

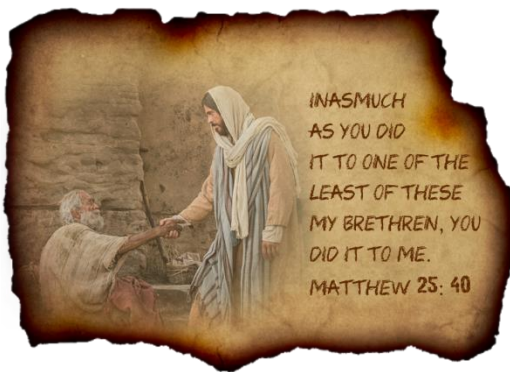
## Warning Against Idleness

### 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15

Online Sermon:

[http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page\\_id=3567](http://www.mckeefamily.com/?page_id=3567)

Praise be to God that we have received every spiritual blessing in our Lord Jesus Christ! With humility, prayer, and gratitude, we aspire to extend the solace, compassion, grace, and affection bestowed upon us by Christ to those who hunger, thirst, and lack clothing,



thereby embodying His love in action. But what does the Good Shepherd require of us when those extending their hands for assistance can work and provide for themselves? Amid soaring costs of essentials like food and gasoline,

who among us hasn't felt the pressure to cinch our financial belts tighter, diligently stretching every penny to its fullest extent? Giving was undoubtedly simpler when it stemmed from our abundance, but nowadays, it frequently involves forfeiting our own desires to support others. This truth often prompts Christians to ponder the genuine need

of the recipient before reaching into their nearly depleted pockets. Should those who have received ample comfort from the Lord extend aid to those who can provide for themselves but choose not to do so because receiving a handout demands less effort? What if these "takers" reside within the sanctuary of the church? If those who have been abundantly comforted by the Lord hesitate to support these individuals, do we risk facing the accusation from the Good Shepherd of neglecting His hunger and thirst? Furthermore, if we dare withhold our giving from these "takers," does the Lord desire us to take further action and discipline them for their deceitful endeavors? In the following sermon we are going to answer these questions by reviewing Paul's warning against idleness as taken from 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15.

## Keep Away from Believers who are Idle

With a "distinctly military ring"<sup>1</sup> and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, Apostle Paul commanded the brothers and sisters of the church of Thessalonica to discipline those who were idle and disruptive. Among the congregation, there were individuals who, influenced either by the societal norms of Greco-Roman aristocracy which looked down upon manual labor,<sup>2</sup> a lack of motivation, or an intense anticipation of the imminent return of the Lord, opted not to engage in productive

<sup>1</sup> David J. Williams, [1 and 2 Thessalonians](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 144.

<sup>2</sup> Craig S. Keener, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament](#) (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 2 Th 3:6.

work. Instead,<sup>3</sup> they relied on the generosity of more affluent believers, while investing their idle time in meddling with the affairs of others.<sup>4</sup> Since the “idlers” were ignoring his “softer appeal”<sup>5</sup> in his first letter, that “stressed the need to work and



**Idlers  
Disruptive**

to lead a quiet (i.e., nonpublic) life and thereby to avoid dependency on others (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12),”<sup>6</sup> Paul now commands the body of Christ to socially ostracize

this disobedient group.<sup>7</sup> He was not asking the church to exclude the offenders from membership or “place them in the category of the “evil or wicked”<sup>8</sup> but was likely suggesting they be “removed from formal activities of the church such as

corporate worship and the meal that was typically a part of the Lord’s supper celebration (1 Corinthians 5:11; 11:17–34).”<sup>9</sup> While this discipline does not seem harsh by our “Western society that is highly individualistic and largely shameless,”<sup>10</sup> in a culture where identity was often “bound up intimately with the group to which he or she belonged,”<sup>11</sup> this was harsh discipline indeed!

## Christians Should Work to Support Themselves

Paul urged the church to avoid the negative influence of those who were 'idle and disruptive.' Instead, he encouraged them to emulate his example by engaging in diligent work to provide for their own basic needs. In the Greco-Roman culture

<sup>3</sup> Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 109-110.

<sup>4</sup> Douglas J. Moo, “*The Letters and Revelation*,” in *NIV Biblical Theology Study Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2018), 2164.

<sup>5</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 603.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 270.

<sup>7</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 439–440.

<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 605.

<sup>9</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 440.

<sup>10</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians*, ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 604.

