

## What'S So Bad About Busybodies?

Why Meddling Is Sin

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Imagine you were relaxing around the house one day and a loud knock on the door interrupts your leisure. You go to the door, and answer it, and you find two policemen standing on your porch.

One of them says, "Are you Mr. So-and-so (or Mrs. So-and-so)?" And you say, "Yes."

And he replies, "Well, I have a warrant for your arrest."

Obviously, you are stunned! As far as you know, you hadn't broken any laws, done anything illegal. So, you finally say after you get over your surprise, "What am I under arrest for?" And the officer says, "Meddling. You are a busybody. I have to take you downtown."

Now that seems pretty preposterous to us, doesn't it? But, according to God's word, it is not that far wrong. God doesn't come down with a legion of angels and arrest you for meddling, or for being a busybody, but nonetheless, meddling—being a busybody—is a sin analogous in this example to a crime.

You might recall that in my last sermon, I was going through (right near the end) I Peter 4:15. If you will turn there we'll open with reading this.

If you will remember, I had suddenly stopped in my tracks upon reading this because even though I had read this verse a dozen times or more, it was the first time I noticed something. Let's read just this one verse.

**I Peter 4:15** But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.

And then in my sermon I looked at that and I wanted to go smoothly into verse 16, and I suddenly stopped. The thought had went through my head, "Now isn't that something!" Peter lumps murderers, thieves, evil doers, and busybodies all into one big category. I thought, "Hmmm. That's pretty interesting! How can that be?"

How bad is it, really, to be a meddler, or a busybody, compared to knifing somebody, or

What's So Bad About Busybodies? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

robbing them on the road, or just being plain downright evil? That got me to thinking, and out popped this sermon! What is so bad about busybodies? Why does the Bible take such a stern view of meddling?

We will see by the time this is over (I hope I'll be able to explain it!) that this sin has several tentacles that reach into various areas of our Christian lives, and has a great impact upon our relationships both with God, and with other people. That's what makes it so bad.

While we're here in I Peter 4:15, we will examine the word translated as "busybody." Many of you have the New King James, and you will see in the margin the word "meddler." That is a very good translation of this word—a meddler.

I don't know how many of you know the word, *hapaxlegomenon*. I know some of you do, because you have written, or talked about it. It is a fancy, scholarly word that means, "only occurs once."

This Greek word *allotriepiskopos* is a compound word—two normal Greek words stuck together—it is only found in this one spot (in the Bible). Because of this, and its compound nature, some commentators believe that Peter made it up or that he coined the term.

This *allotriepiskopos* (how do those Greeks get their mouths around these words?) literally means, "Not one's own overseer." "Not one's own" is one word, and "overseer" is the other.

It means thus, "One who oversees other's matters, or other's affairs." "Not one's own overseer." I don't know if you caught it, but the word *episkopos* is in there. *Episkopos* is the Greek word for "overseer," sometimes translated as "shepherd," and often translated as "bishop."

It could be a good thing—this *allotriepiskopos*—if it was someone like a steward of an estate who was assigned to be the caretaker of another's matters. Or like an executor of a will, someone who is appointed to look over another's affairs after his decease.

However, in this one time, and in the normal Greek (which is only used a couple of other times in the classics, and not quite in this same context either), it is a negative term. It means a person who takes it upon himself to interfere in another person's matter.

If you will turn to II Corinthians 10 we will see something from the apostle Paul in which

What's So Bad About Busybodies? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

he doesn't use the term, but he alludes to this very practice. He uses himself as an example of someone who doesn't do this.

**II Corinthians 10:12-16** For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. We, however, will not boast beyond measure, but within the limits of the sphere which God appointed us—a sphere which especially includes you. For we are not overextending ourselves (as though our authority did not extend to you), for it was to you that we came with the gospel of Christ; not boasting of things beyond measure, that is, in other men's labors, but having hope, that as your faith is increased, we shall be greatly enlarged by you in our sphere, to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's sphere of accomplishment.

