

Brotherly Love and Orderly Living

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12
Preached on: Sunday, February 28, 2016

We return once again this morning to Paul's epistle to the Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians 4. We will be examining verses 9 through 12. I'm always amazed at how contemporary the world of God really is. It's as though it was written yesterday for today's issues but in truth the issues of the ancient church have really never changed. We deal with many of the same kinds of things today. It's no surprise, we're all a bunch of sinners saved by grace, placed into this mysterious organism called the body of Christ and so we come to fellowship, we come to worship, bringing all of our unredeemed humanness with us; all of our sinful pride that manifests itself in our interpersonal styles of relating; all of our personal preferences that we have a tendency to force upon other people; all of our beliefs and biases, sometimes they're unbiblical but we all have these things. We need to be challenged. We need to be corrected. All of this was true in the early church even as it's true in our church and if these things aren't corrected, chaos ensues. As I read through the New Testament account of the early churches, I can safely say that as I look at the good bad and the ugly that were in their churches, I can say, "Well, I've seen that in my life. I've seen that in your life. I've seen that in this church." It makes me celebrate grace all the more, amen? Absolutely, and the only thing that I haven't witnessed is God striking dead a husband and a wife during a church service because of their hypocrisy. That's not to say that it doesn't exist here but it is to say that God is merciful and it may be that might happen someday, I hope not. But what I find fascinating and what I find so instructive in the New Testament epistles, is the great lengths the apostles went to to lovingly shepherd the people; to come alongside them and help them understand how to apply the word of God so that they will walk in a way that's pleasing to him; not merely giving them doctrinal and theological instruction as important, frankly as crucial and as foundational as that is, but to also come alongside them very practically concerning how to live in a manner that is pleasing to God.

You will recall, this is what's going on here in 1 Thessalonians 4. You will recall in verse 1, "Finally then," Paul says, "brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more." Then he says in verse 3, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality." And you will remember last week we examined that, three instructions that he gives regarding sexual fidelity that we need to master our body; we need to live counter culturally; and we need to live with integrity. But then he goes on to address two more issues that we are going to examine today, that of brotherly love and orderly living, and I'm sure that these exhortations will be as convicting as the ones were last week with respect to sexual fidelity.

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Now, before we look at this, I want to remind you of something that many times we take for granted and that is what we have before us, dear friends, is the inerrant, inspired, infallible, authoritative, all sufficient word of the living God so God is speaking to you directly through his servant, through his word and so we need to listen up. We need to listen very carefully. We need to learn and to live accordingly. So let's read the passage that we have before us this morning beginning in verse 9. He goes on to tell them,

9 Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; 10 for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, 11 and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, 12 so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.

So let's examine this first exhortation, that of brotherly love. Notice verse 9, "Now as to the love of the brethren." Love here in the original language is philadelphios. It's a term used almost exclusively in Jewish and Greek writings to describe the love a person would have for blood brothers and sisters, so it's a familial type of love, and here Paul applies it metaphorically to express love between members of the Christian family. And by the way, we see this same usage throughout the New Testament.

Now, this is a very important issue for any church but especially a church like the one in Thessalonica that had within it these radically diverse group of people; these opposing cultures that at one time hated each other. Now they are all gathered together around the same table of fellowship: Greeks, Romans, Macedonians, Jews, barbarians, all shared the same cup in the worship of their Lord together. Now everyone has equal status. All ethnic, religious, gender, social boundaries were forsaken as a fruit of their common salvation. You will recall in Colossians 3:11, Paul says there is "there is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman, but Christ is all, and in all." By the way, the Scythians were the most hated and feared of all of the so-called barbarians because of their savagery. The counterpart today would be ISIS, alright, so these people too had come to Christ so they're all together worshipping and serving Christ together. Moreover, you've got former idol worshipers who had been involved in unspeakable forms of sexual debauchery as part of their worship and now they are serving Christ alongside Jews who formerly would never even touch them; they certainly wouldn't go into their home; they wouldn't eat with them. So you have a church that is made up of every class of people, especially the way society tends to classify people: you've got rich and you've got poor; you've got, shall we say, white-collar and blue-collar. In fact, in Luke 17 we learn that a number of the leading Greek women

