

“Idleness”

2 Thessalonians More About the End Times

2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

Rev. Jeff Stivason, Ph.D.

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Jeff: Gracious God, we are thankful for this day. It’s another day You have given, and Lord, we know that every day is a gift from You. And in those days we find the grace of Your Spirit present in our lives working and acting according to Your will and good purposes for us. Lord, as we come before You today we are thankful for yet another, and look forward to and anticipate with great desire and eagerness what You will do in our lives, because we know that each day You have us on the anvil, forming us and shaping us after Christ’s own image.

Father, as we come we ask that You will do just that: shape us after the image of Christ. And Father, as You do we pray that we would be useful in the lives of others, not only edified in ourselves but also useful. And Lord, we pray that You will through Your providence put us into those situations wherein we might be useful and a help to others.

Father, we are thankful for the gift of prayer. This morning we offer up our thanks to You for the many blessings that You give. But also we offer concerns. We think about Gregg and we are thankful for the significant progress and joys in his life, and also pray for him and ask that You will continually work in his body and his mind and his spirit. Father, we also pray for our brother Kevin. We ask that Your hand would be upon him for good. We ask, Lord, that You would be ministering to him. We pray, Father, for Ted and his wife as they are not well today. We ask that You would bless them with health and wellness.

Lord, as we come before You in Your word we are thankful for it—thankful that You have inspired it, thankful that it is infallible and inerrant, thankful that it is authoritative for our lives. And Lord, we ask that You’ll help us to be submissive to it. It’s not always easy and You know that. The worst part of us seeks to continue to remove ourselves from under it. And yet, Lord, we know that the safest of all places is to be in Your hand and under Your word. So we pray that You will help us to be in just that spot today. Lord, we ask now that Your Spirit who is in us will bless us and strengthen us as we study this Word. And we ask this in Jesus’ blessed and precious name. Amen.

Brave Men: Amen.

Jeff: All right. Well, today we’re going to look at the last part of 2 Thessalonians. But could I talk with you a minute about what’s next? Would you give me a little direction in terms of what you might be interested in studying? And I’ll see what I can do. I won’t make any promises, but I’ll see what I can do. What might you be interested in? I figured that the way to hold your interest is that. I can tell you all about the things I’m interested in.

Don Maurer: What about going back to Romans? Is that viable?

Jeff: You want to go back to Romans. Okay, I’ll put that up here. I’m going to take a picture of this once we’re done so I have it. Anything else?

Jim Hamilton: Acts.

Jeff: Acts, the book of Acts. I was going to say that I was just going to take a picture of Romans there. But go ahead. *(Laughter)* Anything else?

Don Rimbe: I like both of those.

Jeff: Okay. Well I think I can remember those. *(Laughter)* I thought that maybe I was going to have competing banjos, but okay; sounds good; thank you.

“Idleness”

All right. Well let me remind you of the outline, the broad outline. And looking at the book of 2 Thessalonians, and the broad outline has been The God Who Hears. And remember that last week we brought that back around; it functions as that whole idea of prayer in the book of 2 Thessalonians. It functions as something of an inclusio, an inclusion, that is, a book ending of the text. In other words it begins with prayer; that’s the first book end. And then the latter book end is prayer.

And then in the middle we find things pertaining to the end times. And so for instance we talked about tribulation to apocalypse or to the end. We talked about the man of lawlessness. We talked about how Paul encourages us to stand firm in the midst of this kind of infiltration of the evil one.

And so now we’re going to focus on the last part of the letter. I think this is really significant because it’s at this point that Paul turns his attention to a topic that really is foreign to what we’ve been thinking about. He’s turning our attention to idleness. And so as he does I think it’s going to be interesting. I find that maybe it’s not necessarily the most exciting part of the letter. But it is indeed fascinating, and to watch how he covers the subject is fascinating. Let’s turn there; it’s in verses 6-18. Don, do you have that?

Don Maurer: Yes.

Jeff: Let me ask that you read it: 6-18.

Don: Okay. My translation says “*disorderly*.” I don’t know if that—

Jeff: I’ll read it. (*Laughter*) No, go ahead. That’s fine; go ahead. Disorderly?

Don: Yes.

Jeff: Okay.

Transcriber’s Note: NKJV.

Don: *“But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.*

“For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

“But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good. And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.

