Bethel Fellowship Church, Minneota, MN
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Introduction

Anybody know what the very first official coin was that was authorized by the United States under the Articles of Confederation in 1787? It was the "Fugio Cent," also known as the "Franklin Cent" because it used Benjamin Franklin's symbols and mottos. One of those mottos—the most prominent one, on the front of the coin, in all capital letters—said, "MIND YOUR BUSINESS."

So, what did Benjamin Franklin mean by that? Did he mean, "Mind Your OWN Business," or did he mean, "Mind Your Business WELL?" I suspect that he meant it both ways. He often wrote about being diligent. And history records how sick and tired Benjamin Franklin and his fellow colonists were of being meddled with. So yes, mind your own business, and mind it well.

Benjamin Franklin may not have been a Christian, but what he put on that coin sure fits with what the Bible says—especially in the letters Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy wrote to the church in Thessalonica. More than once they told the members of that church to mind their own business, and to mind it well. But they said it even better than that.

Please open your Bibles to 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12. I am going to start reading at the beginning of chapter 4. I am reading from the English Standard Version:

> 1 Thessalonians 4:1–12
>
> [1] 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. [3] For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; [4] that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, [5] not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; [6] that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. [7] For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. [8] Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.
>
> [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 [emphasis added].**[1]

Now, before we look closely at those last two verses, I want to stop for a moment to look at the big picture.

This letter—First Thessalonians—is the first of two letters that Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy wrote to the church in Thessalonica. They planted that church on their second missionary journey. They barely got to say goodbye when they left. After only a few weeks, an angry mob came after them. They fled

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by night to Berea, but some of those Thessalonians hated them so much they chased them out of Berea, too. You can read all about it in Acts 17.

This church in Thessalonica is made up of Jews, Greeks, and, we're told, "not a few of the leading women" (Acts 17:4). It's a pretty diverse church in a thriving town, a big city on a major highway in the Roman Empire.

Eventually Timothy went back to Thessalonica to see how the church was doing. And when Timothy returned with a report on the church, the missionaries composed this letter. It is a loving letter, full of kindly encouragements and blessings.

But toward the end of the letter, here in our passage this morning, the missionaries are obviously dealing with a serious problem. In fact, the problem is so bad they end up writing another letter that spells out the problem in painful detail. It helps a lot to understand our passage this morning.

The problem was that some of the church members refused to work. Even worse, when they should have been working they were being busybodies! Lazy busybodies. This problem must have been obvious to the missionaries while they were there, because they insisted on paying their own way even though they had the right to be supported by the church.

But don't take my word for it:

> 2 Thessalonians 3:6–12
>
> [6] Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. [7] For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, [8] nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. [9] It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. [10] For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. [11] For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. [12] Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

Ouch! Back to 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12.

Now we know why they're writing about living quietly, minding their own business, and working. This problem with idle busybodies was a plague on the early church.

Paul saw this so often that when he wrote his first letter to Timothy, one of the reasons he gave for not supporting young widows was that they "learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not" (1 Timothy 5:13).

This problem has never gone away. Nearly two thousand years later in our culture, the problem may be bigger than ever. As a people, we have more leisure time than ever in history. We have government welfare programs beyond the wildest dreams of those idle busybodies in Thessalonica. And we all have a megaphone in our pocket, a computer that amplifies our voice in what passes for the public square these days. It's mighty easy to be an idle busybody today.

So 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 is worth studying this morning if you're a disciple of Christ. And whether you are an idle busybody or whether you are working so hard that you can't remember the last time you had an hour of discretionary time, whether you are a child, a grown-up, an employee, or a retiree, there is something here to bless you and strengthen you.

To sum up v. 11, aspire to be quiet, mind your own business, and work.

