to the tradition** (the pattern of teaching and living) Paul and the apostles gave to them.

- Churches should never withdraw from someone because he fails to conform to *man’s* traditions or teachings. The only standard to uphold is *apostolic* tradition and teaching.
- The present tense of the verb *walks* denotes that it is a deliberate course of action. Their disorderly conduct is not an occasional lapse but a persistent practice.

Why did Paul say to keep away from the idle and disruptive?

Paul had already told the Thessalonians to *warn the unruly* (1 Thessalonians 5:14). Apparently, the problem still remained in some measure, so he told them to now discipline the *unruly* ones in question.

What is the problem with the idle?

Being idle is not characteristic of true born-again Christians...

Ephesians 2:10 – *For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.*

We are saved for the purpose of doing good works...

James 2:17-18 – *faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead... I will show you my faith by my works.*

What is the purpose in withdrawing from the disobedient?

It was not so much punishment, but more so simply to deny these disobedient ones the aid and comfort of the fellowship of the body of Christ until they repented.

- It put them out of the church into the “domain” of Satan (the world), in hope that they might miss the fellowship of the church so much they would repent of their disobedience.
- Paul echoed the same idea in 1 Corinthians 5:4-5. The purpose was to bring about repentance and salvation in the disobedient ones, not to condemn or damn them.
- In an indirect way, Paul showed that his vision for the church was that it should be such a place of love and comfort that one would genuinely feel sad and sorry to be excluded from the church. Churches today should also fit that description.

v7-9 – How had Paul been an excellent example among the Thessalonians?

Paul worked hard to support his own needs. This wasn’t because apostles like Paul didn’t have the right to request support. Instead, it was because he wanted to set a good example of hard work and prove false any accusation that he preached the Gospel for personal gain.

- Therefore, the Thessalonians should follow Paul in his example of both hard work and willingness to sacrifice for the furtherance and integrity of the Gospel.

v10 – What is the principle regarding idleness?

If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat: Simply put, Paul says that if anyone **will not work** (instead of *can not work*), **neither shall he eat**. God’s plan is to provide for our needs through our work.

Since God is able to provide our needs in any manner imaginable, why does He require our work?

This is part of God’s character; because He is a busy God and always at work Himself, we being made in His image should also work.

- Adam worked in the Garden of Eden even before the Fall.
- Work is an opportunity for us to exercise our unique creativity and to also bless others.

How is idleness in general regarded in Scripture?

Scripture often addresses sloth or laziness as sin. For example, Proverbs 18:9 says, “*One who is slack in his work is brother to one who destroys.*” Proverbs 19:15 adds, “*Laziness brings on deep sleep, and the shiftless go hungry*”—there is a clear link between not working and not eating in this proverb. Ecclesiastes 10:18 also notes the negative consequences of laziness: “*Through laziness, the rafters sag; because of idle hands, the house leaks.*”

- A sluggard is a person who has the ability to work but refuses to. He lacks the drive, personal responsibility, and common sense to provide for his needs.
- Regarding sluggards, see also Proverbs 6:9, 10:26, 13:4, 19:24, 20:4, 21:25, 22:13, & 26:14

v11 – How else is idleness a problem?

The idleness of some had become a source of sin. It was not only because of the work that they *didn't do*, but also because of the harm they *did do* with their idle time (**but are busybodies**).

- There is a play on words between the ancient Greek phrasing in the lines **not working at all** and **but are busybodies**. The idea is something like “busybodies who do no business.”

Why might the Thessalonians have had idle busybodies?

Perhaps these **busybodies** thought that if Jesus was coming soon, it made no sense to work. It would then be easy for them to intrude into the lives of others and take advantage of Christian generosity.

v12 – What were the idle busybodies commanded to do?

With authority, **through our Lord Jesus**, Paul commanded these **busybodies** to **work**, to get out of the business of others (**in quietness**) and to provide for their own needs (**eat their own bread**) instead of expecting other Christians to provide for them.

- The early church did provide for the truly needy among them, but only after being certain that they were truly needy and after putting them to work for the church (1 Timothy 5:3-16).
- Paul forbid the Thessalonians to encourage laziness by indulging it, and taughts that those who provided for themselves with the necessities of life by honorable and useful work characterize a life of holiness.

v13 – What encouragement did Paul offer here?

Do not grow weary in doing good: This was a proper encouragement for those who were working as they should. Few things are more wearying than seeing others take advantage of Christian generosity. But we should never let the manipulations of some discourage us from doing good to the truly needy.

What excuses might one make to accepting weariness in doing good?

- “It takes so much effort to keep doing good” — but you will extend effort towards the things of the world.
- “It takes so much self-denial to keep doing good” — but it is worth it when we consider the reward.

- “It just brings me persecution to do good” — but your persecutions are nothing compared to that which others have suffered.
- “People don't respond and there are little results when I do good” — but remember how slow you were to respond to Jesus Christ.
- “It doesn't earn much gratitude when I do good” — but God sends many blessings even to those who do not thank or appreciate Him.

v14-15 – What should be done about Christians who do not obey God?

Note that person and do not keep company with him: To *withdraw* means to **note that person**, and to **not keep company with him**, with the purpose of causing him to be **ashamed**. Yet, the purpose is not to make him an **enemy** of the church, but through the severity of the withdrawal from fellowship, to warn and **admonish** him as an erring **brother**.

- The intention of excommunication is not to drive men from the Lord's flock, but rather to bring them back again when they have wandered and gone astray... Excommunication is to be distinguished from anathema.

v16 – Why did Paul conclude his letter with a blessing of peace?

It was appropriate for this church experiencing both persecution and tribulation. It is the presence of the **Lord of peace** that will grant them this peace.

v17 – Why did Paul point out that the end salutation was by his own hand?

As was his custom, Paul himself wrote the final words of the epistle with his own hand. This was both a personal demonstration of affection, and proof that the letter was authentic (**a sign in every epistle**).

v18 – What was the significance of Paul's final words being a benediction of grace?

For Paul, God's **grace** was the beginning and the end of the Christian life. It was appropriate that this letter — and most — of his letters began and ended with a mention of **grace**.

What applications come to mind from this passage?

- Don't quench the Spirit; let Him work in our lives and in others
- Idleness is deadly; a godly work-ethic is a blessing to ourselves and others.
- Don't grow weary from doing good; the rewards are worth it!