Paul here describes what Peter means. He explains that even as an apostle, his authority has limits. Remember and keep in the back of your mind that the word that Peter coined for this is *allotriepiskopos*. *Episkopos* is overseer, one having authority. He is talking about an overseer who has stepped outside the bounds of his authority, and meddles in areas he has not been given responsibility for.

Even an Apostle has a sphere. It simply means "an area over which a person has responsibility."

Now in this case, Paul was, I think, primarily thinking of a geographical area over which he had been given certain authority. We might not say geographical, but Paul has been given the specific appointment to preach to the gentiles.

In divvying up the responsibilities in the places where the apostles went, Paul had been given a certain sphere of influence, a sphere of responsibility, a sphere of authority; and he was not going to encroach into someone else's—Peter's or John's or any other's—area of responsibility.

So, Paul was saying that it would not be wise to move beyond what he had been given, and that he would not do that. Why should he boast or glory in something that is another man's responsibility? He was going to go specifically to those people that God had told him to go to.

Now notice in verse 13 that it says that God had appointed him, or "us" (he means the

What's So Bad About Busybodies? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

apostles) but within the limits of their sphere which God had appointed them. This is very important because in terms of the church, especially in terms of the ministry, they have been set apart for a specific responsibility. It is important for a minister not to go beyond that specific calling and appointment.

But, we should not limit this appointment of responsibility just to apostles, just to ministers, or even to the church, or matters concerning the church, because God has given us all a sphere of influence, responsibility, and authority; and each one of those has limits.

If we are a father, we have certain responsibilities and authority, and limits to that authority. The same thing with mothers. Same thing with children. Same thing with elders, and deacons in the church. Same things with employers and employees.

We find that God even says in Romans 13 that He has appointed our governmental leaders to their areas of responsibility. The implication is that He can take them down at will if they step outside that certain responsibility that He has given them.

Let's not limit this sphere of responsibility idea just to the church. It includes aspects of our lives far beyond what we might call normal church activities. God has given us all a sphere of responsibility which we must stay within, and not go beyond. Now of course, our best example of this is Jesus Christ.

Let's look at two examples of this where He refused to go beyond His sphere of responsibility. First, let's start in Luke 12, verses 13, and 14. This is the prologue to the parable of the rich fool. I just want to pick up these two verses to show His response to someone—a man out of the crowd—who wanted Him to do something that was beyond His area of responsibility at the time.

**Luke 12:13-14** Then one from the crowd said to Him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." But He said to him, "Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?"

We don't need to go any farther because then He goes into the parable.

Even our Lord and Master Jesus Christ would not go beyond His area of authority. And His area of authority was one that God had specifically given Him. He was supposed to live His life a certain way. He was a man like us. He was to do the things He had to do to preach the gospel and then give His life in sacrifice as our Redeemer and build the

What's So Bad About Busybodies? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

church. But within all those responsibilities, within all his sphere of influence He had not been given the responsibility at the time, or the authority, to be a judge, or an arbitrator in matters such as these.

And so He refused to go beyond the powers and the authority that He had been given.

We might say that had He done this, He would have taken the job of someone else. He would have been meddling in the affairs of, oh let's say, a justice of the peace. Or, one of the elders at the gate, or some other person who had been put into a legal position whose job it was to arbitrate or judge matters such as inheritances. And Jesus didn't have any purpose, any right, to put his finger in that pie, because God had not given Him that as part of His sphere of influence.

We know and are told in other places that He has been given the responsibility and authority to be judge of all. We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. But when does that appointment take place?

We could say that it took place once He was received up into Heaven, and it began at that point, legally, because He had qualified to be our judge. But that was after this happened in Luke 12. It will come into its fullness in the judgment. It is happening to us right now. Judgment is on the house of God right now. But at this time He had not been given the responsibility to judge. So if He had stepped outside of that, His sphere, He would have been guilty of sin, taking another's responsibility.

So, He overcame the temptation. Speaking of temptations, let's go to Luke 4. This is another example in which He refused to go beyond His sphere. This is the temptation after the 40 days and 40 nights of fasting.

