

Confidence in Christ

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 October 2022

Preacher: Daniel Ralph

[0 : 00] Thessalonians, chapter 3. So, 2 Thessalonians, chapter 3, beginning at verse 1.

Okay, now hear God's word. Finally, brothers, pray for us that the word of the Lord may speed ahead and be honored, as happened among you, and that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men.

For not all have faith, but the Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one. And we have confidence in the Lord about you that you are doing and will do the things that we command.

May the Lord direct your hearts to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ. Now, we command you, brothers, in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you have received from us.

For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it.

[1 : 46] But with toil and labor we worked night and day that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have the right, but to give you in ourselves as an example to imitate.

For even when we were with you, we would give you this command. If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busy bodies.

As such persons, we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living. As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.

If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in every way. The Lord be with you all. I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand.

[2 : 54] This is the sign of genuineness in every letter of mine. It is the way I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Amen. Well, as I said from the very beginning, or rather as it was said from the very beginning of chapter one, two Thessalonians has a particular way of focusing the Christian life on the Christian calling that God gives you.

The reason why this is so challenging is because so many Christians live according to their own direction.

This is very apparent in the decisions that they make and the things that they are committed to. And, of course, this takes up time. And, of course, when it takes up time, service to the Lord cannot be rendered.

And, of course, when service to the Lord is not rendered, that then shapes the Christian individual further and most definitely shapes the church. Not in a way that is faithful, but rather in a way that is not consistent with God's word.

- [4 : 11] Here in chapter three, it becomes even more apparent with those in the Christian faith who are idle. Now, idle is quite a strong word, and it is something that needs to be addressed so much so that most of chapter three is devoted to addressing idleness.
- Of when a person is idle. Now, of course, it's clear here that the relationship between work and benefits is clearly seen.
- That if you do not work, you do not receive the benefits. This is not a popular message in a current climate. But, nonetheless, it is a biblical one, and it is one that comes with a command.
- Now, why is this important? Well, it's important for a number of different reasons, and this is where I want to begin. Having understood the emphasis here in 2 Thessalonians is to refocus your attention on your calling, what God has actually called you to do as a Christian.
- Number one is the obvious one, that not everybody's future is the same, even though everybody's Monday will be a Monday, and everybody's Tuesday will be a Tuesday.
- [5 : 29] We don't live on different days. We live, so pointedly, the same 24 hours as everyone else lives. The difference, however, is that if we have relationship with Christ, our ultimate future is different, and, of course, our daily future is different as well.
- So there's a clear difference between the future of people, or people's future, if I can put it that way. Paul wants to make abundantly clear right from the very beginning that the Lord Jesus Christ is returning, and when he does, there is, of course, both separation and judgment.
- Judgment falls upon those who do not believe in God and who do not obey the gospel. It doesn't fall on us who do know God and do obey the gospel.
- And so in chapter 1, he addresses the issues of reassurance, that this is something to be reassured about. We're not to live as though we are going to face a happy ever after, if indeed a person is not going to face a happy ever after.
- Everyone is going to stand before the judgment of God. Of course, those who are saved are indeed saved and will be saved, you know, to put it in the three tenses of you have been saved, you are being saved, and you will be saved.
- [6 : 56] But those who are not will face the judgment. So you've got to think about the future in this way, because if you don't, neither will you understand that your works of service count for anything.
- You only have to go read the end of Matthew or go read Revelation or elsewhere in the New Testament and James, even the book of James, and it becomes quite apparent that you will be judged as Christians based according to what you have done or not done in the service of Christ.
- That's important, because it allows us to understand the importance placed upon our calling. What we render in the flesh to the flesh, what we render in the spirit to the spirit, what we actually commit ourselves to will face an accountability.
- And so while here it seems to be addressing a physical idleness, that is a material idleness of not being able to get out of bed in the morning and do an honest day's work and come home and be satisfied, there is also the opportunity for people to become spiritually idle in the sense that they're not engaging in material physical work for the Lord.
- And there's an idleness there also. Because not all contribution is a contribution you get paid for. You know, mothers who stay at home looking after the family are the hardest working people, or at least one of the hardest working people in the world.
- [8 : 33] And yet, do they make a profit? Well, not in a worldly sense they don't. But when you look at the profit of their contribution, it is great.