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believed in Christ and were saved, so they are part of this and this means that they are worshiping Christ along with others that perhaps were some of their slaves, and you must remember that there existed a huge social barrier between slaves and free men, in fact, Aristotle had referred to slaves as "a living tool." So now they are all on equal footing. They're all worshiping together in the same family because, you see, faith in Christ removes all of the separation. Paul said in Galatians 3:28, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Now they are all brothers and sisters in Christ, a phrase, by the way, that Paul uses 19 times in 1 Thessalonians alone. We are brothers and sisters in Christ. We are all related in Christ. We all have the same spiritual DNA. We all have the same Father. An amazing thought.

Now, it's also important by way of background to remember that all of the New Testament churches had centralized meeting places, most of the time it would be a large portico or what we might call a huge patio with trees that would give them shade because in that part of the world they didn't have the types of weather that we would have so you could meet outside a lot more and there were also large homes that they would meet in and so forth, but also many of the people met in homes, in smaller homes. They had centralized places and they had their own version of what we would call home fellowship groups. For example, Scripture indicates that there were a couple of large churches in Rome so that the epistle to the Romans went to these churches and one of those churches, or an offshoot of that church, met in the home of Prisca and Aquila. Romans 16:4, Paul says of them that they risked their lives, they risked their own necks for my life and he says, "Greet the church that is in their house." Also in Colossians 4:15, he says, "Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house." He says in Philemon 2 where Paul writes not only to Philemon but "to Apphia," he says, "our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house." So here's the point: despite all of the former hatred and prejudices towards one another, they are coming together as a family not only worshiping together in more of the public forums, but also meeting together in each other's homes. This culturally, this was absolutely unheard of in the ancient world. Moreover, they didn't have hotels, they didn't have restaurants, and so if you traveled someplace for business, you had to stay with family or with friends and that's what was going on here.

Hospitality was actually a matter of life and death in those ancient days. A classic illustration of this is found in Romans 16 where Paul asked the saints in Rome to care for their sister Phoebe. You may recall she was the servant, the deaconess from the church there in Corinth that was given the responsibility of delivering the epistle of the Romans to the Romans so he says she "is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea," which was a port in Corinth and he says, "I want you to receive her in the Lord in a manner

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worthy of the saints, and that you help her in whatever matter she may have need of you." So here's the point: they're meeting in homes; they're taking care of one another.

Now, in those cities like cities today, you had various ethnic and social divisions. There would be a Jewish quarter; there is a Gentile quarter; there would be the wealthy versus the poor and so forth. Now, imagine being in a Jewish neighborhood and you've got some Jewish friends over here who are now part of the way, they are worshipping this Jesus of Nazareth guy, and all of a sudden you look down the street and here comes barbarians, Scythians, the Gentiles, these Greeks. "Oh my goodness, there are some of the leading Greek women. Where are they going? Well, they're going into that house. Are you kidding me? What is going on? Oh yeah, those people now worship Jesus of Nazareth. Remember the guy that got crucified, you know, said he was King of the Jews and all of this stuff and they say that he rose from the dead? Well, these people actually believe all that stuff and now they're calling each other brothers and sisters. No way! There goes the neighborhood." You know, that's what was going on in the culture. They even supported each other financially. We know that they helped one another in financial hardship. They sent money to other churches to help them in time of need, just like we do with the Frederico's in our church plant in Kalispell, Montana. And Paul notes that the Macedonian Christians were known for their poverty, 2 Corinthians 8, they are known for their poverty yet they gave liberally and the church at Thessalonica was actually a benefactor of some of the other churches in the province of Macedonia. We read in Romans 15 that it even contributed to the saints at the Jerusalem church. They distributed food to the poor among themselves. And what we see in the New Testament is that the truest expression of Christian love is serving one another, meeting the needs of other fellow believers, primarily within the body of Christ, your own church but others as well; giving sacrificially to help those who are less fortunate. Now, folks, think about this: what would the world think of us if we were not that way? If we were always fighting with one another? If we didn't love one another? It would be a terrible thing and I commend you, I hear this all the time from other people, especially new people, "I can't believe how friendly this church," and I watch how you all help each other, you know, if there is ever a need, there is always an army of people to come and to help. There is never a need that goes unmet. Most all of you are a part of that.