**Luke 4:5-8** Then the devil, taking Him up on a high mountain, showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, "All this authority I will give You, and their glory; for this has been delivered to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore, if You will worship before me, all will be Yours. And Jesus answered and said to him, "Get behind Me, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the LORD your God, and Him only you shall serve.'"

Now this is a very similar example to what we just saw in Luke 12, except the context is not judgment, but rulership, and glory. Satan is correct when he said that he had the authority to give rulership to Jesus, because it was his to give.

What's So Bad About Busybodies? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

He could have given Him all the kingdoms of the world. But that wouldn't have been right. It would have been before the time. Jesus understood that the timing and manner of becoming King of Kings via Satan's appointment would be illegitimate. And it would be disastrous to God's plan. If He stepped outside the sphere of responsibility that He'd been given for that particular time then the whole plan of God would have gone up in smoke.

So, how can we take these two examples and put them into an application to us?

We cannot to presume to take an office, or authority that is promised to us, but has not yet been given. These things that I have mentioned here—the judgment and the kingship, and the glory (three things)—had been promised to Jesus, but He refused to take them until the proper time, until He had qualified to have them, until God wanted Him to have them.

The same thing can be a temptation to us to go beyond what God has given to us. By doing so, we meddle, we become a busybody in affairs that are not ours to control, to partake in, or to have anything to do with whatsoever.

Let's see this in I Corinthians 6. This is also in terms of judgment. Here the Corinthian church had begun making lawsuits against one another, and Paul was castigating the people there in the church because they had already been given the authority to judge matters among themselves within the church. There were certain ones who should have been wise enough to be able to work these matters out.

But, notice what Paul says here:

**I Corinthians 6:2** Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world will be judged by you, are you unworthy to judge the smallest matters?

He is basically saying that if we're going to have this great responsibility of judging the world, we should be practicing it in our own lives—to judge our small matters in our own lives right now.

**I Corinthians 6:3** Do you not know that we shall judge angels? [He ups the ante!] How much more, things that pertain to this life?

What's So Bad About Busybodies? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

These are promised offices. Promised positions that we have. They are still future. We have not been given, just as Christ had not been given, the authority to judge during this physical life. So Paul says that we have this to look forward to, but we have to use this physical life in preparation for that.

Back to Romans 14 and let's pick up verse 4 and get another side to this.

**Romans 14:4** Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

We have the other side of the coin here. Yes, God has given us this promise of being judges, kings, and priests in the world tomorrow, but He has not given us the authority to be judges now. We are to be making judgments, and learning how to do this. But, right now, unless we have been appointed to a certain position in which these judgments must be made, if we take it upon ourselves to make those judgments, then we are stepping into the muck. We have gone beyond our sphere.

What he is saying here is that if we decide to take this into our own hands to judge another man's servant (think of it this way: Every other man is God's servant) judging other people for the things that they do, then we have started to be presumptuous. It is meddling in another's matters.

Jesus would have been meddling in somebody else's affairs had He decided to arbitrate that dispute. He would have been what is called in the Bible a busybody—someone who is doing something that he has not been called to do, or not been given that authority to do.

Let's get a little bit of practical instruction here on this matter in Matthew 7:3-5—part of the Sermon on the Mount, the section on judgment—the chapter that begins with "Judge not, that you be not judged!" which is very similar to what Paul said there in Romans 14:4.

**Matthew 7:3-5** And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck from your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

What's So Bad About Busybodies? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

This is the practical instruction on this matter that Jesus gives us. In a word we're not qualified. If you want to break these three verses down into anything, that is it. We're not qualified to judge, to make these judgments. Setting ourselves up to judge another to "help" him in whatever problem that he may happen to have is self-exalting, proud, presumptuous, vain in terms both of vanity and being futile, and (as Jesus says) hypocritical, because we're guilty of the same problem. In fact, Jesus implies here that our problems are worse! Our problems are planks versus specks in the other person's eye.

And, the one that I haven't mentioned but is the great overriding problem here is that it abrogates to ourselves a prerogative of God. He is the Judge. What are we doing taking one of His jobs from Him? James says in James 4:12, "Who are you to judge another?"

