

2Thessalonians 12-11-09a

This is Friday, the 9th of November, 2012, Marine Corps Birthday's Eve, and we continue our study in the Book of 2 Thessalonians in Chapter 3, and we'll be resuming in verse 11. Let's take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer and dedicate our time of study and worship to Him, and then we'll begin. Father, we thank You for this opportunity to study Your Word, to receive the blessing that comes from assembly and from the gifts that You have distributed in our midst.

We thank You for each one that is present with us, whether here or remotely, and for their enthusiasm and appreciation for the value of Your Word and the ministry of Your Spirit. We pray that as we study this passage together that God, the Holy Spirit, will be our teacher, help us to see its pertinence and meaning in the circumstances and challenges that we face. We pray that our time will be fruitful, that each one will derive a blessing and an encouragement and a motivation to fulfill all of the potential that You have made available to us in Your plan.

We pray these things in Jesus' name, amen. Let's read our passage and refresh our minds on what Paul is talking about here. He says, As for the rest, brethren, pray for us that the Word of the Lord may run swiftly and be glorified just as it is with you, and that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men, for not all have faith.

He has talked about their faith, and this is sort of a tongue-in-cheek reference back to the reception of the Gospel in Thessalonica when they first came. These are the people that had faith. Those that didn't have faith are the synagogue types that have been causing them so much trouble.

And he says, Pray for us, because when we go other places, we're hitting similar resistance. And so this is sort of a, I think there's a half-smile on the Apostle Paul's face when he dictates this part of the letter, because when he says, Not all have faith, that's an understatement. A lot of them have hostility instead of faith, and the Word is not glorified, it's not received.

And this is pertinent for us. You look around just our environment, our country, and the hostility with which Christian values are met. There is an active effort to suppress them, to drive them out of the public discourse, out of public places, out of public schools, out of any venue where in former days it was a commonplace.

It was a commonplace to see people pray or refer to God or express faith in movies, in books, in common discourse, on the evening news. It was something that was taken for granted, that people, if they weren't church-going themselves, they were at least appreciative in general of the role of Christianity in our nation and in our culture. Well, that's gone.

And in its place is an active persecution. It's a very mild form in this country now. We're not in fear for our lives or our property, but that is coming.

In the lifetime of our children, it will go beyond, far beyond what it is now. Right now, it's just a lot of talk, and it is policy changes. But it is going to come to the point where no mention of the Bible's proscription of homosexuality and other forms of perversion will be allowed in a public pulpit.

If you stand up and preach those passages, you will be subject to arrest. Somebody reports you, you will go to jail, because the groundwork for that is being laid now. And to speak out for Christian values will be criminalized in many of these areas.

As long as it's the gentle Jesus and peace and love and let's all just get along, that's fine. But any of the rebuke and correction and instruction in righteousness, they've taken the Ten Commandments already out of public display. What's wrong with the Ten Commandments? Don't commit adultery, don't steal, don't murder.

Well, we can't have that, can't have that in the public arena. Not because of what it says, but because of where it comes from. And there is a relative standard of ethics, a relative standard of morality.

And this is what Paul is addressing in this passage when he says, not all have faith. It's the understatement, very few have faith. And this tends to run in cycles, and we are on the downward side of a cycle in this nation.

We have been here before in this country. You go back to the early part of the 19th century, that was a real down point. If you read detailed history, and I've, for some strange reason, had an intersection of six or seven different books that all address the last few decades of the 1700s and the first several decades of the 1800s.

And it's astonishing, it's jaw-dropping how much evil there was in this nation. It's the evil that got Andrew Jackson elected president. It's the evil that got the Cherokees driven down the Trail of Tears.

It's the evil that slaughtered and massacred tens of thousands of Native Americans. So, I introduce this partly by way of encouragement. There's a tendency to look around at things that are happening in our nation today and think, we have reached an all-time nadir.

This is a low, we are in the bottomless pit of evil. No, we're not. This is the same kind of evil that's always been around.

It's the same human nature. Humans are not any more or less evil than they have ever been. We've always been this way.

It's expression changes, nations rise and fall depending on how closely they adhere to biblical principles. This nation is in a fall, a free fall, economically, morally, socially, and it will disappear

before end-time prophecy kicks in. That's why we're not in it.

So, no cause for alarm. It's predictable, it's expectable, and it is a gil-gal cycle of up and down, just like the nation of Israel. And we're all made out of the same clay.

And the application from that observation and that interpretation of human history is to look to ourselves. We need to look to our own souls, and we need to look to our own households, just as Paul is going to command in this passage. Don't be so busy pointing fingers at stuff in the nation and in politics and on the other side of the cultural spectrum.