Exposition

I. Aspire to be quiet

"Aspire to live quietly," says the ESV. Here I think the KJV does a better job translating it literally: "Study to be quiet." These missionaries knew the Proverbs—and Proverbs say a very great deal about the wisdom of silence and the foolishness of a big mouth:

> Proverbs 10
>
> [19] When words are many, transgression is not lacking,
> but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.
>
> Proverbs 11
>
> [12] Whoever belittles his neighbor lacks sense,
> but a man of understanding remains silent.
> [13] Whoever goes about slandering reveals secrets,
> but he who is trustworthy in spirit keeps a thing covered.
>
> Proverbs 13
>
> [3] Whoever guards his mouth preserves his life;
> he who opens wide his lips comes to ruin.
>
> Proverbs 16
>
> [28] A dishonest man spreads strife,
> and a whisperer separates close friends.
>
> Proverbs 17
>
> [9] Whoever covers an offense seeks love,
> but he who repeats a matter separates close friends.
>
> [14] The beginning of strife is like letting out water,
> so quit before the quarrel breaks out.
>
> [27] Whoever restrains his words has knowledge,
> and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding.

[28] Even a fool who keeps silent is considered wise;
when he closes his lips, he is deemed intelligent.

Proverbs 18

[2] A fool takes no pleasure in understanding,
but only in expressing his opinion.

[7] A fool's mouth is his ruin,
and his lips are a snare to his soul.
[8] The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels;
they go down into the inner parts of the body.

Proverbs 20

[3] It is an honor for a man to keep aloof from strife,
but every fool will be quarreling.

Proverbs 29

[11] A fool gives full vent to his spirit,
but a wise man quietly holds it back.

I have rarely regretted keeping my mouth shut. I have often regretted opening it. Yes, sometimes we need to speak up. That's a different sermon. Our dream, our aspiration, should be silence most of the time. As James says, "let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak" (James 1:19b).

Yes, sometimes we need to speak up. But not usually. And as James goes on to say, "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness" (James 3:1).

So aspire to be quiet—and mind your own business.

II. Mind your own business

Literally, in 1 Thessalonians 4:11, "do your own"—"do your own *thing*" if you like, or "do your own business" (KJV).

It reminds me of something that long-distance hikers say: "Hike Your Own Hike." It means don't be a busybody and don't pay attention to busybodies. When some hiker starts acting like a busybody, picking apart how you pack your pack, or how you plan your route, or whatever, the answer is, "Hey, hike your own hike."

Even so, in the church. As we strive to walk in the Way, we don't have to agree on everything. We may disagree a lot on lesser points of theology or how we educate our children, or even on how we educate ourselves. It's not for me to meddle in your life and browbeat you about how I think you ought to homeshool your children, or the hobbies I think you should or shouldn't have, or whether you should be a vegetarian or only eat meat, or all sorts of things that are none

of my business. I'll try not to meddle in your business, and I'll appreciate if you don't meddle in mine.

Now, minding your own business is not the same thing as keeping to yourself. Nor does it mean ignoring other people's business. You're supposed to pay enough attention to your brother's business to admonish him if he is truly overtaken by some sin—but you better be careful how you do it! Read Galatatians 6:1-2. But that's another sermon for another day.

And it's wise to notice the mistakes of others, if you want to learn from their mistakes like Solomon did:

> Proverbs 24
>
> [30] I passed by the field of a sluggard,
> by the vineyard of a man lacking sense,
> [31] and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns;
> the ground was covered with nettles,
> and its stone wall was broken down.
> [32] Then I saw and considered it;
> I looked and received instruction.
> [33] A little sleep, a little slumber,
> a little folding of the hands to rest,
> [34] and poverty will come upon you like a robber,
> and want like an armed man.

See how he learned from a neglected field? He learned from the sluggard's mistakes. Minding your own business doesn't mean you aren't paying attention to other people's business, but it does usually mean you keep your opinions to yourself.

The worst kind of meddling is the gossiping kind—talking behind someone's back to turn others away from the person you're gossiping about. Peter warns, "let none of you suffer as a murderer or a thief or an evildoer or as a meddler" (1 Peter 4:15).

The busiest busybodies aren't content with starting their own quarrells. They'll wade right into someone else's quarrel. Social media is a dumpster fire full of these flame wars in comments from random people. But it's even more painful in real life. "Whoever meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a passing dog by the ears" (Proverbs 26:17).

So mind your own business. And what is your business? What should your business be, as a disciple of Christ? Listen to what Paul wrote to the church in Corinth:

> 1 Corinthians 7:20–21
>
> [20] Each one should remain in the condition in which he was called. [21] Were you a bondservant when called? Do not be concerned about it. (But if you can gain your freedom, avail yourself of the opportunity.)