It is rather harsh the way that he puts that. "Who are you to take upon yourself the authority to judge this other person?" "Have you become a judge of the law?" he says. That is what happens when you take it upon yourself to judge another person.

OK. We've spent enough time on *allotriepiskopos*. That's what this whole section has been about. Let's go to the other New Testament word for busybody.

That word is *periergos*. *Peri*, if you know your Greek prepositions (and all of you school kids should know this) means "around." Sometimes it means "about" in terms of being around. *Ergos* means "to work." So what does this word (*periergos*) mean? It means to work about, or to work around. It suggests being busy at trifles. It suggests puttering about, flitting here, fluttering there, doing this, or that.

Think of a piece of property. You have a job of mowing this piece of property. Let's say that it is a couple of acres. It is mostly lawn.

Well, someone who is guilty of *periergos* would mow a little here, and then go do something else. And then come back and mow some more about the periphery of the property, but never get his job done because he is busy at trifles—he flits from here to there, never putting in a whole day's work.

Thus, because of this idea—working about, or working around something, that you should be doing—it came to mean "being efficient," or "over-busy." Rather than being seriously engaged in work, one is busy at not one's own responsibilities but rather interfering in other people's responsibilities.

Someone who is *periergos* was always sticking his nose into other people's affairs



What's So Bad About Busybodies? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

because he was not busy enough in his own. He was avoiding his own work. But, since he is around the periphery, he is always able to look over the fence and see what somebody else is doing. Checking out where they are going, and who is coming to their house, and what kind of things they buy, or engage in, or whatever it might be.

It is always somebody who is not working at his own affairs, but rather sticking his nose into somebody else's.

Let's see one of these in II Thessalonians 3. We'll read verse 6 and then jump down to verse 10.

In the New King James, this section is titled, "Warning against Idleness." That is the backdrop to all of this. Paul writes:

**II Thessalonians 3:6** But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us.

Just notice that he starts this by talking about disorderly conduct.

**II Thessalonians 3:10-12** For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

The emphasis is on "own."

Evidently what had happened is that some in Thessalonica (after Paul's first letter) had concluded that Christ was about to come. And so they quit their jobs. They were just waiting for Him to come. And, Christ didn't come, and didn't come, and didn't come; and so they were just sitting around just mooching off the rest of the brethren who had continued to work. And because they didn't have anything to do, they started sticking their noses into places where it didn't belong.

Their idleness, which Paul was here warning about, caused them to become busybodies.

What's So Bad About Busybodies? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

They spent their days meddling, gossiping, interfering, creating disorder and confusion within the Church. Paul had to write very sternly. In order to correct this thing he said that if there is anybody in there that is doing this, nobody in the church is supposed to give them food. "We'll have no more of this mooching off the brethren. They're going to learn that if they're going to live and be in this church, they are going to get themselves a job, and support themselves. We will not tolerate anymore anybody living off the church. Unless, of course, there is the proper need."

Paul had to lay down the law. These people had started off with a bad judgment call about what Paul had written in the first letter. Then they deteriorated into annoying meddling busybodies, mooching off the church.

He uses a play on words here in verse 11 where he says "not working at all, but are busybodies." It is actually a type of pun. It is hard to bring it into the English from the Greek. They both have the word *ergon* in them.

Working, or to work, is *ergon*. And busybody is *periergos*. So, what he says here some people have translated literally, "Not working at all, but working about," or you could say, "Not busy, but busybodies," which is kind of how the *New King James* chose to translate it.

Today, we might say, "Idle hands, or an idle mind, are the Devil's playground." Matthew Henry on this section comments:

"If we are idle, the Devil and a corrupt heart will soon find us something to do."

That is so very true. The person who doesn't have anything to do will find something to do. Chances are about even that it will be wrong, unless one has a pretty good grasp of his own will and wants to actually produce something while he's not working.

The Bible frequently exhorts us to keep busy. This isn't "busy work." This isn't busy for the sake of being busy. It means to labor, or to be working; to keep ourselves occupied with things to do.