The family is fed, kept warm. There's a number of other blessings that come with that, but the blessings upon the family spiritually as well.

So these things matter. And they matter because they matter in light of a future judgment and a future accountability. Are you afraid?

Do you have a healthy sense of fear that you will stand before God on the grounds of what you have done and what you have not done? Not to determine whether or not you will be saved.

That's already been determined at the cross. But to you give an account for what you have not done or done, rather, to the Lord, for the Lord, rather, in the flesh.

[9 : 39] So in chapter 1, we have this strange reassurance of a future judgment. How can the judgment of Christ be reassuring? Well, it's reassuring because it shows you that whatever people seem to get away with in this current condition of life will not get away with it in the end.

There is a final accounting, and that's reassuring. And then, of course, the true comfort of chapter 2 is a comfort that has to be true.

You cannot be comforted by a lie. Now, people will try it in desperation to be comforted by a lie.

Hence, the nature of desperation. The mantra of, it'll be all right, it'll be all right, it'll be all right, is a cry of desperation.

It's a cry of comfort, especially, or most definitely, if it's not rooted in the Lord. And people around the world and next-door neighbors do this all the time. They have the mantra of, it'll be all right.

[10 : 43] They have no reason to believe that it'll be all right, other than that if they don't keep telling themselves that it'll be all right, they will fall apart. That's a very false comfort, but it is a false comfort that people do choose to live with.

Now, true comfort has to be true. The truth has to be in it. There are certain things that once you know it is a lie, it can no longer produce the type of feelings of comfort that it once did.

For instance, if you were on a boat and it had a very small leak in it, but you didn't know, you'd feel quite comfortable.

But if you were then a couple of miles offshore, which is a long way if you had to swim, and then you found out there was a leak in the boat, suddenly, the reassurance or the comfort disappears because now, it's the same boat, but now you know something more about the boat.

It's the same with other things when it comes to what we take comfort in. So, true comfort, or rather, comfort can only be true because it cannot comfort at all.

[12 : 04] Here in chapter three, it's about being confident in Christ, or rather, having our confidence in Christ to continue in the faith. And largely, most of the chapter here focuses on, again, work.

We saw work in chapter one, the good work that we are to do. We saw the work in chapter two, and here, Paul is returned to this theme of work. And so, in a letter which is predominantly known for its focus on the second coming of Christ, or rather, addressing the second coming of Christ, there's a great deal of attention in every single chapter on being a good worker.

And what does it mean, then, to be a good worker? Well, there are two errors that people seem to fall into. The first error here seems to be the obvious one, that those who have given up work or have decided not to work could have responded to the false teaching, the idea that if you believed, if you believed, sat here this morning that Jesus was coming back next week, or let's say in a couple of weeks, what would you now do?

Would you give up your job? Would you go to a place in the world that you've never been before? What would you do? If you were absolutely certain that Christ was going to return, and we were all certain that Christ was going to return in two weeks' time, what would you do for these next two weeks?

And it's understandable that if someone says, well, I'm going to give up work because I've got enough to perhaps get by for two weeks, just enough to get by for two weeks, why don't I just give up work?

[13 : 50] Well, that would make sense. You can understand how someone would think that way. It's the same way like when we're in the trade, like, and you know that you're going on holiday or you've got two weeks off, you know, at the end of once you finish work on Friday, that you slow down.

You slow down towards the day that you go away. It's just part of that getting ready for the holiday. Well, the same thing you would expect to happen if someone thought the Lord was going to return.

The trouble is, here is the very opposite. The false teaching isn't saying that Christ is coming in two weeks' time, but that Christ has already come.

And so I find it very hard how that can create anything that makes a person then want to give up working. So the idea that Christ has already come, the teaching, the false teaching that Christ has come, doesn't give reason to why these men or women or whoever they are are no longer working.

No, rather, Paul says, the problem is one of idleness, not one of false teaching. It's now one of witness, not one of teaching. So there are two errors that has to be addressed in this church.

[15 : 06] The first one is, of course, the false teaching, which can lead people to false behaviors or behaviors that are not consistent with the way God wants us to live. And now, we have a false witness at the end of the book.

People who are idle and why we should be kept away from idle people, why we should not imitate them, why we should not practice what they practice.

