

Legacy Standard Bible 2 Thessalonians 3:6 - 18

6 Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who walks in an unruly manner and not according to the tradition which they received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we did not act in an unruly manner among you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; 9 not because we do not have the authority, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would imitate us. 10 For even when we were with you, we used to command this to you: if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat. 11 For we hear that some among you are walking in an unruly manner, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ, that working with quietness, they eat their own bread. 13 But as for you, brothers, do not lose heart in doing good. 14 And if anyone does not obey our word in this letter, take special note of that person to not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. 15 And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother. 16 Now may the Lord of peace Himself continually give you peace in every circumstance. The Lord be with you all! 17 The greeting is in my own hand—Paul, which is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

"Sweepers, Sweepers, man your brooms. Give the ship a clean sweep down both fore and aft! Sweep down all decks, ladders and passageways! Dump all garbage clear of the fantail! Sweepers."

That was the message you would hear over the main public address system aboard ship at the captain's pleasure. And a certain class of sailor, we knew exactly who we were, would begin our sweep downs.

Work is something that is universal to God's created image bearers. God works. God is not idle, and He designed His image bearers to glorify Him by capacities of thinking, planning, designing, and working to achieve

ends.

Animals don't work. They forage enough food for the day and then they move on to other things God created for them to do for His glory. They not only do not work, few animals save anything for later. A few do. It pleased God to design some animals with the pre-programmed sense to store enough food in season to last through a non food season.

Humans not only work, we try to plan for both our immediate future and longer range future. We work hard enough to provide shelter and food and safety for our partners and our young. Families are tiered. Working age men in families also provide support for family elders who can no longer work.

We are separate from the animals in that we are always thinking about tomorrow. We plan our work loads. We plan the amount of time for all of the activities we will need for the best quality of existence available to us.

God works and He designed us to work. Labor. Even before the fall, Adam had a job given to Him by God. He was a gardener in God's garden, and he also was tasked to give all of the animals a name. He was busy. Then, in the cool of the day, he walked and fellowshiped with God. Perfect contentment.

People study for lifetimes trying to nail down contentment. Here's a random sampling of titles from those stupid clickbait pocket articles that pop up every time I open a new page. This was Thursday morning's offerings; / 6 Causes of Burnout, and How to Avoid Them / What I've learned about relationships as an agony uncle / My 'Soul Is Tapped Out:' the Pandemic Killed My Ambition. Here's How I'm Getting It Back. / Job interviews are a nightmare — and only getting worse / What Is a Narcissist? (*someone who clicks on this stuff?*) / Born That Way: How Infant Temperament Extends Its Reach Into Young Adulthood / Burn, Baby, Burn: The New Science of Metabolism / *and my personal favorite . . .* We need a lot more electricians if we're going to electrify

everything (*missed the pyramid, . . . again*)

That one ever changing page is a science in itself of mass stupidity. The multimillion dollar industry of naval gazing trying to figure out why we're sad and what to try to make us content. We have endless fascination with what the secret method for happiness and wellness might be, if only we could read a 9 minute article and find out. How many times a day do you read; "This will change your life" "This widget changed my life."

Our book, God's revealed to us truth, tells us a couple of things that cause us satisfaction and contentment. Why would it surprise us to discover that the two things God created and designed us to do, would give us satisfaction and contentment? Two things that align with God's very design for us in creation.

*4 The **soul** of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, But the soul of the diligent is enriched.* Prov. 13:4

This problem goes to the core, the soul, the innermost being. The person who avoids work ends up with a deficit in his innermost parts. His soul craves. Poverty of spirit along with physical poverty. Laziness doesn't just empty your bank account, it empties your soul.

Likewise in this verse, the soul, the innermost being of one who works is enriched. Not just his bank account profits. His very soul is enriched. Look around you at our land. Have we ever been more spiritually bankrupt?

This will be your 20 minute pocket article on fulfillment and you don't even have to read it. Just listen. Two magic bullets. Are you ready for a game changer? The hidden secret to fulfillment and satisfaction? God built us, He designed us for worship, and He built us for work. He designed us for those dual functions. Big surprise that when we are running well in both of those areas, we are completely content.

And yet, also no surprise that in Adam's fallen race, those are the two things we work hard . . . not to do . . . and then we pay some psychiatrist a few gazillion dollars to explain to us why we don't feel happy, which he has no clue about, and then we wind up taking some drug to put us in a stupor.

A quick review of Genesis and we find Adam with his wife working during the heat of the day and then God came for a visit in the evening when it was cool. Except, sin interrupted the visit that day and we've been dodging God and dodging labor ever since.

