

THE BOOK OF FIRST THESSALONIANS

"Christian Ambition"

1 Thessalonians 4:11, 12

Introduction

1. This is a section of Paul's closing comments to the church at Thessalonica. He has already addressed himself to Christian morality (vv. 1-8) and Christian love (vv. 9, 10). He has a deep concern for the behavior of the saints.

2. The verb "study" (v. 11) is a compound one. It comes from the verb to "love" and the noun "honor," hence to love honor is the meaning. It also may mean "be ambitious" or "strive restlessly after." It is a big word and needs to be in the spiritual vocabulary of every believer. It is only found three times in the Bible (here, Rom. 15:19, 2 Cor. 5:9).

3. When it comes to the matter of "ambition," the child of God has responsibility. He is not able to just run rough shod over God's purpose for his life. Hence, Paul brings God's Word to bear at this point. But this can only apply to the believer. Those who are not children of God (John 1:12, 13) are not addressed here. They are slaves to sin and need a Redeemer. There is only One and He is Christ (Eph. 1:7). But having experienced true redemption in the Lord, your life belongs to Him and is to be spent for His glory. Now study the accent on ambition here:

1. WORK vv. 11, 12.

a. Privately The world moves in the orbit of fleshly personal distinction. We are to reject this and live a tranquil peaceful life (cf. 1 Tim. 2:2). What a paradox: strive restlessly to be quiet! We are to have no feverish fuss.

b. Practically The literal translation is: "do your own things." It therefore means to attend to your own affairs. The noun is not expressed, but the plural pronoun will sustain this rendering (cf. John 1:11). Every man has his own work (Mark 13:34; Titus 3:8, 14). If this is not adhered to, then the idler becomes an "overseer of other's concerns" (Greek for 1 Pet. 4:15). God has a purpose for your life; live it and don't try to take someone's place. Do your own things (plural)!

c. Productively Two enormous items are taught here: 1) The ordinary occupation is not necessarily to be discarded for the sake of the Gospel. It is only specific persons who will do this (Eph. 4:11). 2) There is nothing nasty about manual labor (1 Cor. 7:24).

d. Purposefully The purpose clause (v. 12) is very meaningful. Its main thrust is that the above three items are urged so that the believer may "walk honestly." The word "honest" means "decently" (cf. Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 14:40). If this is done, then two necessities will be cared for: 1) Outsiders will not be sidetracked from the Gospel. The non-believer must see the difference between order and confusion, diligence and idleness, independence and sponging. Behavior is 99% of the witness we give to the world. 2) Insiders will not lack anything. While love is to be expressed, it is not to be a detriment to solid work. Hence, everyone who is a child of God should develop a healthy spirit of independent action to be self-supporting. We are never relieved of personal responsibility.

NOTE: This is all a commandment from Paul to Thessalonica. How it behooves us to respond with a similar sense of being commanded regarding our work.

2. WALK 2 Cor. 5:9.

This is the second verse in which the verb "love of honor" is found. Admittedly, we are absolutely graced in Christ (Eph. 1:6). But this acceptance in Him does not affect our responsibility to make it a matter of ambition to be acceptable (not accepted) to Him. This is the expected sort of behavior whether here on earth (absent) or in heaven (home). The testimonies of Daniel (Dan. 6) and Joseph (Gen. 39) are healthy reminders of sound witness under pressure. Acceptableness is a demonstration of character.

3. WITNESS Rom. 15:20.

This is the third instance of the verb "love of honor." It urges reaching out where Christ is not named. The unreached areas of the world are enormous. Think of China, the entire Far East, or the Muslim world. Nearly 400,000 souls are born daily. We are losing the battle for the unreached! But it is to these we are expected to go and preach the Gospel. We must be careful not to condemn when we gospelize (cf. John 3:16, 17). To transfer believers around among the churches is a poor substitute for reaching the unreached! The former merely "builds on another man's foundation." There is no need to cross lines with friends. There is room for all in the whitened harvest fields. This is certainly a forceful plea to get out of the assembly as a matter of honor!

Conclusion The development of independent responsible believers is the real thrust here. If we will hear the Word and do it, we shall experience blessing reserved for those who made it a matter of honor to work, walk and witness unto HIM.