

I.N.I.

Twenty-first Sunday after Pentecost  
November 6, 2011  
II Thess. 3:6-13

In Christ Jesus, Who worked diligently for our salvation by giving of His life for us, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

If there is one word that describes our society today it is **BUSY!** Everybody is busy. Many are too busy for their own good. They are too busy for their families, for their children, for their spouse. They are too busy for their own health. They are too busy to take time for spiritual growth in God's Word and in worship of their Lord and Savior. They are just too **BUSY!** They need a **BALANCE** in their life.

On the other hand we look at the welfare state of our country and we see that in today's work market there are some who just refuse to work. Even with our declining economy and high unemployment, jobs are still out there. They may not always be the best paying, or the most glamorous, but they are there. Too many have the philosophy of "the world, the government owes me a living" and sometimes generation after generation are trained to live off welfare and be **LAZY!** What they need is a change in their lifestyle. They need to get out and work, to get **BUSY.** They need a **BALANCE** in their life.

This **BALANCE** we sometimes see in a good way in our society in our recreation. More and more people see the need and are realizing the importance of getting away for a vacation, for a weekend, for a quiet walk, a camping, hiking or canoeing trip, etc. But even here people can go to the extreme, thinking that they need this every weekend or need more and more elaborate vacations and therefore this recreation is done at the expense of their soul's welfare (their church attendance) and it may cause financial burdens which makes them have to work even more and more to pay for their expensive vacations. **BALANCE!** It is so important in the Christian's life.

It seems the people of Thessalonica had a problem with the balance between work and recreation also. Paul had mentioned the problem of idleness and laziness in his first letter to the Thessalonians. In chapter 4:11,12 we read; **THAT YOU ALSO ASPIRE TO LEAD A QUIET LIFE, TO MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS, AND TO WORK WITH YOUR OWN HANDS, AS WE COMMANDED YOU, THAT YOU MAY WALK PROPERLY TOWARD THOSE WHO ARE OUTSIDE, AND THAT YOU MAY LACK NOTHING.** And again in chapter 5:14 Paul wrote **NOW WE EXHORT YOU, BRETHREN, WARN THOSE WHO ARE UNRULY, COMFORT THE FAINTHEARTED, UPHOLD THE WEAK, BE PATIENT WITH ALL.**

An understanding of Greek society will help us to grasp the type of sin problem the congregation was facing. Greek men preferred to leave the manual labor to their wives and to slaves (if they owned them) so that they could spend time in the marketplace discussing the latest ideas and issues. This often led them to gossip and busy themselves in the affairs of others.

Paul begins this rebuke with a command to the congregation. Vs. 6 **BUT WE COMMAND YOU, BRETHREN, IN THE NAME OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST, THAT YOU WITHDRAW FROM EVERY BROTHER WHO WALKS DISORDERLY AND NOT ACCORDING TO THE TRADITION WHICH HE RECEIVED FROM US.**

In the name and by the authority of Jesus, Paul commands the Thessalonians to take action in regard to their unrepentant fellow members who were living in the sin of idleness. They were to

withdraw from them. It wasn't as if they didn't know that what they were doing was wrong. Paul says they had received the tradition or teaching from us. They could not plead ignorance. They were disorderly, not in line with God's Word and will. They were idly sitting around expecting others to support them by their hard work. The Greek participle that is used indicates that this was not just a one-time happening, but an ongoing way of life. They were persisting in this sin and had not listened to previous reprimands or rebukes.

In keeping with Jesus' words of Matt. 18:15-17, Paul tells the members to withdraw, keep away from them. Jesus says the last step of church discipline is to treat the unrepentant brother "**LIKE A HEATHEN AND A TAX COLLECTOR.**" The reason? To demonstrate true brotherly love for another person's soul. To impress on the sinner that his unrepentant sin excludes him from God's family. The other members of his family are to treat him as an outsider, an unbeliever. This is God's plan for leading the unrepentant sinner to realize the seriousness of his sin and so motivated by the Word be led to repent and be saved rather than continue in his sinful path to his soul's destruction. For the sin of idleness, as well as any sin, can endanger a person's soul if left unchecked and not repented of.