It's real convenient to, you know, this is Romans 2, and you, oh, man, who are busy looking at these Romans 1 types are doing the same thing. We are made out of the very same stuff, and we are equally capable of perpetrating equally heinous evil. You and I cannot control national politics.

You and I cannot tip an election. You and I cannot determine the moral course of the nation. We're not going to change any of that.

We have direct personal control over what goes on in our soul and in our household. That we can change, and that we are accountable for. And this is why Paul says, the Lord is faithful who will establish you.

He doesn't say he'll establish the nation, or he'll establish Palestine, or he'll establish Israel, or he'll establish Texas. You remember what Jesus said, I don't even remember the context, but he said, when the Son of Man returns, will he find faith on the earth? Well, I don't think he's going to find it in the United States. I don't think he's going to find it in the culture.

I don't think he's going to find it in most churches. But we can ensure that he will find faith in our household, and that he will find faith in our souls. This is why Paul says, the Lord is faithful.

A lot of men don't have faith, but the Lord is faithful. And our relationship is not with a political party. It's not with even the state and the nation primarily.

Our relationship is with God, and God is faithful. There is a government coming that is going to be completely righteous, completely squared away. All of the policies will be good.

All of the justice will be fair and swift. The Lord is faithful who will establish you and guard you from the evil one. And from the evil, period.

And there is a lot of evil. We are surrounded. We are swamped.

We are swimming in it. We're up to our neck, up to our nose in evil. Our children are entering a society that is actively hostile to their faith.

Actively propagandizing, actively attacking it, actively seeking to subvert it, and to insult it, and to

suborn it, and to vilify it, and to make them feel like outcasts, and there's something wrong with them. They don't belong. They don't fit.

And it's kind of like the dilemma. You know, the Republicans are all doing a lot of naval gazing now, saying, well, how can we get popular again so we can win elections? Well, they're never going to be popular as long as they stick to any kind of values, because values are out the window. So you can either support abortion, pot, and socialism, or you can never win another election in this country.

It's one or the other. You can't do both. Because we are on a down cycle, and we're not returning to family values.

We're not returning to conservative, biblical, Judeo-Christian morals and ethics in this country. We're not. Don't expect it.

Don't wait for it. Don't pine for it. Release that delusion.

It's not going to happen. We are families and individuals that will preserve those things. But this is why God gave us the book of Isaiah.

This is why God gave us the book of Ezekiel. Righteousness will prevail in the hearts and in the families of God's people, and he will preserve them, he will bless them in the midst of national discipline and destruction and the downgrade that we see all around us. We are just like the nation of Judah in its downward spiral with its evil kings, and yet there were righteous people looking to God, looking in faith, waiting for the day when there would be a righteous king from the line of David once again, and that's the Lord Jesus.

That's who we're waiting for as well, and we do it the very same way. The Lord is faithful. He will establish you.

We're not established by what goes on in the economy or in politics or in social culture. May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ. You know why you need patience? Because there's a situation that requires it.

When everything is rosy, you don't have to have patience. We are in a very unrosy situation. So Paul says, just as it was in their day, may the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the patience of Christ.

How do you think the Lord Jesus viewed society in his day? Do you think, like it says about Lot, it vexed his righteous soul to see the evil that permeated the ruling class and the structure in Jerusalem? Of course it did. 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. Withdraw from every brother.

Now, what is the nature of this withdrawing? Well, he goes on to tell us, You yourselves know how you ought to follow us. We were not disorderly among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but we 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 live, how you should follow us. In this specific example, this is self-reliance and hard work and avoiding charity, avoiding government subsidization, avoiding handouts.

This was the system in Israel. There were no handouts in Israel. Even the widows and orphans got no handouts.

There was no bread line. There was no soup kitchen in Israel. How did charity work in Israel? How was subsistence provided for those who did not have a provider? How did it work? Those who had land left the corners of the field ungleaned.

Well, that seems very hard-hearted and very callous, just to leave the grain standing there. Because what did the people who needed that kind of help, what did they have to do? They had to go and reap the grain. They had to carry those stalks of grain to the threshing floor, and they had to thresh it themselves.

They had to separate the wheat from the chaff, and they had to gather up the wheat. They had to take the wheat and go and grind it themselves. They had to take the ground wheat and find some oil and some fire and make their own bread.

