

2 Thessalonians

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2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Vss. 6-7

- Paul here returns to a crucial issue for the Thessalonians: what to do in the face of the immanent return of Christ. The words here translated in the New American Standard Bible as “an unruly life” are literally translated as “walking disorderly” as a soldier who cannot march correctly with his unit. It seems there were people in the church who had quit their jobs and were relying on the support of the church as they excitedly waited for the return of Christ. They were not playing their part in the Body of Christ.
- Paul says to stop supporting them, to keep away from them, in order to force them to get back to work. Paul had no patience for anyone who would not work. Jewish rabbis were forbidden from taking money and this was the practice that Paul himself maintained as he ministered to his churches. Rabbis were butchers, masons, carpenters, and every other kind of workmen. Paul himself was a tentmaker (Acts 18:3). And Paul himself set the example. It was Paul who taught them that Christ could return very soon, yet he himself worked at his craft every day and maintained a strict, disciplined life, not just anxiously staring at the heavens all day.

Vss. 8-12

- Paul was sensitive to people’s perceptions. “Here comes another itinerant preacher and his disciples and surely they are coming with their hands out.” There were many traveling pagan preachers in Paul’s day and none of them were to be trusted. So perception problem #1 for Paul was to overcome the idea that he was looking for a handout. He would settle in, open up his tent building business, and build relationships, and with it all, trust. The second perception problem was not wanting to be a burden to anyone. If Paul and his companions ate with you, he insisted it be a Dutch treat. And he understood that maybe as a teacher he had a right to ask. In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul scolds that church for not taking care of their ministers financially. “If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we reap material things from you?”, he asked in

1 Cor. 9:11. But here with the Thessalonians he is not speaking on behalf of others. He is pointing to the example he left for them to follow.

- He reminds them that the rule when he was with them was “if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either.” The key word here is “*willing*”. There may be many who are unable to work, but there is no excuse for those simply unwilling to work and such people should not be allowed to be parasites on the church. The question turns on how best are we to love our brother, for Paul does refer to these as brothers. There is a great little book entitled, “When Helping Hurts” by Steve Corbett. Danny Wuerffel requires the book to be read by anyone working with Desire Street Ministries. In short, if you always carry someone who could walk, then are you strengthening their legs or weakening them? So Paul says those who are UNWILLING to work should not eat, should not be carried.
- Worse, Paul says he hears that these people are filling their time being busybodies and gossips. To these people Paul issues a command given with divine authority: get back to work, shut your mouths, and mind your own business!

Vs. 13

- Lastly, Paul is also aware that dealing with such people can leave such a bad taste in the mouth of good disciples that they no longer want to help or serve the poor at all. But Paul encourages the church not to be soured by such people and do not let them begin to make you weary of genuinely serving as Christ taught us to serve and requires us to serve.