

Idling - or Stalled?

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

Cradock Presbyterian Church

November 15, 2013

I hate to drive a car that doesn't run right. I suppose that's why I spent a bunch of my vacation replacing the timing belt in my Sienna this summer. Or maybe God wanted to test my faith, I don't know... But I've always been a tinkerer when it comes to cars. In the old days, when cars had carburetors on them, I never was satisfied, I was always hooking up a tachometer and going under the hood diddling. I guess that's because I hate what my dad used to call a "rough idle". You remember sitting at the light, and the car shaking around you? Besides all that shakin', it was wasting gas, and polluting the atmosphere. The kind of idling that makes you think your engine might just quit – might just stall right out on you. I've had that happen. Sometimes, when it's idling bad, you step on the gas, and it just chokes out. Dies on the starting line! And when you stall out at that red light, nobody behind you is very patient! The horns start honking, or playing Dixie, or whatever, if you just sit there, 'cause you're keeping people from getting where they want to go, doing what they want to do. You *better* fix that idle, so you can do your part to keep things going. I hated all of that! So I'd fix it right away.

They didn't have cars in Paul's day, but they knew about *idling*. If you define "idling" as "sitting still, not doing any work," you'd have it about half right. Paul wrote this letter to a church that was apparently not as new as some of the others for which we have letters. They were settled enough to have jobs to do. Some people, it seems, didn't want to do theirs. And instead of wanting to share in all things with their brothers and sisters in Christ, they were willing to mooch. Paul was having none of it! Verses 7 and 8 make it clear:

"For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us; we were not idle when we were with you, and we did not eat anyone's bread without paying for it; but with toil and labor we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you."

Paul's principle is clear to us: I'm not going to be the guy stalled out at the red light! I'm not going to hold you up – but don't you hold each other up. We need to get where we're going *together*. It wasn't about *travel*; it was more about the work they needed to do each day. So Paul was making it clear: don't make others have to support you! If you make others work more, then the whole body, the whole church, gets choked out, can't get going – just like that line of cars behind you when you stall. On the one hand, he *was* talking about

secular work, having to work to make a living, to get food to put on your table; but on the other hand, it was about having time to worship and work for God. More work time – because everybody has to work harder to make up for the slackers – means less time for God. And there's the other thing, too, resentments. Those honking horns behind the stalled guy are a symbol of the resentment folks feel when they have to deal with somebody they think is slacking, think is "being idle" when they could just as well get moving. Paul points out that he and the other "apostles" have given them something to imitate, because *they* insisted on working. He implies in verse 9 that they had the right to be paid as evangelists and leaders, but they didn't exercise that right. No they chose to give witness by the example of their work.

The same principle applies in all our church, too, and in all churches today. If it's really true what they say, that 20% of the people do 80% of all the church's work, then there's an awful lot of "idling" going on! . Our Lord needs every believer to get tuned up to find ways to use the gifts they have to glorify God, because you know what? If they do, and they step on the gas, they will further hasten the coming of the Kingdom, here and now. You probably won't like hearing it, but the many programs and offices of the church are opportunities that have been staring you in the face for years. Many folks stay stuck right there at the light, because they convince themselves that they don't "fit in", that they don't have the gifts, but let me tell you, you DO have the gifts, you DO have the opportunities – you just might have to change or adapt some things so you can use your talents to the fullest. If you refuse to stay there stalled, and take off instead of just sitting, God might just guide you to some gifts you never knew you had. There's no excuse to just sit there at the light.

There's another dimension to this idleness that bothers Paul. These idle folks, it seems, aren't really all that "idle" – they have gone to being "busybodies" as he puts it. They've gone to doing other things. You know, they're still sitting here when the light turns green, talking on their cell phone, or texting somebody, or maybe doing a little "dashboard dining," or maybe messin' with the radio, anything but paying attention to the light. Your job

when you're sitting at a stop light, is to *watch the light!* When it turns green, that's the signal to go! Now what happens when you're not paying attention? Here come those horns! Then you know what you do? You *mash down* on that accelerator, try to get moving. It's like [demonstrate holding a phone and texting, then suddenly dropping it and accelerating big time]. And if you don't have that car tuned, guess what? You're gonna stall – and then you talk about some horns going! It's all about getting in tune. Listening for God, seeking his direction, that's like tuning yourself up. If you don't listen for the Lord, you're gonna idle rough. If you don't do the Lord's work for a long time, as a powerful way of tuning up, you're gonna stall out. You know where you are when you stall out? You're sitting right in the middle of the intersection – you're blocking everybody. You're a sitting duck for somebody to come along and wreck into you. If you don't do the Lord's work, and you try to cover up by taking off too fast, you're a sitting duck for all the the things this world can wreck you with.

