

Grace, mercy, and peace be to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ:

“Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus to do their work quietly and to earn their own living” (2 Thessalonians 3:12).

What is your view on work? Is work a pleasing thing or is work something that you’d rather not do? What is your opinion on work?

The people from the day of St. Paul to today often have a wrong view of work. For most people, they view work like this: *“I owe, I owe, so off to work I go.”*

For most people, work is just seen as a necessary evil. Work is just a way to pay off debts or to fund your lifestyle. For most people, they would rather extoll the virtue of laziness. Or they would rather do anything else but work, such as fishing, hunting, golfing, sailing, traveling. You can think of all those signs that say, “I would rather be – *just fill in the blank.*” So, often, we would rather be doing anything else but work.

With this attitude, it is easy to see why so many people dislike their job. They see work as valueless – *except for the paycheck.* That they like. But with this attitude, instead of trying to be the best at your job, so often people just want to do only enough to avoid being fired, or to be constantly looking for a better and more lucrative opportunity. In general, so many of us just show utter indifference to the quality of your work. The one thing that makes the difference is getting that paycheck, so, again, *“I owe, I owe, so off to work I go.”*

Who really wants to work? Work is hard work! But this attitude is nothing new, for there is nothing new under the sun.

You see, throughout history, cultures have denigrated the value of work. Jews thought work was inferior to studying God’s Law. Greeks and Romans viewed manual labor as beneath their dignity. They viewed work as only fit for slaves or the lower class.

Even in the early to medieval Church, Christians had a negative view on work. They saw the first-class Christians serving God alone through church-work vocations, such as pastor, monk or nun. They saw second-class Christians as those who would engage in secular employment.

This was the prevalent view until Martin Luther promoted the doctrine of vocation, which taught the Biblical truth that all Christians are equal in Christ. Luther promoted the idea that all honest work is a way to serve God and your neighbor. So, a shoemaker serves God by making durable and well-crafted shoes, and a baker by baking good bread, and a pastor by preaching and administering the Sacraments rightly. All are God-given vocations. Each vocation is a mask of God. For example, behind the baker is a gracious God faithfully providing for His creatures.

Through this doctrine of vocation, there is no such thing as just a “secular job” for a Christian, since all work is our spiritual duty as is done to give glory to God.

In the Garden, God gave us all the vocation of work. And originally, work was not a chore. Work used to be easy and enjoyable. Work was not a result of the Fall, since God commanded Adam to work in the Garden before the Fall (Genesis 2:15). The Fall did not initiate work, but the Fall certainly cursed it (Genesis 3:17-19).

So, because Adam did not listen to God and rather to Eve, work today is no longer easy and enjoyable, but laborious and painful.

Work was meant to be a gift from God. Work was meant to provide development of skill and productivity. Work was meant to provide contribution, value, meaning and fulfillment. Work was meant to prevent idleness. After all, as the saying goes, “Idle hands are the devil’s workshop.” God’s gift of work served as a means of demonstrating the image of God in man, who by work provides for the needs of all in their care. God’s gift of work was meant to serve one’s neighbor.

So, what was the situation in our Epistle reading today? Well, the situation in Thessalonica was that some people, believing the resurrection had already occurred, were living as if nothing mattered, and among other things, had stopped working. They did *nothing* all day, but blabber and chat and upset their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ by yapping and running their mouth. They had no filter. They offered their opinion on every subject, and especially proclaiming false doctrine – in this case, that the resurrection had already happened, strange as that falsehood may seem.

They were ***“not busy at work, but busybodies”*** (2 Thess. 3:11).

So, what was causing this strife? Certainly, there was disagreement about the coming of Christ, or if He had already come. But there was also an underlying cultural issue. You see, the Thessalonians may have been influenced by the prevailing Greek, Roman, and Jewish understandings of work, and felt that work was beneath their dignity. Or, it could have just been plain laziness. In this letter, St. Paul does not mention their motives for failing to work, because none of them are valid, since there is no excuse for someone who is physically able to work and thus chooses *not* to work.

The Holy Spirit inspires St. Paul to be quite clear: ***“If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat”*** (2 Thess. 3:10). This may seem harsh, but freeloading **does not come without consequences**. Talking and not working is not a victimless crime. Nothing is free. Everything has a cost. And St. Paul’s point is simple: If people get hungry enough, they will work for food. Solomon was inspired to put it this way in Proverbs 16: ***“A laborer’s appetite labors for him, because the hunger of his mouth drives him on”*** (Proverbs 16:26).

So, Christians who have the opportunity and the ability to work are to work so they can eat. And for those who have the ability to work and refuse to work, God’s Word says in 1 Timothy 5: ***“If anyone does not provide for his own family, and especially for his own household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever”*** (1 Timothy 5:8).

The core issue of Paul here is on those ***not*** willing to work. He is not going after those physically unable to work. There is a difference. The difference is on responsibility. Able-bodied people are to work and care for their families and their neighbors in need who are physically unable to work. Paul, here, is saying don’t be too lazy to work.

In modern America, we are so used to entitlements. This is the idea that those who will not work are entitled to be paid money from those who do work. And the results of this welfare culture are evident for all to see. Some use this system as a safety net; others abuse this system to their advantage. Certainly, financial needs must be met when you or I hit hard times. At those hard times, welfare is certainly a blessing, but as God’s Word says, if you are physically able to work, you must work. Again, idle hands are never good, since God created us to work, so that we would benefit our family and our neighbor.

For these Thessalonians, this idleness was not just a matter of mooching on their neighbor's bread or sticking their noses into others' business, this idleness exemplified living *“not in accord with the tradition [that is, the teachings of the faith] that you received from us”* (2 Thess. 3:6).

You see, not only had they become lazy at work, but they had also become complacent spiritually. They were not imitating the teachings of their divine Master Jesus Christ. They were altering teachings they were not to alter. They were teaching laziness as a good thing across temporal and spiritual realms. They were weighed down with the cares of life. They were not awake spiritually.

Like the Thessalonians then, if you had a choice to work or not to work, what would you choose? Knowing my sinful nature, I'd choose not to work. But laziness is a serious sin against God who created us with talents and abilities to work. It is also a sin against the Body of Christ, against our brothers and sisters in Christ, to whom we are connected as co-workers.

Even though St. Paul calls us to keep away from those who walk in idleness, his Lord and our Lord Jesus Christ did not. Jesus came into this fallen world filled with lazy, sinful people. Now, Jesus never encouraged idleness, but He did call the sinner to realize the seriousness of his sin, so he would repent and be saved through His blood and merit, rather than continuing on his sinful path to his soul's destruction.

Jesus came into this fallen world to save us. He lived the life we were all called to live. He did the work. He completed our work. He suffered and died the penalty that we all deserve because of our sin: death. He died, so that He would be raised again, so that by faith in Him, we also receive the fruits of His cross and bodily resurrection: forgiveness of sins, life everlasting, and salvation. Jesus did the work. He didn't ignore us. He died for us. He rose for us. He ascended for us.

So, for everyone who is in Christ, everyone who has received His grace and mercy, let us not grow weary of doing good. Let us who are able to use our talents and responsibilities use them for the good of your neighbor. May the Lord help us to follow His example through our daily vocations. With the Holy Spirit's help, let us never grow weary in doing good. Amen.

*The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.*

+ SOLI DEO GLORIA +