

Busy in the Lord

Proper 28

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Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Are there ever times when you feel the Lord is leading you to do something, but you put it off? Or perhaps you know that the Lord is directing you to do a particular thing from His Word, and yet you haven't done it yet? Maybe you've had good intentions about getting it done time and again, but each time you have let it slip by without getting it done. Sometimes I wonder about these kinds of things.

One time I did such wondering was at college. Attending a Non-Denomination group on campus because I didn't know the dangers at the time, I saw many fellow Christians who would work hard at their school work, at being kind to others, and beyond that, serving others, sometimes in random or unexpected ways. As I progressed through college, and attended Adult Bible Class at Concordia Church in Springfield, IL, I began to wonder if these friends in Christ were serving with such zeal because they knew that God's grace was free, or because they thought they had to earn it. Sadly, some of them may have been doing it because they thought they had to earn God's favor. That's one of the dangers of Non-Denominational groups—they don't emphasize grace through faith alone the way that the LCMS does. It wasn't long, though, before I had another thought to wonder about and contemplate: if they were so zealous to serve because they thought they *had to*, how much more should we serve knowing that we have been saved *for free*?

Apparently I'm not the only one to consider this idea. While he was not an LCMS believer, I ran across a quote in C.S. Lewis' Narnia series from *The Horse and His Boy*. It sounds from this quote that while Lewis may have disagreed with us on some points, he understood grace by faith. Listen to this: "I feel just like Bree that I *can't* go on. But when Horses have humans (with spurs and things) on their backs, aren't they often made to go on when they're feeling like this? and then they find that they can. I m-mean—oughtn't we to be able to do more even, now that we're free. It's all for Narnia."

Ok, this quote may sound a bit odd, but here's the context: it's spoken by a talking horse from Narnia. She is with a group trying to return to Narnia, and with a special message. Narnia is in danger of being attacked and they are the only ones who know about it. What's worse, the enemies, the ones who desire to attack, are right behind them. So, in the midst of this trouble, Hwin the horse makes this statement. Yes, she is tired, too, she doesn't feel up to doing the good she knows she needs to, but she believes that she has been made free.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, have we not been set free by Christ's death and resurrection? Yet how often do we feel that we can't or don't want to do what we know is good? Let's take a look at our Epistle text, then, and see what Paul has written on continuing to work in the Lord.

Verse 1

"Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies."

Paul writes to the brothers and sisters in Christ at Thessalonica about those among them walking in idleness. At the time, some believed Christ Jesus' return would be imminent, and so they did not work as they

should, or else they were just being lazy. In his first letter, Paul wrote to them of the importance of doing their work in the Lord. Even further, he set an example for them in person when he was there living among them. So at the time when Paul wrote this his second letter, these brothers and sisters in the faith had no excuse for being idle. They could not claim that they had not heard the command or that they had not seen an example, because they had received both from Paul.

Today, brothers and sisters in Christ, you have heard from this pulpit how our Lord Jesus' return could be imminent or thousands of years down the road. Nevertheless, you may still know some who walk in idleness. Idleness is just as bad of a sin as any other way in which a baptized child of God might err from the tradition we have been given in the Scriptures. In our text, Paul was advancing along the Matthew 18 line of discipline, having gone from talking to the brothers in private to now encouraging others to keep away from them in the hope that they would realize their sin, repent, and return. If there is idleness going on today, it has not gotten to that point yet, but again, idleness is not the only way to be out of step with the tradition handed down to us in Scripture. How are you doing in living your vocations? Do you work hard at them as though for the Lord? Or do you spend your time on the internet and your cell phones playing games and checking your e-mail, Facebook, or Twitter accounts when you are in the office? Are you living your vocation of parent, grandparent, or child as for the Lord? Are you using the gifts God has given you through His Spirit in order to serve the church in helping at potlucks or doing mission work? What about using your gifts in teaching Sunday School or being a superintendent for it?

Verse 2

“Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.”

Just as Paul had commanded the brothers and sisters walking in step with the tradition handed down from our Savior, he also commands those who were walking in the sin of laziness to stop it! To stop it, and to “work quietly and to earn their own living.” Paul’s desire is that of any believer: that the sinners would repent and turn from their sin and not persist in it. He speaks as both one speaking the Word of God by using the word “command” but he also uses the word “encourage” as one hoping that those caught in their sin would turn from it.

Again, on the topic of laziness, or any sin right now, none of you has been told repeatedly to stop. So on the flipside, why does Paul encourage these “such persons” in Thessalonica to “work quietly and earn their own living”? Because it is a blessing from God. This is what Luther had to write on the subject. He connected this verse to Ecclesiastes 9:7, where it says “Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do.” Luther highlighted the phrases of the author of Ecclesiastes “your bread” and “your wine” as bread and wine earned from doing your own work. He was saying that by having earned bread of your own and wine of your own, you were living as God desires and with His blessing. “This...applies to the godly, to those who fear God, as though he were saying: ‘You who are godly, do what you can, because you know that God approves what you do.’”

But how do we know that God approves what we do? From the Gospel of His Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. As we heard last Sunday, we have all been made God’s saints and His dear children by the work of His Son Jesus on the cross of Calvary. Our own works could never merit being called God’s saints or His children, but only His mortal enemies. Yet through Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection three days later, you and I are called not only God’s children but even His saints. What is more, God now approves what we do when we follow the tradition of the Scriptures.

Verse 3

So “As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good.”

That’s how Paul concludes this section. Don’t “grow weary in doing good.” That is, don’t look at anyone around you who is walking out of step, whether in idleness or any other sin, and be envious of them. While it may seem in some cases that the lazy ones are well off in this world and this life, if they do not repent, it will not go well for them in the end.

But for you, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, who are walking in repentance and the tradition of the Scriptures of Christ, that Last Day will go well for you. We heard last week of how not only heaven awaits us, but even more, restored, glorified bodies; the new heaven and new earth; being brought together again with all the saints; and being with God and our Savior Jesus Christ for all eternity await us. We have this assurance not in ourselves or our works, but in our Lord Jesus Christ who has called us to Himself through His Word and His Sacraments.

So we do not grow weary in doing good but instead we work as for the Lord, knowing that He has already approved it in the death and resurrection of His Son. We live as free men and women—not of Narnia, but of God. Free to live as God desires through His Spirit and through faith in His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.