The fallen human condition is to default to non worship and not working. The two things God designed us for, in our fallenness we actually work hard to avoid. But by avoiding those things built into our design, we also avoid the contentment, the wellness if you will, that comes if we return to God's original intent and design for us.

As I look back on 47 1/2 years of marriage with Pam I am thankful that as a christian couple, without really understanding completely what I'm teaching this morning, we simply embraced work and children and more work, and more children, lots of work, combined with worship as best could be found in our desert home, and almost as if by accident, we look back on much happiness.

We didn't understand God's design and plan for the happiness ahead of time. We simply minimally obeyed and lived within God's set design and it has turned out well for us. We are blessed, and anyone who comes into our home almost universally recognizes that blessing. We have always had laughter and joy along with our share of heartaches.

At 70 if someone asked me what is the secret to contentment in life, I might say, "Worship God and get up sober every week day and go to work." Ask God to give you a mate who will join with you in those simple endeavors, because the product of 2 far exceeds the math.

This morning then, we want to look at a biblical view of work ethic. What

does the Bible say about work? You don't have to go very far in the book to find a formulaic doctrine of both labor and worship.

*9 Six days you shall labor and do all your work,
10 but the seventh day is a sabbath of Yahweh your God; in it you shall not do any work, you or your son or your daughter, your male or your female slave or your cattle or your sojourner who is within your gates.
11 For in six days Yahweh made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, and rested on the seventh day; therefore Yahweh blessed the sabbath day and made it holy.* Exodus 20:9 - 11

Labor and worship are foundations of human thriving. They are expected. In the word of God, work and worship are normative. By design. And a few chapters later in Exodus 34 God says the division of those dual endeavors is to be consistent. Six days of labor and then a Sabbath day holy to the Lord.

21 *"You shall work six days, but on the seventh day you shall rest; even during plowing time and harvest you shall rest.* Business and necessity are not to interfere with cessation of work for the purpose of Sabbath worship.

How telling it is that when I was a young lad, back in the dark ages when our nation still had a sense and fear of Almighty God, just 60 years ago, almost everything was closed on Sunday.

Now in our secular culture which has dismissed God from His throne, yeah, His very being, there is no observance of a day of rest. At all. No fear of God. No sabbath. No worship. Universally in this land. Whoever it was that made up that logo "NO FEAR" that you see so often, I wonder if they realized the depth of that statement. No fear of God. No recognition of God. No worship. And following very closely behind, no work.

And I might add, from a perspective of a christian world view that understands God's design in creation, and understands the effects of sin, No Surprise.

*30 I passed by the field of the sluggard
And by the vineyard of the man lacking a heart of wisdom,
31 And behold, it was completely overgrown with thistles;
Nettles have covered its surface,
And its stone wall has been torn down.
32 And I beheld, I set my heart upon it;
I saw, I received discipline.
33 “A little sleep, a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands to rest,”
34 Then your poverty will come as a robber
And your want like an armed man. Prov. 24*

Laziness is the default of Adam's fallen race. When left to ourselves, or in the case of our culture in 2023, when enabled by our government, our fallen sinful natures will default to doing nothing.

The Bible has much to say about sluggard's. It is the favorite word of Solomon to define the person who gives in to laziness. A slacker.

*6 Go to the ant, O sluggard,
Observe her ways and be wise,
7 Which, having no chief,
Officer or ruler,
8 Prepares her food in the summer
And gathers her provision in the harvest.
9 How long will you lie down, O sluggard?
When will you arise from your sleep?
10 “A little sleep, a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands to rest”—
11 Your poverty will come in like a vagabond
And your want like an armed man. Prov. 6*

Notice that the writer of the Proverbs uses the feminine gender to describe the thing which is the metaphor for wisdom regarding labor. There's probably

no mistake there. Women seem to be more willing workers than men. Men are more susceptible to defaulting to the sin of laziness. It's universal in the fall, but I have observed less effect with women than men. My wife and my daughters have always been willing workers. My grandsons struggle more.

16 The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes

Than seven men who can respond with a discreet answer. Prov. 26:16

This is an associated phenomenon. People brag about their laziness. The more they cheat the system and escape any real work, the smarter they think they are. An empty soul combined with bragging. I'm the smartest man in the world. Don't do a lick of work. I make you feed me. I'm basically robbing money from your pocket to feed my belly. And I'm proud about that.

The Bible has a word for that. Sin. Evil. Theft. And combined with that, the government that will enable that is also evil.

