

1 THESSALONIANS 4:9-12 "A Brotherly And Orderly Life"

Over the last couple of weeks we've looked at justification and sanctification as the working of God in the lives of His people.

Justification is the act of God whereby He declares us "not guilty" for the penalty of our sin, which we deserve to pay for, eternally separated from Him; but has, through the Son of God, Jesus Christ, paid that debt by taking our place by dying for our penalty even when He was without sin.

By faith, as we accept this free gift of forgiveness and eternal life, we come into the family of God to be separated unto our Lord and Savior to live lives that demonstrate that we are in fact sons and daughters of Christ.

This process of becoming conformed, more and more, into the image of Christ is a work of the Holy Spirit as we submit to our King and Lord, known as sanctification.

And it's in this light that Paul can encourage the Thessalonians to consider what it is to be an ambassador for Christ; a representative of our God in a world which rejects Him.

This is why Paul tells the Thessalonians in 1TH 4:7 "For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life."

It's not as though we've been called to be part of a family where we set the standard for behavior, but rather God has promised to be a part of our lives, filling us with the Holy Spirit to be those servants who are called out, set apart for a holy purpose, to bless the Lord as we love and serve Him by our service and love to others in the name of Christ and in His power.

And Paul recognizes the Spirit of God working in the lives of these people as he tells them in 1TH 4:9 "Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other."

This is an interesting statement because it testifies to the fact that God is at work in their lives. He is the one who has brought this band of believers together and He is the one who, as Paul says in PHI 1:6, "began a good work in them and will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."

Our sanctification is a supernatural work and Christ Himself is the one who is personally involved in our growth.

Paul speaks of their brotherly love in verse 9. This love is the love they have for one another as believers in Christ. In fact the Greek word for brotherly love is the same word we have in English describing the city of brotherly love; Philadelphia.

They loved each other. But, that brotherly love is motivated directly from the love of God in their lives. In that same verse 9 where Paul says, "for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other."

That second word for love in the Greek referring to love "taught by God" is *agapao* in the Greek which is a selfless love, a love which desires the best for others which is a love from God in action, not a love motivated by feelings.

Now, when Paul tells the Thessalonians, "Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.", he's not suggesting that these people exclude the means of growth which comes from being taught by another believer.

In fact, Paul records for us in EPH 4:11-13 "It was he [Christ] who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

And so, Paul isn't saying that being taught the things of God doesn't include the teachers and encouragers of God, but rather Paul is testifying to the supernatural love they possess which only God can give and which only He can teach in the spiritual sense.

Paul couldn't give that to them. He could only encourage them in that love of God. And that's what Paul says by using the Greek word *theodidaktos* which is literally translated "divinely instructed;" but not divinely instructed apart from the divine mandate to grow in the grace and **knowledge** of our Lord through His word.

By the way, in all of the things we learn concerning God and His ways, whether in a sermon like this or a small bible study like we have on Tuesday's or even in your personal devotions as you come

to the word reading and meditating upon it, we must still turn to God for the instruction He has for us.

I may explain the word but it is the Holy Spirit who takes the word and encourages us and motivates us and uses His word to change us into the image of Christ. The prophet Isaiah touches on this in ISA 54:13 "All your sons will be taught by the LORD, and great will be your children's peace."

Even Jesus quotes this portion of His word when He talks of how He will effectually change a person's heart to seek Him.

JOH 6:45 "It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me."

We need to listen to the Lord as we come to His word and come to Him in prayer. God is in the business of teaching us. When Jesus spoke to His disciples He once said to them, "But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you." (JOH 14:26)

What has Jesus said to you and me that the Spirit of God would remind us of? Well, only as we come to His word will we know. And so, as we take the attitude that, 'I want to learn from you Lord as I come to your word', will we begin to grow as He takes that living word and motivates us to move in the direction He has given us according to His word. It's all part of the supernatural sanctification process.

But, His teaching should not be like the teaching we may have received in school in our childhood. As kids we've all made this statement at least once in our lives. If you're anything like your own kids you've heard it on numerous occasions. "'Why do I have to learn this stuff, I'll never use it in the real world.'

