

## **My Reputation's Never Been Worse**

### **1 Thessalonians 4:1-12**

**Sunday, May 31, 2020**

In the book of Proverbs we read:

*A good name is more desirable than great riches;  
to be esteemed is better than silver or gold. (Proverbs 22:1)*

The Bible speaks highly about having a good reputation. It's seen as more desirable than great riches. It's seen as being of great worth than silver or gold or money.

People know that having a great reputation is of great value. A bad reputation can destroy a business. A bad reputation can ruin someone's career. Everyone is trying to manage and manufacture their reputation.

- Every political cycle politicians cut themselves off from the past people in their lives. Every friend or associate who has done bad things, or said offensive things, or is disliked by certain people is cut off from that politician's life. Politicians, in trying to keep that squeaky clean reputation may seem to think they're a bit like Jesus, declaring to past acquaintances, "Depart from me, I never knew you."
- Organizations, large and small, (and sadly including churches) cover up misdeeds instead of dealing with the people and situations that are problematic. Rather than rooting out things in an organization that are bad, more time is spent on the spin to make the organization seem upright and virtuous.
- Athletes aren't just focusing their attention on their sport. There are endorsements to be made. There are future jobs to be had. Athletes will go through their Twitter feeds and social media platforms deleting past posts to correct or maintain their public image. (To be honest, I've gone through my Twitter and deleted past posts, but that has less to do with grooming an image and more to do with posting stupid things that I regret saying!)
- Over and over again we see well-manicured, well written and well-crafted reputations, be they athletes, politicians, pastors, CEOs, coaches or people with even the slightest leadership role.

Reputation is important, but the kind of reputation that Proverbs is speaking of is not manufactured or groomed. The Bible does not speaking of after-the fact reputation management. When the author in Proverbs wrote, "A good name is more desirable than great riches," an expensive image management team is not what he was writing about! A good name

and reputation is something genuine. It's not an invented projection of a reputation – it's the real thing.

In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul is pleading with the early church to have a good reputation. But he is pleading with them to have a reputation that is genuine. He is calling early Christians to have a good name in society that is completely earned and completely true.

NONE of this is about image. ALL of this is about who the Thessalonians are at their deepest selves. This is not about a projected reputation. This is about a sincere and good reputation that is real.

Paul speaks extremely highly of the Thessalonians. It's one of the hallmarks of the entire letter. *"You do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia."* But Paul does not stop there at high praise: *"Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more."* More and more? They have love for all of God's family throughout Macedonia! Paul says keep it up! Carry it onward! Do not give up in loving well and caring well for the people of God.

Then Paul keys in on some very interesting stuff about the kind of reputation the followers of Jesus are supposed to have among the people of Thessalonica:

- *make it your ambition to lead a quiet life:*
- *You should mind your own business and work with your hands,*
- *so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.*

Live a quiet life. Mind your business. Work with your hands.

When we discussed this passage last week in our Thursday morning men's Bible study, someone noted the strange wording of this passage. Make it your **ambition** to live a **quiet life**. It does not seem like the words "ambition" and "quiet life" belong anywhere near each other. We think of ambition as something huge and loud. We think of ambition when we hear Michael Jordan talking about doing whatever it takes to win a basketball championship. We think of ambition when we see someone rise to the highest political office in their country. We think of ambition when we see someone working all hours of the day to turn a small business into a world renowned company.

And yet Paul says *"make it your ambition . . . to lead a quiet life."* A quiet life speaks to contributing to the lives of others without needing the attention or the credit. Leading a quiet life speaks to peacemaking and not being demanding or overbearing. Leading a quiet life adds

to the lives of others and does not take away. It sounds peaceful. It sounds holy. It sounds sacred and dedicated and set apart.

Paul says “mind your own business”. Be faithful in your own work. Faithful in the ways that God has gifted you.

How amazing has it been to be part of these worship services online? How amazing has it been to have people record worship in their homes or in a socially distant manner at church and post it online? These are truly people “minding their business”! Putting their gifting to work and having it benefit the lives of others as we are scattered everywhere.

I think of the art class at our church, of which you have seen some of their paintings this morning. There can be a real spiritual discipline around the attention and focus that art demands. It takes us to places of reflection and honesty. Art can lead us to Jesus!

Mind your business – know what you can do and do it to the best of your ability.

Paul adds, *“Work with your hands.”* Contribute to what needs doing.

And with these principles – ambitiously lead a quiet life, mind your business, work with your hands – *“your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.”*

It’s that faithfulness, that consistency, that reliability that lets people know that a change has happened in the lives of the Thessalonian Christians. It’s this inside out transformation that lets the city know that Jesus is alive, that Jesus is real, that Jesus is worthy of allegiance and trust.

What would Paul have to say to the church in Lethbridge, in Alberta, in Canada about our own reputation?

It certainly seems like we have ambition, but it is certainly not to live a quiet life. How strange would it be for Paul to hear Christians demand loudly that politicians let churches be open? How odd would it be for Paul to hear Christians make demands using words like “rights” and “liberty” and “freedom” at this time in history?

At the same time, Paul would hear people complain that they cannot worship and follow Jesus because they can’t get in the church building. And I can almost hear him ask, “What in the world are you doing with your time?”

Listen to the words and tone used by some believers today. Then contrast that with the words of Paul throughout his letters to the early church:

*You do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more, and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and 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.*

One of these things is not like the others. One of these things just don't belong!

Reputation is not built bombastically or loudly. It is built in small ways. And when reputation is built in small simple ways, it endures for a very long time.

Think of anyone in your life that has truly affected your life in Jesus. Think of those who led you to Christ. Think of those who showed you the way. Chances are the people that had the greatest effect on your faith are the ones that did so in faithful, consistent, quiet ways. Everyone clamors for the attention of the popular charismatic person. But we are truly impacted by the genuine, small and honest living people. That genuine and honest reputation is what has pointed us confidently to Jesus Christ.

Back to the Thessalonians! It seems that Paul is applying a lot of pressure to them. "You are doing a great job of loving others. Now do more!" "Your reputation is what will carry the Good News of Jesus forward!" This seems like a lot of pressure, for anyone, let alone people that were from the early church in a city hostile to their existence!

It may seem like Paul is asking for a lot. It seems like God is asking for a lot. But everything God is asking for, God has provided.

In 1 Thessaolians 4 Paul reminds them that they have **the commands of God**. They have instructions concerning how to live.

Paul reminds them they have **the Presence of God** with them. They have the fantastic promise that Jesus left them – I will never leave you nor forsake you.

They have the **indwelling power of the Holy Spirit**. They are equipped. They are empowered. They are filled.

All that God ASKS of you God has already provided FOR you.

Look to the Thessalonians. Look to Paul. LOOK TO JESUS. For a pattern of life that will certainly give you problems. But it is also a life where you have a good conscience with God and with people.

Church I ask of you, I beg of you, let's get in trouble for the right reasons. Let's not be in trouble for being meddlesome. Or being combative. Let's not get in trouble for being loud and

abrasive. Jesus, Paul and the Thessalonians have taught us that following Jesus is enough trouble of its own.

Instead, in faithfulness to Jesus, let's be ambitiously quiet. Let's mind our business and do it well. Let's work hard at whatever is before us. Let's realize that the reputation that we build in this manner brings enduring glory and attention to Jesus and the way he calls us to follow.