Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Ambition
Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4
Code: BQ21611

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need. (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12)

Though there is a great urgency in the imminent coming of the Lord, which prompts earnestness about proclaiming the gospel while there is yet time, the apostle Paul did not command the Thessalonians to live lives of noisy, frenetic evangelistic agitation. Instead, and as a result of their excelling still more in brotherly love, they were **to make it** their **ambition to lead a quiet life.**

In that phrase Paul used the two verb forms in almost a contradictory fashion. **Make it your ambition** (from *philotimeomai*) means to be zealous and strive eagerly, even to consider it an honor (as in Rom. 15:20; 2 Cor. 5:9), whereas **lead a quiet life** (from *hsuchaz*) means to be silent (as in Luke 14:4; Acts 21:14), not speaking out inappropriately (see 1 Tim. 2:11–12), remaining at rest and tranquil (as in Luke 23:56). In anticipation of the Lord's return, believers are to lead peaceful lives, free of conflict and hostility toward others, which is a witness to the transforming power of the gospel.

The goal of Paul's directive, as it was when he instructed Timothy and the church at Ephesus to pray for those in authority, was that believers "may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity" (1 Tim. 2:2; cf. Isa. 30:15; 32:17; 2 Thess. 3:12).

The admonition to **attend to your own business** was a common one in secular Greek writings but used only here in the New Testament. It is not clear, however, whether Paul was speaking to a particular group within the Thessalonian church or addressing a specific issue. The apostle may have used the expression as a general exhortation for the Thessalonians to concentrate on their own lives, take care of their own jobs, and not meddle in the affairs of others.

Paul issued them a follow-up exhortation in 2 Thessalonians 3:11–12: "For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread." Those who did not **attend to** their **own business** were "acting like busybodies" (*periergazomai,* "wasting their labor"), running around meddling in everyone's problems.

Paul’s antidote for such unwise, undisciplined behavior was that the Thessalonians work diligently and faithfully at their jobs (cf. Prov. 27:23–27; Gal. 6:5; Eph. 4:28; 6:5–7; Col. 3:22–24; 1 Tim. 6:1–2), stay out of other people’s business, and lead quiet, unobtrusive lives that serve fellow believers and glorify the Lord before unbelievers.

The purpose underlying Paul’s exhortation on work and motivating all his other injunctions—to love, to live quietly, and to mind their own business—was evangelistic, so that the Thessalonians would **behave properly toward outsiders.** For him, the key to evangelism was the integrity Christians manifest to a sinful, confused, and agitated world (cf. Job 2:3; Ps. 26:1; Matt. 5:16; Phil. 2:15–16; 1 Peter 2:12). When believers display diligent work attitudes and habits and live in a loving and tranquil manner that respects others’ privacy and does not intrude or gossip, it constitutes a powerful testimony to unbelievers and makes the gospel credible.

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