The problem Paul is using great lengths to solve involves a member or members at Thessalonica who had ceased working and were therefore mooching for lack of a better word, we just called it theft, eating other people's food. Doing no work at all. Pah handling is the old term. And actually becoming busybody's. A problem. That lifestyle choice is sinful.

Last week we spent a whole service looking at the depth of the problem measured by the severity of the necessary solution. Whoever this person is, who has ceased work and is eating food other people worked to pay for, what he is doing is sin, and ultimately it gets dealt with in the same manner as any other continuous lifestyle ongoing unrepented sin.

Paul ordered the congregation to separate themselves from this person or people. That's serious. Even dire. That indicates that Paul and the elders remaining after Paul had departed, have worked with this person to correct the problem and they have been unresponsive. Unwilling to cease the sin

of not working and mooching other peoples food.

We looked at vss 5, 6, and 7 last week and we'll pick it up in vs. 7 again to re-establish the context going into verse 8. Paul says; You didn't learn this behaviour from our example! We struggled to earn our keep while we were with you. We ate no food we didn't pay for.

7 For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we did not act in an unruly manner among you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you;

That's the example set by Paul. He preached and taught by day, and he worked at his trade by night. We know from other places that Paul was a tentmaker, he prepared animal skins and sewed them together in order to make tents for dwelling in as a trade.

He worked hard to pay his own way so that he wouldn't cause any hardship on other people who were working for mere provision in that culture. That was his example to them. Work ethic. You say, doesn't the Bible say, The worker is worthy of his hire, you're supposed to pay the preacher? Yes. Yes it does.

1 Tim 5:17 The elders who lead well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor at preaching the word and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle the ox while it is threshing," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages."

Well then, doesn't that mean Paul should have been able to put all of his effort into church building? He shouldn't have had to make tents all night long and then taught all day long, right? Yes, perhaps, but Paul argues;

9 not because we do not have the authority, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would imitate us.

Paul could have enforced the Pay the Preacher rule. He did have that authority, and he tells us so right here. But he chose to forego his due payment for his work as their teacher in order to model a work ethic that they could imitate.

The Thessalonians seem to be a little hyper compared to other groups, other problems that Paul writes different letters to solve, in their fixation on Jesus imminent return. The rapture.

Did the non working guy find himself out of a job, perhaps as a result of his new faith, we really don't know, and then did he say, I think I'll just hang out and wait for Jesus, and let you folks feed me for a couple of weeks while we wait. No sense to go get more work if Jesus is on His way to get us.

If that's what was going on, was it a viable plan? Part of our christian work ethic comes from something Jesus said in a parable in Luke 19;

*11 Now while they were listening to these things, Jesus went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and they thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear **immediately**. (That's what the Thessalonians thought too. Jesus will be here tomorrow, why work today.)*
12 So He said, "A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return. 13 And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come back.'

I'm leaving you here while I go take care of my business somewhere else, not here, and while I'm gone, I expect you to engage in business here until I return. In the old english; *Occupy until I come*.

We also learn from that parable, not only are we to work in His absense, we also have a priority in our work. Our main work is to be engaging in the business of Christ's kingdom. He doesn't just tell us to work, He tells us to work for His benefit. We are not building our kingdom, we are engaging in labor for the benefit of our king, not us.

That's pretty foreign to our culture. Pretty crazy. I might work. But the reason capitalism works so well is because of the inherent greed built into Adam's fallen race. I *might* get up sober every day and work . . . for me.

Go back and read that parable in it's completeness in Luke 19:11 - 27, the parable of the 10 mina's. Jesus says, I'm the King, you're the slaves, you work for my kingdom, not yours. Shocking.

The reason capitalism works so well is because it rewards our fallen nature. We work hard to build our little kingdoms. Communism fails because of ideology. I ain't gonna bust my hump and you decide what everyone gets that's all equal. Really? Did someone say billionaire oligarch's? And I get to stand in line to get a loaf of bread if it doesn't run out before I get there?

Capitalism works based on the reality of our fallen greedy nature. I'll work harder than someone else and give you more value for your money so you'll take the product I labored to produce over my competitor and then I get to keep the reward of my hard work. That's real. And it works.

But the biblical standard, the dirty little secret that most christians never think about, and their churches aren't teaching them, Jesus is Lord, we are His slaves, we work for Him. The trouble is we can't out give Him. The more we work to build up His kingdom, the more blessings He pours out on us.