“Now may the Lord of peace Himself give you peace always in every way. The Lord be with you all. The salutation of Paul with my own hand, which is a sign in every epistle; so I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.” “This is the word of the Lord.

Brave Men: Thanks be to God.

Jeff: All right.

Don Maurer: Disorderly and idle; there’s a difference there.

Jeff: Yeah, there is. Just a second.

Don: While Jeff is preparing, (*laughter*), this is the first time this year that Jeff has talked about inclusioes.

“Idleness”

Jeff: Is that right?

Don: Yeah.

Jeff: Wow! There you have it.

Jeff: All right. So I want to talk about idleness. And when you think about idleness I think one of the things that you might think about is avoiding work. I think you might think about one of the things that we think about, which is being lazy. If somebody is idle he is lazy. You know, it’s interesting. I did just look up that word. It took forever to get my Greek text up. And that word can be translated “unruly” or “disorderly.” And so that’s a legitimate translation. And when you think about that, when you think about unruly, when you think about disorderly, when you think about idle, all of those things have the tendency to go together. Somebody that’s idle is disorderly. They’re not well organized; they’re not disciplined. And as a result that has the tendency to idleness, laziness, those kinds of things.

So the idea of idleness is here in the text. And one of the things that we may or may not think about because we’re Protestants when we think about idleness is the seven deadly sins. This is oftentimes a medieval characterization of a particular set of sins that are considered to be deadly.

Now when you’re into medieval Catholicism or when you’re into Roman Catholicism these seven deadly sins are mortal sins, and so we don’t have a tendency to think in the same way—thank the Lord!—that the Roman Catholics think about these kinds of things. And yet it is a full classification of sins.

What are they? Well, you have pride. You have envy, anger, sloth, lust, greed and gluttony. Those are the seven deadly sins. And of course when we think about idleness we think about slothfulness. We think about laziness; we think about idleness. And so those are the typical categorizations when we think about the seven deadly sins, idleness being among them as sloth.

There’s an interesting quote that Dorothy Sayers writes. She was a famous author, most famous I think for her detective novels. She was also a friend of Tolkien and Lewis. And I want to share with you some interesting quotes from her. I think that they’ll have a tendency to make you think.

The first one is this. *“The church names the sixth deadly sin ascetia or sloth. In the world it calls itself tolerance. But in hell it’s called despair.”*

Now I think that’s interesting because she equates sloth with tolerance. And you might wonder why in the world she does that. But she’s going to go on and explain herself. And I think it[’s in the explanation that we find the most hard-hitting point that she offers. Let me give it to you.

She says, *“It is the accomplice of other sins, and their worst punishment. It is the sin which believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and only remains alive because there is nothing to die for. We have known it far too well for too many years.”*

Now that’s what she said eighty years ago. And she thought that description described her culture well. Here we are almost a hundred years later, 80-some years later, and that description fits our own culture. And it fits our culture perhaps even better than it fit her culture. And yet I would say to you that if you were to go back 80 years and ask her, “What do you think times are like in comparison to what came before?”, she would have said, “This is the worst we’ve possibly been.”

“Idleness”

And the reason for that, the reason why someone might say that then eighty years ago and someone might say that now is very simple. It's the same reason, it's almost exactly the same reason why we would say in every generation, do you think the antichrist is among us? And it's because his spirit, the spirit of deceitfulness, is always among us. And therefore the spirit of antichrist always feels present.

And the reason that sloth always feels present and idleness always feels present is because it is. And it always takes its description in this very way. *“It believes in nothing, interferes with nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, and only remains alive because it has nothing to die for.”* That's a pretty scary thought when you think about it.

Now we think about that in terms of our culture. We certainly think that's a good description of tolerance in our culture. When you think about our culture it really believes nothing. Well, it does believe one thing. It does believe that Christianity is not good. It believes that Christianity is evil. But it really does not want to interfere with anything. It thinks it loves everything when in fact it hates everything, because you know as well as I do that the Bible is right. If you don't discipline your child you hate your child. And if you never correct with truth, then you hate. And so it hates everything and it hates nothing at the same time.

Now when you think about that definition, that does fit our culture. And I think our culture is increasingly moving in a direction that is descriptive of this.

