

There's really 2 topics in today's reading: Work; and Accountability.

A young man was having a job interview and it all went well and they said,

“We're going to offer you the job. Your pay will be \$1000/week, and in 6 months time, it'll go up to \$1200.”

And the young man said,

“Hmm, I might start in 6 months”.

Work.

Some people become addicted to work, and work becomes their life and their passion – it's what defines them... And some see their addiction to work as a badge of honour....

It's not. ... And I'm going to be blunt and say, “Anyone who is addicted to their work, isn't giving their best to God.”

It's become quite trendy in the Christian church, to label things as “addictions” instead of what they are, “sin”... You see, an addiction we understand as being “a disease” – it's not my fault – it's a sickness I have...

We used to call it:

- drunkenness – alcoholism;
- adultery/fornication/perverseness – sexual/pornography addiction;
- lazy/lacked self-direction – gaming addiction;
- gossip – social media addiction...

And when it comes to work, we might call it “being addicted to work”, but in reality, there’s sin at play. It’s either:

- greed (working to get more);
- avoiding other responsibilities/relationships we don’t want to deal with; or
- seeking glory for one’s self...

All of these are sin. And letting our work consume us, is sin because we’re not living our life for Jesus.

Now, having said that, today’s topic isn’t about “giving work the place of dominance” – it’s quite the opposite... While **some** people let work dominate them, others see work as “a necessary evil” ...

But then again, when one lives in a welfare state like Australia, some go even further, and realise “work” is something they **never** have to do... And sadly, there are now generations of family lines, who have never worked a day in their life...

- Mum & Dad don’t have a job – they’re living on the dole;
- Their parents (who never had a job), are now on the pension;
- Their kids go to school because they have to, but they don’t put in the work at school;
- And so when they leave school, they don’t really want a job, and because they haven’t put in the work to learn at school, their skills and knowledge is lacking, and so, if they do get a job, it would be a very low-paying, low-responsibility.

And now I've said that, some of you might be thinking, "You are so judgmental Michael..." Yeah I am, because work isn't an option. Work is a commandment.

*I don't seem to come across **this** as much as what I used to, but in one job I had, a few of my colleagues were planning for early retirement. I remember one particular young fella (he was still in his mid-twenties) and he had it all mapped out. I think he owned about a dozen rental houses (all on borrowed money), and his plan was to be able to retire before he got to 50.*

That way, he could just sit back; relax; travel if he wanted to... and he wouldn't be beholding to anyone... Now, I don't know how that worked out for him. He'd be about 50 by now...

But for many, retirement is the goal – it's the pinnacle...

- begin work 18
- retire 65 = 47y work
- Live 80 = 15y retirement
- Live 90 = 25y retirement = 47y work & 43y not-working

We're becoming a society, who feel it's our **right** to not work...

Work... How should a disciple of Jesus approach the topic of work?

V⁶ Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who [does this]... Wow! What sin is so bad, that he's not only commanding them – he's commanding them in the **Name of the Lord Jesus Christ**, to have nothing to do with **anyone** who is a “brother” (nothing to do with any Christian) – Shun them..., if they do what???

Laziness; Idleness; The Greek word actually means “disorderly” or “out of ranks” if you were using it as a military term...

Basically, he's talking about people who won't work – they don't provide for themselves – they were relying on the charity of other Christians. And Paul is so blunt, he says **If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.**

That would be a very simple government policy, wouldn't it...

Being a Christian – being saved from our sin, doesn't mean that we're saved from having to work...

Some people have the attitude that “work” is something we only have to do, because it's a consequence of “sin”. When Adam & Eve ate the forbidden fruit, part of the curse would be pain... God said to Adam, “Thorns and thistles would grow”.

I've had my fair share of chipping thorns and thistles, AND spraying; ploughing ... In my younger years, after a week of sheep-work, on a Sunday morning (as I sat in church), I'd take my specially sharpened needle out of my wallet and dig out burs from my hands... In hind-sight, I'm sorry to all my previous ministers – they must've thought I was terribly disinterested, but I was listening...

And so some people feel, “Because in Jesus we've been set free from sin, we don't need to work.”...

Others don't work because “It's not worth it – I've got enough to get by – Jesus is coming back soon, so I don't need to work”...

Others feel they've had their turn at working... “I worked hard when I was young. I can now do the things I enjoy doing, and other people, it's their turn to work....”