They did it all themselves. Now, why didn't the priests have a little bread line there at the tabernacle and later at the temple where they would take the corners of the field, and they would harvest it, and they would thresh it, and they would separate it, and they would grind it, and they would mix it, and they would bake it, and then they would hand out bread to the poor. Why didn't they do that? Because he who does not work does not eat.

It's a biblical principle, Old Testament, New Testament. There are lots of systems of charity, and there are times when you take a fall, you have a sudden reversal, and we can look out for one another. We can help meet each other's needs, but it's short term.

The Bible encourages us as rapidly as we can to stand on our feet and provide for ourselves. Paul says, look, we had authority. We could have demanded that you all support us because we're doing the work of the Lord.

We're preaching the gospel. We need to study the scriptures. We need to put our lesson plans together.

But no, he said, we worked with our hands. We didn't burden anybody. We ate nobody's bread that we didn't pay for.

We bought our own food. We did our own work. We supported ourselves, and we did it as an example of how you should follow us, and it is still true today.

You remember Merle Haggard? Well, most of you young ones don't remember. Merle Haggard had a great song about the working man. Hey, hey, the working man, working man like me ain't never been on welfare, and that's one place I won't be.

I'll be working long as my two hands are fit to use. Drink a little beer in the evening, sing a little bit of these working man blues. But that used to be the common approach, the common ethic.

I take pride in supporting myself, in earning my own keep, earning my own bread. Now, the reason I emphasize that is, A, it's in our passage, and B, we have just seen in the recent election, those values roundly, soundly repudiated. We had two very clearly different philosophies represented in our presidential candidates.

One was preaching and presenting and supporting and promising self-reliance, hard work, we will solve our fiscal problems. We will get our country back on the right track through hard work and self-reliance. The other candidate is preaching government subsidization.

The government will solve your problems. The government will provide. The government will be your sugar daddy.

The government will basically be your God. Look to the government and it will provide. You shouldn't have to work.

We need to have the rich people give a little more. We'll take a little bit more from the rich and give to the poor. It's sort of a Robin Hood approach.

Well, the rich don't need what they have. And there is a sense of entitlement on the part of the poor that they should be given what they need. There's a sense of entitlement on the part of the storm damaged that somebody should come in and provide housing and provide food and provide everything they think they need.

And yes, it's tough. That's tough when your stuff gets blown away, gets flooded away, gets taken away when your power's not on for two weeks. All the sympathy for you in the world.

There are plenty of local charities, plenty of out-of-state charities will come in and work and provide and set up stuff that you need for that short-term charitable assistance. But that is not the government's job. Now, I'm not talking politics here.

This is Bible. It is not. Do you ever see the government in Israel? Did God ever say, behold, the king shall come and fill in when there's a terrible disaster? No.

Did Jesus ever say that? No. What does the Bible say? You work, you provide for yourself. And

brothers and sisters in Christ can look out for one another in the short term.

But notice what he says. We didn't eat anyone's bread free of charge. We worked with labor and toil night and day.

If you don't make very much, then guess what? You got to work longer night and day. Paul and Timothy and Silas didn't have a high paying salary job in Thessalonica or any of the other towns they went to. They were migrant workers.

And so the work that was available to them like tent mending or whatever other manual labor that they could do didn't pay very much. So you know what they did? They did a lot of work at a low wage to support themselves. We worked and toiled night and day in order to not be a burden to any of you.

Even though they could have laid claim to support from the church, they never did it. There were some churches in other times and other trips that would send them support, but it was freewill offerings. The people knew what Paul was doing.

They wanted to help him. They took up a collection on their own and sent it in the same way that the ladies wanted to support the Lord Jesus and his disciples. But Jesus never went to them, never asked for a shekel.

This was a freewill offering. People wanted to be a part of that work. They wanted to invest in it and see it go forward.

But it was entirely their choice. We did not eat anyone's bread, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. This pertains today.

We have a responsibility to do the very best we can to support ourselves. And it just doesn't get any plainer than this. There's no excuses.

There's no extenuating circumstances. Even when we were with you, we commanded you this. If anyone will not work, he does not eat.

We hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner. Remember, we looked at this word in Greek last time. It means undisciplined, not willing to do what is necessary to support themselves.

Well, it's too hard. I've got an excuse here. I've got an excuse there.

Boo-hoo for me. You should feel sorry for me. You should help me.

Paul says no excuse. If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. It is a command.

Now this informs our charity in the church. And as a church and as believers, we have to be

careful and use discernment when we distribute charity. There is a time for support.

There is a time to weep with those who weep. There's a time to provide. There's a time to help.

