
Taking New Territory in Troubling Times, Pt. 7

Christ-Like Conduct

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Hope for today

I'm tired... I'm tired of the pain, I'm tired of everyone shouting at one another, I'm tired of the violence, I'm tired of opinions, I'm tired of all the pointing fingers, I'm tired. And at the same time, I've got a word from God for us this morning.

My hope today, my singular aim for today is to help us see Jesus. Jesus is still the answer. His Kingdom is still the solution. His ways are still above our ways no matter what side of the aisle you find yourself on this morning. Can we all agree that Jesus' ways are higher than our ways?

“So, God, silence our busy minds, bring our souls to a place of rest and readiness to visit with you to receive the gift of your Word today. Reveal to us your beauty and goodness in the midst of a deeply hurting and broken world.”

1 Thessalonians 4:1-2,9-12

Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to **please God**, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. ² For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. ⁹ Now concerning **brotherly love** you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to **love one another**, ¹⁰ for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, ¹¹ and to aspire to **live quietly**, and to **mind your own affairs**, and to **work with your hands**, as we instructed you, ¹² so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

Paul says in verse 9, you don't need us to write to you about brotherly love... you've got that down. You're doing a good job. Then Paul specifically lays out what he means. He tells them, not just what to do, but how to do it....

**LIVE QUIETLY
MIND YOUR BUSINESS
GET TO WORK**

LIVE QUIETLY

What Paul is addressing here is that there were people within the church in Thessalonica that were idle. They weren't active. They weren't contributing to the community in any way. In fact, they were causing division, breaking apart relationships, they were busybodies — jumping into everyone else's business and causing problems.

Paul isn't chastising people who want to contribute, who want to add value to the community but couldn't. He's condemning idleness, people who have something to offer, who can contribute toward the common good, but won't. He's calling out those who are idle.

Because what Paul understood, and what we're experiencing in our day, is that when we're idle for long enough, whatever is going on inside of us is eventually going to come out one way or another... whatever tension is building... it's going to blow at some point — and it's going to do major damage, relationally, socially, culturally.

- We've been living in a season of forced idleness
- We've been isolated from one another
- We've been in a season that has been over-saturated with information and misinformation
- With both inner turmoil and societal conflict
- The fear-mongering of the 24-hour news cycle is driving us all mad and dividing us from one another
- All of it is pushing us toward cultural destruction and devastation

We're more connected to mainstream media that we are to God... and we wonder why we're disquieted. We wonder why we're not hopeful.

WHY? Like Peter, we're staring at the waves. These waves are BIG. Jesus doesn't tell us to know the waves — to be able to describe how big they are, how far they span, how destructive they might be. He calls us to lock in on Him.

2 Thessalonians 3:11

For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.

- Paul says, you're not working toward anything... you're just stirring up conflict because you're bored. And your idleness is leading you to bring about disorder and dissention within the community of God.

Proverbs 16:27-29

An ungodly man digs up evil, And *it is* on his lips like a burning fire. ²⁸ A perverse man sows strife, And a whisperer separates the best of friends. ²⁹ A violent man entices his neighbor, And leads him in a way *that is* not good.

- where there is no objective, no vision, people will dig up evil, sow strife, division, tear each other apart, and deliberately entertain sin and destruction as a result of their idleness.
- James 3 tells us that the tongue is a fire, and can set the whole world ablaze and take us with it

The problem of our current idleness is that we're taking all of our disquieted tension and rushing toward whatever release valve we can find — the most readily accessible is Social Media. When we, as followers of Jesus, start spouting off about the latest controversy, headline, tweet — it doesn't matter which side it's from — the only thing we're accomplishing is we're amplifying to the world that we're not a people of peace, but of fear. We're boldly declaring to the watching world that **our ultimate concerns, and our ultimate allegiance is not to the kingdom of God but the kingdom of men!**

The irony of western civilization is we think we're so advanced, so far ahead of other cultures in times past... But Paul was addressing the same kinds of problems... in the first century!

**Follower of Jesus, are you living quietly?
Are you at rest?
The first thing Paul tells the Thessalonians and us...
Live Quietly. Strive for quiet.**

MIND YOUR BUSINESS

1 Thessalonians 4:11

... mind your own affairs

- Paul is talking to those who are idle; trying to get involved in everyone else's business

Paul is saying, *"Before you go around getting involved in everyone else's business, look after your own household because you are causing more problems not less! You're sowing division and strife... and I just need you to mind your own business!"*

Application — *We're living in a world where everyone knows about and is involved in everyone else's business — pointing the finger — blame and rationalization going around. If you pay attention to the loudest voices — it feels like the world is unraveling right before your eyes.*

And in all the noise, all the arguing, all the shouting, all the chaos...

Here's what I think we can do:

I think we can agree that what happened to George Floyd was unjust. What happened to George Floyd was wrong. The end.

I think we can agree that the outbreaks of violence and destruction, burning down communities, and looting in the name of "Justice," is also unjust.

I think we can agree that there are a lot of black people who don't agree with the violence and riots and autonomous zones and the destruction of communities.

And I think we can agree that there are a lot of white people who trying to do right, trying to bring about changes in legislation, working toward a more just society for all people.