<sup>11</sup> Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos, 2002), 345.

of Paul's day, it was commonplace to teach by example<sup>12</sup> because "men/women tend to put more faith in their eyes than in their ears."<sup>13</sup> While Paul as an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ



had the right to financial support from the church he was ministering too he voluntarily chose to work night and day so that he could provide for his own basic needs and not be a burden to the church.<sup>14</sup> Paul's

adopted this practice of "self-sufficient work"<sup>15</sup> was not only because it distanced him from the idle workers and the "itinerant teaches whose coming was selfishly rooted in

financial gain personal glory, or both;"<sup>16</sup> but more importantly to exemplify the truth that "work is a good creation gift instituted by God prior to the Fall (Genesis 2:15)!<sup>17</sup> Believing that his "was patterned after God's stand for how to live"<sup>18</sup> Paul boldly stated, "the one who is unwilling to work shall not eat" (3:10)! While many of his day shared Paul's work ethic, such as Rabbi Abbahu<sup>19</sup> and the Stoics,<sup>20</sup> for Paul this was not just a clever philosopher to entice the masses to work to take care of themselves but rooted in God's word and as such a command<sup>21</sup> that when followed was a sweet aroma unto a holy God!

**Reflection.** Apostle Paul's exhortation to work or not eat is not a blanket statement applicable to every individual. The church, as stewards of the God of all comfort, still bears the responsibility to provide food and clothing to the impoverished and underprivileged, treating them as they would Christ

<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, [Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians](#), ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 607.

<sup>13</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, [Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians](#), ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 607.

<sup>14</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, [Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians](#), ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 612.

<sup>15</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, [Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians](#), ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 606.

<sup>16</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, [Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians](#), ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 610.

<sup>17</sup> Clinton E. Arnold, [Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon](#), vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 440.

<sup>18</sup> Mark Howell et al., [Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 249.

<sup>19</sup> Joseph R. Dodson, "1–2 Thessalonians," in [The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary](#), ed. J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020), 1202.

<sup>20</sup> Joseph R. Dodson, "1–2 Thessalonians," in [The Baker Illustrated Bible Background Commentary](#), ed. J. Scott Duvall and J. Daniel Hays (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2020), 1202.

<sup>21</sup> Jay E. Adams, [Romans, Philippians, I Thessalonians, and II Thessalonians](#), The Christian Counselor's Commentary (Cordova, TN: Institute for Nouthetic Studies, 2020), 234.

Himself (2 Corinthians 1:3-5; Matthew 25:35-40). However, Paul emphasizes the importance of personal responsibility, urging those capable of working to support their basic needs independently, thereby relieving the burden on both the church and government!

## Don't be a Burden

Paul skillfully employs a linguistic twist in his message, gently tempering his military-like tone<sup>22</sup> to effectively address the issue of idleness among his audience. He employs a clever wordplay in Greek<sup>23</sup> to convey his point: "they are not busy, they are busybodies." This linguistic finesse serves as a poignant critique of idleness, framing it not merely as a lack of activity, but as an indulgence in gossip and meddling in the affairs of others. Regardless of the underlying reasons—whether it stemmed from a sense of superiority regarding manual labor, sheer laziness, or an anticipation of the imminent return of the Lord—the consequences remained the same. The idleness among certain members of the community afforded them

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<sup>22</sup> David J. Williams, [1 and 2 Thessalonians](#), Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2011), 147.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Howell et al., [Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 250.

<sup>24</sup> Grant R. Osborne, [1 & 2 Thessalonians: Verse by Verse](#), ed. Elliot Ritzema and Danielle Thevenaz, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 207.

ample free time,<sup>24</sup> which, unfortunately, became fertile ground for Satan's influence.<sup>25</sup> This idleness led them down a path of sin, akin to the behavior of the widows mentioned in 1 Timothy



5:13. Much like those widows who wandered from house to house, spreading gossip, and meddling in the affairs of others, the idle members of the community found themselves similarly ensnared.<sup>26</sup> Their

free time became a breeding ground for idle chatter and interference in the lives of their brethren, ultimately undermining the unity and health of the body of Christ. Apostle Paul, firmly rooted in his own self-sufficient work ethic<sup>27</sup> and fortified by the authority vested in him by the Lord Jesus

<sup>25</sup> F. F. Bruce, [1 and 2 Thessalonians](#), vol. 45, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1982), 207.

<sup>26</sup> Grant R. Osborne, [1 & 2 Thessalonians: Verse by Verse](#), ed. Elliot Ritzema and Danielle Thevenaz, Osborne New Testament Commentaries (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2018), 207.

<sup>27</sup> Mark Howell et al., [Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 250.

Christ,<sup>28</sup> delivers a compelling appeal to the idlers within the community. His exhortation is clear: it is time for repentance and a return to diligent labor. Those who persist in idleness, irresponsibility, or disruption are to be ostracized,<sup>29</sup> not out of malice but out of a genuine concern for the integrity and cohesion of the community. This firm stance reflects Paul's unwavering commitment to upholding the standards of righteousness and accountability within the body of believers.

