

Templates of Truth with Rick Smith
Audio Script – February 20, 2009

The Apostle Paul had a simple, yet clearly defined work ethic: a person who doesn't work, doesn't eat! While Paul's approach may sound harsh and insensitive to many in our world, God chose to make his statement a standard of inspired Scripture. We'll think more about Paul's work ethic in today's Templates of Truth.

Since it could happen at any moment, some of the believers in the church at Thessalonica quit their jobs in order to wait for the second return of Jesus Christ. While they thought this was an expression of spiritual fervor and maturity, Paul called it *unruly* and *undisciplined* (II Thessalonians 3:6-7); and it was an ethic they certainly didn't learn from him. In fact, Paul said: *we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you...in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example* (3:7-9). Paul was no lazy Christian. He had a tent-making company that filled his daytime business hours, and then carried on his pastoral ministry duties at night and on weekends. If you want to justify a straight 40-hour work week, you'll have to look elsewhere for a role model. In our society, Paul would be deemed a workaholic!

Paul issued a simple instruction to these undisciplined people: *work in quiet fashion and eat your own bread* (3:12). In other words, mind your own business and earn your keep! The reason for this rather straight-forward directive was because *some among (them)...were doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies* (3:11). That means they were meddling in everyone else's business and not tending to their own. As a result, they were getting nothing done and becoming a burden to society. Paul didn't want the others to *regard (them) as an enemy*, but he did say, *do not associate with him, so that he may be put to shame* (3:14-15). A lazy, unproductive work performance is a shameful ethic that should be avoided and challenged with clear warning of the alienating consequences that may result.

While it is easy to preach Paul's ethic to the perfectly able-bodied person living off welfare, or the professional couch potato earning unemployment benefits while writing HBO reviews; it is not so easy to broaden Paul's standard of work and apply it to our spiritual performance. Paul was both a professional worker and a Kingdom worker. He had a job with society, but he also had a job with God. His work ethic applied to both. Paul taught that God has equipped every believer with spiritual gifts that we are to exercise within the body of Christ. Just as we use our talents, skills and training in job performance, we use our spiritual gifts in Kingdom work. James taught that *faith without works is useless* (James 2:20). God has a job in the ministry of His church that He expects each of us to do. Believers who fail to do their share of Kingdom work, are just as *unruly* and *undisciplined* as those who are slothful in their secular work. They are *busybodies* as well. The Christians who are most critical of those who do anything for God are usually those who do little or nothing for God.

Paul would apply the same standard to Kingdom work – *if anyone will not work, neither let him eat* (II Thessalonians 3:10). We all want to belly-up to God's table and feast on His bountiful

supply of blessing and favor, yet do nothing to earn it. Of course, we can never merit God's favor, but failing to do our share of Kingdom work is no excuse for humility. In fact, it is outright disobedience! Is it possible that God is withholding certain blessings from your life, because He is still waiting for you to show up for work? Paul's instruction to the slothful Christian is the same: *work in a quiet fashion and eat your own bread*. In other words, quit being concerned about what another Christian is doing or not doing for God, and focus on what you should be doing. Diligently do the work of ministry God has called you to do, and God will deal with everyone else. He's the boss, and you answer to Him for your job performance.

That's today's Templates of Truth. This is your Bible teacher, Rick Smith, reminding you to attend church this Sunday for Bible study and worship, pray for one another, and always strive to abide. Until next time, have a blessed and glorious day in Christ Jesus.

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