

“A Lifestyle of Love” – 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

This morning, we’re picking up where we left off last week. No surprise there. You know I like to preach through entire books of the Bible verse-by-verse. But this week, we really are finishing Paul’s thought on a specific subject and that is the subject he introduced in verse 1 of this chapter.

Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; (1 Thessalonians 4:1)

As Christians, we must aspire to live our lives in a manner that pleases God, not so we can be saved – Jesus takes care of that -but because we are saved. Pleasing God needs to be our goal every waking moment, to bring glory to our Savior, to exalt Him by the way we live. And of course, we won’t do so perfectly. That’s why Paul says we should “abound more and more”. We need show continual improvement. You need to be more Christ-like today than you were last week!

Part of that involves knowing what God wants from us. That’s why we all need to be students of the Bible. We need to learn what God’s will is, and it really isn’t hard because He wrote it down for us.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Paul was really explicit in verse 3.

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

God wants us to be sanctified, that is, set apart for a holy purpose. After telling us that, Paul begins to give us some examples of what a sanctified lifestyle looks like.

Last week, we looked into his teaching on sexual morality. Paul tells us that we are to possess our bodies in an honorable way. We are not to follow the way of the world. We are to strive for sexual purity, not passion and lust.

This week, he shows us that we need to engage in a lifestyle of love and he shows us what that looks like. Four characteristics ... four commands, if you will: love more, strive for peace, mind your own business, do your own work. Or, to put it negatively: Don’t be self-centered, don’t be a fanatic, don’t be a busybody and don’t be a slacker.

Let’s go to the word.

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; 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. (1 Thessalonians 4:9-12)

Paul starts out with a bit of commendation.

But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you ...

What does he mean by that? Well, these Thessalonians are already doing a pretty good job of loving one another already, not only within their local church, but also throughout Macedonia. This is a really good thing; they should be commended. You know, the very

same thing could be said of Canyon Community Church. This is a fellowship that demonstrates love for one another. I'm so thankful for that, but we don't want to rest on our laurels ... we can do even better.

Now, you need to understand that the Greek word translated brotherly love is *philadelphia*. (*φιλαδελφία*). It isn't *agapeo* (*ἀγαπάω*). Remember, *agapeo* is that self-sacrificial, godly love that provides what is needed regardless of what is deserved. You can *agapeo* somebody even if you don't like them. (And you should.) This is a volitional sort of love – "I'm going to do what's good for you even when I don't feel like it."

But to have *philadelphia* is to be kindly affectionate toward someone. It is to enjoy being in their presence. That's why it's called brotherly love and it is a mark of Christian fellowship.

I like ... I really like being in the presence of the saints! It wasn't always that way. When I was a new Christian, I'd go to church, but I didn't want to hang with Christians. What happened to me? Paul tells us.

... for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another ...

And that word translated "love" is *agapeo*. You see, when you *agapeo* somebody, it naturally leads to *philadelphia*. For example, I've found, and I'll bet you have too, if you start praying for somebody that is giving you some sort of trouble, pretty soon you have a hard time hating that person. *Agapeo* leads to *Philadelphia* and God teaches us to *agapeo*.

... for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another ...

When you turn to Jesus for your salvation, when you confess Him as Lord of your life and believe God has raised Him from the dead, He gives you the Holy Spirit. In fact, it is the Holy Spirit that enables you to believe in and trust in Jesus. We see that up in verse 8.

God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit. (1 Thessalonians 4:8b)

It is exactly what Jesus promised:

And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you. (John 14:16-17)

God the Holy Spirit becomes our teacher.

But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you. (John 14:26)

The Thessalonians already displayed love for one another because God was at work in them. Paul wanted them to do even better. He wants us to do even better.

But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more

Don't be self-centered; love more!

Paul's second admonition is that we strive for peace.

... that you also aspire to lead a quiet life,

This is really an ironic statement in the Greek. In fact, it's almost a pun. The word translated aspire is *philotimeomai* (*φιλοτιμέομαι*). It literally means to be fond of honor. It has the sense of striving for, or laboring for or exerting maximum effort so that people would notice you and give you kudos. It's working to improve your brand so people will

tell you how great you are. But the word translated as “quiet life” is hēsuchazō (ἡσυχάζω). And it means to be at rest, or to be tranquil. It could mean to refrain from labor. It is to be at peace.