So with this background, we come to verse 9 again. He says, "Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another." What he's saying here is, "I don't even need to teach you to love one another, God does that. Love is the fruit of the new birth. It's a fruit of the Holy Spirit." 1 John 5:1, we read, "Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and whoever loves the Father loves the child born of Him."

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So Paul goes on in verse 10 and he says, "for indeed you do practice it," this love for the brethren, "toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But," you knew a "but" was coming, right? "But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more." To abound, to overflow to an even greater degree in your love toward one another. So obviously this kind of love was evident within the church but there is a hint that there is something lacking; that the shepherd needs to come along, he sees something, he hears it from Timothy's report, apparently certain tensions still exist within that Christian community. By the way, we see this in every church. There were some members of that church that we, as we studied, were still engaged in different forms of sexual immorality even amongst one another in the church, and evidently some were not as loving toward one another as they really should be. And you might examine your heart just for a moment before we look at this more closely, I'm sure if you're honest, there are some people in your church family that you really don't love as you should. Frankly, you really don't like to associate with them. They're probably not going to be the kind of people you're ever going to invite over to your house. You have no interest in fellowship with them or to help them. You prefer just to live in isolation. Perhaps you are secretly indifferent at best, publicly demeaning at worst. And certainly if that is you, you need to excel still more, right? That's the point. You may love the brethren but you need to excel still more. And I might also add if you are indifferent or actually hostile towards others in the church family, you really have no basis to claim that you have experienced new life in Christ. I mean, Scripture is so clear on this. 1 John 3:14, "We know that we have passed out of death into life," in other words, we know that we have been born again, here's one of the evidences of genuine saving faith, "because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death." Crystal clear. 1 John 4, beginning in verse 7, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love." Peter also encouraged his readers in 1 Peter 1:22, "Since you have in obedience to the truth purified your souls for a sincere love of the brethren, fervently love one another from the heart." "Fervently" means "to stretch yourself out to the utter limits of your ability to love one another from the heart."

James Usher was the Irish Archbishop of Armagh and the Primate of all Ireland between 1625 and 1656. He was a prolific author, theologian, church leader, a committed Calvinist that was opposed to Arminianism and opposed to the heresies of the Roman Catholic Church and I think in light of this discussion we would be wise to remember what he called the 11th commandment. A story about him goes like this, the archbishop was once wrecked off the coast of Ireland and being almost destitute of clothing, wandered to the house of a local clergyman who was suspicious of his identity and cold toward him. After a few minutes of uncomfortable silence, the clergyman demanded, "How many commandments are there?" fully expecting to uncover an imposter. "I can at once satisfy you that I am not an imposter as you think," replied the Archbishop, "for there are 11

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commandments." "No," interrupted the clergyman, pleased that his suspicions were well-founded. "There are only 10 Commandments. If you can tell me the 11th commandment, I shall give you all you need." Usher said, "Bring me a Bible." Turning to John 13:34, he read, "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another as I have loved you that you also love one another." With that the clergyman was ready to help him in every way. It's a great story, isn't it?

