



Pleasing God with a Quiet and Productive Life

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody. (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12)

God's Word is definitely counter-cultural in so many ways. The most obvious difference between how the world thinks and how our God thinks is grace. That we are saved by believing in Jesus without any regard for our works goes against the grain of our nature and our culture, which say we have to earn for ourselves. Today Paul touches on three other guidelines for godly living that appear backwards to our society.

Our world seeks value and worth in self-recognition, "Be loud!" "Make a name for yourself!" "Light up the newsfeeds and social media! Then you've made it! Then you're finally somebody!" But Paul advises us to "make it [our] ambition to lead a quiet life." Since God's attention and affection have already been secured for us in Christ, we don't need to live in the limelight. We are content with living "beneath the radar."

Perhaps think of life in the Northern Kingdom of Israel during the time of the prophet Elijah (cf. 1 Kings 19ff). King Ahab and his wife, Jezebel, had made it their official policy to wipe out worship and worshippers of the Lord in their territory, so that eventually Elijah headed for the hills. He fled to Mount Sinai and hid in a cave. There the Lord appeared to him and Elijah complained that he was the only believer left. In response, God said he had reserved 7,000 in Israel who had not bowed down in worship of Baal. These were just everyday ordinary believers living out their faith, but not making a point drawing extra attention to themselves.

Secondly, Paul says we are to mind our own business, but the world says, "Everyone else's business is my business! I have the right to tell everyone else what they should be doing and to make my opinions heard!" But meddling in the lives and opinions of others is a bad way to live. At first it may provide a little boost for our egos, but later on it comes back to haunt us when we're to blame when our advice is followed and everything falls apart.

Thirdly, the dream of our flesh is to live a life of carefree ease, to sit back with no responsibilities and nothing else to do but indulge ourselves. God is pleased when we honor him and serve our neighbor by "working with our hands" so long as he blesses us with the strength and ability to do so.

But why make it our goal to live quietly and industriously? Besides glorifying God, Paul provides two other reasons: "so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders, and... you will not be dependent on anybody." Our lives should not give anyone inside or outside the church cause for complaining that Christians act

inappropriately or immodestly or suspiciously. Rather our daily walk with the Lord should win their appreciation and respect (even if they don't agree with us).

It is also best for God's people not to be dependent on anyone. Repeatedly we are commanded to supply the needs of any fellow-believer who lacks the basic necessities of life (cf. James 2:15-16, 1 John 3:17-18) so that then they won't be tempted to steal or fall into despair. Furthermore, it is unwise for us to be dependent on others, whether that's the government or anybody else, because then they have leverage to influence our decisions in ways that may not be God-pleasing. How many times have we allowed ourselves to be drawn into a sin or blackmailed into keeping quiet because someone said the words, "Remember, you owe me!"? God would rather have us not owe anyone anything so that we can be true to him and each other and keep on letting our light shine against the darkness of this world.

Prayer: Lord God, you have called us to faith in your Son Jesus and put your Spirit into our hearts so that we are saved forever and empowered to live differently. Give us the strength to swim against the current of this self-centered sinful world and live quiet, productive, and contented lives to your praise and glory. Amen.