

God Addresses Our Attitude Regarding Work
Sermon on 2 Thessalonians 3:5-13
Saint Mark's, Watertown, WI
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The Apostle Paul wrote early on: *I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.* That's our attitude today, too! Amen.

God's Word for our special consideration this morning is the final installment of our summer sermon series on the Apostle Paul's first three epistles—this time: Second Thessalonians, chapter three, verses five through thirteen:

May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.

For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, 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. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."

We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.

And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.

This is God's Spirit-inspired Word of Jesus Christ.

Introduction: What Is Your Attitude Regarding Your Work?

Dear fellow Christians—who work hard for Christ, and for whom Christ Jesus himself worked even harder:

It's one of the first points of conversation when you and I first meet somebody.... After getting to know their name, and maybe hopefully asking about their family, we ask others and they ask us, "Well, what do you do for a living? Where do you work?" and maybe if we're bold enough, "Do you like your job?"

I wonder what responses I'd get if I asked each of you those questions today...: "What do you do? Do you like your work?" Wow, the answers would vary, wouldn't they?!

I mean, some of you would say, "Well, I'm still a student." And you'd name your school and your grade or your class. And some of you would say, "Yeah, I like school," and others would say, "Naw, I can't wait to get out!"

Many of you, of course, do have jobs. You'd tell me where you work, maybe how many years you've worked there, and you'd tell me what you do specifically. I've found that most people generally like their work—and that's a gift from God! And most of the polls they take on that issue suggest the same—that job satisfaction in the USA is high. But of course, some of you would say, "No, I can't wait to get another job—or to retire."

And then some of you don't officially have a job. Some of you are stay-at-home moms – or dads – and it's rightly been said that: that's a full time job. Others of you are between jobs or looking for a job. And many others of you are retired from jobs. All of which is not at all to say that you don't have work to do. It's just that you don't right now have employment or an occupation in the general sense of the word.

Theme: God Addresses Our Attitude Regarding Work

So, what I mean to say is that – whatever our station in life – we all have our work to do, right? And I guess that brings up another good question: “What attitude should we take toward our work?” Being that we’re in church gathered around God’s Word, we might ask: “Hey, does God address our attitude regarding work?”

And the answer is that he does. Although God is much more concerned with getting us to recognize the work he’s done for us, he does address our work – our work for him – as well. And today’s Word from God to us is one of the places he does that. Here: **GOD ADDRESSES OUR ATTITUDE REGARDING WORK.** We’ll see that: **BECAUSE OF JESUS’ HARD WORK FOR US, WE WORK HARD FOR JESUS.**

Part One: Jesus Labored Hard for Us

Now, as you listened to me read the text, you heard that the largest amount of God’s Word to us today obviously addresses our labor. But it’s interesting to notice how the Lord gets into that subject with us. He doesn’t start with our work. He starts with his work. The Apostle Paul writes: *May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.* So, before we take a look at our labor, we’ve got to take a look at God’s work for us.

We’ve got to take a look at *God’s love*, as it says here: that amazing grace that led God to perceive our every evil desire, to hear our every wicked word, to witness our every damnable deed – and absolutely to hate all that – but still to say, “I love you! And I’ll do anything to restore you to me.”

We’ve got to take a look at *Christ’s perseverance*, as it says here. It was Jesus’ persevering love that led him – for forty centuries or more! – to preserve the line of the Savior. It was enduring mercy that led Jesus – the holy baby, the perfect child, the unparalleled man – to put up with sinful, selfish people for thirty-three years on earth. It was Jesus’ persevering love that kept him on the cross – suffering for our sins, dying for our deeds, damned in our place – when at any moment, Jesus could have chosen to quit on us. And it’s still Jesus’ enduring mercy that moment by moment forgives us, day by day speaks to us in his Word, and week by week meets with us here at church—sending his Holy Spirit through his Word to make us fit for heaven through confidence in him.

And isn’t all of that what motivates you to do the work you do?!

I mean: let’s say you grow food, or deliver food, or sell food, or serve food for a living. You do that, finally, because you are grateful God has given you your food—also your heavenly food in Jesus Christ. Therefore, you love others, and you want them to have the food they need, as well. See, your work doesn’t just earn you a living. No! Your work has you loving God and loving others.

Or let’s say that you manufacture things in a factory, or you build things in construction, or you sell what’s necessary to do that. You do your work, finally, because you are grateful that God has manufactured and built for you your place and your possessions—even a heavenly place and heavenly blessings: through Jesus Christ. So, you love others, and you want them to have the things they need, as well.