But it is always short term. It is sort of a crisis. It's an episodic thing, not a pattern, not a stipend, not an ongoing charity.

Those who walk among you, this isn't having a momentary setback. This isn't a short term. Wow, I'm between jobs.

I've had a health issue, just was bereaved. I'm in a transition. This is a pattern.

Those who walk among you, walk is lifestyle. Walk is the climate of life, not the weather. Walk among you in an undisciplined way, not ordered, not organized, not pursuing work, finding work, doing work, obtaining work.

Look at Paul and Silas. They're strangers. They haven't been in Thessalonica before.

They come in there, they found work and they had to do a lot of it to support themselves. But that's what they did. And nobody had to give them a biscuit.

Nobody had to give them a fish. They bought all their food. They bought all their lodging.

Nobody was out anything when they came to that town. And they said, this is the example for you. And we have to try to instill this biblical ethic, this biblical principle in our children, because society says just the opposite.

Society says, well, there's a sense of entitlement. Any kind of a setback. You know, I'm ADD.

I can't concentrate. So you should send me a check. I'm not feeling good today.

So you should send me a check. I only feel like working a couple of days a week. So you should fill in my income for those times when I, you know, I mean, you can't expect me to work when I just don't have any motivation.

I heard somebody saying just this morning, you know, one of the valuable things about military training is you are, or were, I hope they still do it, imbued with the strong realization that it doesn't matter what the resistance is. It doesn't matter what the problem is. You have got to push through.

If there's a formation, you were either in the formation or you were in the hospital or the morgue. There is no other excuse. You are either, you know, when the ship is pulling away from the dock, you were either on it or somebody is figuring out what killed you.

There is no excuse. You find a way. Many, many, many of us, how many times have we gone to

work feeling like the walking dead, feeling like we have come down with the plague, the black death, you know, bubonic this and, you know, brain cancer that, nothing works, nothing feels good, can't hold my child down, but have to be there.

It's an important day. Something has to be done by a deadline. We go and we work anyway.

This is a command of scripture. It doesn't matter how you feel. It doesn't matter how many excuses you can invent.

The Bible says, work with your own hands and support yourself. No excuses, no buy your leaves, no outs. Well, I'm different.

I'm special. No, you're not. The Bible says, you find a way to support yourself.

The only people that don't have to do this are children and children. Once you leave home, don't come back. This is a commonplace.

There's a 40% of young people go back home and live with their parents. Get out, get a job, support yourself. It's a biblical principle.

I'm not talking about you students. I got students living with me. That's fine.

When you finish and you're qualified to go out and get a job, get a job, get a job, support yourself, be independent. The Bible tells you so. Did you see verse six? We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, you will answer to the Lord Jesus Christ for compliance or disobedience on this point.

And we have an equal responsibility on the other side. Do not support someone that should not be supported. You enter into their evil.

You enter into their disobedience. Short term, occasional charity. Great.

Long term subsidization of an indigent lifestyle is evil. And it is prohibited. It is proscribed.

It is against the law of God. Always has been, always will be. So in the face of all of the cultural coddling and cuddling and check writing that goes on, that's not God's way.

And it is not God's word. And don't let anybody tell you different. The gentle Jesus never ran a soup kitchen.

Did he? He did occasional short term charity. He healed. Do you ever see Jesus giving a dime to anyone? He fed a crowd that had stayed for Bible class for hours and hours and hours and hours.

Gave him one meal. When they said, hey, give us this bread always. What did he say? No.

That's what he said. He said, no, not giving you bread always. We hear that there are some who

walk among you in a disorderly, undisciplined, unworking, non-diligent manner.

Not working at all, but are standers around the side. Peri-ergazomos. The work is going on, but they're in the periphery.

They're near the work, but they're not doing the work. They're watching the work, maybe even sharpshooting the work, waiting for the benefit of the work, but they're not doing the work. Peri-ergazominoi.

Just close enough to take a little credit, but not actually doing it. Those who are such, we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ. Can I make this any more emphatic? Look at what the Apostle Paul says.

We command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work. No welfare, no checks that aren't in response to an invoice, detailed invoice showing work done. Work in quietness and eat their own bread.

Don't be eating bread bought with taxpayer money. We will answer for it at the judgment seat of Christ. As for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing well-doing, doing what is right, following the traditions, heeding the instructions of scripture.

Well, we'll pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll be in a less emphatic section, but the 180 degree difference between what scripture teaches and what our culture teaches has to be addressed. And there's nobody that is going to be up against it more forcefully than the generation that is now entering adult life.

It is something we'll have a little bit more to say about after the break.