In fact, God puts it directly into the Ten Commandments. Commandment number four, "Six days shall you labor, and do all your work..."

So, we see that if we are getting into some sort of meddling, some sort of poking our

What's So Bad About Busybodies? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

nose where it's not to be, we're in danger of breaking the fourth commandment. Because we're not working on those six days in which God has given us to labor, just like He labored those six days, and then rested on the Sabbath.

John 5:17 says, "The Father Himself works, and I work..." and we're to follow their example. They are busy Beings! Not busy bees, but busy Beings! They are constantly involved in their way of life, in ruling, in working with us.

Now, they aren't busybodies, though. They have perfect wisdom and know everything that is wise to make us grow up into them. But, we don't have that wisdom. We can't do things like that. So, we have to be occupied with profitable things in terms of work.

This doesn't mean that we should be workaholics. But, it does mean that we have to keep ourselves busy in the things that we have been given to do.

And if we do, if we keep ourselves busy in the things that we've been given to do, and it isn't hard, we will not have time to step out of our sphere of responsibilities. And, the old truism, "Busy hands are happy hands" is really true!

If one is engaged in mind and body in some wholesome activity, there is little time and opportunity for mischief and sin. This is one of the things that kept Jesus on the straight and narrow.

It says there in Acts 10, I believe, that "He went about doing good." He was engaged, both mind and body, in doing good and following God's law. There were fewer opportunities for Him to sin, or to engage in something that would be wrong.

It is not surprising that often the most troublesome church members are those who are unemployed. Just as Paul shows in this example here. It is not because they are in financial trouble. Usually, God provides whatever is necessary to take care of their financial problem, whether third tithe, a loan, or whatever to tide them over. That is usually the easy part. The hard part is the free time that they have.

Frequently (I can speak for myself as a minister) it is the unemployed people that have time to correct the ministry about some point of doctrine, or some remark from their last sermon, or something they may have said fifteen years ago in a sermonette. Or, these people have the time to "counsel" their friends and brethren.

So, they end up sticking their noses into other people's problems.

What's So Bad About Busybodies? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Let's see an example of something like this. This is not exact, but it is close enough. It is in I Timothy 5. Paul was speaking of young widows here, younger unmarried women with too much time on their hands. It is interesting how he phrases all of this. Paul is giving instruction to the ministry about how to handle church support for people, in this case, widows.

**I Timothy 5:11-13** But refuse the younger widows; for when they have begun to grow wanton against Christ, they desire to marry, having condemnation because they have cast off their first faith. And besides they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house, and not only idle but also gossips and busybodies, saying things which they ought not.

Now this is very similar to what I had mentioned about my own experience regarding people who are unemployed. If they are unemployed for any period of time, if they don't have strength of will, they learn to be idle.

It is a difficult Greek construction this phrase, "Learn to be idle..." I think that the New International Version, although I normally don't like it, gets this one right: "They get into the habit of being idle."

They get into the habit of being idle. That is how the NIV translates this. It's not that they sit down and study how to be idle, but over a period of time (they may start out gang busters looking for a job, and being involved in something using their spare time in a profitable manner) inertia sets in.

Notwithstanding their good intentions, they start rising a little bit later, taking their time doing this or that. And they find over time that it is far easier to sit around and drink their coffee, call their neighbors or brethren, chew the fat, talk about this person or that person:

"How are they doing?"

"Oh fine!"

"But you know they have this problem."

"Oh, do they?"

"Yes. Their marriage is not real good."

What's So Bad About Busybodies? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

"Well you know I went through a problem back a few years ago. Maybe I'll give them a call and I can give them some advice. It is tried and true! It worked for me. If they need me to, I'll go over, and I'll watch their kids for them..."

And pretty soon they are fully involved in somebody's marital crisis when they should not have even known about it.

Now, if you will notice just in the last few moments that being a busybody is linked with gossip, and tale-bearing, and scandal-mongering. They usually go hand in hand.

Once a person starts messing in other people's business, before long he's telling his friends what is happening and how wonderfully he is advising and helping these people. And soon all sorts of rumors are flying back and forth about so and so, and this and that.