And one of the things that I used to think is this. I've read *The City of God* not too awfully long ago. It took a year to do it through a Paideia group, a reading group. It's a massive work by Augustine, and I'm not sure it lives up to its expectation. But whatever; I digress. *(Laughter)*

But there are some really fascinating sections in *The City of God*. And one of the fascinating sections was this. I always used to think to myself, well at least America is not Rome. At least we're not where the Romans were. And you know, reading *The City of God* made me realize that we have far surpassed Rome. And so these are good descriptors of us.

In fact some of you may have read Carl Truman's article. Where was it? This was in *World* magazine online. He talked about how the *Cambridge Dictionary* is now changing the definition of a woman. *(Laughter)* There's a Supreme Court justice who doesn't know how to define a woman. But the *Cambridge Dictionary* is taking a shot at it. In the first definition it's still defined traditionally. You know how dictionaries have one to 82 definitions, right? In the second definition it is *“the person who identifies as a woman, though biologically born as a man.”* That's the second definition.

Now you know as well as I do that a dictionary is both descriptive and prescriptive in that it describes. And in one sense that would be okay because it is describing the current situation where we find ourselves in this cultural turmoil. But a dictionary is also prescriptive.

What does the dictionary say? Paul was just pulling out a word on me earlier. And I said, “I don't know what that word means. And he looked it up and he showed me what it says in the dictionary. And I go, “Oh yeah, okay.” I'm not going to say what that word is, Paul. *(Laughter)* But the idea is that it's prescriptive. He showed me and there's agreement. And this is the way we use the word from now on. We just naturally think that way. And that's the power of the dictionary because it offers us truth. And so when you think about this definition it's right on target.

But what about the church? Can such a thing be said of her? I sometimes fear that it can. When I think about the church, and I think about the church's desire to win the

“Idleness”

culture, sometimes I think the church moves into a tolerant posture in order to win some. In other words, it takes the bar that the Scripture sets and it reduces it to a much lower level. And it says, “You can come in and you can be a Christian and forget some of those things that the Scriptures actually say.”

For instance, I don’t know if you read Rosaria Butterfield’s biography. Maybe it’s not a biography, but it’s certainly an account of her conversion which is biographical.

Maybe you don’t know Rosaria Butterfield; I take that for granted. She’s been on so many programs these days. She was a lesbian professor, actually a department chair at Syracuse University. And she runs into a pastor because she’s studying the religious right, and she’s going to write a book about them. She’s even studying the Greek language so she can read the Scriptures, and so on. And she gets to talking with this pastor. And as she’s reading the Scriptures, studying for this book, she comes to faith in Christ.

And one of the things that’s fascinating is, she’s still not quite there in her thinking. But she’s expressing interest in joining the church. And the pastor actually held her off and told her, “You need to think about this,” and gave her a couple of things to think about.

And she came away from that experience saying, “You know, it’s interesting that he didn’t just latch on to me and pull me in. He wanted me to think through, to count the cost. And in counting the cost I came to Christ.” She said, “At that time, if they would have brought me into the church, at that time I did not feel guilty for being a lesbian,” because she had never been raised with the category of needing to feel guilty for loving someone, right? That’s the way you might put it. And so her conscience had to be instructed by the Word in order for her to experience guilt before God.

And yet the great thing about her as she expresses it in the book is that “I knew I needed to repent whether I felt guilty for it or not, because the Scripture said it was wrong.” And she said, “I had to learn these things. I had to count the cost of these things. And this pastor, kind of holding me at arm’s length, taught me these things.”

And so sometimes I wonder about the church. I wonder whether we are more tolerant. And in being more tolerant we love nothing, and we do things that are well, wrong, in order to win some. And I think that’s a challenge to the church; it certainly ought to be.

Well when we think about the nature of idleness, I want you to think with me for just a minute about something, because this can be easily confused. What I don’t want us to get into is thinking about patterns and incidents and pressing the two together as if they are one thing. When Paul talks about sloth, idleness, disorderliness and unruliness, he is not talking about incidents. We can all point to incidents in our lives as those places where we experience slothfulness in small ways, right?

For instance, when I have a Saturday wherein I have absolutely nothing I am one of the most slothful people you will ever meet, right? And so it’s not as if we’re talking about a pattern of slothfulness when we have an incident of slothfulness. And so I want us to get that kind of down in our thinking because we all have incidents of sin throughout the day. The Confession is right, the Catechism is right: We all sin daily in word and thought and deed, incidentally. In other words there are incidents of these things.