And so, it is effectively a denial of creation, idleness. You are denying that you are created by God when you are being idle. Because work is not a creation of sin.

Work is a creation of God. God created us to work. God wants us to work. That is what it means to be made in the image of God and therefore to be idle, whether that is in the church, in service of God, or in the world providing material needs.

Any form of idleness is to deny the image of God, to deny that you are created in the image of God. It is to deny what God has made you for.

[16 : 15] And so, there is a real challenge here to the church, not just to be hard workers in the sense of providing for family, but also in the church as well.

Those who are idle when it comes to serving Christ. Because to be idle in the service of Christ is to doubly deny what God has created you for.

Because you are a new creation in Christ Jesus. Not only are you denying your original creation, but you are denying who you are in Christ Jesus. And that denial through being idle, well, I'm just not going to do it.

Why are you not going to do it? Because I want to do other things. Why are you doing other things? Right? The list is endless. The problem with idleness is not one of false teaching, but one of false witness that unfortunately has the ability to infect others.

Well, we have, or we used to have, this is going back a very long time now, it's longer, the longer I'm in the ministry, the longer it is.

[17 : 34] that the idea of if you pay peanuts, you get monkeys. There is a correlation in the world between what a person gets paid and the work that they produce.

Meaningful work and a fair wage is something that has to be discussed perhaps in this current climate. But the idea of working among men, and they say, well, if you pay me minimum wage, you get minimum work.

In other words, you get what you pay for. Just like you do with anything else. That attitude is wrong, but that attitude is understandable. In other words, if you want me to do more, you have to pay me more.

Right? Because it correlates. There has to be a correspondence. But when it comes to Christ, and when it comes to the death of Christ being the purchase price of your life, and then all the benefits you have in Christ, there is no way an argument like that could ever be made in the church.

That God has to bless me more before I do more. It would be entirely wrong. And the other thing that would be wrong is picking and choosing what you want to do rather than what needs to be done.

[18 : 56] This, I think, is one of the fatal errors of service in the church. Picking and choosing what you want to do rather than what needs to be done.

I think this is a big problem. And so it's very clear to understand how idleness can occur within a church setting as much as in a worldly setting.

Let's then look just briefly at how Paul lays this argument out before we come to any kind of point or conclusion. Paul knows that the church faces opposition in exactly the same way he does.

He prays that he asks the church to pray for him that the work that he is doing in spreading the gospel would go unhindered, that he wouldn't face opposition from wicked and evil men.

But he recognizes that the environment in which the church serves Christ is in an environment where there are wicked and evil men who seek to oppose the work of God.

[20 : 06] And as we saw, this is actually the work of Satan through wicked and evil men. God is the one who will establish us and keep us in the faith.

And then he prays for them, verse 5, if you just look down, that the Lord would direct their hearts. So his heart is directed to serve God and now he prays that their heart would be directed to love God in the steadfastness of Christ.

Then he moves on to imitation. So he begins with a prayer for work, unhindered work. He then prays for them to love God in the same way.

And then he moves on to this issue of imitation, verses 6 through to 12. There's a faithful pattern to follow and there is an unfaithful pattern to follow.

Idleness needs to be addressed just like anything needs to be addressed in the church. The idea that the Bible can only speak or address matters of faith in practice is somewhat of a limited understanding.

[21 : 14] Whereas the Bible is allowed to speak and does speak into matters of you're not working hard enough for your boss. You're lazy.

And therefore the Bible has the ability to speak into matters of business, employment, politics, governance, whatever it may be. The Bible has the right to address those issues or rather God has the right to address those issues with his word that we have.

Back in the day in Scotland a man could be refused communion at the Lord's table if he was found not to be doing the right things in the home for his family.

Such was the standard in Scotland that everybody knew that a standard ought to be maintained. the law's standard ought to be kept but now it's as if no I'm free to do as I choose as though there are no standards.

Nothing to obey. Nothing to be commanded by. But Paul here in chapter 3 is quite clear that hear these words and follow them as commands and those who don't do it have nothing to do with them.

[22 : 39] Now Paul's not getting on his high horse as though he has the right to command God's people but rather he recognizes as an apostle of God he speaks the word of God and therefore it's really the Lord's command through Paul that the people ought to obey.