'I can't stand diagramming sentences. In fact dad, when was the last time your employer asked you to diagram a sentence?'

'And what about you mom?' 'Has learning the formula for an isosceles triangle made you a better domestic engineer?'

It's true. As important as some of the things we've learned in life from textbooks are, not everyone will be able to use every bit of information in their particular niche in life.

But with God there isn't one single jot or tittle of His word that isn't important for every area of life. And quite honestly that's why we must be students of the word of God because it will take a lifetime as the word of God has its effect on us and the Spirit of God works in and through us as we submit to His teaching.

Paul recognized how the Holy Spirit was working in their lives. In verse 10 he says, "And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia."

But, then he goes on to essentially say, despite this love that God has given you and which you are walking in, don't think that you never have to give it a second thought or that you've somehow arrived.

This love of Christ in us may not always be working through us if we are bent on moving in a direction contrary to God. This is why Paul continues. "Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more." That is, grow in this love and practice this love more and more as you depend on God; His love and power more and more.

The NAS says "that you may excel still more." The meaning in the original Greek is to abound or to super abound. Our walk with God and our love for Him and the world should super abound more and more. In other words, it should be alive. Dead things don't grow. But, a healthy life grows more and more.

How healthy are you spiritually? Are you growing in the grace of God or are you stagnating like a shallow pond which eventually evaporates where only mud is left? In Christ we are connected to the Spirit where rivers of living water flow through us as we tap into those waters by faith and obedience.

And this is what Paul wanted for the Thessalonians. He wanted their faith to run deep in Christ as they depended on Him and walked in the love He gave them. Because as they loved God above all they could in turn love each other as God wanted them to love.

This is what Jesus Himself tells us in JOH 13:35 "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."

And this love will be seen in the way we encourage one other.

GAL 5:13 "You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love."

That's what the unsaved needs to see; our love in service to each other and to the world as well. But, all too often they see back-biting, jealousy, selfish ambition and pride.

1TH 4:11 "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you,"

The Christian walk is something that doesn't bring attention to itself, but to Christ. In most cases the world promotes ungodly ambition, to lead a life which elevates self, and it doesn't normally mind its own business, and it will gravitate towards dishonesty, if it has the opportunity.

This flies in the face of what Paul says here. "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life". A more literal translation would be, "be ambitious to be quiet." In other words, as F.F. Bruce would put it, "lead a quiet life and don't be an agitator."

You ever run into a person who's always promoting themselves? Someone who is always going out of his or her way to make sure other people notice them and how they excel over others? They have a tendency to be busy about themselves and to let everyone else know how important they are in the scheme of things.

Like humming birds they flit from one bible study to the other, and from one church to the other as they ambitiously promote their importance and they're always interested in private matters that don't concern them.

In contrast, Paul say's if you want to be ambitious, be ambitious in "being still" long enough for the Lord to teach you and to direct you in His ways, which Paul says will lead to a different lifestyle; that which is a quiet life.

Now, leading a quiet life doesn't suggest that we all pack our bags and head to the nearest monastery where we all take a vow of poverty and silence. A quiet life suggests living a normal life where our main concern is to lift up the name of Jesus Christ in all of our behavior. It desires to meet the needs of our family and those to whom God gives us to minister to.

It means, in the words which Paul wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the letter to the Philippians.

PHI 2:3-5 "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you

should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:"

Jesus Christ spent a great deal of time interacting with people and yet He was ambitious in being quiet in the sense that He helped to direct the eyes of people to the Father and the salvation they could have by turning to the Messiah He sent.

And that's what we've been called to do. We are to interact with people so that they may be directed to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

That may take place in a very busy environment as we talk with people or go about our normal duties of life. But, in all things we should consider how others might be directed to Christ and how they may see Christ in us as we take our Lord's love, and love others.

In the next part of verse 11 Paul continues: ".....to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you,"

Paul mentions two things here. Minding your own business or not being a busybody, and working with your hands so that you don't have to be dependent on others.

