

THE SIN OF LAZINESS
2 Thessalonians 3:1-18
By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Bible describes two types of poor people. The worthy poor and the unworthy poor. The worthy poor are those who are worthy of assistance. They are worthy of charity. They are truly needy, and it's not their fault. They have done and are doing everything within their power to rise out of poverty.
2. The unworthy poor are those who want help, ask for help, beg for help, demand help, but are not worthy of assistance. They are poor because of their laziness, and their solution is not to go to work, it is not to help themselves, but to mooch off others. They don't want a hand up, but a handout. They don't want to rise out of poverty; they just want to be comfortable in their poverty.
3. All of us have come across these two types of people. We've all met people who truly deserved help. And we've met people who needed help because of their own laziness.
4. When it comes to the worthy poor, the Bible teaches Christians to be generous. We are to help. We are to share. But what about the unworthy poor? How are we to treat those who are poor because of their own laziness?
5. The Bible tells us how to deal with these people. It tells us how to spot a lazy person, and it tells us how to handle lazy people.

II. TEXT: 2 Thessalonians 3:1-18

1. *1 In addition, brothers and sisters, pray for us that the word of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you, 2 and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil people, for not all have faith. 3 But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one. 4 We have confidence in the Lord about you, that you are doing and will continue to do what we command. 5 May the Lord direct your hearts to God's love and Christ's endurance.*
2. *6 Now we command you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from every brother or sister who is idle and does not live according to the tradition received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you should imitate us: We were not idle among you; 8 we did not eat anyone's food free of charge; instead, we labored and toiled, working night and day, so that we would not be a burden to any of you. 9 It is not that we don't have the right to support, but we did it to make ourselves an example to you so that you would imitate us. 10 In fact, when we were with you, this is what we commanded you: "If anyone isn't willing to work, he should not eat." 11 For we hear that there are some among you who are idle. They are not busy but busybodies. 12 Now we command and exhort such people by the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and provide for themselves. 13 But as for you, brothers and sisters, do not grow weary in doing good.*

3. *14 If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take note of that person; don't associate with him, so that he may be ashamed. 15 Yet don't consider him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.*
4. *16 May the Lord of peace himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with all of you. 17 I, Paul, am writing this greeting with my own hand, which is an authenticating mark in every letter; this is how I write. 18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.*
 - i. In the Thessalonian church there were poor who were relying upon the charity of other Christians. But some of these people were poor because they were lazy. Paul uses the word "idle," which is another word for lazy. They were poor because they refused to get a job and provide for themselves.
 1. Scholars have suggested that it is likely that many of them were expecting the Second Coming of Christ to happen at any moment, and so saw no need in continuing with normal daily life.
 - ii. Paul teaches us how to spot a lazy person, and how to deal with a lazy person.

III. TWO TRAITS OF LAZY PEOPLE

1. They refuse to get a job.

- i. **2 Thessalonians 3:7-8** "7 For you yourselves know how you should imitate us: We were not idle among you; 8 we did not eat anyone's food free of charge; instead, we labored and toiled, working night and day, so that we would not be a burden to any of you."
- ii. There were people in the church who were poor because they refused to get a job. So they mooched off of others. It's not that they couldn't find a job. It's not that they were not physically able to work. They simply refused to work.
- iii. This was such a huge problem that Paul had to resort to drastic measures to teach them a lesson. Paul had the right to earn a living from the gospel through tithes and offerings (2 Thess 3:9). But he forfeited this right. Instead of receiving tithes and offerings from the church, he got a second job. We're not told what kind of work he did, but we know from other parts of the Bible that Paul was a tentmaker. Whatever the work, he worked very hard so that he would not have to depend on others. He wanted to set the example of working and providing for yourself.
- iv. Lazy people often refuse to get a job. They refuse to work. They mooch off of others instead of earning a living.
- v. The Bible teaches that if you are an able-bodied adult, you need to get a job and earn a living and pay your way rather than mooch off others.
- vi. This doesn't mean that you have to move out of your parent's house when you grow up. That's between you and your parents. But if you do stay at