We jump to verses 10-12. Paul writes, **FOR EVEN WHEN WE WERE WITH YOU, WE COMMANDED YOU THIS; IF ANYONE WILL NOT WORK, NEITHER SHALL HE EAT. FOR WE HEAR THAT THERE ARE SOME WHO WALK AMONG YOU IN A DISORDERLY MANNER, NOT WORKING AT ALL, BUT ARE BUSYBODIES. NOW THOSE WHO ARE SUCH WE COMMAND AND EXHORT THROUGH OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST THAT THEY WORK IN QUIETNESS AND EAT THEIR OWN BREAD.**

Paul reminds them of the rule he had given them when he was with them for that brief time. **IF ANYONE WILL NOT WORK, NEITHER SHALL HE EAT.** If someone of the congregation **WILL NOT** work, but simply wants to live off others, the Thessalonians were to let him go without food. Does this command fly in the face of Jesus' second table of the law; **LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF?** If someone is in need of food should we not feed him? Not if what we do encourages him in his sin. We are not to condone or foster a lazy attitude by giving support to a person in this sin. Feeding and clothing a person who refuses to work for himself will only encourage him to continue in that sin of laziness.

Is it therefore sinful to be on welfare, to receive food and help from the government? Notice carefully what Paul says; **IF ANYONE WILL NOT WORK.** He did not say **IF ANYONE CAN NOT or DOES NOT WORK.** The Greek word for **WILL NOT** points to an attitude of the heart. It is not that anyone who is not working is sinning. Often age, health problems or other factors make it impossible for a person at that point in time to be actively working. But the attitude of not wanting to work and expecting others to care for you is what Paul is speaking about here. While the welfare program in our country may be abused by some, the program itself is not contrary to God's Word. It may need improvement to safeguard these abuses, but using it in times of need is not unscriptural.

Paul's play on words hit home. **NOT WORKING AT ALL, BUT ARE BUSYBODIES.** One translation has it; **THEY ARE NOT BUSY, BUT BUSYBODIES.** They were doing nothing beneficial, just wasting time and as they stood around talking, they often busied themselves in the affairs of others, gossiping and meddling in the lives of others.

Paul again **COMMANDS through OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST** that they stop this sinful way of life and quietly get to work and provide their own bread. Paul is saying that not only the authority for him to say this comes from Jesus but the power for them to be able to change their hearts and attitudes and therefore their lives also comes from their Lord and Savior through His Word. Paul knew that the Law could whip them into doing the right things, but only Jesus and His forgiving love

in the Gospel could provide the power to change their attitudes and their hearts and lead them to want to work.

Not only is Paul encouraging the Thessalonian Christians to

**I: WARN THOSE CAUGHT IN THE SIN OF IDLENESS**

but he also encourages them to

**II: WATCH OUT FOR THE TEMPTATION TO JOIN IN**

Faithful, hard-working Christians face many temptations to give up. It gets tiresome to be always helping others, working hard for others. Our selfish, sinful nature wants us to allow a feeling of self-pity to overwhelm us. When we feel we are always serving and not being served, always the ones giving, but not receiving in return we may feel sorry for ourselves or feel as if no one cares about us. Sometimes we get depressed, or think "what's the use." Satan is close by our side whispering in our ear, "Why should you always work so hard when these other people who hardly do anything are getting along fine? Why work so much? They're not working at all, and they're living even better than you! Let someone else do the work. Take life easy!"

