



### Looking Inwards (15 mins) *Caring For Each Other*

*Reflecting on your life at the moment, is there anything you would like to share with other members of your home group which you feel is appropriate (this is an **opportunity to share**, not something you have to do, however, 'it's the sharing that enables the caring!') for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



### Looking Outwards (15 mins) *Concern For Others*

*Is there anything concerning someone in your: family; circle of friends; neighbours; or church, which you would like to share (please be careful not to pass on anything that is **confidential** or which you think the person/people concerned would not wish to be shared) for:*

Thanksgiving?

Prayer?

Encouragement?

Support in any way?



### HG53: A Church Thrives In Troubled Times *(5/5) Continue: At Any Cost*

**2 Thessalonians 3:6-18**

**Home Group Study Notes**

24<sup>th</sup> July 2011 - Revd Tom Loh



PLEASE COMPLETE AS MUCH AS YOU CAN ON THIS WORKSHEET IN PREPARATION **BEFORE** THE MEETING!

*Don't forget to take your Bible to Home Group with you, along with any previous notes and other resources which might be helpful.*



### Welcome/Ice Breaker (10 mins)

Name one 'something' you would like to achieve over the summer holidays and explain why.



### Looking Upwards (10 mins) *Worship*

In your time of worship, you may want to sing Songs of Praise; listen to a Worship CD, as well as using Meditations; Bible Readings; Prayers ...





## Looking Upwards (40 mins) *Bible Study*

Read through the text for this study, and any references given below, alongside those in the sermon notes, then answer the following questions - you may find it helpful to read through the sermon notes as you do so. Discuss some, or all, of your answers with your Home Group.

1. If you knew Jesus was returning in a month... what would you do?

2. What do you think Paul means when he says in verse 10, "*The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat*"?

3. Why is laziness so unloving and harmful to our gospel witness? How does Paul recommend we deal with idleness in the church? Is this reasonable and loving?

How committed to goodness, to Jesus, and to one another can we be if we are not prepared to do the tough thing? All of us, I'm sure, have disciplined our children or were disciplined by our parents. It's a way to demonstrate that we actually care about the well being of those we love.

But neither can we use Paul's words here as an excuse to go round bashing people with their sin. We mustn't throw people out because we think they're no good (an attitude we often take with disruptive and idle youth in our towns). No, Paul says we do not regard them as an enemy, but as a fellow believer. We take people out of the community, **in order to bring them back into the community**. When we are forcibly removed from the company of others it is always a painful, sobering and shaming experience. It is often the harshest form of discipline for children to be removed from the secure and loving company of their parents. But it is often the most effective way of demonstrating the seriousness of a bad attitude. It should only be used, perhaps, as a last resort. Jesus himself taught that an issue of sin arising in the church should first of all be settled privately, and only as a last resort should action be taken to deny fellowship to anyone (Matthew 18:15-17).

Where does this leave us? For many of us, you might recognize a deep-seated laziness in your heart, a lack of care for others and apathy towards the work of the church. I know all too often I find it in my own heart.

However, Paul ends his letter, not with a heavy-handed chastisement for all of us good for nothings. But with a wonderful reminder of the type of Lord we have in Jesus.

*16 Now may the Lord of peace himself give you peace at all times and in every way. The Lord be with all of you.*

*17 I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand, which is the distinguishing mark in all my letters. This is how I write.*

*18 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.*

None of us are going to change our lives through sheer will power, or by enforcing rules. Neither does God get people to work hard by beating us with a stick. Rather, we work hard and lead productive lives because we're won over by the love Jesus has shown to us. Our hearts are moved with gratitude and thankfulness for the **work Jesus has done for us**. The work of redemption came at great expense to Jesus. It cost him everything, even his eternal relationship with his loving Father. On the cross Jesus was cast out of the loving presence of God, and underwent the chastisement we deserved. He did this so that we could freely enjoy the loving welcome of God and be treated not as our sinful lives deserve. Therefore, **we work hard because we are loved**. We do not take advantage of our Christian brothers and sisters; neither do we sit by idly, waiting for Jesus to return whilst our non-Christian friends, neighbours and work colleagues live on without hope.

