

If Any Would Not Work

"For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat." (II Thessalonians 3:10).

From the beginning, God has intended for mankind to work. Even while sinless Adam walked in the pristine land of Eden, he was expected to dress the garden and keep it (Genesis 2:15). Beyond this, the Bible is filled with examples of those who worked. The virtuous woman of Proverbs 31 was commended for her hard work (Proverbs 31:10-31). The mighty prophet Amos was a "herdman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit." (Amos 7:14). When we're introduced to Peter, Andrew, James and John in the Gospel of Mark we find them working (Mark 1:16-20). The apostle Paul made several references to the work that he did to support himself (Acts 18:3; I Corinthians 4:12; I Thessalonians 2:9; II Thessalonians 3:8). Many other passages attest to the demand that God has placed on us to be workers but none says it better than the verse cited in the opening of this article and none more clearly addresses a need that still exists today, namely, the need for men and women to rely on their own diligence as much as physically and mentally possible to provide a living for themselves.

As children of God, it is our responsibility to work to provide not only for our own needs (Ephesians 4:28) but also for the needs of our household. Paul wrote in I Timothy 5:8, "But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." While God has promised to bless us with our daily requirements (Matthew 6:33), He has nowhere promised to hand it all over to us without any effort on our part. We must be workers.

Having made it abundantly clear that those of us who are able must work, let's take a moment to consider two extremes. The first extreme is the one that shuns work as much as possible. This is referenced in the verse at the beginning of this article. That verse is not talking about those who have lost jobs, been laid off or have had other circumstances hinder them from working. Instead it is talking about those who just refuse to work. They want to be "sponges" and soak up the rewards from the efforts of other people's work. It was a source of trouble in the first century and continues to be one today. Notice in II Thessalonians 3:11 that Paul says those who conduct themselves in this way are walking disorderly, a word that means, "out of ranks, often so of soldiers." In other words, the one who is unwilling to work is like a soldier who does not keep step. Not only does his indolence lead to other sins (in this case, becoming a busybody), but it also has an adverse affect on those around him, particularly in this context, the Lord's church.

The other extreme is too much work, as evidenced by those who put jobs ahead of God. Certainly in this day and time when some people find it necessary to work two or three jobs or even more just to make ends meet, this is an especially difficult challenge. We must, however, at all times remember the principle of Matthew 6:33. "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Yes, we must work to supply our needs and, yes, we must work to provide for our families but we must always temper our work with the knowledge that God must have the top priority in our lives.

There's a balance that can be struck in working to provide for our needs. Perhaps I Corinthians 10:31 should be our guiding light. "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God."

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