However, if we are participating in a pattern of sin,--in other words, if there’s a sin that is well worn in our lives, then that is what needs to be uprooted. It’s not as if we shouldn’t deal with those other incidents by way of confession and repentance; we should. But what I’m talking about when we talk about something like idleness of this

“Idleness”

sort, Paul is talking about a pattern—a well-worn path—of slothfulness or idleness. And so that’s the idea.

So it’s like he says. He talks about *peripitaeo*—walking in idleness. This is the pattern; this is a well-worn path. And we are committing this sin regularly, daily, perhaps hourly; this sort of thing.

And you see this sort of thing in the rest of Scripture. When Scripture wants us to understand that walking is a way of living it will say as much. And so for instance he says, “Walk worthy.” In other words it means “live worthy.” Have a way of life that is worthy. Or walk in wisdom, or walk in truth, or walk in light. All of these things express the idea of a way of living.

Now there’s an irony that I want us to think about here: walking in idleness over against walking worthy, walking in truth, walking in those kinds of things. And we all know it to be true, right? And we all can see it, especially as we think back to our children, or as we think back to when we were children.

Do you remember how your mom used to say to you, or maybe you used to say to your children, “You know, if you would spend as much time doing x as you do doing y, you would probably be a much better person by now.” (*Laughter*) You know, that sort of thing, right? What they’re doing is, they’re pointing out our slothfulness.

My mom used to say this to me all the time. “If you spent as much time studying as you do trying to get out of studying, you might be smart someday.” (*Laughter*) You know, that sort of thing, right? And so what we need to understand is that idleness, according to Paul, opposes the Word. It opposes the Word; it opposes the commandments of God. It opposes a way of life imposed by Scripture. And so what we need is some clarity on slothfulness.

I want us to think about that nuance for just a minute because I think it’s going to be a driver for the rest of what we think about in terms of 2 Thessalonians. We could think about laziness and I think we could get the mark. I think that would get us into proximity. I think an unordered life would get us into proximity. But I think we need to nuance this for just a minute in order to understand what it is we’re actually talking about when we’re talking about slothfulness.

We’ve been thinking in terms of the externals. We’ve been thinking in terms, for instance, of outward manifestations of idleness or unruliness, and so on. But when the ancients talked about sloth, in other words, when the early fathers talked about sloth, they weren’t necessarily talking about the external manifestation of sloth or laziness.

What were they talking about? Well, if you were to talk to the early fathers, the early fathers would have diagnosed sloth in a much different way. In other words they would have said that laziness is a symptom of some deeper problem.

Now what would the problem be? Well the problem would be an inner disposition. In other words I want you to think about it like this. When you think about the person you think about the mind, you think about the will, you think about the affections. That’s basically the makeup of a person.

Now when you think about an inner disposition toward sloth which manifests itself in idleness or unruliness, think about it this way. This is what Evagrius said in the fourth century. He said, “*Sloth is the inner resistance or coldness to spiritual well-being.*”

Now we can think about my mom saying to me, “If you put half the amount of time into studying as you do trying to get out of studying you might have something at some point in your life.” Or you can think about it from an inner dispositional perspective. That is to say that if sloth is manifested in my life, if laziness is a product of my life, then

“Idleness”

maybe sloth is indicative of an inner resistance or an inner coldness. Maybe it's something spiritual in my life, and indeed, I think it is. And that's the way I want us to think about this.

Why is it? Well I want you to think about it like this for a minute; this may bring it into a little bit better of a perspective. If you think of the unbeliever, the unbeliever is dead. He's dead inside; he's spiritually dead. He is as cold as you're going to get, right? That's the unbeliever.

But the believer is not dead but can cool off, right? The believer can experience slothfulness. We say that the unbeliever is slothful because he's dead all the time. I mean, they're as cold as ice when it comes to their spiritual well-being. And so we should expect slothfulness, at least some manifestation of it, to come out in their lives.

Now let me just be clear about what I mean. You may have an executive who goes to work every day. You may have a plumber who never misses a day, even in sickness. But if they are dead in their sins my guess is they go to church twice a year—Christmas and Easter. And that is as spiritually slothful as one might get, right? Do you see what I'm saying?

So the nuance is to think about sloth in terms of inner spiritual well-being, and how it manifests itself as a result. The believer, on the other hand, is alive and can cool off. He can become inwardly cold—spiritually unwell, that is. And that's the difference.

