

Please God in your work

Hello Dear Listeners;

Work - it comes in many forms. For some it is at home, for others away from home. For some it is paid well, for others it does not meet their needs. For some there is plenty of work, others are looking for work. Some are giving it their all, others have little strength. For some work is a joy, for others work is a struggle. Some make it their idol. All they do is work. For others work is a necessary evil and therefore will try to do as little as possible. How do you look at work? Perhaps you wonder, does the Bible speak about work? Yes it does. Israel in the OT was instructed to work, but at the same time God give time to relax. As the apostles made disciples of all nations teaching them to observe what Christ had instructed, they included instructions about work. We see this e.g. in 1 Thessalonians 4.

Let's start with keeping in mind the context in 1 Thess 4. This letter wants to further instruct the believers in Thessalonica because Paul and Silas had to leave in a hurry. The verses 1 and 2 of chapter 4 set the context. We are called to live in such a way that we please God. That was applied in the first place to avoiding sexual immorality. And that is now applied to their work ethics; the way they do their daily work. So the context is: live in order to please God. Why do they have to live in order to please God? Because they have been set apart by God for himself through the sacrifice of Christ. Also here applies what we saw earlier: your redemption has to show. God's grace has to permeate our work.

Was there a problem in Thessalonica with regard to this? Or is this ongoing education, part of growing in Christ? Perhaps both. We do read in 1 and 2 Thessalonians that the church is instructed to admonish those who are idle. To stay away from a brother who is idle. Perhaps there were brothers who were idle. At the same time it is also ongoing education. In the Greek/Roman culture manual work was looked down upon. The goal, the ideal of a man was to be so well off that he would not need to work with his hands. Manual labour was for the poor, for the slaves. In addition, it was expected of the rich that they would give to the poor. Over time this became a matter of showing off. If you had many people you provided for, it meant you were well-off. Of course, it means that the poor who depended on the rich were no longer free to do what they wanted. All this also led to people being idle and causing unrest.

Then on a certain day Paul, Silas and Timothy come into town and preach the gospel. We know from other letters as well, that among the believers there were prominent people, business people and masters but also servants and slaves. To all of them come now the instructions of the Lord Jesus. Paul speaks with the authority of Christ. What is the instruction? We find it in verse 11, which begins with the words: "Make it your ambition." Ambition implies focus and dedication. An ambitious person is a person who has goals and wants to make sure he reaches these goals. So here too: give it your full attention. What should be the object of their ambition? Three things: to lead a quiet life; to mind your own business; to work with your own hands.

Let's start with the first: to lead a quiet life. What is a quiet life? Quiet is not the same as passive, or not saying anything. Instead it means not causing problems - at work, in your neighbourhood.

Idleness can lead to disturbing the peace. Secondly, the believers have to be ambitious to mind their own business. No, that does not mean: don't care for others. The Bible is very clear that we are called to care for others. What our text means is, not sticking your nose in other people's business. In 2 Thessalonians 3 we read about busybodies, people think they have to run the affairs of others. Stay with yourself; make sure your life reflects the gospel. And in the third place: make it your ambition to work with your own hands. I mentioned that manual work was looked down upon in Greek society. The less you do the better it is. The Gospel however says work with your own hands so that you do not dependent on others.

All three instructions have to do with how we work and puts in the centre the question why we have to work. Is it to make sure I have a comfortable retirement? Remember the context, we have to live lives that reflect the gospel of Jesus Christ. Your attitude towards work, the way you work, whether it is paid work or not, whether you are in the workforce or retired, it is in Christ. It has to reflect our redemption.

Adam was created to work. No, it was not slavery, but work, God glorifying work. After falling into sin, he is still called to work, but now work becomes more difficult. The LORD spoke in his curse about sweat and thistles. The people of Israel experienced this curse as well, when they served Pharaoh as slaves and had no rest. But the LORD brought them out and led them to Canaan. Sure they had to work in their new land, but were also allowed to relax and rest. Their redemption meant no more slave labour, but now working the land to serve God and enjoy his gifts. In the same way, our redemption in Christ means we work for the Lord. Laziness is not

consistent with Christian faith. Our work is to be done for God's glory. That will have wonderful consequences.

Verse 12 gives the consequences - two are mentioned. First: In this way you win the respect of outsiders. They will notice. They know that you are a believer and now they see it does not make you a busybody, an idler, but one who is reliable. Because of their conversion the Thessalonians were now working in a different way. It is as if Paul is saying: Your unbelieving masters and fellow citizens may be suspicious of your change, but your work-ethics will show them you are not out to disturb the peace and turn society upside down." Our work habits have to adorn the gospel.

The second consequence of your new approach to work is that you are independent. Being paid by a rich person can make them dependent on that person. That could interfere with their faith. As believers we depend first and foremost on God. This being independent does not mean that believers have to isolate themselves from everything, but it show that you can take care of yourself. It is the evidence that you are not out to take advantage of others and their goodwill by living of handouts. Again, in the way we do our work we have to make the gospel visible.

In 2 Thessalonians 3 Paul has to come back to it. He has to be more to the point. "We command you in the name of Jesus Christ: avoid every brother who is idle." That shows how serious this is. For such an idle person is not living according to the apostolic teaching. The apostles heard that some were idle - and had become busybodies. "We command them to settle down, to earn their own bread." And to the church Paul says, do not help them and so promote a lazy attitude. If a man will not work he shall not eat. If he does not work

- then do not provide for him either. This may sound harsh, but, it is means to promote a God-glorifying lifestyle.

The Bible is clear when it comes to work: make it your ambition to please God in your work! Work is not a necessary evil. Yes our fall into sin has caused work to become more difficult, and our work is not always as successful as we hope. But in Christ we can serve God in our work. What is more wonderful than to know that the Creator of heaven and earth is pleased with our work? We work to serve him. Laziness is inconsistent with the gospel. Work may never become our idol. We do not serve ourselves, we do not serve Mammon, we serve our God. Do you work that way? You can when you follow Christ. Then your work is not in vain. Amen andf may you too follow Jesus Christ in all you do. Thanks so much for listening.