Well, to be sure, Paul did not want the Thessalonians to think that they had somehow arrived in the discipline of love. You see, learning to love is like developing physical strength and stamina, it requires unending devotion and discipline. Michael Martin says, quote, "The nature of Christian love is such that it is always practiced, never mastered." And beloved, may I warn you that a little leaven of ill will or indifference toward your brothers and sisters in Christ will very quickly leaven the whole lump of your life. Many times I have witnessed this in the church. A person gets offended, perhaps even unintentionally by someone else and that offense begins to fester and it begins to fuel bitterness which turns to gossip and then to slander and then to jealousy and strife and then broken fellowship. Sometimes whole families, even the kids won't speak to each other. It's crazy how this can work. Such a dangerous thing. Oh, dear child of God, please hear this: every seed of bitterness has the potential of producing a massive bush of thorns that will inevitably cause others to avoid you and the fruit of the Spirit simply will not grow on that tree. That is not being like Christ. That is not pleasing to God. Thinking about it very practically, no one likes to be around the church gossip, right? Nobody wants to be around the church curmudgeon. Nobody wants to be around the angry woman who always speaks her mind as if that is some Christian virtue. Humble saints are loving saints and we all want to take this to heart.

So Paul then shifts from his exhortation concerning brotherly love to 2. Orderly living. Notice verse 11, "make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need." So here he focuses on three areas that evidently were a concern to him given Timothy's report, areas of personal conduct in which the work of sanctification would become evident and remember, he's concerned about the issue of sanctification as we see in verse 3. So he's going to ask them to lead a quiet life and I'm going to expand upon this more in a moment, but lead a quiet life versus being the obnoxious religious fanatic trying to cram your beliefs down everyone's throats. He wants them to mind their own business rather than being the nosy busybody meddling in everybody else's business and telling them how to live their life. And also work with your hands versus being the lazy entitlement sluggard who refuses to work and expects others in the church and in the community to take care of him and his family until

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Jesus comes. That's kind of the dynamic of what's happening here in a nutshell and like every church, they had individuals that manifested these characteristics.

Now, in order to better understand what may have contributed to these behaviors, it's very important that we reconstruct some of the circumstances which caused Paul to write these letters in the first place. As we read both letters to the Thessalonians, we quickly discover that there were a group of people within the church that had been caught up in what we might call end times fervor based upon Paul's teaching on the subject of Christ's return. And like many people today, they were confused about the sequence of events, issues pertaining to eschatology. Paul is going to correct that later on but some of these folks were obsessed with the second coming of Christ. Evidently their boisterous enthusiasm had become a problem in the church and in the community and I might say, there is nothing more offensive to a pagan, to a person that does not know Christ, than having what they would perceive to be some loudmouth Bible thumper coming up to them, telling them that, "Jesus is coming again and you are the object of his wrath unless you repent." And so there was something like that going on which, by the way, is true but you want to be winsome in how you communicate the truth. So there was something like that going on and certainly the outside world thought even less of these people when they saw that some of them had quit their job in anticipation of the end of human history and were now mooching off the generosity of others in the church and in the community.

Moreover, because of the persecution that they were experiencing, some in the church believed that they had missed the rapture of the church and were now living in the day of the Lord. Paul addresses this in 2 Thessalonians 2. Let me read you a little bit of this beginning in verse 1, he says, "Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come." So evidently some false teachers who supposedly received divine revelation, who would appear to have had all of the marks of apostolic authority, they are teaching them now that the folks are living in the pre-kingdom judgments, what we might call the tribulation, and even the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord, of course, in reality refers to the final unleashing of God's wrath; his judgment upon the world at his second coming and then again at the millennial kingdom. So they are thinking, "My goodness, we are living in this with all of this persecution with what these guys are saying." These teachers appear to have apostolic sanction as if Paul had signed off on it. And I might add that forgeries and counterfeit apostolic documents were commonplace in the life of the early church; they were called the pseudepigrapha. And it's because of this that in order to really verify the apostolic authenticity of his letters, Paul would sign the last part of them with his own distinctive handwriting because usually a secretary or an amanuensis, as it is sometimes called,

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would write them but at the end he would sign off on them. In fact, we see this in 2 Thessalonians 3:17 and 18, Paul says, "I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all." So he's trying to clarify what these people were saying.