And that's who Paul is talking to. Paul is talking to believers who can cool off and become spiritually unwell. That's what he's dealing with here. Okay, so does that make sense?

All right. So I want you to know, just to be clear about this, that the power of sin is broken in our lives, which means that you're not dead; you're alive. And therefore sin has no hold on you. However, the presence of sin remains. This is the teaching of Romans 7. And because the presence of sin remains that means you can cool off. That means that sin can develop inroads into your life. And that means that instead of developing incidents of sloth you can fall into patterns of sloth; that's the idea. Okay?

Now I want to say something to you; I think this is important. This is Romans 7. And sometimes Romans 7 is misconstrued with this idea; I think this is wrong. This is the best picture I could find. Do you realize that if you go to Power Point and you type in certain pictures that you're not going to get them? Or the interesting thing is that if you type in certain pictures, you'll only get certain kinds. Type in “fireman,” and you'll get a fire woman every time. (*Laughter*) I digress; I put in “two dogs fighting” and this is what I get.

Transcriber's Note: A dog and a cat.

Jeff: So I put it up there anyway. (*Laughter*) I wanted you to see two dogs fighting. I want you to know though that the cat identifies as a dog and—(*Laughter*) People don't realize that, but that's the way it is.

So anyway there are two dogs fighting. There's an old view that says that the Christian has two dogs fighting within him. And then the person will usually look at you and say, “And it's the dog you feed that wins.”

Well that's not a Christian perspective. The Christian perspective is that there's a dead dog in you and a living dog in you, right? And if we are alive in Christ then Adam is dead in us. That's the idea.

Now you say, “If the power of sin is broken, if the one dog is dead, why is there the presence of sin that remains?” And that is because you have a corpse laying in you, right? And that's the best way I can think of to describe it. If you type in “corpse” that's what

“Idleness”

you get. (*Laughter*) The idea is that until the glorification we’re going to struggle with the old battle.

It’s sort of like this. The illustration is a little bit different than how I’m about to give it. But basically it’s that we’re married until a spouse dies. When the spouse dies we’re free. But the implication of that is that Adam was our first husband, and Adam abused us. And though we are dead to Adam in Christ and now married to Christ, because we were married to such a crummy guy like Adam we still react in our relationship with Christ like we’re married to Adam. And so we recoil and we get into bad habits. All that will happen until the glorification. And then all of those things will be put off fully and finally. That’s the idea if I can put it that way.

So the presence of sin opposes the work of God in us, but not like two dogs fighting. It’s like there’s a corpse in us. Adam is rotting, and when the light of the Word shines on the corpse it begins to smell in our lives, and manifests itself as that kind of thing.

Well let me give you this quote from the *Westminster Confession of Faith* 13:2 on sanctification. “*This sanctification is throughout, in the whole man, yet imperfect in this life, there abiding still some remnants of corruption in every part, whence ariseth a continual and irreconcilable war, the flesh lusting against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh.*” Again, that’s the *Westminster Confession* 13:2.

Let me give you another angle on it. Another angle on what I’ve been saying on how we might think about Romans chapter 7 and that aspect of if the power of sin is broken in our lives why does the presence of sin remain, it’s the fourfold state of man. I mean, think about the fourfold state of man. This is something that Augustine gave as a way of thinking about man prior to the Fall, man post-Fall, saved man prior to glorification and glorified man.

This is what he said. He said that man prior to the Fall was *posse peccare, posse non-peccare: that is, able to sin, able not to sin*. And then man after the Fall is *non-posse non-peccare*. This is Adam immediately after the Fall in his sin: not able not to sin.

And then regenerate man—*posse non-peccare*—is able not to sin. We’re still able to sin, but now we’ve put in such a way as we are able not to sin. We’re able to say no to the sin. And then *non-posse peccare*—not able to sin—is the state of glorification. There will come a time when we will not be able to sin. That will be a great day.

So in other words, when you just think about the power of sin broken in our lives, and yet the presence of sin still remains and is still manifest, this is another way of thinking about it.

Now the unbeliever is *non-posse non-peccare*—not able not to sin. They’re dead; they’re cold. But the believer is *posse non-peccare*—able not to sin. In other words, he is able to sin as well, and that means able to develop these incidents in our lives of slothfulness, laziness and tolerance.