And it is only a matter of time, because it is like gravity, that a relationship conflict is going to erupt.

And what we find is that often it is going to come back to bite the person who is the meddler. What do we have then in the church? War! And disunity!

Let's show you an Old Testament graphic image of what happens to such a person. Leave it to the Hebrews to come up with a way to make it stick into your mind what you should not do.

**Proverbs 26:17** He who passes by and meddles in a quarrel not his own is like one who takes a dog by the ears.

And, just a few inches away from those dog's ears are big sharp teeth!

So, what we see is that when you meddle in other people's affairs, it comes back to bite you. No one wins when meddling is happening.

So, what does Paul advise?

I see this in my family. For these days and times, I have as fairly large family—four kids. Johnny and Aric have formed a kind of bond. John is ten, and Aric is two. I don't know exactly why they have this affinity for one another, but they do. We just have to deal with

What's So Bad About Busybodies? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

it. Sometimes that affinity gets in the way of how Beth and I parent—rear—our children.

For instance, this happened this morning. It wasn't so bad. It didn't turn out badly. But, it could have.

Beth has been trying to potty train Aric. Being two and a half, he's getting to that time he should be trained. He did a no-no. You have to know Aric, he is a sweet little boy, but he is almost as stubborn as Jared. That's bad. We have some hard-headed kids. Probably every parent says this about their kids at some point, but Aric has been resisting, and resisting, and resisting, and so Beth let him have it.

He was basically being stubborn. He is refusing when he is supposed to go to the potty and do his business. He has been digging in his heels and won't do it. She did not spare the rod as biblically instructed just to get through that very thick steel barrier that he has at the front of his forehead.

Anyway, he started wailing as all kids do. I don't think it is as bad as he made it out to be. Of course, no parent does. Beth didn't hurt him. It was just a smack to remind him that he needs to get himself to the potty. That is the only way that he's going to be a big boy.

So, he lets go of Beth, and goes to Johnny. Johnny, of course, full of sympathy for his younger brother, picks him up and puts his head on his shoulder, and generally meddled in our affairs.

The problem with this is that Aric uses Johnny as a tool in his relationship with Beth.

"Well, if you're not going to be nice to me, I'll go give Johnny hugs."

Sometimes Johnny inserts himself willingly, but oftentimes because Aric is playing him, and Johnny doesn't know and is being made use of. I have to tell Johnny, "No! Don't let him do that! Mommy is trying to teach him something."

But, I don't know that Johnny completely understands. He probably does now since I'm using him as an illustration.

That can be applied spiritually as well.

Think about it in terms of our Great Parent, God. Oftentimes He spans us. He gives us something to remember our sins by. If we go running to somebody else for comfort, or

What's So Bad About Busybodies? by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

we go running to some certain person, or allow somebody to insert himself into that process of God's chastisement, and His teaching, suddenly the whole process becomes much more complicated than it otherwise would have.

Another factor has been inserted into the relationship. Instead of it being a one-on-one relationship where direct teaching is being related from God to the person, now there is a three-way problem.

Every time you add an additional person to these things the opportunity for friction, for confusion, for you-name-it things to go wrong, increases.

So, we're getting into some of the reasons why being a meddler in another person's affairs is so disastrous, and sinful. Paul's advice:

**I Thessalonians 4:9-12** But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more [in love]; that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.

Paul's advice is to increase in love for the brethren, try to live quietly and unobtrusively, mind your own affairs, and keep yourself busy in productive labor.

Now this brings up a seeming paradox.

**Philippians 2:4** Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

Is there a contradiction between that and not meddling in other people's affairs? Actually, there is not. This is resolved quite easily by the "Golden Rule: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Yes, we are to help. We are to look out for other people's interests. But, how often do you want people to meddle in your affairs? I would say that probably 99.9% of people, if I asked them the question, "Would you like somebody to interfere in your life?" would say, "No. People should get their noses out of my business."