Now, Paul had taught them that the rapture is going to take place before the day of the Lord, that's what they expected. If they expected it otherwise to be gathered together to him after the tribulation judgments and the final day of the Lord, they would have rejoiced because Christ was about to come. So instead of this though we see in verse 2, that they are shaken from their composure. They are disturbed. Now, if I can digress for a moment, beloved, doctrinal confusion will always produce chaos in your life. It is inevitable. God does not bless error, he blesses truth. That's why Jesus prayed to the Father in John 17:17, "Father, sanctify them in the truth, thy word is truth." So they had expected to be taken to glory. They had expected heavenly rest, not left to endure persecution and the unprecedented judgments that undoubtedly Paul had talked about that we read in many other passages of Scripture, and it's for this reason in verse 3, Paul says, "Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction." And he goes on to explain the sequence of events that will occur after they have been snatched away in the rapture, the things that will lead up to the day of the Lord, and when we come to these passages, we will go into these in great depth so that you will understand them.

So, what do you have happening in the church? You've got people running around in the church at Thessalonica scared to death and they've got, shall we say, their new prophecy chart. They've got a new prophecy chart. No doubt there are others in the church that say, "No, wait a minute. That is not what Paul taught. I'm sure of it. Yeah, but these guys are saying and it would appear that Paul has signed off on this. No, I don't think we're living in the pre-kingdom judgments right now, the time of the tribulation. I don't think this is the day of the Lord. Yeah, it's tough but it's not that bad. So something's wrong here so please will you guys just calm down. You're running around like Chicken Little saying the sky is falling, driving everybody nuts with your fanaticism." That's the dynamic that was going on in the church. "Worse yet, you're sticking your nose into everybody else's business, meddling where you don't belong, trying to tell us all what to believe, how to conduct our life, how to raise our kids, how to evangelize, telling the church leaders how to lead and if that isn't bad enough, some of you have actually quit your jobs, you refuse to work because you're convinced that Jesus is about to come and we're having to take care of you." Do you get it? That's what's happening.

So Paul hears about all this and being a loving shepherd, he encourages them in all of the wonderful things that they are doing, but he exhorts them to excel still more in their

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brotherly love and in how to live an orderly life and he gives them three things to focus on. First of all, lead a quiet life. Notice verse 11, he says, "I want you to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life," literally to be silent. What he's saying here if you get to kind of the literal language, ambition carries the idea of making every effort; have the strongest desire and determination to lead a quiet life. So he's dealing with issues pertaining to social conduct and how they should conduct themselves, their public demeanor which has to be shaped by Christian love. So he's basically saying, "Folks, you need to be ambitious to be quiet, not noisy and frenetic, running around in a panic, running around in some manic state of religious frenzy driving everybody nuts both in the church and outside the church. Live calmly. Relax. God is in control." If I can put it real practically: put your four blood moons prophecy theory away. That's been debunked. Put away all of your attempts to pinpoint Christ's return based upon the feasts and convocations of Israel. That's been debunked. Stop setting dates. Put all of your charts away, so to speak. Stop picking fights with other believers and making a fool out of yourself in the eyes of unbelievers. Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life or as Paul said in 1 Timothy 2:2, "lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity."

I want to make this very practical because this applies to so many areas in Christian life and ministry. Beware of the man who plays a one stringed banjo, especially if all he wants to talk about is the end times, all he wants to talk about is prophecy or it could be some other subject. You know, the most obnoxious Christians I have ever experienced tend to be obsessed with one specific area of Bible doctrine and within minutes of having a conversation with them, you can tell they're trying to find out where you are on a particular topic so that they can either join with you or attack you. I'm sure you have experienced that. I have on many occasions. I remember, I don't know, a year or so ago, I met this family in a hotel breakfast lobby thing and my folks had told them that, "Oh yeah, my son and daughter are here and he's a pastor." "Oh great." So I come in and, "Oh, you're a pastor. How wonderful. Where do you pastor?" And I told her and the lady did all the talking in the family and then the very next question was, "What translation of the Bible do you use?" I know what's coming. I've been there before and I said, "Well, I preach out of the New American Standard Version." "Well," she said, "I'm curious. Why would you use that and not the King James Version?" I said, "Well, because it's much more readable and I think it's a more accurate translation." Oh my. Her face turned as red as a ripe jalapeno pepper. The veins started bulging. The fingers started pointing and she began to unload on me. One stringed banjo. And finally after a while, of course, I'm already sitting there with my food thinking this is going to be a wonderful time of fellowship but I had to say, "Ma'am, with all due respect, I'm very familiar with the King James only position and I find it both divisive and bereft of compelling scholarship and so on the basis of Christian charity, I would suggest we just change the subject." And at

