

2 Thessalonians 3:10

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.

Analysis

For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat—when we were with you recalls Paul's initial Thessalonian ministry. **This we commanded** (touto parēngellomen, τοῦτο παρηγγέλλομεν, gave authoritative order): **if any would not work** (ei tis ou thelei ergazesthai, εἴ τις οὐ θέλει ἐργάζεσθαι, refuses to work), **neither should he eat** (mēde esthietō, μηδὲ ἐσθιέτω).

This isn't about inability to work (disability, unemployment) but unwillingness—thelō (θέλω, to will, desire). Those capable of labor who refuse shouldn't receive community support. This prevents enabling laziness. Work is God's creation ordinance (Gen. 2:15), not a curse. Christians must work to eat, avoiding both forced dependency and unjust exploitation of charity.

Historical Context

Greco-Roman society had large unemployed populations living off patrons or government grain doles. Christianity introduced dignified labor as normative, regardless of class. Paul's principle protected church resources for truly needy (widows, orphans, disabled) while refusing to subsidize laziness.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Colossians 1:16 — All things created through Christ

Study Questions

1. How do you distinguish between helping the genuinely needy and enabling the unwilling to work?
2. What attitudes toward work in contemporary culture contradict biblical teaching?
3. How does working 'as unto the Lord' transform mundane labor into worship?

Interlinear Text

καὶ	γὰρ	ὅτε	ἤμεν	πρὸς	ὑμᾶς	τοῦτο	παρηγγέλλομεν	
even	For	when	G1510	with	you	this	we commanded	
G2532	G1063	G3753		G4314	G5209	G5124	G3853	
ὑμῖν	ὅτι	εἴ	τις	οὐ	θέλει	ἐργάζεσθαι	μηδὲ	ἐσθιέτω
you	that	G1487	G5100	not	would	work	neither	should he eat
G5213	G3754			G3756	G2309	G2038	G3366	G2068

Additional Cross-References

Genesis 3:19 (Parallel theme): In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Proverbs 20:4 (Parallel theme): The sluggard will not plow by reason of the cold; therefore shall he beg in harvest, and have nothing.

1 Thessalonians 4:11 (Parallel theme): And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you;

Proverbs 13:4 (Parallel theme): The soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing: but the soul of the diligent shall be made fat.

Proverbs 21:25 (Parallel theme): The desire of the slothful killeth him; for his hands refuse to labour.

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