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LIFE NEWS

Peaceful Ambition . . .

AKA - Mind Your Own Business

BY NIGEL UNRAU, LEAD PASTOR

A funny thing happened in Thessalonica. I bet you haven't heard that one before! No, it's not the start of an awful joke, but rather a historical observation of unintended consequences. Every letter Paul wrote to the churches, with the exception of Philippians, in some way dealt with problems the church was experiencing. Sometimes those problems were internal, and in other cases, there were specific external challenges they were enduring.

For the Thessalonians, their problem grew out of two seemingly polarized perspectives. One, an excitement for Christ and the expectation that His return was imminent. And two, a fear that they had missed it.

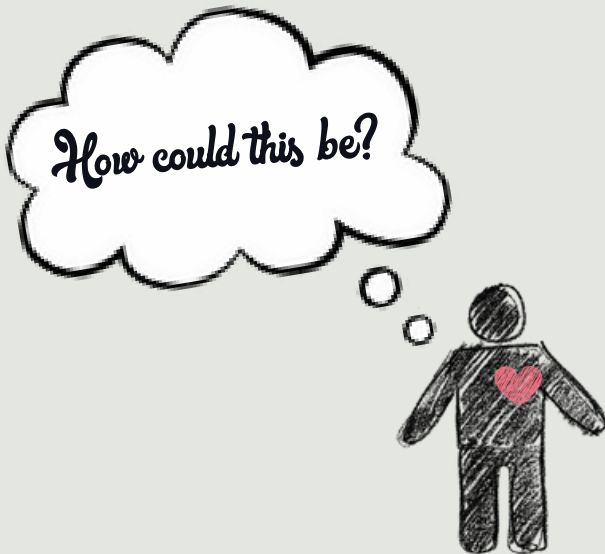
To address the second problem, Paul writes to assure them that they haven't missed the return of Christ.

He assures them that God has a greater work in the world to accomplish - a work for which He has called the church to participate. So, while we can easily see how the second concern would be a problem, understanding why the first concern was a problem is a little more difficult. How could an enthusiasm for Christ be a problem? What could be happening that this created an issue for the church?

In both letters to the Thessalonians, Paul addresses something that is mostly absent in the other churches. But before we get to that, it is apparent that this is a community of believers that is really caught up in their newfound faith. Commentators tell us that there was a natural excitement among them that came from this new hope in Christ, the promise of eternal life, and the expectation of His return. They are so consumed with their excitement for Christ's return in the face of severe

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persecution that they expected His return any minute. The problem this gave rise to was disorder in the church and a poor witness to those outside the church.



Paul writes to them and assures them that he knows they love each other, and he does not doubt that. But he wants their love to excel even more. He wants their love to be more appropriately shown to one another, which is a kind way of rebuking the church for erroneous demonstrations of love. Things they would say they were doing out of love fell short of the kind of love that was truly for the good of the other person. He writes, *"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 Thess. 4:11-12)

The anticipation that Jesus was returning at any moment had caused some in the church to neglect their occupations and the business of daily living. Some had stopped working entirely to give themselves over to "more spiritual work" and were relying on the generosity of others to provide for them.

This not only promoted laziness but resulted in their taking advantage of brothers and sisters. Because they felt like the time was short, they were inserting themselves into the lives of others.

They were meddlesome, trying to stir others up, which inevitably led to assertions of spiritual superiority. Because they had nothing to occupy their time, they made themselves busy by being in other people's business. Paul rebukes them in his second letter.

"For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. 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." (2 Thess. 3:10-12)

They thought they were showing love by being the spiritual thorn in the sides of others. They thought they would help people grow spiritually by meddling in their lives, always having something to say about how others were living and making decisions. They thought this was loving.

Paul says, let us show love by being a good example, rather than dispensing advice. Be a godly influence by focusing on growing in godliness when it comes to our own affairs, rather than making ourselves the center of attention. He tells the church to be busy with their own lives, to pay attention to what God is doing in them. When Paul says that we should attend to our own business and work with our hands, he not only wants us to take responsibility for ourselves but to make sure our lives are not idle. Idle time is not only unproductive time, but it also creates empty space for us to start looking critically at others.

Seeking to serve God with our whole lives will keep us from the idleness that causes us to be critical and judge others. Being productive and taking responsibility for our own daily needs will keep us from holding others in contempt as they seek to honor God in doing the same. The result will be that we love each other more, are more humble in our estimation of ourselves, and the integrity of our witness to the world remains intact.

Because of Jesus,

Pastor Nigel



Nigel Unrau, Lead Pastor

