

SERMON THEME: FACING THE END WITH SOBRIETY

SERMON TITLE: PURSUING WHAT IS RIGHT,

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SERMON TEXT: 2 THESSALONIANS 3:6-15

⁶In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. ⁷For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, ⁸nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. ⁹We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate. ¹⁰For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat." ¹¹We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. ¹²Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat. ¹³And as for you, brothers and sisters, never tire of doing what is good. ¹⁴Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instruction in this letter. Do not associate with them, in order that they may feel ashamed. ¹⁵Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer.

PROLOGUE

- 2 Thessalonians 3 begins with a prayer request, revealing a transition in Paul's thought:
 - From turning the readers' attention away from the false end time teachings,
 - To the deliverance (of the Thessalonians) from their present danger and suffering.
 - It is a warning against idleness
- Paul wants to impress 2 truths on readers of the letter:
 - Not everyone is faithful,
 - But the Lord is faithful.
 - These truths are encouragement to all believers, especially in times of unceasing persecution and trials, to *persistently pursue* what is right.
- To 'pursue' is:
 - Not an action born out of fear of being left behind,
 - An action born out of an initiative to accomplish what is right.

A. BELIEVERS MUST WORK

- Paul, being aware of the presence of some who lived a life of disorder and disruption amongst the Thessalonian Christians, gave the believers a stark warning – as believers, they:

Are urged in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 to be	Must not be
<i>"and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life"</i>	Idle and disruptive
<i>"mind your own business and work with your hands"</i>	Busybodies
<i>"your daily life may win the respect of outsiders"</i>	Freeloaders
<i>"you will not be dependent on anybody"</i>	Unemployed

- Paul's repetition of these undesirable traits in his letters to the Thessalonians, proved that there is a continuing outward display of such disorderly and disruptive lifestyle by a particular group of people.

- As we study the people in this group and the reasons for their behaviour, we learn what Paul tells the congregation to do with regards to this group of people.
 - These were Christians who believed that the end times were near and decided to stop everything in life and wait for Jesus to come and take them.
 - The end times was a justification to escape from the endless persecution – since everything is coming to an end, work became a waste of time.
 - Paul asks true believers to keep away from those who are causing division (2 Thes 3:6-15).
 - Church discipline is at stake here (Romans 16:17).
 - The disassociation is not against the person but against the teachings that are contrary to the true teachings from God.
 - This is not to create guilt, but to raise up in the strayed believer, a realization of guilt in the error that they have committed.
 - True believers should help Christians who have gone astray to see the truth and turn away from their error.
 - For the unemployed, Paul is referring specifically to one who is *able-bodied to work but chooses not to work*.
 - It is an irresponsible behaviour for an able-bodied person not to work and expect others to provide for their needs.
 - Paul saw that this group of believers were making a serious mistake, and required correcting as a fellow believer, not as an enemy.
 - It stretches and challenges our understanding of unconditional love.
 - In loving our neighbour, we need to be mindful that Christian charity is to be directed at true needs, not artificial needs created by acts of irresponsibility.
 - It is possible that the idleness of the trouble-making believers led them to becoming busy bodies and we should mind our own business and focus on our true work.
- Throughout scripture we know that work is part of God's big picture.
 - We know that God worked in creating the world (Genesis 2:2).
 - Adam was the steward of Eden and took care of it (Genesis 2:15).
 - After the fall, work was redefined (Genesis 3:19a).
 - Today, work is an exchange of one's labour, skill and time for monetary and non-monetary rewards.
- Our takeaway from Paul's writing is not one of punishment but of Christian discipline.
 - It is about restoring a person to Christ-like behaviour and fellowship.
 - A changed behaviour pursuing what is right doing what is right.

B. C.A.R.S. (CONFIRM-AUTHORITY-RESPONSE-SUBMISSION)

1. Conform-Authority

- There are times when we need reminder of what is wrong or right, by someone with the right authority and standard.
 - As believers, Jesus is our authority and deserves our absolute obedience.
 - Paul evoked the name of Jesus Christ twice in the scripture text to remind the church about the obligation of obedience.
 - In the context of the idle believers who were disrupting the work of the church and living off others, Paul cited his own behaviour as an example for self-support and church discipline and is a model for us to imitate (v7).