- home, you still need to get a job and not be a freeloader. You need to help out. As your income increases, your contribution should increase.
- vii. Many people hate work because they don't know the truth about work.
1. We were made to work. Many Christians think that work was a punishment for Adam and Eve eating the forbidden fruit. However, God put them to work before they sinned.
 - a. **Genesis 1:28** "God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and every creature that crawls on the earth."
 - i. Before they sinned, they were commanded to subdue the earth and to rule over the creatures. To subdue the earth means to "use all its vast resources (AMP)." To bring it under control.
 - b. **Genesis 2:15** "The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden to work it and watch over it."
 - i. Before the Fall, man was given work.
 - c. This means that we were created to work. Human beings are human workers. We are happiest and healthiest and holiest when we are working – whether that be creating, producing, building, repairing, beautifying, organizing, cleaning, etc.
 - d. **Samuel Smiles** "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy. But all play and no work makes him something worse."
 2. We serve God when we work. Many Christians don't realize that they are serving God at work. They think that they are only serving God when they are doing ministry/church work. The preacher serves God full-time; lay people just get to serve God in their spare time. That's not true. When you work, you are actually serving God. How? Work is how God takes care of us. God uses the farmer to produce food. God uses the grocer to get the food from the farmer to us. God uses the mail man to deliver the mail. God uses the custodian to keep the building clean. God uses parents to raise children. God uses the musician to give us music. God uses the builder to build our homes and buildings. God doesn't need to use all those people. He could simply meet our needs directly. But that's not how He does things. He includes us in His task of caring for people and for the world through work. When you go to work, you are serving God. God is working through you to care for His creation. According to the Bible, the pastor's job is not more important than the engineer's job. Every job has great meaning and importance because it is through our work

that God works; it is through our work that God builds, and heals, and teaches, and cleans.

3. Work is how God provides for us. God wants to provide for you. He wants to meet your needs. He could simply say the word and put money in your bank account, food in your belly, clothes on your back, and a roof over a head. But that's not how God provides for us. God provides for us through our work. God wants you to gather; to hunt; to work the ground; to serve others; to add value to society, and through your work He will care for you. He wants you to earn, not beg; to work, not mooch; to contribute, not just consume; not to be a useless fool, but to be useful. God helps those who help themselves.
- viii. It is sad to think that there are some people who are poor because they cannot find work, while others are poor because work cannot find them. They refuse to work.
- ix. In the United States, poverty is mostly self-curable. You don't have to be poor. According to the Brookings Institution, a think tank in Washington D.C., you can avoid poverty by doing three simple things: Graduate high school, don't have babies until you get married, and get a full-time job.
- x. Don't be lazy. It is wrong to mooch off family, or friends, or the church, or the government if you have the ability to work and earn a living for yourself.
- xi. The Bible says you need to get a job and support yourself.
- xii. **2 Thessalonians 3:12** "Now we command and exhort such people by the Lord Jesus Christ to work quietly and provide for themselves."

2. They refuse to work hard.

- i. **2 Thessalonians 3:7-8** "7 For you yourselves know how you should imitate us: We were not idle among you; 8 we did not eat anyone's food free of charge; instead, we labored and toiled, working night and day, so that we would not be a burden to any of you."
- ii. Notice how Paul contrasts laziness with his own example. Instead of idleness, he worked. But he didn't just work. He labored and toiled, working night and day. He worked hard.
- iii. Another way to spot a lazy person is that they don't work hard.
- iv. There's working, and then there's working hard. There's a difference between being at work and working. There's a difference between being on the clock and working. A lazy person may have a job. They may go to work, but they don't work hard.
- v. The lazy person says, "Hard work never hurt anybody, but why take a chance."
- vi. The book of Proverbs talks about how to succeed financially. Over and over it reiterates that the key is not just work, but hard work (or diligence).

1. **Proverbs 21:5 (NLT)** “Good planning and hard work lead to prosperity, but hasty shortcuts lead to poverty.”
- vii. Some people want a paycheck just for being on the payroll. They want a paycheck just for showing to work. That’s not how it works. If you want a good paycheck, then you need to do good work.
- viii. For Christians, having a job is not enough. We need to be hard workers so we can be both financially independent, and able to share with others.
- ix. Let’s talk about the basics of hard work. What does hard work look like in a very general sense?
 1. Show up when you’re supposed to. Be at work when you’re supposed to, even if you don’t feel like it. Don’t pretend to be sick and play hooky. Don’t be a “no call-no show.”
 2. Show up on time. Be prompt. If the start time is at 7 am, then be there at 7 am.
 3. Do quality work. Lazy people do sloppy work. They turn in work that is half-way done. They do just enough to get by; just enough to avoid getting terminated. Hard workers are the opposite. Go above and beyond. Exceed expectations. Pursue excellence. Do quality work – whether it is sweeping the floor, or painting a wall, or flipping burgers –do the job right. Do the job well.
 - a. **Brian Tracy** “Success in life is in direct proportion to what you do after you do what you are expected to do.”
 4. Pursue quality even when the boss isn’t watching (Eph 6:6). When the boss isn’t watching, lazy people will sleep on the job; they will slack off; they will do a sloppy job. Hard workers pursue quality all the time.
 5. Work with a good attitude (Eph 6:7).
 6. Work fast (Pr 13:4). Lazy people are called sloths because they move slow. The faster you work, the more energy you will have, and the more you can accomplish.
 7. Take the initiative (Pr 6:6-8). If you see something that needs to be done, do it before you are asked to.
 8. Be willing to get your hands dirty. Some people avoid certain jobs because they would be embarrassed if people saw them. Don’t look down on certain jobs, or certain tasks. Work is work. A job is a job. Money is money. Be willing to deliver pizzas. Be willing to wait tables. Be willing to clean bathrooms.
 9. Be an early riser. Throughout history, successful people have been early risers. The Proverbs 31 woman was an early riser (Pr 31:15). The earlier you rise, the more work can get done in the day. “Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise.”