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that point it was so funny, the husband said, "Good luck." So I knew I was going to have to hear that string some more.

Well, the point with all of that is, folks, be kind but avoid people who pull out a one stringed banjo. Trust me, you will not enjoy the concert. You will not enjoy that concert. And, beloved, if that's you, don't make it your crusade. If you've got some, even if it's a glorious doctrine, don't make it your habit to try to cram that down people's throats. In fact, some of the most obnoxious people I've ever been around are the newly converted Calvinists, you know, it's like they're on the hunt for Arminians like Jewish avengers going after Nazis trying to bring them to justice. That can be so offensive and I might also add, if you've only got one string on your banjo, add some more. You know, we're to preach the whole counsel of God. I knew of a guy in another church who has had a Sunday school class where he has taught Bible prophecy for 16 years and I think, "My goodness." He's got a little following of people. Well, you get the point. Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, not one of religious, of even political activism. You know, there is so much power in being around godly people that have a tranquil, godly life. You know, they're loving the Lord, they are serving Christ, they are caring for their families versus those in some religious frenzy and with all the activism and so forth.

But secondly he exhorts them to mind their own business. Notice verse 11 again, "Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business." It's interesting, in 2 Thessalonians 3:12, Paul elaborates on this by accusing some of them of acting like busybodies. The term means one who moves around. If I can give you an image and this is the first one that comes to my mind, it's being on top of a horse on a hot summer day and you've got a horsefly that keeps coming and I'm batting him, they just keep buzzing around. That's the idea. Make it your ambition not to be that kind of person. These are people who are sticking their nose in other people's business.

Now, I'm glad we don't have that ever happening here at Calvary Bible Church and we don't want it to start, but that was a concern for them. By the way, I've noticed Facebook posts are notorious for this kind of thing. It's kind of a platform for every self-proclaimed expert to flaunt their wisdom and tell everybody else how to live. And I might add that gossip is always the counterpart of this sin. For example, in 1 Timothy 5, you may recall that Paul was concerned about some of the young widows in the church and who among other things he said learned to be idle as they go around from house to house and not merely idle but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things that are not proper to mention. So they're gossiping about people, they're in everybody else's business and so he says, "Therefore I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach for some have already turned aside to follow Satan." Basically what he's saying is the idle, gossiping busybody, in this case woman,

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forsakes her commitment of serving Christ and makes herself vulnerable to false teachers, vulnerable to false doctrine, makes herself vulnerable to even marrying an unbeliever and bringing disgrace upon herself and upon the church and so forth.