- Paul and his co-workers toiled night and day, did not take advantage of other's generosity nor burdened others.
- Over and above all that, they were still conducting evangelistic work.
- His actions illustrated Christ-like virtues and values that believers should aspire to emulate (v13, 15):
 - Self-sacrifice, generosity, willingness to work and devotion to the working for the kingdom.
- Paul reminded us that in response to an undisciplined Christian, we should warn them in love as a believer, and not regard them as enemy (v13, 15).
- While there is rebuke in the text, the intent of Paul's message is for the forgiveness and redemption of the wayward believers.
- We are to *conform* to the apostle's teachings and the examples with Christ as our final *authority*.

2. Response-Submission (or Trust and Obey)

- The way we live (*response* to life), is a testament to how we believe (*submission* to God).
 - As believers, we aim to please God by living our lives according to His ways and standards.
 - We have the gift of the Holy Spirit to guide us in our sanctification journey.
 - We must seek to anchor in His words and abide in his presence, maintain church discipline and be unlike those troublemakers as addressed in Paul's letter.
 - Christians needs to hold each other accountable in how we pursue our work, how we live our public and private lives and how we relate to one another.
 - We should imitate Paul's words and actions as we seek to live the gospel in our communities and present the good news of Jesus.

C. COE – Come O'Eternity

- Paul's letters present information on Christ's Second coming and reminders of our salvation.
 - We learn in Ephesians, that it is through grace that we have been saved. Our salvation is:
 - A gift from God, not by works and not something we can earn.
 - The perseverance of faith.
 - Not an entitlement with expiry, needing regular renewal.
 - With the fall of man, humankind experienced physical and spiritual death, and alienation from a just and holy God.
 - With Christ's death on the cross, He died for all His people.
 - Our old way of life under the power of sin dies with His death and is raised to a new life with Him.
 - If anyone is in Christ, a new creation has come, the old has gone, the new is here.
 - Christ is the only way of salvation - To live for Christ is to live like Christ.
 - In the face of adversity, God's grace is our eternal encouragement.
 - Our motivation for persevering in faith is to live out the light of Jesus and for His Second Coming.
 - Tangible indications of our new life in Jesus can be seen in our:
 - Spiritual awareness of God and His identity.
 - Moral transformation,
 - Growth in love for others.

CONCLUSION

- Let Hebrews 9:28 be a reminder to us:
 - About the nature of this salvation gifted to us, by God, through grace.
 - Of the importance of sobriety in our preparedness for His Second Coming.
 - To persevere in our pursuit of what is right, for the sake of our faith.
 - That this church is our eternity.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. The book of Second Thessalonians teaches faithfulness in the present while anticipating the future. Believers need to continue to live well and work hard even while waiting for the return of Christ. How are these exhortations applicable to the Thessalonian believers as well as for us today?
2. Jesus interprets the double commandment in the Law to love God and neighbour (Matt 22:37-39). Scripture teaches that love is an essential mark of a disciple. Paul identifies love as the highest virtue (1 Cor 13:13).

In our Scripture text, Paul commands the believers “to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us” (2 Thess 3:6b NIV) and “do not associate with them, in order that they may feel ashamed” (2 Thess 3:14b). He also gave a rule: “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.” (2 Thess 3:10b).

The above two paragraphs with the referenced Bible verses appear to be contradicting each other. The referenced verses in Paul’s second letter to the Thessalonians also appears to undermine the marks of a true disciple. Be especially careful to read our Scripture text in its context, discuss to reconcile and better understand the perceived contradictions.

3. The Scriptures teach that work is a good creation gift instituted by God prior to the Fall (Gen 2:15). Biblically speaking, after the Fall, work has been redefined as that of “by the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground” (Gen 3:19). Pre- or post- Fall, work in the Bible is often viewed as an exercise of stewardship. Believers, therefore, ought to view their labour as one important way in which they serve Christ.
Paul chose to follow the “tentmaking pattern” of ministry, living by plying his own trade and “worked night and day, labouring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you.”
 - a) How has your work and/or ministry, past and present glorified God?
 - b) Work can be defined as an input of labour, skill, and time in exchange for monetary and non-monetary rewards. It has been said the issue is not how much one makes. It is, rather, what is done with what is received. Genuine stewardship is the recognition that everything belongs to God. Discuss and share your understanding.