



Thoughts from Second Thessalonians ...

## The Apostles' Example

The easiest way to learn how to perform a task is by watching someone skilled accomplish said task. Hence, when it comes to the Christian lifestyle, God had the apostles model the lifestyle, so that first century brethren had visible examples to follow, from which modern saints can glean the necessary information as to how they should live also. This lifestyle, patterned after the life of Jesus, is called "the tradition which you received from us." "You yourselves know how you ought to follow our example," states Paul, "because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you." The apostle and those with him managed their finances, as he pointed out: "We did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it.

- ▼ **Labor and hardship** — It takes discipline to provide money for the household. When the apostle speaks of how he and those with him paid their way, he recalls, "with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we might not be a burden to any of you." The words "labor" and "hardship" create the clear picture that work is not always fun and games, but that challenges to the body and mind arise. The discipline of showing up and working every day — just like showing up at the appointed assemblies every week — develop a character of discipline that is necessary for other aspects of the successful Christian life. Also his expression that he and those with him did not want to "be a burden to any of you" bespeaks their example of being givers rather than takers, of edifiers rather than users.
- ▼ **Their model** — The apostle and his companions were trying to teach these brethren, raised in the midst of Greek society (or Jewish society with a lot of Greek influence) how to live disciplined and productive lives. The Greeks were pagans, they were definitely immoral, and they tended to live in a scattered rather than a focused fashion. Needing direction and mentors, the men with Paul did not burden the brethren with any necessity of financing their teaching and preaching, as Paul says, "not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, that you might follow our example" (2 Thessalonians 3:9). The apostle had made it clear to other congregations that those who labor in the word have "the right" to glean a financial living off their labors for the Lord. "The plowman ought to plow in hope, and the thresher to thresh in hope of sharing the crops," Paul had commented to the Corinthian brethren, using the example of laboring on the farm. "If we sowed spiritual things in you, is it too much if we should reap material things from you?" he further queried rhetorically. He then followed up with this blockbuster statement: "The Lord directed those who proclaim the gospel to get their living from the gospel" (1 Corinthians 9:10-14). Even though, then, Paul and other laborers had "the right" to accept some financial return for their labors, in the midst of this somewhat slack Greek society, they did not use that right, choosing rather to work in addition to preaching to offer themselves as a model — showing what it means to implement the Biblical work ethic.

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The problem was entrenched in the society, such as it was at the time. "Now we hear," says he, with presumably fairly trustworthy sources, "that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies" (2 Thessalonians 3:11). There are always some who are lazy, always figuring out how to scam others and profit off of their labor. Laziness and a slack lifestyle are clearly unchristian, and anyone making a claim to sainthood in Christ who lives in this way needs to face himself. Also he needs to face a very basic concept connected with serving God from ancient times: repentance!

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