

[1Th 4:9-12 ESV] 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.

Remember our context here.

Paul clearly laid out instructions for how the Thessalonians were **to handle their sexuality**. His approach was very direct and clear. He let them know just **how much is really at stake** in this sin that seems so harmless.

Then we move to verse 9 where Paul is actually **commending** them for how loving they have been to the other churches in their area.

I think this shows us even more clues into the Thessalonians' blindness to sexual sins. There appears to be a **disconnect** between what they might regard as **spiritual** stuff and **other life** stuff. Yes, God is interested in us loving our brothers. That is in the **spiritual** realm. That is **church** stuff. But what I do with my body. That isn't important. I think that is why Paul had to be so hard on that issue. It isn't that these people were committing **blatant disobedience**. They just may have thought that what they were doing with their bodies was **irrelevant** to anything spiritual.

Paul removed that disconnect. He knew that this issue had to be **clarified** and the position had to be presented in a **clear** and **solid** fashion because this was going to be a challenge for them to obey.

But as soon as he finishes the marching orders, it is as if he changes gears.

He moves into an area that they **DO** think is spiritual. And they are doing **very well** in THAT area. It makes a lot of sense. They are new believers. They have a lot to learn. At this point they need **instructions** about changes that are not intuitive to them more than they need rebukes about **refusing to obey**. They need to see what pleases Christ in **every area** of their lives. Because as we see in our text this morning, when they **understand what they are to do**, and when they **believe it is important**, they are serious about **doing it**.

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,

When I read this I chuckle. I think, well Paul, if they have **no need for anyone to write**, why are you writing?

He goes on to tell us in the next verse why he does. You can never love too much.

But let's think what it would be like to have **Paul** tell **us** that we show that we know enough about loving by the way we are loving. What a compliment that would be. In those places that the Thessalonians apply themselves, in those places they think are spiritual places, they do well.

Now, what does this next statement mean?

you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another

Those of us who are sensitive about doctrine look at this and think, it cannot mean what it seems to say. God doesn't just teach people without using scripture. And on first reading that is what this looks like.

Well, I don't think it would violate anything if that is what God is actually doing here. Part of the new covenant promise is that God will put the law in our hearts.

Hebrews 8:10 For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord:

**I will put my laws into their minds,
and write them on their hearts,
and I will be their God,
and they shall be my people.**

**11 And they shall not teach, each one his neighbor
and each one his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,'
for they shall all know me,
from the least of them to the greatest.**

So maybe the Thessalonians were being directly taught by God some things. But our text does not necessarily mean that. Think about it. Clearly God was not **directly teaching** the Thessalonians about sexual sins. It was **Paul's job** to do that. And Paul was doing it. And it looks like Paul assumed if he **did not** teach it to them, they were **not going to know it**. So might he think that same thing about **all** of the scriptural teaching, in spite of how this looks?

Well, how are we "**taught by God**"?

John 6 teaches us a little about this. Jesus was dealing with Jewish resistance, which was pretty normal. Then He says this.

44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day. 45 It is written in the Prophets, 'And they

will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me— 46 not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father. 47 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever believes has eternal life.

Here Jesus is making the idea of being “taught by God” synonymous with the Father drawing a person to Himself. The **content** is being **taught by Christ** and by the **Old Testament scriptures**. But when the Holy Spirit intervenes in our hearts, we hear what God has said but we see it in a new light. We are taught by God. If we believe, we believe because we have been taught by God.

So what Paul **could** be saying in our text is that I do not need to say much because you heard what **I was teaching** about love and you were **taught by God** that you **must** do it and **how** you must do it. It does not mean that they received direct supernatural revelation of God’s word. It could just mean that God opened their eyes to see it as it truly is. They were taught the Word of God by the Spirit of God. Another way of saying it would be they were taught by God.

Still another way of viewing it is, how do we know what love is? How are we taught that.

[1Jo 3:16 NIV] 16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters.

Anyone who knows what **real love is** knows it because Christ taught it to them **by example**. How do we know? We see what God taught us through Christ. We look at the example and we learn all kinds of things we need to know about love.

With as long as many of us have attended church, we too should be able to say that **we have been taught by God to love one another**. This does not need to be God showing up and speaking special new things to us verbally. No. The text does not require that. The point is that if you and I find ourselves truly loving brothers and sisters and enemies, it is because God has taught us how.

Let’s think about **what** was being taught by God. Love one another.

You know how many times that is mentioned in the New Testament? 69 times. Love your neighbor? 43 times. Love your enemy? 17 times.