I want you to think about C.S. Lewis for just a minute in *The Silver Chair*. Remember Jill and Eustis Scrub? They were supposed to save Prince Rillian. Did you ever read *The Silver Chair*? Maybe not. One person, two?

If you don’t remember this, the kids go into the land of Narnia, and they enter into a really high mountain. And on this high mountain Aslan, the Christ figure, meets them and gives them instructions, but then tells them, “When you leave this mountain and go down into the city the air is going to become thick, and you’re going to have a tendency to forget. And so repeat these things that I’ve said to you so that they’ll be locked in your thinking.”

“Idleness”

And sure enough, when they go down into the city, they forget. And in forgetting there's a sense of sluggishness and laziness that is described; that is what characterizes them. What is it about us that can fall into these patterns? Well, you walk out the door and you're here; you're thinking about the word of God. We're thinking about it; we're excited about it. And you walk out those doors and you immediately walk into life, and there's a fog that sets in, a heaviness that grips us. And we have a tendency to forget and become sluggardly, cooled off toward the word of God. And that's something that we always have to battle. So that's the idea.

Well let me just hasten on here. This is why, when we look at Deuteronomy chapter 6, we find the Shema, which says, “Talk about these things to your children when you rise up, when you sit down, when you're at home, when you're within the city gates.” Why? Because this is the idea of what Aslan the Christ figure told Jill and Eustis on the mountain. Talk about these things; go over them in your head. Think about them; practice them so that you will not become sluggardly toward them. And Jill and Israel both forgot, and they became sluggish.

This is true of the Hebrews. Let me just read this to you; I want you to see this in Hebrews chapter 5 and verse 11 and then 6:12. And this is another inclusio, Don.

Don Maurer: Okay, very good.

Jeff: *“But about this we have much to say. But it is hard to explain since you have become dull of hearing.”* You've become sluggardly; you've become lazy.

But look in 6:12: *“so that you may not be sluggish.”* That is the same word, and here it's translated “sluggish.” *“And instead be imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”*

And this is the problem with the Thessalonians. There's one more irony here that I want to mention that you see in the text if you look in 2 Thessalonians. And that is that in their idleness they are busybodies. Isn't that funny? In their idleness they are busybodies.

So what's the right approach to this? Well first of all I want us to look at the treatment or the cure for idleness. What is that? Well first of all, let's remind ourselves that the Thessalonians are a young church. And as they're a young church they're an inexperienced church. And so let me ask you a question; just think about it for a minute. If you were ministering to this young church in this situation how might you approach them? What might you say to them? What might you speak into their lives if you noticed some slothfulness?

Well, I think you would say, “Find somebody to imitate. Find somebody to be like.” Look at verses 7 and 9. “You ought to imitate us.” Verse 9: *“but to give you ourselves as an example to imitate.”* In other words, what's good counsel to somebody who has fallen into a pattern of slothfulness? Put them with somebody that they can imitate, that they can learn from, that they can follow.

And that's the very thing that you saw in Hebrews 6:12. There again we saw that they were sluggish. And Paul, or whoever the author was, said, “Imitate those who through patience obey the Word.”

And so there's a strong emphasis on imitation. If Ted were here today he would cheer this on, because what I would say to you is, slothfulness or spiritual coolness which will manifest itself in laziness or sluggishness is best fought by imitation. And that's where the doctrine of the church comes in. In other words, brothers and sisters in the church are a good weapon against laziness and spiritual coolness.

It's an example followed up with a word, or a command of encouragement. Think about what it says in 1 Thessalonians 4:10. It says, “Work quietly.” Let me read it to you.

“Idleness”

I'm going to start in verse 9. It says: *“Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another; for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. We urge you, brothers, to do this more and more.”* And I love verse 11: *“and to aspire to live quietly and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your own hands as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders, and be dependent on no one.”*

So there's this idea that one of the things that you need to do is that you need to aspire to live a quiet and godly life. Let me just say something to you that I think we need to hear. I was talking with somebody the other day about the *Aquila Report*. I don't know if you ever read the *Aquila Report*. But the *Aquila Report* is basically a function of the Presbyterian Church in America. And basically it gathers up stories that are on the Internet that are important for the church to read. And so it brings them all into one place. And you can go through and you can read them, and they take you to various sites.

Well, at the end of the week they send you the Top Ten list. And in the Top Ten list I think a week ago there was an article in there about why John McArthur is a heretic, or why he's teaching heresy at some point or another. I skimmed it because I have too much respect for John McArthur.