No, I'm not teaching prosperity gospel. You can be poor as a church mouse and when Jesus blesses you, with contentment, you'll also be the richest man in town. We can't outgive Him. True contentment, true prosperity, combined with inner peace, is contentment and joy in Christ, no matter your bank account.

Paul tells Timothy; *6 Of course, godliness with contentment is great gain. 7 For we brought nothing into the world, so we cannot carry anything out of it....* 1Tim 6:6,7

Capitalism beats communism hands down. But working for the King of kings and enjoying true joy and peace and contentment while we sojourn in this world, waiting for the next one, beats capitalism and McMansions here.

But Jesus says; while you're here, you work. For Me. Anyone got a problem with that? It's not often heard in christian pulpits these days. He is Master, we are slaves, we work for the Master at the Master's pleasure. And mostly that for us, that looks like ordinary jobs, doing ordinary work that other folks need, but always, we do it as if for the Lord. And He blesses us.

But somehow, in some way, every christian has been given spiritual gifts and job number one should be advancing the Kingdom of God. What is it that you are doing that is advancing the authority to reign of God in Satan's world. That's actually job one.

Yes we usually have to work at other labor to earn our bread and pay our rent, but whatever our spiritual gifts are that the Lord is using with us to advance His kingdom, His reign in this world, that's our main job. Paul had two jobs. Tentmaker to pay for food and rent, but his main job was church building.

This fellow Paul is dealing with is what we used to call a flake. He is neither working for the King or anyone else for that matter. And he's eating the fruits of other people's generosity and work. He's been told it's not OK but has continued that life style. And Paul commands the church to separate themselves from him until he repents.

10 For even when we were with you, we used to command this to you: if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat. 11 For we hear that some among you are walking in an unruly manner, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies.

Paul means business. Time to get out the tough love. Shun that guy. Step away from him. Stop fellowshiping with him. Stop feeding him. Let him

get a job and feed himself or let him go hungry.

Here we have the possibility of a plurality of folks. Maybe the guy has a family he's abusing with this sin. . . . *we hear that some among you are walking*

Again walking indicates a continuous life style, not a single incident. If the man has a family he isn't providing for that escalates the problem by a magnitude;

8 But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 1 Tim. 5:8

The man is the spiritual leader in the family. If this man has not provided for his family and the whole family is eating other peoples food, as a continuous lifestyle, the blame and shame that Paul demands goes to him, not his family. They are his responsibility to provide for. If his whole family is dependent on other peoples food, the blame goes to the man. The father. Oh dear, patriarchy.

12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ, that working with quietness, they eat their own bread.

The solution is simple. Get a job. Again, same language that we looked at last week. This isn't a suggestion, it's a command combined with an exhortation.

We command and exhort with all the power and weight of the Lord Jesus Christ. The situation is sinful. It has to stop. If it doesn't stop the mechanism in place is clear. The sinful man will be removed. Pity his family if that's the case. A sweet wife and dear children can complicate the emotions, but the remedy is absolutely necessary with all the authority of the owner of the church, the Lord Jesus. Get a job, or rejoin the gentiles and tax gatherers.

The word exhort is interesting. This is a verbal spanking, if you will. Tone

police alert. Paul here takes the tone of a father disciplining his children. This is a verbal spanking. Paul is yelling at this person. Times up, mister. This is serious business.

The solution is what all of us should be doing. Working with quietness. Some kind of effort that has enough value to be traded in the market place for necessary sustenance. Labor. Effort. Work. Quietly.

Quietness. It's a word worth stopping to consider. The greek word means calmness. Tranquility. A peacefulness from within. Work with a tranquil calm spirit. Obviously when associated with work, the first thing that comes to mind is complaining about work.

You could build an argument against Unions from this verse. People who hate their job, who complain against their employer, who work unwillingly, who must be compelled to work by force are the antecedent of this word.

Now in a sinful fallen world, Unions were probably necessary to force the sinners with more power to treat the sinners who work for them more fairly. They did some good by leveling things out. But, I have to say that I've worked with people who have this sort of Union attitude where the employer is the enemy and the war against anyone who might benefit from your work is non stop. If that's true of you, you're not working quietly.

Those tensions have been present ever since Cain killed Abel. It's built into our sinful nature that we inherited from our father, Adam. We are angry that we must work, angry that someone is getting wealthy from our labor, angry that someone has more than we have, angry angry angry. Discontent.

The root of that sin is the tenth commandment. If you aren't working quietly, calmly, satisfied with what God has given you to do, you'd better check your covetousness. Working quietly is working without coveting what someone else is receiving. John the baptist told the soldiers, stop complaining about your wages. That's all incorporated in this idea of working quietly.