You and I need to be very careful when dealing with Christ’s church. There are some reasons to create divisions in the church. But we need to be **very sure**

that we are not **violating love** if we do so. Truth matters a lot. Love for **God** always supersedes love for **one another**. And sometimes truth demands a divisive stand. But we had better make sure that we are spot on right. Love for one another is the most predominant theme in the New Testament and it is a commandment that Christ owns as His own. We will never love another brother too much. We might love him in a misguided fashion. But we will never have too much love for our brothers and sisters.

10 for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia.

How sweet this must have been for Paul to say. He knew it was true. The Thessalonians had a reputation as lovers of people. Thessalonica was a trade city. These people probably had contacts with people throughout Macedonia. And as they met believers from other areas, or as they led people to Christ in other areas, they expressed their love. They reached out to meet their needs without regard for personal expense that sprung joyfully from their relationship with God. And those affected would say, man those Thessalonian Christians sure are a loving people.

I hope **we** have that reputation. I hope those **we** encounter would say they sure to do love people. That is what people thought of the Thessalonians. What kind of reputation have we earned at Ferndale? Are there people who say that those people will do whatever it takes to help me through tough life situations? Would they say that we are willing to risk disfavor in an effort to present a message that could save their souls? Do you know of a way that you could improve in your loving those around you?

Again, if you want to know God's will for your life, I can say without hesitation that loving our **brothers** and **neighbors** and **enemies** is the absolute God's will for every believer.

The Thessalonians were doing that. Even though they may have been doing **some** things that were **really bad**, they were doing **this** right. We shouldn't be too surprised when we find things like that in the church. Being very wrong at a single point does not prove that a person is outside the fold, as long as they are willing to repent and submit to the will of God going forward.

Then Paul goes on to say:

But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more,

I am now older than I ever imagined myself ever being. I am 65. Of course my wife is much older than me. But 65 is pretty old. You know one of the beauties of the Christian life? You never accomplish perfection. There is

always something you can do better. If you are a bowler, you can bowl a perfect game. If you are a pitcher, you can pitch a perfect game. But if you are a Christian, you cannot love a perfect love. Christ did. But we cannot. There is always, always, always room to grow.

Andrew Young points out that Christian love may grow in a number of directions: “It may grow in breadth as it reaches out to embrace more of our fellow Christians. It may grow in depth as it enters more deeply into the hurts and joys of others. And it may grow in length as it forbears more patiently and forgives more heartily. A commitment to love others well will cause us to grow more and more in this grace.” When we think in these terms, most Christians will realize that we have been only wading in the shallow waters of the love that God has for us to know and to show. God invites us farther out into the depths, which we first experience in his boundless love for us in Christ and then are called to share more and more deeply with more and more people.

Richard D. Phillips, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Philip Graham Ryken, and Daniel M. Doriani, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2015), 140.

There are so many lifechanging prayers that we can pray in the Christian life. Maybe this week we should commit ourselves to praying **this** one.

Continually. Lord- **who** do you want me to express love to today and exactly **how** would you like me to express it? It is prayers like that that can turn our lives around. Maybe it will be your spouse. Maybe it will be another church member. Maybe it will be some unsaved person. But it is the kind of prayer that God will answer. God is quick to provide our lives with purpose.

Now, Paul challenged the Thessalonians to love even more. And that is always a safe challenge. Every pastor can challenge himself and others to **love more** and it will **never** be a mistake. After all, how could we ever reach the kind of love Christ gave us?

But now we go on to some practical instructions in the mundane day to day.

11 and to aspire to live quietly

Now Paul has not completely changed the topic here. He is still talking about living a life of love for others. And how is one way in which we do this?

We aspire to live quietly.

Love for others does not always take on dramatic qualities. A life well lived does not require using up the resources of the church. It does not put an unnecessary strain on others. That does not seem like much. But it matters. It allows the resources to be used on more urgent needs.