Let's first deal with busybodies. Evidently there was some sort of a problem in the Thessalonian church which brought this response from Paul. In fact, in Paul's second letter to them he writes:

"We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat." (2TH 3:11-12)

In speaking to Timothy, Paul warns his friend to watch out for young widows who have a lot of extra time on their hands.

1TI 5:13 "Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying things they ought not to."

There's a proverb that someone once said, "Idleness is the devils workshop." Paul is basically talking about time management in the Kingdom of God. Most of us are very busy and it doesn't seem to leave us much time for anything else. At least that's what we tell ourselves.

The reality is that we have more time than we realize. The truth of the matter is that we all have the exact same amount of time: 24 hours in a day. The problem really isn't time. It's how we manage time and what we do with it.

Time was created by God when He brought the universe into existence. Prior to that there was no time; only a timeless eternity as God was the only One who existed. But with time there comes responsibility. Each of us must apportion a piece of that God-given time in the pursuing of meeting our daily needs as we depend on God for all things.

Some people work outside the home with jobs of all sorts and some work in the home taking care of the home and meeting the needs of the family. The idea is that honest work is God's desire for us.

And it has some good effects. It keeps us busy in the good sense. Without honest work we become lazy and idle and in turn we begin to pursue things which are detrimental to our spiritual growth.

Now some people have more opportunity with time to find what we might call leisure time; time away from pursuing those things which we call work. In Thessalonica these people, with this unbalanced amount of leisure time, were warned to use their time in a way that would promote not only their spiritual growth but the growth of others.

All of us have leisure time. God designed that as well so that we can relax and rest from the cares of the world to be refreshed and strengthened for the work He's given us. But more often than not we will take the majority of our leisure time and spend it on ourselves to the exclusion of others or God Himself.

Enter the television set. Enter the telephone. These are great inventions which can be used to learn and communicate. But, like anything else in life, excessive amounts of anything can be detrimental to your physical and more important, your spiritual health.

God has given us time to be used to draw close to Him and to learn of Him, while at the same time learning and enjoying people and the universe He's created. But, when our time becomes disproportionately self-centered to the exclusion of the things of God, our effectiveness as servants of God is hindered.

Think about it. In a 24 hour day, how much time do you spend on yourself, on your family, on your friends, on your work? And then calculate into that the amount of time you spend with God and the things of God.

Don't bother trying to work it out in your head. The time we spend with God is miniscule compared to the rest of the day we're doing the things we deem important.

I'm not down-playing the things we do in the course of a day that are important. I'm just asking all of us to re-evaluate those things which could be shortened to include time spent in the word of God, in prayer, in fellowship with the brethren.

Days of our lives, Wheel of Fortune, Jeopardy, the mall, extended lunches, and any number of other diversions might fill the time, but do all of the things we do create idleness which may adversely affect our walk with God?

Here's the reason it's important. Paul touches on it in verse 12: "...so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody."

Our daily lives are designed by God to show the world that we belong to Him and that we will be able to affect their lives by the way we live, together with the message of hope we bring in Jesus Christ.

Being sensitive to God and the leading of the Holy Spirit will make you sensitive to the needs in the Body of Christ and the needs of the world as well.

Spending a part of everyday with the Lord will keep you in touch with what He desires for you according to His word and it will give you an appreciation for the great God that He is and the way He desires to use you, even in your everyday life.

Here's what Paul told the Colossians in regard to their attitude towards seeking God and how it affected their ability to meet the needs of others and to open the door to the gospel.

It may take a small portion of time in your busy day, but God promises to honor those who honor Him and that includes your time with Him.

COL 4:2-6 "Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. 3 And pray for us, too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for

which I am in chains. 4 Pray that I may proclaim it clearly, as I should. 5 Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity. 6 Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone."

You see to be a witness for Christ simply means to be available for Him as you walk by faith and love Him above all. You don't need to be a Pastor or a teacher or an evangelist to do the work of God. Just be what God has made you and be willing to do whatever He wants for you to do, in whatever area He has you.

In the same letter to the Colossians Paul gives us these words of encouragement.

COL 3:23-24 "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, 24 since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving."

May we take God's word to heart and may our hearts be on fire for the One who has put a new song in our hearts.