### **A Prayer**

Into your care, Lord, we trust those for whom work is not a source of joy;  
For those in pain from the results of jobs they have lost, we ask your mercy;  
For those whose work is constantly dangerous, we ask your mercy;  
For those whose duties are boring or stressful, we ask your mercy;  
For those who cannot help but work too long hours, we ask for your mercy;  
For those with no relief from caring for others, we ask for your mercy;  
For those who are bullied at their place of work, we ask for your mercy;  
For those who are disappointed their work has not been recognised for what it is,  
we ask for your mercy;  
For those whose work for this church is vital but unnoticed, we ask for your mercy;  
Into your care, Lord, we commit ourselves. **Amen.**

Paul is attacking those who are lazy in the church. Essentially laziness is taking advantage of others, as it always comes at the expense of someone else. Laziness is to put one's own comfort before the comfort of others, and is a most uncaring and selfish attitude. It is the exact opposite of Jesus' teaching to go the extra mile, and to love your neighbour as yourself.

For those of us who recognise laziness within ourselves, isn't it easy to justify it? "I'm tired, and I've been working hard", "Someone else can do it, it's their turn." "Oh, I'm no good at that," "It's not necessary, leave it". My wife catches me at it all the time – especially when it comes to cleaning. (I'm still not convinced the bed linen needs changing every week).

Paul is not saying it's bad to be dependent on others, or to enjoy the generosity of others. None of us can be truly autonomous. Just as it's not wrong for a child to depend on their parents. In fact dependence is a good thing. It shows our weakness. But laziness is different. Laziness willfully sits back while others do the work.

Not only is laziness unloving but it is disruptive.

*11 We hear that some among you are idle and **disruptive**. They are not busy; they are busybodies.*

You may have heard the saying, "the devil makes work for idle hands". Perhaps there is something in that. Often it's the case that idle people end up busying themselves, not with productive things, but with other people's business. This happens all too often in the church. It's much easier to criticize and comment and interfere with what everyone else is doing in the church, than to join in and contribute yourself.

What's worse about this attitude is that it is contagious. As sinful people, we all love to have a good moan. We all love to gossip about other people, especially when we don't like what they're doing. And so, it doesn't take much to drag other people into the same undermining attitude. The devil loves it when we're like that. Why? Because it is distracting and wearying. Look at what Paul says,

*12 Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat. 13 And as for you, brothers and sisters, **never tire of doing what is good.***

This is the danger Paul fears. Jesus is coming soon, and we are getting distracted and beginning to weary. Laziness is creeping in, and our love is growing cold. Jesus himself said this would happen towards the end – "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold." (Matthew 24:12). Jesus is here talking about the Christians. This is a very distressing and troubling prediction, as many people in the world, and even our local communities still need to hear the good news of salvation in Jesus. For this to happen, the church needs to be busy, and united. Not lazy, distracted and cold hearted.

The thing is, Paul knows laziness is an issue of the heart, and that to solve the problem is going to require real love and commitment on behalf of the Christian community.

*14 Take special note of anyone who does not obey our instruction in this letter. Do not associate with them, in order that they may feel ashamed. 15 Yet do not regard them as an enemy, but warn them as you would a fellow believer.*

When we first hear Paul's suggestion we might squirm a little in our seats. It sounds a bit draconian. But think about it. How much easier is it to ignore sin in the church than it is to deal with it?

4. Jesus was not always in paid employment, but at times lived off the generosity of others. Was he being idle?

5. Why is it dangerous to value ourselves by how productive we are? How would that impact the way we view God?

6: There's no doubt that our series on 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessalonians has touched the hearts and minds of many. What, for you, has been the most significant aspect of this study? What has encouraged you the most? What will you 'carry' with you into your future Christian life as a result of these studies?



Is there anything you most want to put into practice as a result of this study?



## HG53: A Church Thrives In Troubled Times (5/5) Continue: At Any Cost

### 2 Thessalonians 3:6-18

### Home Group Sermon Notes

24<sup>th</sup> July 2011 - Revd Tom Loh

*"If a man or woman does not work, neither shall he or she eat."* These strong words of Paul have often been taken out of context. Entire political and economic systems have been built upon these words. The more work you put in, the more deserving you are. Conversely, if you are lazy and idle, then you should expect to receive nothing. Is it any wonder that the more protestant a nation is the more capitalist their economy tends to become? In the U.S. the idea of social welfare is still unwelcome in the psyche of many in society.