In this culture, this fellow that Paul is ordering back to work, may have been a slave. He might have thought christianity was his meal ticket to freedom. These nice folks can feed me. And my family. NO. That's not what christianity is. Get back to work, and do it quietly. Paul is classy. This is dignified behaviour, even if you're a slave in that system.

Chapter 6 of Ephesians says, *“Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart. With good will render service, as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatever good thing each one does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether slave or free.”*

When the world looks at the church of God, what will they see? People who work with quiet dignity, who don't complain against their masters, who are content with their position in this life, quietly waiting for unspeakable riches waiting for us, held in account for us, in the next life. People who work for their masters as if they were working directly for the Lord Jesus.

That's the expectation that Paul is working towards in this current problem. The Southern Baptist Convention in their 2019 Annual convention had big banners up on the walls that said, The World is Watching Us. There is some truth in that statement, although the motive behind those particular banners was questionable.

The world *is* watching us. If our work ethic comes into question, if we are cheaters and moochers and lazy non workers, eating food someone else had to pay for, the world will see that and dismiss a Christ who is Lord of people like that. That makes Christ the Lord of thieves and panhandlers.

Paul had apparently worked with this problem while he was present with them and in his absense, the problem had persisted. That means the

problem has traveled within the cell like cancer. In order for the problem to persist, there had to be enablers, who continued to enable after Paul's clear teaching.

13 But as for you, brothers, do not lose heart in doing good. 14 And if anyone does not obey our word in this letter, take special note of that person to not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. 15 And yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

This final exhortation could actually be aimed at the enablers who were allowing the problem to persist. If there is dear precious family members involved, how difficult tough love can be. To cut off this person and watch his family have to suffer also could be heart breaking.

Paul is adamant. This cancer, in total, the sinning man, and anyone who continues to enable his sin, all of it has to go. You might have to disassociate with people who are sympathetically trying to do good, but who are in fact enabling this person to persist in sin. It can get very complicated.

If a man won't work, neither let him eat. If a man doesn't care for his family, provide for his family, he is worse than an ifidel, worse than an unbeliever. What a complicated mess, because . . . On the one hand James tells us;

14 What use is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled," and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that?

And then Paul comes along and tells us;

10 For even when we were with you, we used to command this to you: if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat.

There is wisdom necessary in the church. God gives gifts of wisdom to

every church. What do you do with able bodied people who are hungry because they won't work? What do you do with their poor little dependents?? A dear faithful sweet wife who is hungry because her husband won't work? And little ones?

You can understand why Paul had to get out the big guns perhaps. When Russ Daines was pastor for a short time up at the Baptist church, people would come by begging all the time. Broken down car with wife and little kids. Brother can you spare a dime? And Russ being a former police officer had seen it all.

Russ would point out a half an acre of weeds and tell the guy there would be \$20 bucks to get down the road a bit further if the weeds were pulled. 98% of them would move along to the next stop for a possible hustle. That sounds harsh but there is wisdom there.

The perfect solution is when the guy who won't work and care properly for his family hears and understands the gospel and is transformed by the indwelling Christ and becomes a useful worker for the glory of God. Then both him and his family will be blessed. That's what Paul is working towards. But sometimes tough love has to enter into the equation.

Paul is very protective of the church's purity. He says that he wants to present the church to the Lord Jesus as a chaste virgin.

For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. 1 Cor. 11:2

Secondary to Paul but also important is the onlooking world. The world needs to see that same chastity in the church. The world isn't stupid. They can tell a pan-handler from someone in true need. The pan handler needs to go.

To the rest Paul says; *do not lose heart in doing good.*

This can be a messy business. We can't look inside someone's heart and determine that they really are a christian. It can be discouraging working

working working with someone and ultimately, there is no change and they walk away from Christ.

My brother-in-law went through a suicide. A guy on pastoral staff. Sexual sin. The guy ended his life. Messy business. *do not lose heart in doing good*. Satan loves it when he can cause a mess.

I'm retired now, but oddly, I think about going back to my old job, so i can get a rest. We simply moved into a different kind of work after retirement. And we have our own food. Plus you folks over pay us. We are blessed, both physically and spiritually. In the kingdom of God, there is no retirement in *this* world.

9 There remains, therefore, a Sabbath rest for the people of God. 10 For whoever enters God's rest also rests from his own work, just as God did from His.... Hebrews 4:9,10