What does it mean to live quietly? The emphasis is not so much on the amount of noise. The word for quiet here means **undisturbed, settled**. We get the idea of peaceful instead of chaotic. The Thessalonians are not to live in a frantic way, not restless, not chaotic, but peaceful. They are not to be living in such a way that the church's resources are continually required to calm them down, to remediate their chaos. They are to learn how to do that themselves in order to live a quiet life.

and to mind your own affairs

Each of our households has stuff needing done. Any responsibility that was given to us by God that we do not attend to, for whatever reason, creates a burden on someone else. If we think we can bail out on a responsibility with no repercussions to our home and to our church, we are being foolish. Everything we **fail to do**, someone **else** will need to do. And everything they **must do** will **keep them** from doing something else. Another way Paul could have put this is, **do your job**. That is a spiritual thing. That is really a big deal. When you **don't do your job**, you **create a burden**. When you don't do your job, you are refusing to love those around you. Our jobs may not seem like **spiritual services**, but they **are**. Show me a man who will not work for a living and I will show you a man that creates utter chaos in a family. The same is true for women. Minding our own affairs is sort of the minimum spiritual requirement of a believer. Hopefully we will do more than this. But if we do **less** than this we **create a drain** on someone else. We essentially rob someone else of the service we should be doing. The time they spend to **mind our affairs** is stolen from them by us.

I know, this does not seem spiritual. But it is. Doing our jobs isn't the most we can do. But it is sort of the least we can do. If we bail out, we are hurting the body.

and to work with your hands

We get a better indicator of what Paul is shooting for in 2 Thess

[2Th 3:6-9 NIV] 6 In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers and sisters, to keep away from every believer who is idle and disruptive and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. 9 We did this,

not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate.

It is easy to think that simply doing one's job like the rest of the world does in order to pay bills and provide food, clothing and shelter to those who depend upon us really does not seem that spiritual. Everybody does that in the world. Isn't being spiritual like **abandoning all that** for the Lord. Isn't it just **trusting God** to provide all that stuff while we pray and study? Well. No. Jesus commands us, according to Paul, to provide financial resources for our families by our work. We cannot get an idea that this is **not part** of our service to Jesus.

Look how Paul handles it. He is telling believers to separate themselves from anyone who gets the idea that true spirituality abdicates normal human responsibility to provide. Guys, when you go to work every morning, you are obeying God. Take comfort in the drive to work. You are in the center of God's will. Work with your hands. Work with your mind. Not with eyeservice as man pleasers, but with sincerity of heart in the fear of God. It is a **noble and good** thing that you are doing.

Mothers, when you feed your kids every day, when you make sure they have clothes to put on, when you meet all kinds of needs, when you clean and order your homes, realize that this is all vitally important. If you fail to do it, someone else will pay the price. Yeah, it is hard. And it might not always get the **attention** that you wish it did. But know that if you do it as unto the Lord it will receive its just reward. Keep it up. It matters. It really, really matters. It is spiritual.

And there really isn't anyone left out in this. All of us have obligations and duties to fulfill. And all of them matter. Keep it up.

as we instructed you

Yeah, Paul is pretty good about instructing about even the most mundane duties. Do your jobs. Do what you were given to do. Never think that you can dodge your job without some loss to the kingdom. Do your job.

Now what is the result? What inevitably happens when a believer **lives as they should** in the common mundane tasks of life? Because He loves Jesus more than he loves anything else?

12 so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

Two things happen.

First, non believers will be confronted with an example of godliness. Now my guess is that our explanations may sometimes help with this witness. It may be good to tell the lookers-on that we **do what we do** the **way** we do it because we **love Christ**. We are doing our best to **honor Christ**. That is our motivation in everything that we do. **That** may have a greater impact on our fellow workers than just seeing what we do. But what we **do** and what we **say** must be congruent.

And the second effect is that we are **not dependent** on anyone. Now why is that a problem? Why is it a problem to be dependent on the church? Well, in some things being dependent upon the church is a good thing. We should be dependent upon the church to provide us fellowship. We should depend upon their counsel. We should depend upon their wisdom. We should depend upon them for lots of things.

But we should not depend upon the body to **provide us with** that which God has commanded us to **provide for ourselves**.

Men are to provide resources needed to provide what their family needs. Women are to use the resources their husbands provide to take care of the needs of their families. As those things happen, there is no strain placed upon the church to provide for those needs. Evidently that is good. That is what God wants.

Now there are times when God sees fit that, no matter what we do, we cannot provide for our families. That happens. And that is not a bad thing. But it is a bad thing when that happens because of our **unwillingness to work**. It is a bad thing when we bail out of our responsibility for any reason.

There is a sense that we are **dependent** upon God and we **can depend** upon the church to meet needs. But I think the point is we should never be unnecessarily dependent upon others because we have simply determined not to carry out our responsibilities. The church is never to be viewed as the welfare state. It is not to be viewed as a means of making our lives easier because someone there will **cover for us** if we do not want to do the **difficult work** in our lives.

Maybe a good application this week would be to continually ask God to guide us in loving those around us. "**Who** should I show love to and **how** should I show it." And keep in mind, God will answer prayers that are undeniably in Jesus's name.