In contrast to that, Paul says in the last verse of our text, **BUT AS FOR YOU, BRETHREN, DO NOT GROW TIRED IN DOING GOOD.** In verses 7-9 Paul uses himself and his companions as examples for them to follow. He writes **FOR YOU YOURSELVES KNOW HOW YOU OUGHT TO FOLLOW US, FOR WE WERE NOT DISORDERLY AMONG YOU; NOR DID WE EAT ANYONE'S BREAD FREE OF CHARGE, BUT WORKED WITH LABOR AND TOIL NIGHT AND DAY, THAT WE MIGHT NOT BE A BURDEN TO ANY OF YOU, NOT BECAUSE WE DO NOT HAVE AUTHORITY, BUT TO MAKE OURSELVES AN EXAMPLE OF HOW YOU SHOULD FOLLOW US.**

As a called servant of God, Paul had every right to expect the Thessalonians to supply his bodily needs when he preached the Gospel to them. God wants His people who are taught His Word to provide a living for their teachers. The Lord through Paul wrote in Gal. 6:6 **LET HIM WHO IS TAUGHT THE WORD SHARE IN ALL GOOD THINGS WITH HIM WHO TEACHES.** Jesus Himself had told His disciples when He sent them out two by two, **GO YOUR WAY; BEHOLD I SEND YOU OUT AS LAMBS AMONG WOLVES. CARRY NEITHER MONEY BAG, SACK, NOR SANDALS;... BUT WHATEVER HOUSE YOU ENTER, FIRST SAY, 'PEACE TO THIS HOUSE.' AND IF A SON OF PEACE IS THERE, YOUR PEACE WILL REST ON IT; IF NOT, IT WILL RETURN TO YOU. AND REMAIN IN THE SAME HOUSE, EATING AND DRINKING SUCH THINGS AS THEY GIVE, FOR THE LABORER IS WORTHY OF HIS WAGES. DO NOT GO FROM HOUSE TO HOUSE. WHATEVER CITY YOU ENTER, AND THEY RECEIVE YOU, EAT SUCH THINGS AS ARE SET BEFORE YOU.**

Paul knew this, yet he avoided accepting anything from these Thessalonians because he did not want to encourage them in the sin of idleness. He went so far as to not even accept free meals from them, but paid for them. Paul worked with his own hands. We are told in the book of Acts that Paul knew the trade of tent making and that no doubt is how he made a living among these Thessalonians and others elsewhere.

Are we examples of hard working Christians to others? Do we work for our Savior at our jobs whatever they are and wherever they may be? Or are we lazy, putting in the least amount of labor, and yet expecting back the greatest amount of benefits? Are we examples to others of hard working Christians here at church, pitching in when we need volunteers, working hard at our callings as Pastor, Day School Teacher, S.S. Teachers, Church Officers, Voters? Or do we so often think "let someone else do it?" The Lord usually finds someone else to do it, but then shame on us.

It can be demoralizing to see someone else loafing off and not working, living off others while we work hard and struggle to get our jobs done. It may be frustrating to see others not volunteer for church activities while the same few seem to have to do it again and again. We can quickly grow tired of it all. We mentioned earlier that Satan so often whispers in our ear "Why should you work so hard?" Or we have to admit that we too have been at times idle and lazy and not as busy and active as we should be for our families, in service to our Lord or at our jobs.

Well this morning may the Holy Spirit whisper in our ears, **"Don't envy those idlers. They're sinning and that will only harm them in the long run. But you, repent of your own sins of laziness or arrogant feelings of doing more than others. Remember Jesus and how He loves you with an agape love that never ends. Remember how He served you, worked hard for you willingly and continually without complaint, how He kept the Law perfectly for you in thought, word and deed, how He suffered and died for you on the cross to pay for the punishment and guilt of all of your sins."**

Jesus has the power to help us break out of the cycle of this sin of idleness or that of being busybodies and gossips, or being workaholics and neglecting our family or from judging others as not being as busy as we are or from any sin that plagues us.

He, through His Word first forgives us and then gives us the encouragement we need and empowers us to keep working faithfully so that we will glorify His name before our neighbors and be a good example for others to follow.

Praise alone be to our Savior!

Amen.