

Against Idleness

- I. Definitions.
- A. idleness: The state or condition of being idle or unoccupied; want of occupation; habitual avoidance of work, inactivity, indolence; an instance of this.
 - B. bread of idleness: bread not earned by labour.
 - C. business: The state of being busily engaged in anything. Industry, diligence.
 - D. diligent: Of persons: Constant in application, persevering in endeavour, assiduous, industrious; not idle, not negligent, not lazy.
 - E. honestly: In an honourable or respectable manner, honourably, worthily, respectably; in a seemly or becoming manner; decently.
 - F. slothful: Of persons, etc.: Full of sloth; indisposed to exertion; inactive, indolent, lazy, sluggish.
 - G. sloth: Physical or mental inactivity; disinclination to action, exertion, or labour; sluggishness, idleness, indolence, laziness.
 - H. sluggard: One who is naturally or habitually slow, lazy, or idle; one who is disinclined for work or exertion of any kind; a slothful or indolent person.
- II. The church at Thessalonica was commendable for many things.
- A. They received the words of the apostles as the words of God. **1TH 2:13.**
 - B. They had done so with much affliction yet with joy of the Holy Ghost. **1TH 1:6.**
 - C. They had abandoned dead idols for the living God. **1TH 1:9.**
 - D. They trusted in Christ and His return. **1TH 1:10.**
 - E. They had suffered for their conversion. **1TH 2:14.**
 - F. They were acclaimed for their witness to others. **1TH 1:7-8.**
 - G. They were noted for their faith and charity. **1TH 3:6; 4:9-10; 2TH 1:3.**
- III. Yet for all of the above, the Thessalonians had a problem with *idleness* (the state or condition of being idle or unoccupied; want of occupation; habitual avoidance of work, inactivity, indolence; an instance of this).
- A. Paul had at his first entrance unto them commanded them to work. **1TH 4:11.**
 - B. Yet in his first epistle back to them, he had to reinforce that command. **1TH 4:11-12.**
 - C. He reinforced this again in **2TH 3:6-13** because some were still idle.
 - (1) Paul drew lines of fellowship over this issue. **2TH 3:6, 14.**
 - (2) Such would be turned over to Satan, per **1CO 5:5.**
 - (3) Such should not be fed by others' labors. **2TH 3:10.**
 - (4) "...if any would not work, neither should he eat" is a command for the church.
 - (5) The same rule would make a great national motto and should be embraced in a household.
 - (6) It is the *laborer* that is worthy of a reward (**1TI 5:18**), not the *idler*.
 - D. These saints were well taught and well exercised in *brotherly love*. **1TH 4:9-10.**
 - (1) Brotherly love neither excludes nor is a substitute for labor.
 - a. The same theme was addressed to the Romans. **ROM 12:10-11.**
 - b. "For though we must prefer others (as our translation reads it), and put on others, as more capable and deserving than ourselves, yet we must not make that an excuse for our lying by and doing nothing, nor under a pretence of honouring others, and their serviceableness and performances, indulge ourselves in ease and slothfulness." (Matthew Henry Commentary)