10. Avoid procrastination (Pr 6:8). You can't turn in quality work if you wait until the last minute.
- a. **Abraham Lincoln** "The leading rule for the lawyer, as for the man of every other calling, is diligence. Leave nothing for tomorrow which can be done to-day."
11. Master your craft (Pr 22:29). Don't be average or mediocre. Strive to be the very best that you can be at your particular job.
- x. Hard work is a key to success in life. It is certainly a key to financial success. The harder you work, the greater the rewards.
 - xi. Let me encourage the young people in our church for a moment. Don't shy away from a profession because the schooling will be hard, or the schooling will be long. Many kids would like to be a nurse, a doctor, an engineer, an attorney, but they avoid them because the schooling will be long and hard. But remember, in the end the rewards will be worth it. As a general rule, the harder the education, the longer the education, the better the pay.
 - xii. **William Barclay** "All life is based on the fact that anything worth getting is hard to get. There is always a price to be paid. Scholarship can be bought only at the price of study; skill in any craft or technique can be bought only at the price of practice; distinction in any sport can be bought only at the price of training and discipline. The world is full of people who have missed their destiny because they would not pay the price. No one can take the easy way and enter into glory or greatness; no one can take the hard way and fail to find these things."
 - xiii. So, lazy people refuse to get a job, or if they have a job they refuse to work hard, and so they are poor.
 - xiv. But notice their poverty doesn't just affect them, because then they need assistance.
 - xv. **2 Thessalonians 3:8** "we did not eat anyone's food free of charge; instead, we labored and toiled, working night and day, so that we would not be a burden to any of you."
 - xvi. The problem with lazy people is that they are a burden on others. They aren't just affecting themselves. How are they a burden?
 1. They mooch off hard workers, so hard workers have less for themselves.
 2. When hard workers have to help the lazy, they have less money to share with people who are truly in need.
 - xvii. Laziness is a form of theft. You are stealing from your employer. You are stealing from the people who are helping you. And you are stealing from the people who are in genuine need of charity.

IV. HOW TO DEAL WITH A LAZY PERSON

1. Stay away from them.

- i. **2 Thessalonians 3:6** “Now we command you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to keep away from every brother or sister who is idle and does not live according to the tradition received from us.”
- ii. Sometimes you can't control who is around you, but the point is that you shouldn't be friends with a lazy person. Don't be friends with a freeloader, a moocher.

2. Don't help them.

- i. **2 Thessalonians 3:10** “In fact, when we were with you, this is what we commanded you: ‘If anyone isn't willing to work, he should not eat.’”
- ii. What happens when you give to lazy people? You enable them. You become party to their sin; a partner in crime.

3. Warn them.

- i. **2 Thessalonians 3:15** “Yet don't consider him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.”
- ii. If they are a Christian, you should warn them that laziness is a sin, that freeloading is a sin, that taking advantage of people's generosity is a sin, and God will judge them.
- iii. You can also warn them that even though they may be surviving now, their laziness will catch up with them, and they will become poor.

V. CONCLUSION

1. A father was scolding his teenage son for being lazy. “You ought to be ashamed,” he said. “When Lincoln was your age, he was busy building rail fences. You won't even do your homework.” “Sure,” said the boy, “and when Lincoln was your age, he was president of the United States.”
2. I think the teenager missed the point. Don't be lazy.
3. When God wants to do something special, He doesn't go to the lazy or the idle. He finds a person who is a hard worker. “Moses was busy with his flocks at Horeb. Gideon was busy threshing wheat. Saul was busy searching for his father's lost sheep. Elisha was busy plowing with twelve yoke of oxen. Amos was busy following the flock. Nehemiah was busy bearing the king's cup. Peter and Andrew were busy casting a net into the sea. James and John were busy mending their nets. Matthew was busy collecting customs. Saul was busy persecuting the friends of Jesus (AMG Bible Illustrations).” Be a hard worker at whatever your job is, and God will see you, and bless you, and use you.
4. How should Christians deal with the sin of laziness?
 - i. Give discriminately. While we love to give to those in need, we are careful to only give to the worthy poor so that we do not enable laziness.
 - ii. Receive reluctantly. While it is okay to ask for and receive financial aid when you are in need, we work extremely hard to be financially independent so that charity can be reserved for the truly needy – those who cannot provide for themselves.