In other words, when you turn to Christ, just keep doing the job you're doing. This assumes that your job is not itself clearly immoral. But do you realize what this means?

It means that you don't have to agonize over whether or not you've discerned the exact career God wants you to have. If you can improve your situation, go for it! "Avail yourself of the opportunity." But more imporantly, this means that the simplest job—even the dirtiest job a slave might have—is a noble job when done for the glory of God. Whatever your business is, God can delight in your diligent work. It is your diligence that brings him glory, and it is your work that rains his grace down upon the people affected by your work.

But all this talk about work brings us to the last part of 1 Thessalonians 4:11. Aspire to be quiet, mind your own business, and work.

III.Work

Literally, "work with your hands." So what does this mean? Does it mean that you must be doing manual labor, work that requires your hands?

Definitely not. The missionaries claimed the right to be paid just for their preaching and teaching, even though they chose to pay their own way. In 1 Timothy 5, Paul makes clear that elders should get paid for preaching and teaching, which certainly can be done without hands.

No, when they say, "work with your hands" they simply mean to be productive. And it brings it home, doesn't it? Working with your hands seems like a very unspiritual thing, at first. But if you're going to be heavenly minded, then you need to be some earthly good, if you can. If you're heavenly minded, then there is no work that cannot be spiritual, even the most mundane work of your hands.

Work was ordained from the beginning. Before the fall of man, "The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). Work didn't come with the curse. The curse just made it harder and more painful.

Before I say much more about work, though, I want to do the same thing I did a few minutes ago when I read all those proverbs about how we use our mouths. Proverbs says a lot about the foolishness of laziness and wisdom of work.

As I read some more proverbs to you, think about 1 Thessalonians 4:12, about walking properly before outsiders. Do people see that you're a wise, diligent worker, or do they see you as a foolish sluggard, a lazy person, or even a freeloader? They can tell the difference. Even an ant knows better:

> Proverbs 6
>
> [6] Go to the ant, O sluggard;
> consider her ways, and be wise.
> [7] Without having any chief,
> officer, or ruler,
> [8] she prepares her bread in summer
> and gathers her food in harvest.
> [9] How long will you lie there, O sluggard?
> When will you arise from your sleep?

[10] A little sleep, a little slumber,
a little folding of the hands to rest,
[11] and poverty will come upon you like a robber,
and want like an armed man.

Proverbs 10

[4] A slack hand causes poverty,
but the hand of the diligent makes rich.
[5] He who gathers in summer is a prudent son,
but he who sleeps in harvest is a son who brings shame.

[26] Like vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes,
so is the sluggard to those who send him.

Proverbs 12

[11] Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread,
but he who follows worthless pursuits lacks sense.

[24] The hand of the diligent will rule,
while the slothful will be put to forced labor.

[27] Whoever is slothful will not roast his game,
but the diligent man will get precious wealth.

Proverbs 13

[4] The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing,
while the soul of the diligent is richly supplied.

Proverbs 15

[19] The way of a sluggard is like a hedge of thorns,
but the path of the upright is a level highway.

Proverbs 18

[9] Whoever is slack in his work
is a brother to him who destroys.

Proverbs 19

[15] Slothfulness casts into a deep sleep,
and an idle person will suffer hunger.

Proverbs 20

[4] The sluggard does not plow in the autumn;
he will seek at harvest and have nothing.

Proverbs 21

[25] The desire of the sluggard kills him,
for his hands refuse to labor.
[26] All day long he craves and craves,
but the righteous gives and does not hold back.

Proverbs 22

[13] The sluggard says, “There is a lion outside!
I shall be killed in the streets!” [us: it’s cold outside!]

Proverbs 26

[13] The sluggard says, “There is a lion in the road!
There is a lion in the streets!”
[14] As a door turns on its hinges,
so does a sluggard on his bed.
[15] The sluggard buries his hand in the dish;
it wears him out to bring it back to his mouth.
[16] The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes
than seven men who can answer sensibly.

Proverbs 31 [Writing about the precious wife]

[13] She seeks wool and flax,
and works with willing hands.

