

Focus on 2 Thessalonians 3:6–13

Semicontinuous
Isa. 65:17–25 Isa.
12

Complementary
Mal. 4:1–2a Ps.
98

2 Thess. 3:6–13
Luke 21:5–19

WHAT is important to know?

—From “Exegetical Perspective” by Abraham Smith

Although scholars debate the exact nature of the behavior addressed by the writer in 2 Thessalonians 3:6–13, many now think the “errant” behavior was not “idleness,” as the NRSV

(v. 6) suggests, but a type of disorderliness. The writer describes the problem as that of any person (v. 6) or persons (v. 11) walking/living *atakto-s*, literally “without order.” With a pun on the word “working,” the writer also notes that such persons are not “working” (*ergazomenous*) but “working around” (*periergazomenous*, v. 11), with “working around” being the opposite of “working [*ergazomenoi*] quietly” (v. 12), which the writer lauds as an ideal.

WHERE is God in these words?

—From “Theological Perspective” by Barbara J. Blodgett

Disciplining rebellious and disorderly members, as strict as it may seem, is actually one way to sustain mutual trust within a community. When the bar for orderly conduct is set high and clearly articulated, all members of a community are assured that their life together has “direction, meaning, and significance” and that the ultimate ends for which they formed themselves together as a community in the first place are still being sought. As individuals and as communities, brothers and sisters need to be encouraged gently but firmly not to become “weary in doing what is right” (v. 13), for each other’s sake.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

—From “Pastoral Perspective” by Neta Pringle

It is not enough to have an individual commitment to Christ. That commitment must be lived out in the context of a community of faith. Read Paul’s letters and see just how much his writings focus on building a community that is caring, supportive, and joyful. Moochers and busybodies disrupt the community. They build resentment and distrust. Moochers and busybodies tarnish our witness and keep us from being Christ’s body in the world. Do we create a place that makes folk stop and look: “Maybe there is something happening there that I want to be part of. Might this be a place where I can grow in my faith”?

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

—From “Homiletical Perspective” by
Elizabeth Barrington Forney

Life in community requires that everyone be enabled and encouraged to work. This commonality is essential for the cultivation of both dignity and humility. Leaving someone out of the work life of the community can be demeaning. Just ask the stroke victims or the senior citizens in your congregation if they do not wish there were more they could do to feel part of the life of the church. Opportunities to work are invitations into the inner workings of the Christian body in these places, deepening relationships with others on the same journey as well. Not to work would render one a “tourist” and truncate the experience of the Christian life.

The Church at Thessalonica

On his second missionary journey, Paul established the church in Thessalonica as one of three centers in Macedonia. Thessalonica was the capital of Macedonia and its most populous city. It was a flourishing and prosperous seaport, with one of the best natural harbors on the Aegean. It was a free city of the Roman Empire and was situated on the Via Egnatia, the imperial highway that extended from Asia through Greece to the Adriatic. The city was cosmopolitan and included adherents of diverse religions.

Paul came to Thessalonica with Silvanus and Timothy. He first preached to those who worshiped at the Jewish synagogue, some of whom responded positively along with devout Greeks. But when others organized a riot based on objections to their preaching, Paul and Silvanus left the city, probably returning later to bring the gospel to the Gentile population.

As Paul continued his missionary travels, he was concerned about the fledgling church at Thessalonica, and was delighted when Timothy could report that all was well, even though the young church faced opposition and persecution. Not all of the church's problems came from outside. Frenzied members believed that the Day of the Lord was at hand. Many wondered whether Christians who had died before the second coming would share in the joy of that event. They wondered when the Day would finally come. Rumors abounded. Many believers were confused about how to live in the period before the end time; some thought they should put aside their daily work to prepare for Day of the Lord, and in so doing, they soon became dependent on others and took advantage of them. Paul had to calm the frenzy and point out that none of the expected signs of the end had actually occurred yet. He also had to deal with the matter of how to handle disruptive members. And that issue forms the background against which we begin to move into today's focus text.