So Paul admonishes these dear saints and all of us to attend to their own business. Stop interfering in the affairs of other people, especially over spiritual and doctrinal matters. And I might also add that I've noticed even in my own life and I'm sure you will have to agree in yours, that many times we can do this without realizing it and it can be very destructive in relationships. It can bring great division in the church. I've seen how troublesome this can be in even our own church where you have some kind of gossiping busybody inserting himself or herself into the lives of other people. I think of women who have confronted other women over the fact that they are working outside of the home. Do you know what? That's none of your business. That's none of your business. You don't have all the facts. Or confronting them because they don't breast-feed. Can you imagine that being a big issue? It has been even in this church. Men and women condemning others who use birth control or condemning somebody because, as one lady was weeping over that, "I'm committing a form of child abuse because I have to send my kids to public school and I don't homeschool them or because I give my kids antibiotics. Don't you know that will ruin their health?" Busybodies. Self-appointed experts who think it's their responsibility to somehow insert themselves in everybody's life, tell everybody how to raise their kids, how to conduct their ministries and on and on and on. And a failure to mind your own business can manifest itself even in church leadership. I mean, the last thing we want to do as a church is to micromanage everybody's life and everybody's ministries and we have to guard against that. Years ago I remember a man in the church who claimed that he believed that God had called him to this church to "police the pastor." I'm sure I need some policing. I wasn't real comfortable with him being that policeman and he tried to police everybody else too and kind of the modern-day Diotrefes, remember him in 3 John, the self-promoting demagogue that was kind of the keeper of the gate that John condemned? Folks, here's the point: all it takes is one nosy Nelly or one Barney Fife with a bullet and a badge and you've got division in the church. Guard yourself from that type of thing. We would all do well to mind our own business. If we want your opinion, we'll ask for it. Is that fair? By the way, there's plenty of business in our own lives that needs minding, right?

So that's what he says. Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business. Then he adds this, "and work with your own hands." Work with your hands, "just as we commanded you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need." So this is the third thing that he exhorts them to do: work with your hands. Now, bear in mind that in that ancient culture manual labor was considered to be demeaning, it was for the lower class people, and it's interesting that Paul worked with

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his hands with leather as a tent maker which was a very demeaning, smelly, nasty job. And most of those who came to Christ in the early church were from what we might call the working class, the manual labor group of people, not from the wealthy elite. So what we have here is Paul not only dignifying manual labor, but he's dignifying work in general, alright? That's what we see. "Yes, Jesus is coming but we don't know when so put all of your charts and your pinpointing away and don't fool yourself into thinking that now you're no longer obligated to work for your master, to serve your master if you're a slave, or that you don't have to work for your employer, that you no longer have to provide for your families and don't become some entitlement sluggard that expects the church to take care of you and the community to take care of you because unbelievers look at that kind of behavior and they find it reprehensible so don't do that. Work with your hands just as we commanded you so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need."

Well, to close this this morning, I want to read Paul's words that give such a good summary to his heart to these dear saints and to all of us. It's found in 2 Thessalonians 3, beginning in verse 5. Here's what he says, "May the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God and into the steadfastness of Christ. Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; not because we do not have the right to this, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example. For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either." Boy, that would sure shake things up in our country, wouldn't it? "For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like," there it is, "busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread." Don't you know when that letter was read, I mean, some of those people were there. I mean, they knew who it was. I'm sure there were some elbows going and people kind of looking over at other people. But this is what a loving shepherd will do, this is what the Holy Spirit does to all of us through the power of his word.

So may I challenge each of you to examine your heart in these areas. Be willing to excel still more in your love for one another. We're brothers and sisters in Christ. All of the diverse backgrounds and all of the baggage, let's love one another better and better and better and make it our ambition to lead a quiet and tranquil life, not a frenetic, chaotic life, especially as we wait for the Lord's return, and this includes attending to our own

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business, not our neighbor's business, and be faithful in our everyday duties to work hard for the benefit of others so that we're not some kind of, as I say, entitlement sluggard that expects others in the church to take care of us or others in the community. And when we do these things, dear friends, unbelievers will look at us and they will respect us. We will not be an object of their scorn. Let their offense be in the Gospel, not in us, okay? Let it be in the Gospel, not in us.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these very practical truths. I pray that by the power of your Spirit you will help us all to see where we can excel still more in these areas in our life. And thank you for your love for us, for your desire to help us understand those things that we can apply to our lives that will make us pleasing to you and therefore allow us to experience more and more of the magnificent benefits of being in intimate relationship and fellowship with you. And Lord, if there be one here today or within the sound of my voice that knows nothing of the Savior, how I pray that you would convict their heart and help them to see their sin and the remedy for that sin in the cross of Jesus Christ. So we commit them to you. We thank you. We give you praise in Jesus' name. Amen.

We pray you have been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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