Do you realise though, God created us to work. He designed us as beings, who would work. **Genesis 2:15 (ESV)**
¹⁵ YHWH God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Look at that. He created man to work... And when we have teaching on the Sabbath, we usually concentrate on “Don't work on the Sabbath”, or we Christian-ise it “Don't work on a Sunday”... But what does the Scripture say? **Exodus 34:21 (ESV)** **²¹ “Six days you shall work, but on the seventh**

day you shall rest. In ploughing time and in harvest you shall rest.

“Work” was so important, that Paul worked a paying job, as well as preaching the Gospel. Now, I’ve done that, and that’s not easy.

He worked, not because he **needed** to, but because he wanted to give them an example. Jesus Himself had taught that the preacher doesn’t need to fend for himself “When you go preaching, don’t take your own provisions – the labourer deserves his food. What Jesus was saying is “the preacher is worth his wages”...

And in **other** letters that Paul wrote, he made it very clear:
1 Timothy 5:17-18 (ESV) ¹⁷ Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching.
¹⁸ For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, **“The labourer deserves his wages.”**

As a preacher, Paul had every right to receive payment for the work he was doing for the Gospel, but when he visited Thessalonica, he did forgo that right. Why? As an example. Let me give you an example of an example:

When I was working as an instructor at the Ag College, the subject I oversaw most of the time, is what we called “Farm Routine”... So, there was:

- *theory subjects, where they learned in the classroom;*
- *practical subjects, where structured practical lessons;*
- *Routine. And Routine was where whatever work had to be done on the farm that day, had to be done... (Sort of like work-experience).*

And what the student happened to be doing, depended on the luck of the draw.

- *If it was raining, you'd probably be in the shed, hard-facing points;*
- *If there was planting to be done, he might take a turn carting seed and fertiliser;*
- *And then have a turn driving the tractor doing the planting;*
- *If there was earthworks, I might've had one on a dozer or on a laser bucket...*
- *But if there were weeds needed chipping, guess what – chipping weeds it would be.*

Now, if I was teaching someone to plough a paddock, once they were competent, I could leave them there, ploughing the paddock, for most of the day, and just check on them occasionally...

But a job like chipping Stramonium, I'd have to work with them... Why?

- *It's a safe job;*
- *not much learning involved;*
- *no secret process to chipping well...*

I had to be an example.

And you know what? Some would follow that example, and others would not.

Now, as the instructor, I had every right to just tell them what to do, and to leave them there doing it... But if I did that, very little chipping would get done. And so, I'd take a hoe, and I'd set the pace. Have an occasional break, but just keep plugging on...

Now everyone of those students were a lot younger/fitter than what I was, and most of them understood, "If I can't keep up with Mr Brumpton, that's embarrassing". And some did keep up with me, but not many...

*The thing is, even though I **was** leading by example, some young lads had a real sense of entitlement "I don't have to be doing this. I came here to learn – I'm not learning anything." Yeah well, part of learning, is learning how to work, and learning, that when work has to be done, no task is too menial...*

And so, Paul was doing with the Thessalonians, like what I was doing with the Stramonium chippers – being an example to imitate. And as parents, it's really important that our children observe us as 'not being idle', and that we instil into them, from an early age, a work ethic.

But, what about if a person doesn't need to work? They might have an investment they can live off of, and so they can provide for their financial needs, without lifting a finger... Do they need to work?

Or what about a person who can't find a job? There might be some very rare times when there is no work available... But

that is extremely rare. In my lifetime (in our country), I'm pretty certain, that anyone who is genuinely prepared to work, will find work.

They may have to

- move their family to a location where there is a job;
- change their choice of career;
- do work that they feel is beneath them and their ambitions...

but there are plenty of jobs available if someone is prepared to do them...

Even so, the issue is 2-fold here. Yes, working is about providing for your own needs, and the needs of our family, but the other part of work, is doing what God has created us to do:

Work. It's about "Not being idle". God didn't create us to be idle...

And so, if you have the means, that you don't need to work, well work for free (that's what we call "volunteering"). If you are genuinely unemployed, volunteer to do work experience, where you will get experience, and become employable.

In V11, Paul says this:

¹¹ For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.

That's probably where our Grandparents got the saying "idle hands are the workers of the Devil".