**Reflection.** To a church Paul had barely three weeks to establish he had received disturbing news, some within the church of Thessalonica had chosen to exploit the generosity of the body of Christ. As we enter our later years and retire, we find ourselves with increased discretionary time. Rather than succumbing to the temptation of becoming busybodies, spreading gossip, and meddling in the affairs of others, let us purposefully dedicate ourselves to nurturing the body of Christ and faithfully fulfilling the unique roles that God has appointed for each of us!

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<sup>28</sup> Gene L. Green, [\*The Letters to the Thessalonians\*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos, 2002), 352.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Holmes, [\*1 and 2 Thessalonians\*](#), The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 273.

<sup>30</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, [\*Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians\*](#), ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 623.

## Never Tire Doing Good

Though Paul did not want the church to “enable the idle members to continue to take advantage of the congregation’s generosity,”<sup>30</sup> neither did he want them to grow weary in doing what was good (verse 13)!<sup>31</sup> It is incredibly difficult to not



become discouraged when dealing with “irresponsible, and unproductive believers.”<sup>32</sup> While forbearance, forgiveness, and love are essential components of the character of God’s holy people, as outlined in

Colossians 3:12-14, the practice of church discipline also holds significance. This includes addressing individuals who persistently commit known sins, such as neglecting to engage in self-sufficient work as part of their lifestyle! “Sin within the body of Christ seldom goes away by itself”<sup>33</sup> but left unaddressed often gets worse, making unrighteousness

<sup>31</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, [\*Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians\*](#), ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 622.

<sup>32</sup> Mark Howell et al., [\*Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians\*](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 251.

<sup>33</sup> Mark Howell et al., [\*Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians\*](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 251.



glorified from the actions of a select few! “Although the apostle had absolved the patrons of their responsibility to those who did not want to work (v. 10), this in no way implied that they should quit doing what was correct on behalf of those in genuine need!”<sup>34</sup> After all the work ethic of the church was not to be about accumulating possessions, that are here today and gone tomorrow (Matthew 6:19-21), but about being self-sufficient and even earning extra so that one might be blessed in giving to the poor and “legitimately disadvantaged members of the church!”<sup>35</sup>

**Reflection.** It is incredibly difficult to not become bitter and discouraged when you see others take advantage of your generosity. By the sweat of your brow, you worked hard and pinched many pennies so that you might have a little left over to give to others. Despite there being many “takers” in our society, let us not grow weary giving to others as if we were giving to the Lord! While uncertainty may linger regarding the true recipients of our generosity, may we entrust the outcome of our giving to the Master, who alone governs the ripening of the fields!

## Conclusion - How to Treat Idle Believers

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<sup>34</sup> Gene L. Green, [\*The Letters to the Thessalonians\*](#), The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans Pub.; Apollos, 2002), 353.

<sup>35</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, [\*Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: 1–2 Thessalonians\*](#), ed. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 624.

With humility, prayer, and gratitude, we aspire to extend the solace, compassion, grace, and affection bestowed upon us by Christ to those who hunger, thirst, and lack clothing, thereby embodying His love in action. But when it comes to giving to those who refuse to work, Apostle Paul states the Good Shepherd has another plan in store for them. To not work but



instead rely on others for one's basic needs is a sin against God, for work is a good creation gift instituted by God prior to the Fall. It is also a sin to use one's freed up time from not having to work to become busybodies who indulge in gossip and meddle in the affairs of others. The body of Christ is not to tolerate such selfishness<sup>36</sup> but instead to discipline those who are idle and disruptive by not associating with them so that they might feel ashamed. Believers have the solemn responsibility to hold an unrepentant brother or sister in Christ accountable to keep the sin from spreading through the entire church!<sup>37</sup> Remember, sin within the body of Christ seldom goes away by

<sup>36</sup> Gary Steven Shogren, [\*1 & 2 Thessalonians\*](#), Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 329.

<sup>37</sup> Mark Howell et al., [\*Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians\*](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 255.

itself”<sup>38</sup> but left unaddressed often gets worse, making unrighteousness glorified from the actions of a select few! With great humility and grace, the body of Christ must come together and deal with sin collectively with a unified voice that is not meant to be punitive but instead one that deeply desires the sinful to repent and brought back into good standing before the Lord and them as well. Lastly, even though it can be disheartening to encounter irresponsible and unproductive believers, let us not allow their actions to justify withholding assistance from those unable to work. Instead, let us continue to share the comfort we have received from God with all who are in need.

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<sup>38</sup> Mark Howell et al., [\*Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians\*](#) (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2015), 251.