

Week of September 30-October 6

## **THE DEVIL'S WORKSHOP**

**Scripture Reading:** Read 2 Thessalonians 3

Short maxims and proverbs have a way of sticking with us far better than long-drawn-out explanations. "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush" is far more memorable than "It's better to have a certain although lesser gain than take the risk on a greater gain where it's possible you end up with nothing at all." "Look before you leap" sticks with you much longer than "Don't rush into a situation or decision before exploring all your options since once you do there is no turning back." So, also "Idle hands are the devil's workshop" has a forcefulness to it that "When someone is bored or not busy, he or she has an opportunity to get involved in things that are bad in nature" just doesn't.

Although this last maxim, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop," didn't originate with Paul (it traces back to the 1300's), the sentiment certainly does. Notice what he said to the church at Thessalonica: "*We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies*" (2 Thessalonians 3:11). Their idle hands got them in trouble. They weren't busy, they were just busybodies; nosy, gossiping, lazy, and butting in to other people's business. It would seem that many of these idle folks were simply waiting for the return of Christ and living off the toils of other believers who were working hard.

Paul would have none of that. That's why he reminded the church of his own personal example of working to support himself while he launched the church in Thessalonica (2 Thess 3:7-8). Paul did this, not because he didn't deserve to be supported but because he sought to model for them an appropriate work ethic as he notes in verse 9 of today's chapter reading. "*We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow*" (2 Thess 3:9).

This is also why he gave repeated warnings on this subject to the Thessalonian Christians. For example, in his first epistle to the church, he challenged believers to "*warn those who are idle*" (1 Thess 5:14). In his second epistle, he both commanded and urged idle believers "*to settle down and earn the bread they eat*" and he reminded them of the rule he established, "*If a man will not work, he shall not eat*" (2 Thess 3:10). Finally, with regard to those who would not earn their keep, Paul went so far as to command the church "*to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching*" (2 Thess 3:6).

Paul is not suggesting that Christians should be all work and no play. There is a time and place for rest, renewal and recreation. There is no place, though, for laziness, nosiness and taking advantage of other hardworking believers in the church. Our belief in Christ's return doesn't nullify the need to work for our bread and work for the kingdom during the interim.

**Action Step & Prayer Focus:** Some questions to consider: Are you busy or a busybody? Do you spend your time earning your bread and investing in the kingdom or wasting time and gossiping about your neighbor? Pray that your hands aren't the devil's workshop but tools in the hands of the Lord instead.

**Take-a-way:** *Idle hands are the devil's workshop so be busy with the Lord's business instead.*