And while we’re in Proverbs, we see not only that we should work hard, but we should work well, too—our work should be high quality work:

Proverbs 22

[29] Do you see a man skillful in his work?
He will stand before kings;
he will not stand before obscure men.

So cut those boards straight. Make those frames strong. Be precise in the laboratory, or in whatever job you have.

When we turn to Christ, our work becomes an act of worship. It doesn’t matter how glamorous the job is or how much we get paid or even if we get paid. As Paul wrote in:

> Ephesians 6:5–8
>
> [5] Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ, [6] not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, [7] rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, [8] knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

So don't just work hard when the boss is watching. Work hard and work well because you are serving Christ. Practice the presence of God as you work. You can't meditate upon theology while keeping numbers in your head as you ring up a customer, and you *are* supposed to keep those numbers in your head at that moment, not theology. But you can practice the presence of God as you are "rendering service with a good will as to the Lord."

But I digress. Back to 1 Thessalonians. Stay busy enough, and you'll stay out of trouble. Stay busy enough, and you won't be a meddlesome busybody. Stay busy enough, and you'll not be a burden on others.

This last point is very important to Paul, Silas, and Timothy. It is one of their biggest concerns for these Christians. It is such a big deal that in their next letter they reminded the Thessalonians, "when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat" (2Th 3:10). No welfare to the ones who refuse to work.

Don't misunderstand what they're saying. They aren't saying to never help the poor. Far from it. In fact one of the reasons they want the able-bodied to work is not just so they can feed themselves, but the needy, too:

> Acts 20:34–35
>
> [34] You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. [35] In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"
>
> Ephesians 4:28
>
> [28] Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Some people are in legitimate need. That's a different sermon. But those who can work, should work.

So does this mean you all should have a paying job? What about the homemaker? And what about all you children and students? Does our passage this morning mean that every single one of you had better go get a paying job tomorrow?

No. The Bible is clear that we have different roles, different obligations, different duties. This is very clear in Paul's letters when he discusses husbands, wives, and children. But that's another sermon for another day, too.

But even if you are a child, you have important work to do. You can be lazy and act like you feel entitled to your mother being your servant and picking up your socks and making your bed, or you can do your part and act like you're part of the team. That sock isn't going to pick up itself, and the dishes aren't going to wash themselves, either. "Dishes, laundry, garbage, food, do them now and don't be rude" is a way to remember a few of the basics of life. Someone has to do those chores.

I recently had a conversation I had with a neighbor about filling sandbags during a flood. We agreed that when a moment like that comes in a community, you get to find out who shows up and who doesn't.

A whole lot of things get done in the community by people who show up. Volunteer work in a community can be very good work. And people notice who shows up. I say this not because we should strut around and get noticed. I say this because Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy are teaching us this morning that it does matter what those watching people think of us—because it matters what they think of Christ and his church.

One last word about work, because we can get this very wrong. If work is good, then is more work always better?

Clearly not! It would be pretty hard to qualify as a pastor or deacon if you worked outside the house all the time and never spent any time at home. We must prioritize our time. We must know our duties at work and at home, and divide our time responsibly. We must exercise discernment.

More work is not always better. Rest is good. God himself worked for six days, then rested to admire his work on the seventh day. Once upon a time in Israel, you would be executed if you were caught working on the Sabbath. Rest can be good.

Quiet time is good. The gospels tell us how Jesus would get away in the mornings to be alone and to pray to his Father. Retreats can be good, too. Jesus himself went on a retreat when he went to the region of Tyre and Sydon. He didn't want anyone to know who he was. He was looking for a break from the constant press of his ministry.

A time of preparation is an important part of many jobs, too—spending many years in school is necessary for some jobs. And has there ever been a better time for us to have Christian lawyers and doctors, who need much schooling?

And yes, exercise and hobbies and games fit here, too. The right hobby can improve you as a worker, even bring you into a new career. Games can teach you how to play well with others, how to win well, and how to lose well. It's all about proportion—how much time and money you spend on these things. That's for you to figure out; that's your business, not mine.

In all these things, we must exercise discernment.

Conclusion

Set an example the way Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy did for the church in Thessalonica.

Mind your own business, and mind it well.

Aspire to be quiet, mind your own business, work hard, and work well.