Let's talk about this term “busybody”, because, as I understand the term, it means you're doing work that doesn't amount to anything, running hither and thither, and just generally causing a ruckus, instead of contributing to the forward movement of everyone else. You know, texting and eating and drinking and kissing on your boyfriend or girlfriend, whatever. Nothing worthwhile. I think we all do this sometimes. We can mistake our “busyness” for real work, if we're not careful. We ought to be doing the work God has given to us, and not “idle” things that don't amount to anything; we shouldn't be running hither and thither and causing a ruckus over things that aren't, in the final analysis, going to bring in the Kingdom of God. We ought not to be blocking everybody else from getting where God wants 'em to get. We have to set a good example, like Paul did, for the world to see. You know why? Because the world is our community now. The world is where God wants us to be going. The world is the place where people need to be persuaded from being stalled to being moved – to God.

Finally, Paul commands and exhorts those who have been “idling” to “do their work quietly and to earn their own living. Brothers and sisters, *do not be weary in doing what is right.*”

Do not be weary... You know, sometimes an old car can't help it – it's just so worn out, it's gonna idle rough and stall a lot. It's just used up! But what if you want to keep that old car going? You know what you do. You get into it, you rebuild it, you put in new parts, you tune it up. You've given that old car new life. See, Jesus Christ came to get into us. He came to put "new parts" into us – new hearts, a new spirit, minds tuned up and turned to God. Jesus Christ came to give US new life! Because he did "rebuild us," "tune us up," we can't talk about being "weary in doing what is right." We have no excuse to idle rough, or stall out, or sit there at the light. Those words are the ones that we ought to say to ourselves every morning: : *do not be weary in doing what is right*. In this day, in this age, with everything on our plates, as sensitive as we all are to each other's feelings and as much energy as that burns up, how can you not be weary?

I think what Paul has in mind is indeed "weariness unto stalling". And so this is an exhortation to his people as well as to us. It gets a little tiring sometimes to be a serious, committed Christian. It's tiring to watch some idiot on TV, you now, who claims to speak for yo and me and all Christians, saying some God-awful things that we don't agree with. I mean, you hear some of these idiotic things from supposed men of God, (like, "if we have the capacity to assassinate these anti-Christian foreign dictators, we oughta go ahead and do it.") and you sit there and think, "Why do I even bother? Who's listening to *me*?" I'll tell you who's listening, the people God moves in place to hear you! – but if you get tired, and you stall out, they don't get to hear. If you get to doing your "busybody" work, and don't pay attention, and sit there at the light, they don't get to hear you. If you don't get "tuned up" with God, they won't get to hear you – because you won't have anything to say. I know, I know, It's tiring sometimes when you've had a long, hard week, and family's had demands, and it's Sunday morning, and the last thing you want to do is come and sit in a pew for an hour. During that hour, though, you *might* hear something from the Word that'll make it all worthwhile; and during that hour you'll get to pray for someone you care about, and that prayer will do *you* a powerful lot of good. You'll leave knowing that when *you* need prayer, people will be praying for you. I know it's tiring to see other people play fast-and-loose

with life, and it looks like they got it made, while *you do* the right things, treat everyone right, give to the poor, be an exemplary person because that's what you know God wants. That's what you know God wants people to see, because then they'll see him through you. There's no doubt about it! God knows who his own are. God knows YOU belong to him. God takes care of you. Period. You'll probably get some priceless surprises in this life, and you'll definitely get special treatment in the next life. Never grow weary in doing what is right!

Now, then, we all can say that this command from Paul does mean what it says: if you can work, and not burden others, you should do it. But it's not a job for dollars; it means doing your best in all aspects of life, loving the people God sends your way, because that's your job. That's what God put you here to do. Don't be weary; don't be idling; don't be stalled, when you know you should be going. Give thanks for the loads of opportunities you've been given, give thanks for the loads of choices God helps you make every day. Above all, give thanks that you belong to God. And keep on moving.....

Let us pray: O Lord God, we give great thanks for the energy you give us in the Holy Spirit, that keeps us going, that gives us direction, that inspires us on to new and better things. Help us to avoid the temptations to merely idle along, cheating others, ourselves, and you; keep us from stalling, and delaying your kingdom. Push us on, O Heavenly one, so that our movement is sure, and our progress, heaven-bound; for we ask it in your son Jesus' name, AMEN.