Anyway, here's the idea from this person I was talking to. He asked me, “How could an article like that be in the top ten, because it was so inconsequential in one sense, and it was so picayune?”

And I said, “I think that after COVID the church is geared up and ready for a fight. I think that our antennas are up and I think that we're in a defensive posture. We're mad; we're mad at the government, and so we become mad at one another. We become mad at one another because some people are still wearing masks. We become mad at some people who want to get the vaccine. We become mad at some people who aren't strong enough against the government. We become mad because some people are too much for the government. We become mad; we're just plain mad.

And I would be lying to you if I said that I stand outside that circle. No, I have positions; I take positions; I'm mad sometimes myself. But you know what? The Lord's servant is to be gentle and loving toward those who are both inside the flock and outside the flock. And my job is not to become a political analyst to the church and to those outside the church. My job is to teach the Word. And I think we have a tendency to forget that. And I think that when we do we don't aspire to live quiet lives; we aspire to fight. And I think right now we are in a position where we are aspiring to fight. And I think we have to be really careful about that.

So there's a warning here to be careful. And that warning is “if you don't work, you don't eat.” But what if someone is like that? What if someone has fallen into this pattern and he is slothful? What if someone has cooled off? What if you go to them and talk with them, and they're still cooled off?

Well I don't know what you think about this. It says, “Avoid him.” And you avoid him to shame him. And the thing about it is, I think we're not very prone to doing this kind of stuff today.

You know, you excommunicate somebody. And people naturally talk to him or her as if they're still a brother or a sister. And why? Because if they've had any kind of relationship with them in the past they don't want to offend by treating them any differently than they have. And yet that's not doing them any good. And so there's a sense

“Idleness”

in which shunning has a place. In other words, I think the avoiding here is not that you avoid him because he has been excommunicated.

He may be excommunicated and that may be your position. But here I think that what you have is somebody who is being avoided because he's not listening.

Now this is informal shepherding. And I think it's to heap shame upon them. And so anyway, that's the idea.

However, this is my own view of this. I don't think this is an excommunicated person. Why is that? Because if you look in 2 Thessalonians Paul calls him a brother. This isn't an enemy. Paul says, "Treat him as a brother." If this is an excommunicated person you wouldn't treat him as a brother. But this is not an excommunicated person, and so you treat him as a brother. So you're not to go too far. Paul says, "*Do not grow weary in doing good.*"

In other words, I think that part of it is this. You know what happens when you get around somebody who has bad character. He corrupts you. I mean, why is it that you don't want your kids hanging around people who are bad characters? Because your kid will become a bad character! Bad company corrupts good character.

So here's the deal. When he says that you are not to grow weary in doing good, and that you're to avoid the person who is slothful, what he's basically saying is this. He's taking that advice that he gives the Corinthians: "*Bad company corrupts good character.*" And now he's applying it to the church and he's saying, "Now this person is not responding to shepherding. Shun him. Treat him as a brother; do not excommunicate him. Shun him; don't hang around with him. But don't you grow weary in doing good."

So what he's doing is, he's trying to shepherd both the person who could be corrupted by the person who's slothful, and he's trying to say, "Treat the slothful in this way so they will be shamed by their own behavior." Does that make sense? Okay. Yes, please.

Ron Baling: Jeff, I have a friend of mine who I haven't seen for a couple of years; he used to belong to my church. I feel that if I completely avoid him it would say something about holding the vow. I would still contact him and try to meet him in a singles bar. But I think that to completely—

Jeff: Do you know how I would handle it?

Ron: How?

Jeff: Let's say the issue is sloth, right? Spiritual coolness; he's not doing the things he ought to do. On Saturday night I would invite him to church.

Ron: He won't take me up on that. But I can still go to lunch with him, and I can steer the conversation. But with the places he shouldn't be doing, I don't go there.

Jeff: See, I would say don't invite him to lunch, because that's a context in which he'll come. I'd say to invite him to church on the Lord's Day. Invite him to places where he's supposed to be and where you'd be happy to fellowship with him. Go ahead.

Ron: As far as him going, I think he would ignore it.

Jeff: Treat him as a brother. But unfortunately he's the kind of guy that you have to be strategic about. Where am I going to fellowship with him? I'm going to fellowship with him in the places where he ought to be.

