

Disciple & Serve Others

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Easter is a time for us to reflect on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It's a time when we, as believers, are reminded of God's great love for us and how he has called us to demonstrate that love to others. In Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians, he commends the believers in that region for their obedience to this calling. Starting in chapter 4 verse 9-10, Paul writes, "Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more."

Just as Paul's words were meant to be encouraging and challenging to the original recipients, they should have the same effect on us today. We live in a world dominated by influencers and activists, people who have no reservations about being loud, intrusive and controversial with their messaging. They'll even stir up a little conflict and division if it suits their purpose and helps them get attention. It raises the question: in an environment like this, how do we as Christians "excel still more" and rise above the noise in our efforts to share the gospel and spread the love of Christ?

Paul provides us with the answer in verses 11-12, where he says, "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 towards outsiders and not be in any need."

At first glance, you might think this sounds counterintuitive, or that Paul is commanding Christians to live silent, secluded lives of manual labor. Although there's certainly some practical truths about the benefits of a strong work ethic and the detriments of being a nosy neighbor, I don't think that's the primary message that Paul is trying to convey here. I think our biggest take-away from this text is the reminder that our outward actions (our lives as others see it) should resemble our inner personal relationship with Jesus.

Paul commands the Thessalonians to "work with their hands... so they won't be in need." This is a good reminder for us that the Christian life is meant to be active. It's also a warning against complacency. God's purpose in sanctification is that we would become more and more like Christ, and this is a daily work. If we're not consistent in reading His word, if we're not regularly communicating with God in prayer, then our relationship with Christ will become stagnant, and our lives will not produce the spiritual fruit that God intends for us to enjoy. When we are walking in a right relationship with Christ, then our lives will produce fruit, which others see and will be naturally drawn to.

Second, Paul commands the Thessalonians to "attend to their own business so that they would behave properly towards outsiders." Here we're reminded that if we want to be effective in our outreach, and if our goal is to develop strong relationships with others, then our focus should start internally. As we learn in Matthew chapter 7, we should be more concerned about correcting our own sin and responding in obedience to the convictions that God places on our own hearts than we are about removing the speck from our neighbor's eye. When our personal relationship with Christ is strong and growing, then our relationships with others will flourish as well.

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Ultimately what we learn from the study of Paul's writings is that the foundation for effective outreach starts with an inward focus and an active personal relationship with Christ, knowing that when we excel in these areas, the natural by-product is a quiet life, a life that is peaceful, welcoming and a pleasing melody to those around us.

As we celebrate Easter this year, I pray that you would be reminded of God's great love for you. I also pray that your knowledge of that love would fuel your zeal to share the gospel, but in doing so, I pray that you would make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, one that actively demonstrates the power of the Holy Spirit, because in a crazy and chaotic world, a quiet life speaks volumes!

