

Published based on [No Retirement in the Kingdom -- sermon manuscript](#)

# **No Retirement in the Kingdom -- sermon manuscript**

(The following sermon was written and contributed by **Diane Harrington** who resides in South Carolina. It is obvious that the Lord has blessed Diane with a writing and teaching gift. Thanks to her for this message.)

# “THERE IS NO RETIREMENT IN GOD’S KINGDOM”

## 2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

### 1. Introduction

The city of Thessalonica sat squarely in the middle of an important trade route; hence it was a strategic place to plant a new church. Information from the city could travel easily to the far East and West. Paul was so successful in his efforts to organize the Thessalonian church that outraged Jewish leaders threatened his life. He had to sneak out of the city under the cover of darkness, and then wrote letters to continue to guide the new believers.

[i]

### 2. Exegesis

The second letter was written to clear up misconceptions about Christ’s second coming. There were those who had the attitude that if Christ’s return was imminent, there was no point in doing anything but watching and waiting. This placed an undue burden on the rest of the Christian community, who continued to work and be productive. Paul pointed out the example that he, Silas, and Timothy had set with regard to work. Even though it was their right to receive support from the church, they had worked to provide for their own basic needs. They did not want to be a burden and they wanted to provide an example of how believers should live and work while they waited for Christ’s return.

As we heard in last week’s sermon, Paul emphasized the importance of tradition, or following the beliefs and practices that he and the other apostles taught. Paul reprimanded those who broke from tradition and were guilty of idleness and disorderly conduct. The Greek word “ataktéo” has been translated as “idleness” and as the word “disorderly.” Disorderly is a military term used to describe a

soldier who is out of ranks. [ii] Paul emphasized the need for believers to continue working productively while they waited for the Second Coming. Idleness implies deliberate loafing or goofing off. Judging from Paul’s stern command, “anyone unwilling to work shall not eat,” some were probably using the excuse of waiting for Christ’s return, when really, they were just plain lazy. With too much time on their hands, they mooched off others and caused trouble within the community of believers. They gossiped and meddled in the affairs of others. Paul instructed the faithful to speak the truth in love, to warn the idlers about their destructive attitude and behavior, but not to shun them either.

God established the practice of work in the very beginning. God worked for 6 days to create the earth, and rested on the 7<sup>th</sup> day to enjoy his creation. After creating man and woman, God gave them a job – the responsibility to name other living creatures and rule over them. Adam and Eve were to continue the creative process that God began. Both the Old and New Testaments tell the story of God's mighty acts in and through history to enable and inspire humanity to achieve God's purposes. Elwell Walter in [The Baker Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#), said that any human work is a life-enhancing blessing when it is controlled by God. [\[iii\]](#)

### 3. Employment issues today

Parents of school aged children and youth often remark that they keep their children involved in activities to keep them out of trouble. Idleness breeds negative, unruly behavior. Sometimes the behavior is rooted in boredom or a need for attention, but as we say "one thing leads to another." In the workplace, the "underemployed," or those workers who don't have enough to keep them busy, seem always to be the ones who are a bad influence on other workers. Some effects of idleness in the workplace are petty disagreements, gossiping, broken relationships, and general loss of productivity. Just as in Paul's day, idleness ruins attitudes and prevents us from being all that God calls us to be. There is a difference in not being busy and idleness. Idleness is a sin.

Idleness is an insidious, contagious disease. Paul was tough in his answer to this problem: "anyone unwilling to work shall not eat." But in applying Paul's message to today, we must be careful not to mistake idleness with unemployment or unemployability. [\[iv\]](#) Just because someone is unemployed, they are not necessarily idle. The Department of Labor defines unemployment as those who are actively seeking work. There is also what is called a "shadow workforce," or those who would work, but have stopped looking because they have not been able to find a job. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the unemployment rate is 5.5%. An article on the Society for Human Resources Management website offers that the shadow workforce, if counted, would increase the unemployment rate to 8%. Business closures due to relocating operations offshore or due to financial difficulties have had a devastating effect on the US economy. North and South Carolina's textile and furniture industries have been especially hard hit. Downsizing throughout the country has resulted in workers who don't trust management and management that has had to defend itself against lawsuits – some justifiable, but many that are frivolous. Employment laws that were created to protect workers and guarantee fair and equal treatment are used successfully by some on both sides to "work the system" for their own advantage. Victims of forced unemployment are at high risk of falling into the habit of idleness and joining the ranks of the shadow workforce. It is not usually because they want this to happen, but continued rejection in the job market can lead to a defeatist attitude, depression, illness, or even suicide. Health care is often a low priority as displaced workers lose their insurance coverage. Though coverage is available through COBRA, it is very expensive. Lack of income and insurance benefits put whole families at risk. From my vantage point in human resources, the people who weather the unemployment crisis best are those who continue to cling mightily to their [tradition](#) of Christian values and their faith in God to help them weather the storm.