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In fact, this whole nation has turned into one big advertisement to the whole world for the "right to privacy." Now we have homosexuals and what-not having convinced the Supreme Court that their right to privacy trumps their breaking of God's Law in terms of commandment number seven.

But, most people don't want other people to interfere in their lives. And when they do, they ask for it, don't they?

Let's say Joe and Mary are having a marriage problem. Now, a busybody would go and insert himself between them, and say, "What can I do to help?"

A godly person would say, "They are having a problem. Let them work it out for themselves. And if they want any advice from me, they will have to ask for it." Or, "They will seek counsel from the ministry."

It is one thing if someone asks for help, and when that happens we should give it to the best of our abilities. It says in James 4 that if a person knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is a sin. It also says in Galatians that those of us who are strong should bear with those who are weak.

If people are having a problem, we should build them up and edify them if they want it and ask for it. If they don't ask for it, we are to keep our minds on our own affairs, and not theirs. Thus, Paul says to mind your own business, because someone is working with them. That is God Himself.

Consider that our interference in another's life (I mentioned this earlier) may be complicating God's work with that person.

Whether we realize it or not, whether we have made this association or not, our meddling in another person's affairs says about us, the meddler, that we have more confidence in our own solution than we do in God's.

Do you know what that is? It is idolatry!

It is placing ourselves, and our own "wisdom" above God. It is as if you are saying, "God, you have had your try. Now let me get in here, and roll up my sleeves, and solve this problem for you."

Whereas, God has a plan for that other person and He is taking him step-by-step-by-step through this problem. And then we come in and interfere.



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Think about this: Do we really want to bear the responsibility for someone else's salvation? Do we really want to bear responsibility for someone else's character growth? Maybe their salvation is more assured, but if we had not meddled in their problem, they would have learned that point of character a lot sooner.

Do we want to be the one who may make or break that person's relationship with God? Do we want to be, let's say, that third person who may steer the original person from his relationship with God to a relationship with us, the marriage breaker?

Do we want to see ourselves in that light, as a home buster? God has a covenant relationship with each one of His children. If we come in riding our "white horse" and wearing our white hats with the best of intentions, but (as the saying goes) we pave the road to hell for that other person, what is our judgment going to be?

That makes meddling pretty serious, doesn't it?

That is why I think Peter puts meddling in with terms of murder, thievery, and evil doing. The ramifications of getting in between God and one of His children are disastrous.

So, over the course of this sermon, we've seen that meddling—being a busybody—has some serious ramifications: It directly or indirectly breaks the first commandment (idolatry): Presumptuousness, self exaltation—putting ourselves in place of God, and worshipping ourselves thinking that our solutions to somebody else's problems are better than His.

The third commandment: We saw here in I Thessalonians 4:12 that when we become a meddler and create problems we are being a poor witness. We are not bearing the name of God in a proper manner. We are not glorifying Him before the gentiles, or those who walk outside as it said there. We are actually stirring up the nest by inserting ourselves into other people's lives.

As I mentioned before, it also breaks the fourth commandment in terms of idleness, or not working. The Sabbath commandment is really far reaching in this instance.

And, it also breaks the ninth commandment, bearing false witness, because oftentimes as mentioned, being a meddler, or busybody includes gossip, and tale-bearing.

So, it is not a minor offense at all. In several ways it breaks both of the great commandments. It either destroys, or harms our relationship with God, and it does the

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same to our relationship with our brethren.

So, what should we be doing?

Philippians 2:12 is a good place to start:

**Philippians 2:12** Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling;

Let's read that again!

"...Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling..."

We have enough on our own plate not to be eating off somebody else's. Our Christian lives are full of minute-by-minute decisions that we need to be making, all having something to do with our salvation. And if we're getting involved in another person's life, and in their salvation, in one way or another we're probably neglecting our own.

And so if we keep ourselves busy, if we do the work at hand, which is our own Christian life and walk toward the kingdom of God, we're going to stay out of these disastrous messes in other people's lives.

We have enough problems of our own. Don't make more by inviting other people's.

Let's close now in II John 8. It is only slightly out of context, but the principle is sound:

**II John 8** Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward.