

### Leading Disciplined Lives; the Closing of the Epistle

#### 2 Thessalonians 3:10-18

2 Thessalonians 3:10-18 - *“For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. <sup>11</sup> For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. <sup>12</sup> Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.*

*<sup>13</sup> But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. <sup>14</sup> And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. <sup>15</sup> Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*

*<sup>16</sup> Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all. <sup>17</sup> The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write. <sup>18</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”*

#### Background Notes

In the closing to this letter to the Thessalonians (v16-18), notice that the benediction is typically Pauline: *“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.”* This particular benediction was a sign that the letter was from the apostle Paul (v17). Check out the closing of Paul’s other epistles, and you will find a similar benediction. You couldn’t close an epistle on any higher note than *“the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ”!*

Notice that Paul mentioned he had written the benediction in his own handwriting (v17). He may have done this in other letters as well. The body of his letters, of course, was dictated, and written down by a secretary.

In the closing of this epistle, it’s important to notice that verse 16 is a **prayer**. *“Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all.”* Did you realize that this is the fourth prayer in this short epistle? Prayer #1 was in 1:11-12. Prayer #2 was in 2:16-17. Prayer #3 was in 3:5. And now prayer #4 is in verse 16. It wouldn’t be right to finish our series on 2 Thessalonians without noticing Paul’s **emphasis on prayer!** There’s always room for prayer. We should emphasize prayer.

One of Paul’s primary reasons for writing the two letters to the Thessalonian believers was to clear up some misunderstandings about the return of the Lord. Some of the believers mistakenly thought that the End Times had arrived, and that the Day of the Lord had already begun. As a result, some of these believers had actually stopped working, and were supposedly “waiting in readiness” for the Lord’s return. But the result of not having a job and no income was that they were freeloading and mooching off other believers! Furthermore, because they didn’t have a job

they had too much time on their hands, and they had started to meddle in other believers' affairs. They were becoming busybodies, and behaving in other disorderly ways. *"For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies"*(v11). This had to stop! In these verses, Paul gave further directions for how to deal with this problem - then and today.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Laziness has no place in a believer's lifestyle.

Verse 10: *"For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat."*

This strong remedy for people who refuse to work is called "tough love." Tough love meant that the Thessalonian believers were not to support a believer who was able to work, but would not work - not even to provide the basic necessity of food. If a person won't work, he or she shouldn't eat!

Work never hurt anyone. God created us to work, so work is good. Even before sin came into this world, God asked Adam to tend and keep the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15). Even though we might have the idea that true bliss on this earth is lying on a hammock under the palm trees on a South Sea island, sipping lemonade, the truth is that we wouldn't be happy for long! So - seriously speaking - don't try to avoid work!

There are all kinds of work – jobs outside the home, homemaking, volunteer Christian or community work, full-time Christian work. "Work" is not just employment outside the home in a "secular" role or setting. A Christian man once asked me, "Do you work or teach at Emmaus?" I gave him a one-word answer: "Yes!" This brother certainly had an unbiblical view of "work"!

However, the Bible doesn't teach that a Christian should be a workaholic! There's a proper place for periodic rest and relaxation and vacations. But laziness has no place in a believer's lifestyle!

What do you do if there's a lazy person in your congregation or in your family? We'll answer that under our next doctrinal point.

### 2. Leeching has no place in a believer's lifestyle.

"Leeching" is "freeloading" – it's living off another person's hard work. "Leeches" or "freeloaders" refuse to work at any kind of job, but they expect other Christians to give them money and support them. Proverbs 15:30 says, *"A leech has two daughters: give and give."*

Leeching has no place in a believer's lifestyle. *"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"*(v11-12). Do you want to have a biblical lifestyle? Then don't be a leech! Work quietly, and eat your own bread. In others words, earn your own living.

It's not always easy to do work hard and earn your own living, especially when you see other folks (even Christians) getting free handouts - and getting away with it! That's why verse 13 says, *"As for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good."* In the context, "doing good" means continuing steadfastly to **do the right thing!** Mind your own business, work without complaining, earn your own living, and eat your own bread.

Paul had told the Thessalonian believers the same thing back in his first epistle: *"Aspire to lead a quiet life. Mind your own business and work with your own hands as we commanded you"*(1 Thessalonians 4:11). Apparently, some freeloading believers had not paid attention to Paul's first warning. Because they were not working and had nothing constructive to do, they were living disorderly lives - busybodies, gossipers, and sponging off other believers.

What was to be done? These lazy believers had already been warned. Now Paul had to command that they were to get a job, go to work, and stop leeching from the other believers. They were not employed by the local church - they were sponging off the local church!

Furthermore, "tough love" dictated that other believers were to separate themselves socially from the lazy leeches, to help them recognize and be ashamed of their selfish behavior (v6, v14). *"And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed"*(v14). Financial support for the freeloaders was to stop, but they were not to be treated as "enemies" or excommunicated from the church - because they were believers. *"Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother"*(v15).

Do you see the biblical pattern for dealing with "lazy leeches" in the church today? First, the church leaders should warn the person: "You need to start looking for a job!" If the warning is not heeded, a direct command to "Get a job!" should be given. There should be no support or social fellowship while they refuse to work. The person should not be excommunicated from the church, but there should be continual warnings and admonitions (v15). These same principles should be applied when you have lazy leeches in the family. This is tough love.

Here's an illustration. We often spend the summers away from home, serving at Christian camps. One summer we let a Christian couple stay at our house. We wanted to help this couple who were preparing to be missionaries, so we agreed to charge just enough rent to pay the utilities if they would agree to take good care of the house, mow the lawn, etc. We didn't know this couple well, and they turned out to be "freeloaders." They didn't pay the small amount of rent to cover the utilities, they didn't mow the lawn, and they didn't care for the house or keep it clean. In fact, they left half way through the summer, saying that "the Lord led them" to a better deal!

Later this couple proved to be unfaithful in the foreign missions setting. Their selfish and sinful behavior greatly dishonored the Lord Jesus Christ and seriously damaged the local church in that country.

In Luke 16:10 the Lord Jesus said, *“He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.”* According to the Bible, there is no way that their local church should have sent and supported this couple on the foreign mission field. Prior to sending them to another country, the church should have asked them to prove themselves trustworthy, by getting a job, working in the home country and helping in the local church. They should not have been supported in their consistent freeloading lifestyle. Leeching has no place in the believer’s lifestyle.

## Practical Application

### Can you say, “I don’t have time to gossip?”

Gossip may not seem harmless to you - but ***gossip is a sin!*** Leviticus 9:16 says, *“Thou shall not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people.”* The Thessalonian believers who were not working were not only freeloading, they were busybodies as well. They were involved in other people’s lives, and gossiping. Why? Because they had too much time on their hands! Verse 11: *“For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.”*

When you’re working hard and staying busy with good activities and service for the Lord, you won’t have time for gossip! However, when we have a lot of time for just sitting around over coffee or lunch, we can end up gossiping. Even allowing too much time to share requests for prayer at our weekly Bible studies can end up as gossip!

During social occasions, watch the trend of the conversation. If guards are not set up, our conversations will tend to go downhill. It’s very easy to slide and drift into gossip. Unless there is some Christian input, and unless definite steps are taken to keep the conversation good and godly, it will naturally go downhill. Just sitting around talking can easily decline into gossip.

How do we avoid the downhill trend? Put guards on our social conversations - and make sure we ***don’t have time to gossip.*** Paul told the Thessalonian believers who were shirkers to go out and get a job! That way a limit was placed on leeching - and on gossip!

Here’s a good rule of thumb. Can you say, “I don’t have time to gossip?”