So, what is Paul saying here? He is saying, instead of exerting all this effort to get yourself noticed, exert the same effort to be found at peace. Strive to be unassuming. You don’t need to be the center of attention.

A lot of Christians stumble at this point. A lot of churches have forgotten this lesson. It is not about how much noise we make. It is about being found at peace.

Now, don’t get me wrong, we should be about sharing the gospel. That is our job, to testify of Christ. But if we spend our lives agitated, fearful, shrill, angry, judgmental and then we try to tell somebody that they need to accept Jesus because He will give them peace ...

“Oh, you mean, like you have peace? I think I’ll pass, thank you very much.”

What does scripture say?

*But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, **with meekness and fear**; (1 Peter 3:15)*

Don’t be a fanatic; strive for a lifestyle of peace.

Next, Paul says that as Christians, we are to mind our own business.

*... that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, **to mind your own business** ...*

Those two points dovetail nicely together. If you are leading a quiet life, you probably aren’t a busybody.

This reminds me of a line in an old song I first heard while I was in the service.

- i. “He can’t even run his own life;
- ii. I’ll be darned if he’ll run mine!”

But oh, how many Christians are really good at pointing out everyone else’s shortcomings? And how many prayer chains have the tendency to deteriorate into gossip chains?

And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell. (James 3:6)

Jesus taught explicitly on this subject:

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. (Matthew 7:4-5)

This doesn’t mean we should avoid holding one another accountable, but if we need to correct someone, we need to do so with the utmost humility and tenderness. The Bible says:

Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted. Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing,

he deceives himself. But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load. (Galatians 6:1-5)

Don't be a busybody; mind your own business.

Finally, Paul tells us that we need to do our own work. As Christians, we need to be industrious:

... work with your own hands, as we commanded you

He's telling us, "Don't be a slacker!"

Now to really understand what was going on in Thessalonica, we need to jump forward just a bit. You see, the Thessalonians were really excited about Christ's return. They were looking forward to it. In fact, they had to be encouraged by Paul, because they thought some of their brothers and sisters who had died would miss out. (More on that next week.) It's not a bad thing to be looking forward to Jesus coming back, but apparently, there were those among them who figured it was not worthwhile to continue to work. 'Hey, Jesus is coming back ... so why should I go to all this effort?' And these slackers were becoming a burden on the church. It continued to be a problem, so much so, that in Paul's second letter, he had to write:

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. (2 Thessalonians 3:10-11)

Biblical Christianity values diligent labor. In our day and age the "Puritan work ethic" is sometimes derisively noted. It's become a pejorative statement. If you work hard, you must be some kind of sucker. "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow you die!" they say.

But folks, the Puritan work ethic built this nation!

Human beings were designed to work. That's why it is so important for retired folks to find useful things to do. There is nothing wrong with retirement, but you need to keep yourself busy. And even when your body fails you completely, you can still contribute to the Lord's work by being a prayer warrior.

I guess I must be looking a little long in the tooth, because people keep asking me when I'm going to retire. My stock answer is "You don't retire from ministry." There will come a time when the Lord leads me away from this pulpit, but when He does, He will lead me to another form of ministry.

We are not to be slackers. We are to do our own work.

This passage describes a lifestyle of love. It is the way Christians need to relate to one another and to relate to the world at large.

By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35)

So, if you are a Christian; if you have trusted Jesus for your salvation, *live* in a manner that brings glory to Him. Don't be self-centered. Don't be a fanatic. Don't be a busybody. Don't be a slacker.

Instead, *love* more, strive for peace, *mind* your own business, and do your own work.

But why is this so important? Look again at verse 12:

... that you may walk properly toward those who are outside (1 Thessalonians 4:12a)

There's the first reason. We need to live lives that are attractive to unbelievers even when they persecute us. Especially when they persecute us. Can people see your faith in Christ by the way you conduct your life? Are you tranquil? Are you industrious? Are you honest? Do you display peace and joy?

And there is a second reason this is so important:

... that you may lack nothing. (1 Thessalonians 4:12b)

Now, this is not to say that Christians don't sometimes suffer want. Paul sometimes was hungry, suffering want, but as Christians, we don't want to be a burden to anyone. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. (Ephesians 4:28)

That is a lifestyle of love: Living unassuming lives, loving the brethren, looking out for one another's needs.

Just like Jesus met our greatest need.