Or let’s say that you’re a health professional: a nurse, a doctor, or some other health care worker. You do your work well because you are grateful God has given you good health—and also a resurrection to eternal health through Jesus Christ. And you love others, and you want them to enjoy good health, as well. See, your work doesn’t just earn you a few dollars to spend. No! *The Lord has directed you into God’s love.*

If you're a student, you study hard, so that someday you can be useful like that for others. And if you're a stay-at-home mom or dad, you work hard, so that your husband or wife or someday your children can be that kind of worker. And if you're retired, probably you volunteer – right? – or certainly, you take care of yourself the best you can, to free up people to be of benefit to others. And finally, you work at praying for them.

Part Two: We Labor Hard for Jesus

All of that, and we're only one verse into our text.... I'd better pick up the pace!

Paul writes: *May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.* And then, he says: ***In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ*** – that's a pretty strong assertion of authority – ***we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother*** – so, he's still a Christian, but – ***who is idle*** – literally, *he is walking around doing nothing* – ***and so does not live according to the teaching you received from us.***

And what was the teaching about work that the Thessalonians received from Paul and his companions? Well, it wasn't just what they taught, it was what the Thessalonians caught from their example: ***For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle – doing nothing – when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it*** – literally: *for free. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.*

We know from Scripture that Paul was a tentmaker. So in Thessalonica, he may have preached by day and worked by night, or worked by day and taught by night. It was hard labor! But Paul didn't want to give the least impression to these new Christians that God's Word was a matter of him earning a living, rather than God's Word being a matter of testifying regarding Jesus the Savior.

In fact, Paul says: ***We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow.***

Paul is underlining an important Bible truth here. God teaches us in his Word that those who proclaim his gospel – back then, apostles and others; nowadays, pastors and teachers and the like – they ought to earn their living from the gospel.

Remember: in the Old Testament, the offerings went largely for the support of professional church workers and their families: the Levites, the priests, and the like. In the New Testament, when Jesus sent out his apostles and other workers, he said, “Don't take any money with you, or even any extra provisions. Enjoy the lodging your listeners provide for you, and enjoy their food and drink. *For the worker deserves his wages.*” And this same Apostle Paul wrote, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that the way a farmer gets to eat some of the crops he is harvesting, and the way an ox gets to eat the grain it's treading out, so a preacher or teacher with their families should receive support from the flock. (We're your oxen: you feed us, and we're grateful!)

Well, at any rate, Paul goes on to say: ***For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule*** – and let me translate it literally – *"If a person does not want to work, he should not get to eat."* Pretty strong – eh?! – and a good rule.

Toward the end, Paul writes: ***We hear that some among you are idle*** – going around doing nothing. ***They are not busy; they are busybodies.***

We have the saying, maybe it came from this passage: “Idle hands are the devil's workshop.” If a person doesn't occupy himself usefully, often Satan will take advantage of his sinful nature to occupy him wickedly. That's true, isn't it? It's a warning to us parents to keep our children gainfully occupied. It's advice to young people – and a few more than young people – to get a job. It's even a reminder to more elderly people to find something good to do, in order keep from gossiping and to stay out of meddling in the legitimate business of others.

Such people – Paul says, God says – *we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.*

So, what should we conclude from all of that? Well, I guess it comes down to this.... If you are working hard, doing what Christ has given you to do – if you are managing to take care of yourself, your family, even your church – rejoice! God has really blessed you. If you are not doing anything to be able to support yourself and your family, honestly, get to work trying to accomplish that. And if you can't take care of yourself and your family, thank God for those who do—and pray for them!

Oh, and maybe this goes without saying, but finally, all of that applies to legitimate business. There is illegitimate business.... You wouldn't want to make yourself the actual proprietor of a business directly promoting deeds or doctrine contrary to the Bible. You wouldn't want to make your living being a criminal. You can't make your living being an abortionist, a drug dealer, a prostitute or dealer in prostitution, or anybody else supporting themselves by offering sex outside of marriage. If you're involved in any of that: quit! And yeah, I know: that's not just a financial loss; in some criminal cases it could cost a person his life.

Conclusion: Our Earthly Work Is Only Temporary

But consider Christ's command at the end of our text—and the promise it presupposes: *And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.*

All the hard labor of twelve, fourteen, eighteen, even twenty years of schooling—it does get tiring. All the hard work of carrying heavy loads, or dealing with difficult people, or facing isolation—it does get tiring. Where will each of us get the energy to carry on with our work?

Look again to Christ, and especially Christ on the cross. He worked hard for us—harder than we can ever imagine. So, we work hard for him—maybe harder than we would ever imagine doing. But only temporarily.... Because of the hard work Jesus did for us, we will rest with him: in easy peace, and forever. Amen.

The Apostle Paul wrote early on: *The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself up for me.* That's our attitude today, too! Amen.