

Sloth - A Deadly Sin

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[0 : 0 0] This is the morning service at Holy Trinity on the 10th of December 2000 the preacher is Phil Muleman his sermon is entitled Sloth, a Deadly Sin and is from 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 verses 6 to 18 Let me pray Our Father we pray that your mind would be within us that we may be able to serve you more fully and be more like you in all that we do We ask this in Jesus name Amen You may like to open your Bibles to page 962 as we look at the passage that Alan read to us from 2 Thessalonians this morning What is our attitude to work?

And what is our understanding of work? Our educational system today is geared towards preparing young people for work and people from their earliest years absorb the idea that somehow work is inevitable That's the understanding that they receive as they go through the education system And whether they like it or not they cannot avoid it Now work for a child can take on many forms Cleaning up the bedroom, for example Yesterday our kids cleaned the car I came home to a nice clean car and it was vacuumed as well That was work It can also Work can take on the idea of school work Having to do homework in the evening and so on Through to eventually doing a weekly job such as a paper run or working at McDonald's or something like that And they work in that sort of environment because they hopefully want to save their money up for something that they want to buy Now whether they like it or not

Work it seems in whatever shape it takes becomes something that is unavoidable And there comes a stage for the young person where it is clear that to live in this world a paid income will be a necessity Now sadly for many work has little value in itself And the attitude people take is that work is seen as just a means to an end The end being holidays Escaping the big smoke and relaxing on a desert island Getting a big superannuation payout so that they can spend it on themselves Because after all they are the ones who've worked they are the ones who've earned it And these are the sorts of things that the media and consumerism impresses upon our society today With huge pressures like that It's no wonder we think that work is all about me and getting what I can get out of it so I can spend it for myself in my retirement days or whatever it is

Today our welfare system is rorted by people perfectly able to work It's rorted by people who are perfectly able to work but who don't want to work And so people sponge off the government pretending for example to study along the way They get the benefits from government from their study Others falsify documents so they can maximise welfare payments thus robbing those who really are in need of those sorts of payments due to their circumstances and so on Well should we put up with this sort of rorting that we see in our system day in and day out The truth is that these sorts of scenarios will always be around while the world is the way it is But should we put up with it?

Certainly as a Christian I don't think we should And by that I mean that in the Christian community we should not allow our brothers and sisters in Christ to rot our welfare system or indeed be lazy in their attitude to work We should take action about it in a way that brings glory to God and in a way that seeks to show the person the error of their way while at the same time reminding them that they are loved by God It's a hard thing to do It's a hard thing to balance but I think that's what we should be doing Now the Apostle Paul's final words in this letter to the Thessalonians addresses the problem of idleness or their attitude to work amongst the believers And we see that Paul deals with it firmly here in these 12 verses but he also deals with it with a great deal of pastoral concern for all that are concerned The problem of idleness which is the word that's used here in this text among some of the Thessalonians is stated in two places in this passage in chapter 3

[5 : 17] First of all in verse 6 he says Paul says keep away from believers who are living in idleness and in verse 11 Paul says we hear that some of you are living in idleness Now when Paul says that they are living in idleness I don't think he means that there are that there are people who have downed their tools and stopped work to go and sit on a pole for example I think though that he has been critical of people who have stopped any kind of legitimate work work that will put food on the table and then these he's been critical of those people who are doing that and we're doing what was from Paul's perspective not work but pseudo work busyness that disrupted rather than benefited the community as a whole so if you were to look again at verse 11 Paul says we hear that some of you are living in idleness mere busybodies not doing any work the work that they are doing is unproductive work it's busybody work it's meddling in other people's affairs and that's unproductive and his command to the Christians who are legitimately working is to keep away from these believers who are idle now these are strong words that Paul is using here he says he's commanding them to keep away from them in verse 6 but his command you'll notice here is commissioned from the highest authority it's issued in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ but for all the authority with which

Paul speaks his affection for his readers remains he calls them beloved including those who are in error those who are idle those who are busybodies those who have ceased work or who are working unproductively now why are they in error?

it's because they have been idle the Greek word literally for idle is being disorderly in a sense and this disorderliness this idleness that is going on is contrary to the way Paul lived while he was among them so how does Paul deal with the problem of this idle minority there are four things which I think that I think we see here the first one is that Paul reminds the church of his earlier teaching on the subject of work now when Paul was in Thessalonica previously he took his missionary journey there and he converted a number of the Thessalonian people and they became Christians when he was with them face to face he gave them the command and the command is there for us to see in verse 10 it says anyone unwilling to work should not eat that's what he taught them now there's an elementary justice about this isn't there who can argue with it

I don't think it's right for example that Christians should sponge or bludge off other people when they can quite legitimately earn an income for themselves now I need to qualify here that Paul isn't speaking of those who through injury or illness are unable to work but of those who deliberately choose not to work so Paul reminds them of his earlier teaching on the subject secondly Paul gave a decisive ruling having outlined the principle that believers should earn their own keep Paul then goes on and gives a sharp command to the people in question in verse 12 saying to do their work quietly and earn their own living so he gives them a decisive ruling thirdly he reminds the believers of the example that he had set Paul invites them to reflect on his own behaviour when he had been with them in Thessalonica verses 7 to 9 of chapter 3 says you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us we were not idle when we were with you and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it but with toil and labour we worked night and day so that we might not burden any of you this wasn't because we don't have the right but in order to give you an example to imitate the apostle had the right to earn his living by the preaching of the gospel in the letter that he writes to the

Corinthian Christians he makes that clear that he has the right to earn the living from the gospel that he preaches yet instead of demanding payment and support for the preaching of the gospel Paul set about being an example of working hard and providing for himself as much as he was able instead of taking advantage of people he made sure that he worked hard and wasn't a burden to anybody now that's an example that I think clergy myself and Christians in a position of influence could be reminded of and ought to be reminded of from time to time Christian leadership is servant leadership it's not a standover model where they stand up and they tell you to do this this or this it's servant leadership it's a model that works alongside people and it seeks to serve them for the sake of Jesus Christ now I think a great example of that is

[11 : 12] Mother Teresa despite what some people may think of her and about what she has done she had a real servant heart ministry her ministry impacted the lives of many many people now the fourth thing that Paul does in approaching the problem of idol Christians in Thessalonica is that he demanded decisive action what should be done if some of the idlers in this church had dug in their heels and refused to pay attention to Paul's exhortation which we read about in verse 12 let me read it to you again now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their living what should be done if these people who are idle ignore this command notice here as well that they are commanded in the name of our

Lord Jesus Christ to earn their living the full authority of the Lord stands behind this command just as it does back in verse 6 so to reject them is to reject not merely the words that Paul has written but it is to reject the Lord himself the actual command to the idol is that quietly working they should eat their own bread that is rather than wasting their time in pseudo work or unproductive busyness they should engage in productive self-supporting activities just as Paul modeled when he was with them now Paul was a tent maker and he presumably used this skill while he was there in the city of Thessalonica the point of working and the main point of Paul's command here is that they eat their own bread that is that they earn their own living and by implication stop being an unnecessary burden on the rest of the community but if they're not to obey this command then the congregation must take steps to enforce them and what Paul has said in verse 6 that is keeping away from believers who are living in idleness is essentially what is repeated here in verse 12 and then he goes on in verse 14 and says take note of those who do not obey what we say in this letter have nothing to do with them the reason that they have nothing to do with them is so that they may be ashamed which is what he writes here in the

Mediterranean culture of the day shame was primarily a matter of concern for one's reputation Paul expects that the one who is shamed that is whose reputation is at stake will then respond with an appropriate behavior in this case in regarding repentance repentance and obedience to Paul's instructions which as well is a command from the Lord and this is the goal of the disciplinary action here implied by Paul in verse 15 where he says do not regard them as enemies but warn them but warn them as believers it's a warning for those who are idle to not be idle but to work and earn their living and so on in carrying out Paul's instructions the Thessalonians are not to treat an offender as an enemy instead they are to warn them as a brother or sister in

Christ that what they are doing is wrong so if you could sum it up it would be this the disciplinary action on a Christian is clearly meant to be redemptive for the individual it should seek to build them up in their relationship with Christ at the same time it is also protective for the community one writer puts it this way if repentance does not occur the congregation will nonetheless have been purged of a potentially corrupting influence it is there to warn this discipline action is there to warn the Christian and it's also there for the sake of the community to build up the community well what relevance has this got for us today let me make two comments the first one about church discipline and the second one about work in our culture today there are many churches that are weak in dealing biblically with the issue of church discipline now I think it's due to a number of reasons and

I've outlined some of them for you I'll outline some of them first of all it may be due to the fear of losing a member in the church to another local congregation because you think around here in Doncaster we have many churches around here and there might be the fear of losing someone we go and discipline someone here they might go to another church could be the fear of losing someone we want to keep our numbers up in churches these days it could be due to the fear of a lawsuit now that's probably more likely to happen in America if church discipline is brought in or brought to bear on a person but there is an ever increasing scenario here in Australia of lawsuits for various reasons it could be that there is a fear of being too judgmental we are seeing the church could be seen to be too judgmental and too fundamental and bringing in old practices in a world which is now pluralistic and so on it could also be that the churches are weak in dealing with discipline and so on is that there is a desire to avoid conflict amongst people it could be a reason it could also be that the church and the leaders within the church have a weak view of sin they don't want to look at the person who is in error doing something wrong as if they are doing something sinful that is going against

[17 : 43] God's ways today sin in our world is an outdated word it's an unfashionable word in our pluralistic society and sadly there are many churches which have a very weak view of sin well no doubt there are many other reasons as well but there are just some ideas and some reasons perhaps why churches are weak in dealing with the issue of church discipline but if you know of someone who is a Christian and they are clearly ignoring the biblical teachings on a particular issue such as we see here about work or other issues such as sexual immorality and so on then as brothers and sisters in Christ we ought to be willing to do something about it you see love for and concern about the spiritual health of an erring brother or sister concern for the health of the health of the congregation and a refusal to collude with deception if you remember back in chapter 2 Paul deals with false teaching about the day of the Lord and about this man of lawlessness and so on if you refuse to deal with those sorts of issues love for the person and love for the congregation

I think that they ought to be reasons enough for us all to consider what Paul has to say here about the area of discipline within the church and we ought to be prepared to discipline appropriately for the sake of the gospel now so long as discipline isn't done out of spite but is rather done in love then we also ought to trust that God's spirit will have a hand in the process as I said earlier the goal of discipline is not to excommunicate a member of the church but it is to bring them back into fellowship with other Christians and so strengthen their relationship with God unfortunately though people often see it church discipline as excommunication so the way we go about disciplining a Christian in the church ought to be done with great sensitivity and with love and with much prayer so that's the first issue the issue of discipline within the church secondly the issue of work it's thought that one of the reasons some of these Thessalonians had ceased work was because Jesus had returned or that his return was imminent well that could be so but we don't know if that's the real reason or not what is evident though is that

Paul expects Christians to work they have a responsibility to do so in the biblical tradition people who are able to work do so in order to provide for themselves and for their families they also work in order to provide for those for whatever reasons who are unable to work indeed in the Bible and in the first centuries of Christian tradition meeting one's needs and the needs of one's community especially the underprivileged members was just about the most important purpose of work but work is there work is here in our world primarily because God gave it to us before the fall in the garden of Eden work was balanced and it was in harmony with creation work was given to us by God so that man could look after God's world after the fall however when sin entered into the world work was made difficult in every aspect of living

Genesis 3 tells us that the ground is cursed because of sin and that the women will endure pain through childbirth now they're both work aren't they the point is though that work is flawed just as human beings are flawed by sin nothing is in balance anymore because of sin work is used by people to exploit people and make others wealthy if you like and you could say that there is a lot of inequality within the workplace brought about due I think to our sinful nature as Christians we have the danger of falling into that trap as well but we have a responsibility as Christians and we need to keep our work whatever it may be whether it's paid work whether it is unpaid work we need to keep that all in perspective the reason we do work is to keep ourselves from going hungry but it is also to serve God and that is at the heart of anything that we do we are there to serve God and we would do well to remember that in our daily living the challenge that lies before us all is how we honour

God in our everyday situation does our paid work for example bring glory to Christ are we seen to be working hard at what we do or are we thought of as lazy or greedy or selfish amongst our peers what hope have we got in sharing our faith telling others about Jesus if this is the sort of image we portray to those around us so does our paid work bring glory to Christ does our unpaid work bring glory to Christ is what we do at home for example honouring to God are we bringing our children or teaching our grandchildren are we bringing them up to know the Lord are we teaching them from God's word are we praying with them and helping them to see from scripture his ways or are we being idle in teaching our children or our grandchildren about who

[24 : 07] Jesus is and leaving that up to others so does our unpaid work bring glory to Christ do we seek to use our retirement for our own benefit or are we looking at ways that we can be more active for Jesus within the church and on our travels and so on now retirees like to travel and I'm looking forward to the day when I can retire and spend a bit more time travelling but what ways can travel be used for gospel opportunities what way can we be effective as retired people for ministry opportunities I was pleased to read earlier on this year that BCA they were inviting opportunities for people to use their skills retired people to use their skills in remote parts of Australia for the sake of the gospel perhaps going to parts of remote

Australia and helping with maintenance of the building or being involved in missions and so on for people in the remote parts of Australia they're great opportunities particularly for retired people to use their skills in the times when they have finished their paid work and so on well these are just some issues that as Christians we all need to consider in our day to day living as we seek to serve God well Paul finishes this letter in much the same way as he began it he focuses at the end of this letter as he does at the beginning on the centrality of Jesus Christ Jesus is central for the apostle Paul and by implication Jesus ought to be central in our lives as well whether it be at work whether it be at home whether it be at church whether it be on the road wherever we are

Jesus ought to be central and let me read this the final greetings and benedictions of Paul's letter now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times in all ways the Lord be with all of you I pull right this greeting with my own hand this is the mark in every letter of mine it's the way I write and then he concludes the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with all of you in short our future rests entirely on the power and faithfulness of God as revealed through his son our Lord Jesus Christ and he calls us to be obedient in all that we do as we seek to live our lives for him wherever that may be let me pray our Father we thank you for your word that it teaches that it instructs and

Lord we pray for ourselves that as Christians we would not err from your word we pray that as Christians in a community here in Doncaster that we would seek to encourage and build one another up in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ our Father we pray that we would have the courage to discipline where we see our Christian brother and sister erring and we pray Lord that as Christians if we are erring that we would have the grace and the humility to stand corrected and so be drawn back towards you we pray that as Christians that our work would seek to be honouring and pleasing to you we pray Father that whether we have paid work unpaid work whether we are retired that we would seek to draw attention to you seek to serve you and build up your kingdom

Lord we recognise we can't do this on our own and it is only by your grace that this is possible we ask these things in Jesus name Amen for Christmas love enjoy s■ jej