### 4. Employment in God's Kingdom

The lost jobs crisis is really a global issue that seems impossible to solve. In our helplessness, we wait for our government to solve the problem. When confronted with a displaced worker, we often say "We're praying for you." We go home, thank our lucky stars that we are still gainfully employed or honorably retired, and then do nothing else – out of sight, out of mind. But, as responsible Christians, we can do

more than that. Many years ago, after job loss in my own family, a member of this congregation sent Ed Lewis to our house at Christmas to give us an anonymous monetary gift. I hope that person is here today to hear how much that meant to us. It wasn't the amount of the gift, because I honestly don't remember what it was, but the Christian love it represented. The act itself spoke much louder than words.

Some things we can do regarding the problem of unemployment are:

**First:** we can pray for wisdom to know what it is that God would have us do. We can pray with and for our friends and neighbors, especially those in our faith community, that have experienced job loss, and then do something to help them. We can offer to babysit while someone goes on a job interview. We can offer to serve as a reference, or to forward their resume to a business person we know.

**Second:** we can support local efforts to help those who are victims of forced unemployment. When Pillowtex in Kannapolis closed, many agencies and churches, including ours, responded with aid – be that monetary or volunteers to provide training in resume writing or other job readiness skills.

**Third:** we can study the issues before our Congress, study the candidates for office, pray, and then vote. We just had the opportunity to do that – to be responsible citizens.

**God can and will direct us in how we can help.** We are not only called to work productively to take care of our basic human needs, but we are also called to be employed in God's Kingdom.

In order to avoid idleness in our own lives, it helps to remember that, as Walter Elwell said, "work is a life-enhancing blessing when it is controlled by God." [\[v\]](#) Stewardship of our time, talents, and resources is essential. Stewardship starts with personal bible study, prayer, and reflection in order to receive guidance and direction. God calls us to serve both in our own church and in the community at large. During the stewardship season, we have heard about the many things we can do individually and collectively to love our neighbors. If you have not completed your time and talent form, please remember to do so. Our many committees (Finance, Christian Ed, Worship, Commitment, Weekday Preschool, Personnel, Witness & Service), Church School, Choir, Presbyterian Men and Women, and other groups need your help. Your service not only supports our own congregation, but also provides outreach to the community. Our Logos/Middle School Ministry program has attracted many new members through its efforts to teach our children the Word of God and the traditions of our denomination. Our Witness and Service Committee sponsors outreach efforts such as Habitat for Humanity and Angel Tree, which ministers to children of incarcerated youth.

My Mother-In-Law Mary Harrington was the ultimate "hot roll lady." She whipped up delicious, melt-in-your mouth rolls whenever anyone she knew was down and out. One time, she was expressing her guilt for not helping someone she thought she should have. I will never forget her telling me that "the road to hell is paved with good intentions." While we all know that statement is not really true, what we should realize is that we can do nothing through our own power. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit can we make a difference. We are not responsible for the outcome (that's God's part), but we are responsible for the planting and watering, for being God's agents – God's eyes, ears, hands, and feet. In his book Experiencing God, Henry Blackaby says that we should look to see where God is already at work, and then go there to participate in God's work.

5. Conclusion

In God's Kingdom, there is no reason to remain idle. There are too many jobs and not enough people. We are all called to do God's work, to avoid idleness while others do the work for us. Paul said, "Brothers and sisters, do not weary in doing what is right." Make no mistake, Paul is not talking about works for works sake. He is talking about the believer's proper response in gratitude for God's gift of faith and saving Grace. Unlike our secular world today, **in God's Kingdom, we are called to accept God's employment offer, because there is no unemployment. In God's Kingdom, there is no such thing as retirement.**

Let us pray:

Gracious and loving God,

We thank you for the ability and calling to do your work. Help us have the correct attitude about the work and to avoid idleness, so that the results we produce will glorify you.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord,

Amen.

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[i] Barclay, William, The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians, and Thessalonians, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1975, pages 179-183.

[ii] Ogilvie, Lloyd J., General Editor, The Communicator's Commentary: 1,2 Thessalonians, 1, 2 Timothy, Titus, Word Books, Waco, TX, 1984, pages 136-144.

[iii] Elwell, Walter A., "Entry for Work," "Evangelical Dictionary of Theology," <[https://www.biblestudytools.net/Dictionaries/Baker Evangelical Dictionary/bed/cgi?number=T742](https://www.biblestudytools.net/Dictionaries/Baker%20Evangelical%20Dictionary/bed/cgi?number=T742)>. 1997.

[iv] Ogilvie, Lloyd J., Ibid.

[v] Elwell, Walter A., Ibid.

<sup>vi</sup> Buttrick, George A., The Interpreter's Bible, Volume XI., Abingdon Press, New York/Nashville, 1955, pages 335-338.

<sup>vii</sup> Blackaby, Henry, [Experiencing God](#), Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, TN 1998, pages 67-71.

<sup>viii</sup> [www.shrm.org](http://www.shrm.org)

<sup>viv</sup> [www.usgov.bls.org](http://www.usgov.bls.org)

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