- Don't paint others with a broad brush.
- Treat others how you want to be treated. *Someone said something about that one time.*
- While we can't snap our fingers and solve every *injustice*, what I can control is what I do, how I respond
- How I respond to God's call to *do justice* and in my backyard. In my business. In my neighborhood. In my city.

And this is exactly why Paul says... "*live quietly, take care of your own affairs...*"

Matthew 7:3-5

...why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? ⁴Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? ⁵Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Jesus is telling the Pharisees, "*You're so busy judging everyone else... criticizing everyone else, blaming everyone else out there, you think they're the problem, you're putting the blame out there... so that you won't have to acknowledge the spiritual, personal, emotional, relational work you've got work to do right here!*"

"We find it so easy to turn a microscope on another person's sin, but we look at ours through the wrong end of a telescope."¹

~ Kent Hughes

We magnify the problems out there, so we don't have to face the problems right here...

What Jesus and Paul are saying is the same thing...

- if you haven't first dealt with your own life...
- if you're running from your own contribution to what's wrong in the world...
- if you're trying to ignore your own dysfunction by blaming everyone else for your problems or the problems in the world...
- Jesus says, before you can help solve that — you've got to solve this.
- Look in the mirror... Paul says, "live quietly, and mind your own business" because you can't control that, but you can control this.

¹ Hughes, R. Kent. *The Sermon on the Mount* (Crossway, April 30, 2013)

**One of the best ways to see the plank in your own eye... is ask.
Go to people who know you, and who you know are *for you* and you ask them.**

- Do I have a sin or destructive habits in my life that I'm unaware of?
- Or that I'm ignoring?
- Or that I'm pretending don't exist?
- Do I have biases I'm unaware of?
- Am I carrying any unhealed wounds with me into my relationships and interactions? How are they affecting you? Or the people around me?
- How do you experience me as a follower of Jesus?

**Mind your own business.
Look in the mirror.
Remove the plank before you point out the speck.**

GET TO WORK

This is really important for us to understand... the biblical view of work is radically different from our modern view of work in a few key ways.

Dorothy Sayers in her essay, "Why Work," wrote that the biblical view of work is
"...the gracious expression of creative energy in the service of others."²
~ Dorothy Sayers

The biblical view of work is NOT *what you do to make a living* (the thing you have to do in order to do what you really want to do) — it is **primarily positive effort put toward the common good of a community. It could be *volunteer work*, or a *hobby*, or *activism*, or something else entirely, but the biblical view of work is *much bigger than what you do make a living*.**

1 Thessalonians 4:11 **...work with your hands**

- challenging the Greek and Roman culture that says work with your hands is degrading
 - Paul is drawing out here the idea... what William Temple calls, "a God with His hands in the dirt."
 - He's in the mud, forming us out of dirt, building order into chaos, structure into the world to make it useful and usable, beneficial, enjoyable.

Paul is talking about manual labor, **but he's NOT just talking about manual labor**

- He's saying to the busybodies that we're idle, and into everybody else's business...
- He says, "*take your idle energy and put it toward something productive! Put it toward something that will benefit people!*"

1 Thessalonians 4:9,11

Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another; But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more...

- **Paul says** — you all are loving people in Macedonia well — but I want you to continue to love people more and more... HOW? **Get to work.**
- **Paul says** — you all think you know a lot about love — but unless you are putting your creative energy toward producing something beneficial, bringing order to chaos, building the community up, you're not loving. In other words, **Work is the way that you love.**

² Dodson, Jonathan K. *The Unbelievable Gospel* (Zondervan, September 23, 2014)

- **Paul says** — in verse 12 — I want you to do this so you’ll be...

1 Thessalonians 4:12

...be dependent on no one.

- **Paul says** — if you’re idle, and you’re just spouting off about this and that... and you’re not putting your gifts, your skills, your education, your talents, your time, your resources toward what’s right, and just, and beautiful, and good, unifying, useful, beneficial — you’re demanding that everyone else pull your weight, while you cause division and strife...
- **Paul says** — I don’t want you to be a drain on the community, I want you to contribute. You’re an image bearer of God, be like Him, get your hands in the dirt, and put your creative energy toward the common good.

And the rest of verse 12 tell us why...

1 Thessalonians 4:12

...so that you may walk properly before outsiders

- The people who know you’re a follower of Jesus are watching how you conduct yourself.
- What you say and how you say it.
- They view you as a reflection of the God you say you follow.
- If you manage a business — the people who work for you are paying attention.
- If you have a platform to speak into cultural issues, people are watching.

*That can be quite daunting, but every single one of us is a work in progress.
God’s not asking for perfection from you. He gave perfection for you.*

You don’t have to strive for His pleasure, you get to work from having already received His pleasure in the work that Jesus Christ did on your behalf.

- This means your work isn’t frantic, fearful
- Not too important — nor too unimportant

*Everything you need, everything the world needs, everything beautiful,
and right, and good, everything just is found in Jesus Christ.*

Discussion Questions

1. What was Paul talking about when he admonished the believers to “live quietly”?
2. Do you personally spend more time connected to media than to God? How can you remedy that?
3. Why is it so easy to turn a microscope on another person’s sin, but look at our own through the wrong end of a telescope? How can we remedy that?
4. How is the biblical view of work radically different from the modern view of work?
5. What are you personally doing to put your creative energy toward producing something beneficial, bringing order to chaos, building the community up?

NOTES