Is this what Paul has in mind when he writes these words? I do not think so. Think back to the context in which Paul is writing this letter. When Paul first arrived in Thessalonica his desire was to bring the good news of Jesus to the people there. But at the same time he did not wish to give off the impression that he was peddling the gospel for money. So he made it an absolute rule for himself (and Timothy and Silas) that they would never take anything from the people they were reaching out to, lest it be construed that they were "in it for the money".

Even today, wandering evangelists can easily be perceived as freeloaders and at worst swindlers. How often are we suspicious of those on telly who flash phone numbers across the screen requesting contributions whilst at the same time offering salvation for free through Jesus.

As Christian communities we must be extremely careful not to present this kind of hypocritical message to outsiders. When it comes to gospel work, we cannot be seen to be "in it for the money", nor can we be seen to be in it for an easy ride. We must be seen to genuinely care for and love those outside the church as we seek to reach them with the gospel.

In the Thessalonian church there seems to have been some among them who were freeloaders and sponging off others in the church. Rather than getting involved and working alongside others in the work of the gospel, they were taking advantage of the generosity of others within the community. Not only were they being incredibly inconsiderate to their brothers and sisters in Christ, they were damaging the reputation of Jesus.

This is why Paul gets so serious when he talks about this issue. He even invokes the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, when he commands Christians to keep away from idle and disruptive people.

**6 In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.**

And again in verse 12: **Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat.**

Paul commands us not to be idle and disorderly, but rather work for a living. He reminds the Thessalonians that when he and his co-workers brought the gospel to the Thessalonians they worked night and day, labouring and toiling in order not to be a burden to anyone. Neither did they eat anyone's food without paying for it. This may seem a little extreme to us. You can imagine Paul the Apostle even paying for the cup of tea he had whilst sharing the gospel round at someone's house. But it just goes to show how serious he is – we are not to use the gospel as an excuse to be well fed and constantly entertained.

Paul tells us we are to work for a living, to earn our own way and that we should imitate him in this. Paul is not shy to ask people to imitate him in his attitude to work. It is not because he is particularly arrogant about his lifestyle, but because he himself is someone who models his life on Jesus (1 Cor 11:1 *"Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ."* Cf. 1 Thess 1:6).

**7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. 9 We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate. 10 For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat."**

However, we need to be careful not to fall into the stereotypical attitude of the "Protestant work ethic" whereby our value as people is directly linked to our economic productivity. This is just as dangerous as idleness! The world often operates under such illusions, with the result that it devalues those who contribute little to the GDP of a society. We must remember that Jesus had a great deal of time for the disabled, the young, the elderly and the sick – the very people least likely to be able to pay their own way.

In fact, Jesus himself, although he spent his early adult years as a carpenter, spent the rest of his years as a homeless wanderer – without pay, without earning a living, and totally dependant on the generosity and provision of others. I wonder if Paul thought about that only after he had posted his letter to the Thessalonians! Of course, Paul's situation and Jesus' was completely different. Jesus was supported by his followers, whereas Paul was bringing the gospel to a completely new place where there were no followers of Jesus (In fact Paul does receive money from the Philippian church whilst he was living in Thessalonica, Philippians 4:16). Paul, therefore, does not look down on those who depend on others because they are doing the work of spreading the gospel, v9.

So, for those of us who are not in paid employment, or are unable to work for one reason or another, or are not paid for your work - be encouraged, you're in good company. For, although Jesus during his ministry years was not in paid employment, he still believed he was doing valuable work. Jesus said, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working" (John 5:17). So no matter what our situation is, employed or unemployed, we are able to be involved in God's work.

So, if Paul is not insisting that everyone be in paid employment, what is he concerned about?

Paul is concerned with those who are choosing not to work because they are lazy, and because they can get a free living from the church. It is even more probable that these people are using gospel reasons to excuse their laziness, claiming that they are waiting for the imminent return of Jesus. Perhaps they reasoned that, "After all, this was what the Apostle Paul has been telling us to do all this time. He told us to turn from our old lives and wait for Jesus to return. So we've quit our jobs and we're waiting."