

What's the Big Deal About Work Ethic?

Living in Light of His Return (2 Thess. 3:6-15)

Introduction

- The 40-hour work week is a relatively new invention in America, but the concepts of work, vocation, and labor are much, much older. Genesis 2:15 tells us that God put Adam in the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.
- Believe it or not, the willingness to work was one of major sticking points between the Apostle Paul and his young congregation in Thessalonica.
 - He addressed it in his 1st letter to them in 4:9-12.
 - He addressed it again in his 2nd letter to them in a stronger way in 3:6-15 & that passage will be the focus of our study today. (Read passage & pray)
- Various theories have been suggested as to why some of these Macedonians refused to work and then got into trouble with their free time.
 - Patronage was common in those days and the story in Acts tells us there were some wealthy people in the church there. The wealthy supported the needy to boost their standing in society and it could be that some of the less-well-to-do believers had a hard time breaking away from that system.
 - The church may have been too busy with outreach to find time for work.
 - Another theory is they were so focused on Christ's return they didn't see the need to work. If Jesus is coming back tomorrow, why show up for work, pay your bills, or even buy groceries?
- We don't know for sure why some of the able-bodied believers in this church refused to work, but we do know it was small group, but a big problem.
 - The first and the last two verses in this passage make it clear that leading an unruly or "undisciplined life is serious enough for church discipline.
 - But how can that be? How can a small and struggling congregation even think about church discipline? And what is church discipline anyway?
- The thing that the unruly group didn't understand is that **your work ethic is a reflection of your walk with the Lord.**
 - Your work ethic the set of values and principles that guides your approach to your personal productivity and your job.
 - There's something deeply spiritual about how and why we work and this portion of Scripture has help for us when are "out of whack?"
- So, let's look more closely at this through the lens of two questions...

Body

I. What is a God-Honoring Work Ethic? (v. 6-10)

- A. Paul offers three ways to evaluate a God-honoring work ethic
 1. **The Tradition** (Code for the overall teaching of Scripture, v. 6)
 - a. God created work; the fall made it hard. (Genesis 2:15, 3:17-19)
 - b. Even though it's hard, work provides dignity & purpose (Lev. 23:22)
 - c. Hard work is recommended frequently in the Wisdom portion of the Bible. (Prov. 14:23, Eccl. 9:10)
 - d. Jesus warns against working just to get stuff. (Matt. 6:19-34)

2. **The Demonstration** (Based on his personal example, v. 7-9)
 - a. While there, Paul & his companions worked to support themselves.
 - b. They did not eat anyone's bread and they weren't a burden.
 - c. They choice this, even though they had the right to be supported.
 3. **The Correction** (The jarring consequences of falling short, v. 10)
 - a. The church was actively involved in caring for the needy.
 - b. But those who could work & didn't, were to be turned away.
- B. In sum., a God-honoring approach to work is seeing it as a gift, serving Him directly instead of human bosses, & seeking ways to glorify God in the gen. public.
- C. Mike Rowe hosted a show in the early 2000's called Dirty Jobs where he did difficult, strange, and disgusting job alongside those who do them a regular basis. Even a person who cleans & maintains portable toilets can honor God in their work if they do it with this approach.

II. What if You are Out of Whack? (v. 11-15)

- A. Paul had instructions for both groups in Thessalonica.
 1. **For the "unruly"** (v. 11-12)
 - a. These are ones who are walking through life without discipline, refusing to work when they are able, & meddling.
 - b. To be clear, this doesn't include those who can't work because of their age or a significant disability.
 - c. They are urged get to work, w/o delay, so they can buy their own bread and repair their damaged testimony.
 2. **For the fellowship** (v. 13-15)
 - a. This should not be overinterpreted by giving up on needy.
 - b. This is a serious issue because it gives off the wrong idea in 2 areas:
 - i. About what people who walk with the Lord are like (Is this consistent or hypocritical behavior?)
 - ii. About what God is like (Is He a taker or a giver?)
 - c. Those who continue to give of the wrong idea about themselves or about God should be identified & distanced from the fellowship.
 - i. This only applies to sin issues that public & persistent.
 - ii. The goal has to be the correction of a brother, not the condemnation of an enemy. (v. 15)
- B. "Out of whack" is an expression that means that something is out of order or out of alignment; it also suggests the most obvious fix. The starter in your car is one of those things that can be repaired, temporarily, with good whack. These solutions may seem forceful, but they could be just the thing to get someone moving again in their walk with the Lord.

Conclusion

- Let me close with the main idea here: **Your work ethic is a reflection of your walk with the Lord.**
 - If your work ethic is out of whack your walk with the Lord will be too.
 - If your walk with the Lord is on the right track, your work ethic will follow.