And so one of the mistakes that we have to avoid is that the pastor doesn't have a right to tell you you're not working hard enough for your employer. the elders does have the right they also have the right to be able to come along inside you and say the work that you're committing to is not honoring to the Lord.

This is not honoring. There are too many compromises being made and it is something that you have to leave and get a different job. It seems strange that something could be said like that in this climate but this is exactly what 2 Corinthians 3 is addressing.

Paul is speaking to the idle person. Now where are they idle? They could be idle in the church. They could be idle down at the employment wherever he's employed.

The point is that in a society where it is easy to become dependent on Christian grace because that's what you're meant to do right.

[24 : 06] You're meant to love one another. You're meant to provide for the poor. So if I put myself into a position where you out of good conscience in Christ have to provide for me, then why can't I do that?

Well, that's idleness. We ought to provide for the poor, but the poor are defined carefully. They are not those who have chosen to be that way.

They are rather those who are that way through oppression or opposition or through illness or through disability or whatever it may be. And so when you look at a person, you're able to distinguish the difference between this person being idle and this person falling on hard times, providentially hard times, by which God says to the church, this is a providential dealing of mine so that you can care for the poor.

So the idea of being able to address these issues don't often sit well with God's people because in the church we only should speak about matters of faith and practice.

We're allowed to address matters of idleness, whether or not you're working hard enough. And Paul's quite clear that if you don't work, don't eat. And let me qualify that.

[25 : 31] by saying that if you take into consideration everything in the New Testament that it says, Paul is not saying to the person, for instance, who is on his sickbed paralyzed and cannot walk, if you don't work, you cannot eat.

Rather, this is said in the context of idleness. The problem is not paralysis, the problem is idleness. He's not saying to the paralytic, if you don't work, you don't eat.

He's saying to the idle person, if you don't work, you don't eat. That's quite clear. You have to be, you know, I don't want any of you going from here saying, Daniel said that if you don't work, you don't eat, and you're speaking to a man in a wheelchair, or you're speaking to, right?

That's not what's being said. It has to be understood in the context of which it is being said. So what does this mean then? Well, it's just one point. In order for us to continue faithfully, we have to be able to tell the difference between true teaching and false teaching, chapter 1 and chapter 2, and we have to be able to tell the difference between a true witness of Christ and a false witness of Christ, false witness of Christianity, chapter 3.

In other words, if you cannot tell the difference, that's when you begin to fall into error. Why has this church believed that Christ has already returned? Well, because they don't know the difference. Why is it possible for people to begin to imitate others in the church that we think, well, there's no way you should imitate an idle person, but if there's no way, why does Paul have to command the church to not do it?

[27 : 06] There's no need to say don't imitate an idle person if people in the church are not tempted to actually imitate an idle person. So Paul is addressing two issues throughout this letter.

In this last chapter, he's addressing the issue of a false witness. witness. Why? Because it's not just false teaching that has an influence over God's church, but it is also the false witness.

A church is not disrupted just by the false teaching it hears, and that can come from any person in the congregation, but it can also be disrupted by the false witness that is being imitated by anybody in the congregation.

And so the problem that you have is one of what I've referred to before as sinful symmetry. Sinful symmetry.

Error always creeps in where you don't have a standard. And error always creeps in in the place where there are gaps in your knowledge. The only way a church can end up believing that Christ has already returned is if they don't understand what needs to happen first, which is exactly the way Paul explains it.

[28 : 27] These things need to happen first before Christ returns. That's how he addresses that issue. So they don't have that knowledge, and so they end up believing something that is false, and it has to be addressed with the truth.

But then we got this issue of now a false witness, and it just so happens to be that the false witness here in the church is idleness. Now it could be anything. And what Paul is trying to avoid is a sinful symmetry, through imitation.

What do I mean by sinful symmetry? Most of you will know, if you've not experienced this in your own home growing up, you may have experienced it in your own home with your children growing up.

And sinful symmetry goes something like this. You're in the kitchen, and one of your children come in and say, can I have a biscuit?

biscuit? And say, you know, the standard question, no, it's ten minutes till tea time, you'll ruin your appetite, you give some kind of reason like that. It makes perfect sense to you whether or not it's true.

[29 : 29] I'm not entirely sure at the time. But you say, no, and then they turn around and say, but my brother or my sister had a biscuit.

it's not fair. And you have to point out as a parent, yes, but they took it without asking. They also took it without me knowing that they took it.