If, for instance, he calls you up and says, "Hey, let's go to lunch; I want to go to lunch with you," say, "You know what? I can't go to lunch, but let's meet at the church. There's going to be this men's gathering, this work day, whatever. Let's meet there, and we can fellowship while we work."

"No, I don't want to do that."

"Well maybe we can find another day when we can do that."

“Idleness”

Ron: I usually go to him and try to steer the conversation toward Scriptural things. And he interrupts and asks me if we can go to lunch.

Jeff: Yes. And you’ve just got to find ways to handle it, right? But you’ve got to be careful so that you’re kind of maintaining this counsel from Paul, you know. So it’s a reminder to do the one good thing. And that’s that externals have their place. But they don’t fix the internal problem. And if sloth is a spiritual problem, an internal problem, then it needs to have an internal cure.

Dorothy Sayers wrote this: *“Sloth is not merely idleness of the mind and laziness of the body. It is the whole poisoning of the will, which beginning with an indifference and an attitude of “I couldn’t care less” extends to the deliberate refusal of joy, and culminates in morbid introspection and despair.* “And so what happens is, you set joy before them while also making them deal with the consequences of their slothfulness. And that’s setting the gospel and Christ before them.

And what’s the closing thought that he gives? *“May the God of peace give you peace at all times and in every way.”* And I love the way Paul signs out. *“I, Paul, sign this with my own hand.”*

Transcriber’s Note: ESV.

Jeff: A sign of genuineness; I love that. There’s a lot that could be said about that. Any final thoughts or comments before we wrap up? Yes, Don?

Don Maurer: It’s interesting that Dorothy Sayers mentions morbid introspection. Doesn’t Paul say at the end of 2 Corinthians to *“examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith?”*

Jeff: It does. But it’s interesting how often he says that, you know? Morbid introspection and introspection are different. Morbid introspection is that introspection which focuses on sin and never leaves that focus. That’s Puritanism gone astray. Introspection is when I take Christ with me when I look inwardly. And I see how bad I am, but Christ is with me on this journey inward. And so I not only see how bad I am; I see how gracious Christ has been. And then I see in Christ my response and what my response ought to be to my own sinfulness. So I see how I’ve been saved and I see how I ought to respond: both justification and sanctification.

Don Bishop: May I read something from Paul Tripp’s book?

Jeff: Oh yeah.

Don: It’s from *How People Change*.

Jeff: Oh, yeah.

Don: *“God has called you to be dissatisfied. You should be discontent, restless and hungry. The Christian life is a state of thankful discontent or a joyful dissatisfaction. That is, I am to be thankful for the grace that has changed my life, but not satisfied, because when I look at myself honestly I have to admit that I am not all I can be in Christ. I’m thankful for the many things in my life that would not be there without Christ. But I will not be settling for part of the inheritance.”*

Jeff: Yes; that’s good. That’s a helpful book. Any other final thoughts? Jim?

Jim: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit.”*

Jeff: Yes. And the great thing about it is, you go back to Isaiah and the whole idea of poor in spirit: *“A smoldering wick He will not snuff out.”* When you’re working with somebody, treat him as a brother. Avoid him, shame him for what he’s doing. But treat him as a brother. Bring him back in; don’t snuff him out. That’s the idea. That’s a balance, right? A balanced treatment demands such a thing. Balance demands that we both hold the line and that we are both gentle and kind.

“Idleness”

And you know, that’s easy to do when you can blame God. Hey, you know, it’s not my rule that God wants you to worship Him, right? It’s His rule. But come with me as we do it, right? That sort of thing.

All right, thanks. Let’s pray. Father in heaven, we ask that You will bless us and encourage our hearts. We’re thankful, Lord, for this Word of Yours that reminds us about slothfulness and talks about its manifestation, and how to deal with others who are slothful. And Lord, that’s an ongoing problem. So we just ask that You’ll bless us and keep us from it. Keep us so that we don’t grow weary in doing good. And Lord, we ask that You’ll give us a day of doing good today, and we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

Hey, you know what? I was just thinking about this. I didn’t think about it until just now in the prayer. But you know, I just read a report that 25% of the church has not come back to worship after COVID. 25%, that’s an amazing figure! And so sloth is alive and well, you know? It’s not some abstract thing; spiritual coolness is real. All right, have a good day.