- c. Mind that Paul taught the same thing in all churches. **1CO 4:17; 7:17.**
- d. Therefore, inasmuch as his epistles to the Thessalonians make it clear that idleness is the breaking of a command, then the phrase, “not slothful in business” (**ROM 12:11**) is also a command, not a suggestion.
- (2) The wording here and in **2TH 3:6-12** implies that some were not doing their *own* business and working with their *own* hands, contrary to the example that Paul and his company had set whereby they did *extra* work so as not to be chargeable to the saints. So how were these non-workers' needs being met?
- (3) It is possible that brotherly love/charity was being extended too far amongst themselves.
- (4) Charitable relief of the “can nots” is good; of the “will nots” is bad.
 - a. Paul is clearly denouncing the idea that someone who won't work should eat of the labors of others.
 - b. Remember that the virtuous woman of **PRO 31** was anything but idle. She did NOT eat the *bread of idleness*. **PRO 31:27.**
- (5) Charity does not rejoice in iniquity (**1CO 13:6**) and expecting others to do for you what you should do for yourself to supply your daily bread IS iniquity!
 - a. The two epistles to Thessalonica prove this!
 - b. An able man is to prove *his own work* and bear *his own burden*. **GAL 6:4-5.**
 - c. The prayer, “Give us this day our daily bread” (**MAT 6:11**) is not Line 4 on a government handout application.
- (6) I have learned a couple of things in life. One of them is that we can injure our fellow man by withholding charity where it is needed or by doling out charity where it is not.
- (7) Idleness is a sin that should be its own punishment. **PRO 19:15; 20:4.**
- E. The Thessalonian saints were converted Gentiles, once steeped in idolatry. **1TH 1:9.**
 - (1) Gentile idolatry was consonant with a flesh-pleasing lifestyle (**1PE 4:3**). Who cares about work while there is all this reveling, banqueting, fornication and drinking to be done?
 - (2) Their idol religions were patently according to the desires and needs of the flesh, not the spirit. **HAB 1:15-16; ACT 19:24-27.**
 - (3) The idolaters tended to believe that their idol god could be enticed by rituals to satisfy their desires: “In accordance with primitive ideas which assume that it is possible to control or aid the powers of nature by the practice of 'sympathetic magic', the cult of the baals and Ashtaroth was characterized by gross sensuality and licentiousness.” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 2, 14th edition, p.834)
 - (4) Gentile converts like the Thessalonians tended to come from a religion in which fleshly desires were believed to be supplied by fleshly rituals which pleased and motivated their god, and that this was more important than industry.
 - (5) A religion characterized by lasciviousness, banqueting, reveling and drunkenness would be very popular to carnal man. But again, who has time for work with all that “fun” stuff to do? Mind that such a worldview would not promote individual industry.
 - (6) This is essentially the kind of worldview and lifestyle from which the Thessalonians would have been converted. But there was a “heathen hangover” amongst them.
 - (7) One need not have been a stump-worshiping heathen who justified idleness based upon superstition; one might just be lazy. **ROM 8:5.**
 - a. Like others, a sluggard has desires (**PRO 13:4**) but he expects his desires

- to be met without his own efforts. Make no mistake: the sluggard desires what his neighbor obtained by labor. **ECC 4:4.**
- b. This is *covetousness* (inordinate and culpable desire of possessing that which belongs to another or to which one has no right) and covetousness is idolatry. **COL 3:5.**
 - c. There are those whose God is their belly. **PHIL 3:19.**
 - d. Paul warned Titus about *slow bellies* (**TIT 1:12-13**) and *slow* here translates the Greek *argos* (SRN G692) which means “inactive, lazy, useless, barren, idle, slow” and is translated as *idle* six out of eight times.
- F. There is a similar error that some entertain upon coming to Christ: that finding Him is some kind of magic solution to all troubles in life, including work.
- (1) When they find out that that is not what Christ intends for them, they become disillusioned, not unlike the fools in **JER 44:17-19.**
 - (2) Christ has not rendered our labor obsolete; He has made it necessary, acceptable and blessed.
- G. Mind the connection between quietness and work in **1TH 4:11; 2TH 3:12.**
- (1) quiet: Absence of disturbance or tumult; peaceful condition of affairs in social or political life.
 - (2) We do well to quietly go about our business, as Christ did. He was no rabble-rouser. **MAT 12:19.**
 - (3) NOTE: A great deal of personal and civil disquietude are associated with a reluctance to work.
 - a. Consider the personal turmoil that comes from desiring prosperity without performance.
 - b. Consider the idle widow whose gossip and busybodyness stirs up strife. **1TI 5:13.**
 - c. Consider the civil unrest that is created by government sanction of non-work.
- IV. Labor and its rewards are God's gifts to men. **ECC 2:24; 3:13.**