They ate it before I could actually stop them from eating it. And so, what you're wanting symmetry with is something that is wrong. You want what is fair, but what is fair is something that's wrong.

You want to have what is what your brother have, but your brother shouldn't have had it in the first place. And so, when this happens in a church, it is detrimental for years and years and years and years because the moment you give way on one issue, the next generation will say, well, this has happened before in the church.

Why can it happen again? You did it for them. Why can't you do it for me? This often goes around the issues of marriage, marriage, family, adultery, drink.

[30 : 46] We let him off. How come you're not going to let me off? And that's an argument of sinful symmetry. In other words, you let it go before. You let it slide before. Why won't you let it slide again?

And, of course, what happens in a church is that when you get so much of it, you do the same thing as what is done in a home, and that is you close the door. And suddenly the mess is no longer there.

And then you get someone come along and says, right, I think it's time we tidy the room. And the problem with tidying the room is you open up the sinful symmetry. Now, ask yourself the very simple question.

You've been in this church long enough, or you've been in the church and you've seen the church long enough for Old Scotland. how many things in this church alone have been repeated by people who have done the same thing before?

And then ask yourself the question, why does it happen? Why does it seem to happen over and over again? Because you've got a sinful symmetry.

[31 : 53] Because you've got the problem that Paul is addressing here. You're imitating something which is sinful. And so if it's not addressed, it continues. And so the reason we address these issues and you make a stand and say, no more.

Well, the person who says, you know, the mom who says to her child, no, wow, I mean, you're the worst person on earth from now on out until tomorrow when the child's forgotten all about it.

But at least for now, to tell your child that they can't have a child when their brother has makes you the worst person. It's not fair.

You're not fair. You're not just. You're uncaring. You don't love me. You love them more than me because you let them have a biscuit and you didn't let me have one. All those arguments come up.

Why? Because the child is making an argument from sinful symmetry. I want the same as what the person did who did wrong.

[32 : 54] wrong. And of course, when that happens in a church, the imitation, imitating idleness, I'm going to do what they're doing. If it's not, if the idle person's not addressed, then the problem that you then have is you can't address any other person that then imitates the idle person after that.

And so the problem is exacerbated and continues throughout the church. it just so happens to be here that the situation is idleness.

But it could be anything, couldn't it? It could be alcohol. It could be money. It could be anything. It could be not serving the Lord. It doesn't matter what it is.

The fact is, if it is not God-honoring and it continues, it continues to be imitated by others in the church, hence why they have to be told to have nothing to do with such people.

these things matter. Well, let's conclude. We should not forget, and this goes without saying, that the church is not perfect.

[34 : 02] You are not perfect, and I am not perfect. However, however, that imperfection is never to be used as a reason for continuing to do what you shouldn't do.

Well, I'm not perfect. Okay? You're not perfect. I'm not perfect. But that imperfection should never be used as a reason for continuing to do what you shouldn't do.

Why have you done it? Well, I'm not perfect. That's not a reason. That is a carefully crafted argument so that you can avoid being challenged.

That's what it is. When someone says I'm not perfect, what they're saying is, don't challenge me. I don't want to be challenged. Leave me alone. No, you're not perfect.

You're sinful and you're proving it by your actions. Stop. But I'm not perfect. I know you're not perfect. And so these things must be addressed.

[35 : 05] We should never use our imperfection as a reason or an excuse for not trying to do the right thing. idleness is just one of those issues, the very present issue here in the church.

And so the point here, and this I will conclude, is that there are two false witnesses in the church. One is through word and one is through deed. One is through a letter or word of mouth that seems to suggest that Christ has already returned and the other is through people not doing what they ought to be doing, which is identified as idleness.

And both have disrupted the church, both the false teaching and the false witness. And so for us, who are concerned about these matters, should not grow weary, as Paul says, in doing good.

More importantly, we should have confidence in Christ, that Christ will return and Christ will be the one to whom we give an account for all that we have said and done in the flesh.

And until that time, may the Lord of peace give you peace. Amen. Amen. Well, let's stand together as we conclude with this final hymn.

[36 : 40] Shabbat's Marian's God is willing to traverse Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[39 : 25] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.