Basically, what Paul's saying, is **when** we are not busy at **God's** work (whether it's earning a living, or Kingdom-work – Gospel-work) – when we've got way too much idle time on our hands, that's when we start sticking our nose in and causing trouble where our nose shouldn't be... **some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies.**

Do you know where I've been seeing this play out lately? Conspiracies... Some people obviously have way too much time on their hands. During the enforced Covid lock-downs (a year or 2 ago), multitudes were thrust into idleness. They weren't busy at work – they became busybodies, gossiping like a busybody does...

And even people who do work, of an evening (when they've finished their day-job), rather than busy themselves in God's work, and sharing the Gospel, they become busybodies: Idle hands...

Now, in our **society**, it's not difficult to notice how "idleness" leads to all sorts of mischief: Break & enters; domestic violence; drunkenness; drug abuse...

Think of the serial protesters we see on the news.

- Greenies chaining themselves to bulldozers;
- Animal Activists opening gates at feedlots;
- Extinction Rebellion super-gluing themselves to busy roads to stop people who do have a real job getting to their jobs...

On a macro-scale, it's obvious to see idleness leading to disorderly meddling and mischief in other people's affairs...

But when you and I hear the word being preached, the way of a **pharisee** is to go "Yeah, those godless sinners – look how bad they are." The way of a disciple of Jesus, is to let the Word of God challenge **us ourselves** in our own lives.

The second theme in this passage, is about "accountability"... As disciples of Jesus, because we are brothers and sisters in Christ, we don't treat one-another as enemies – we love one-another, and we love one-another enough, to hold one-another accountable...

If any of us are idle... If you know another Christian, who will not work, take him to task over it. BTW, "work" is much bigger than paid employment.

- The stay-at-home mum/dad, who's caring for the kids, they're working – they're not idle...
- Retirees, who serve in the church, and who purposely visit others to encourage them in the Lord – they're not idle...
- Nor are we talking about the sick/infirm (who are not able to work)...

Paul is talking about those who are quite **able** to work, but choose to be idle. And in this, we are to hold one-another accountable. And this is completely in line with what Jesus taughtⁱⁱ:

If your brother sins:

- go and tell him his fault, just between you and him;
If he doesn't listen
- take one or 2 others along as witnesses
If he still doesn't listen,
- tell the whole church;
and if he still doesn't repent
- have nothing to do with him
don't mix with him

and the purpose for shunning someone, is that he might be ashamed...

V15 sets this all in context for us, ¹⁵ Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

Do we understand this? What Jesus taught, and what Paul's teaching us again, is that we love our brother, by holding them accountable. And sometimes, when our brothers and sisters in Christ, whom we love, are unrepentant of their sin, such that it makes Jesus look bad, (as idleness does), sometimes we have to break fellowship, so that they will be ashamed and hopefully return to righteousness...

Righto: it's all very good and nice to learn stuff, but how do we apply it? Well, the application in this case, is easy to work out, because the bible tells us:

Obviously, if I'm given to idleness, work:

- Work for a living;
- Work at building the kingdom;
- Work at loving Jesus and loving our brother...

Don't let work become our master, but work because God has created us to not be idle.

Secondly, Paul says ¹³ **As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.**

Jesus went about doing the Father's business. He said, the Father is always at work, and I get involved in The Father's work... And so, let us not grow weary in doing the same thing – getting involved in God's good work.

Thirdly, part of God's work, is to hold our brothers and sisters in Christ accountable. Correct; rebuke; encourage; don't mix with them if necessary...

And fourthly, V12 says, ¹² **Now such persons [talking about the idle] we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.**

When we work, go quietly about our work – it's not a big show. It's not a competition:

- how many hours I can work in a day;
- how much money I can make,
- how esteemed I am within the community...

Work quietly to earn your own living...

And of course, once we've earned enough for our daily bread, we can afford to be generous.

Let's not tire of doing good. That's what God has designed us for, and in Christ, we can serve Him in great joy.

Accountability and Godly work, are characteristics of Disciples of Jesus.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,
we thank you for the way You've created us,
to not be idle, but to work.

And we thank You, that You provide for us.
Lord, help us to live as good examples,
not being idle, but serving You;

Serving You:

- in our homes;
- in our families;
- in the workplace;
- as volunteers in the community;
- giving of our time in the service of others;
- care for the sick;
- comfort the broken-hearted;
- pray for the broken

Lord, we know that You are always at work;

help us to recognise that work,
and to join You in that work.

in Jesus' Name,
Amen.

ⁱ Matthew 10:10; Luke 10:7

ⁱⁱ Matthew 18:15ff