

1 THESSALONIANS 4:9-12; 5:12-28

Brian Orchard, January 6, 2017

We're now looking at 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, the section that is following the lengthy section there on sexual immorality; the things to be avoided in a marriage relationship. And we come now to something very positive. I am really intrigued by the number of times Paul comes back and references this. He's going to be talking about brotherly love. And it's not a subject that's completely different from the subject we've just covered with sexual immorality because he did say in verse 6 not to defraud your brother in this matter. And sexual immorality is going to hurt somebody, particularly if the immorality is adultery, then you're going to hurt your brother.

If the sexual immorality is fornication and it's not in a marriage situation you're still going to hurt your brother because you've taken something from him in terms of taking something from the woman. And so, one way or another you're going to defraud your brothers. So he says:

1 Thessalonians 4:9 But concerning brotherly love (and brotherly love in its genuineness would address this situation of sexual immorality as well)

...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;

Now, this comes up so many times in the Bible. But in Paul's and John's writings, "love one another" comes up so many times that we almost get tired of hearing it. I've had some people say, "You talk too much about love." Well, why does it reoccur and reoccur in scripture as it does? Because it is something important and it has a lot to do with the condition of the spiritual body of Jesus Christ.

10 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;

So he's saying you've done a good job but don't stop. You haven't reached the point you need to be at with this. You've come out of this wretched society. You're doing a good job, but there's more work to be done. Can we not say the same thing?

11 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,

Brotherly love comes down to some real practical works; things that we do and things that we don't do. Before we get into some of those specifics, let's look at John 13 and verse 34. This helps us understand that there are some practical aspects to the love that we are talking about here. Christ said:

John 13:34 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

Which is why the writers in the New Testament (Paul, John and others), come back over and over again to that point of the need for love within the body of Jesus Christ. But there is a reason.

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

The cohesion of the body of Christ in true godly love is an aspect of the gospel message, because a part of the gospel message is to be a witness. The Church is to be a witness of Jesus Christ and God the Father and the relationship between Christ and the Father – Elohim; the family relationship. The Church and the way we function together are to mirror that relationship.

The way we love each other, cooperate with each other, care for each other and look out for each other is an aspect of the way the Father and the Son operate. And so, this is very, very important. We recognize, firstly, the love that has been shown to us. We recognize God's love toward us. It is a love we don't deserve, but it's freely expressed by God through Christ to us. Jesus Christ demonstrated this supremacy of His love by giving of His life as a sacrifice for us who did not deserve it.

Secondly, we recognize this outstanding characteristic as a way of setting the Church apart as an example. And it is very much a part of our calling to be a part of the body of Christ. Love carries personal responsibility. I mentioned John, so let's look at 1 John chapter 2 and verse 4.

1 John 2:4 He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

Again, that's reminiscent of some of the verses we read out of Jeremiah – not speaking the truth.

5 But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him.

6 He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

And so there is personal responsibility in being like Jesus Christ and to walk as Jesus Christ walked in relationship to each other. The way Christ loved us, gave Himself for us; so we are to love each other and to give of ourselves.

We don't always do certain things out of love for our brother. We should show love by giving him encouragement, support, and the right example. And that's really what Paul is getting at here with some of the things we just read out of verse 11 of the 4th chapter of 1 Thessalonians; "aspire to lead a quiet life". Now, aspire means "to be eager or earnest to do something, have a strong desire to do this." To be quiet means to keep still or refrain. What sense can we get from this? Ecclesiastes 4 and verse 6:

Ecclesiastes 4:6 Better a handful with quietness than both hands full, together with toil and grasping for the wind.

To be still or to refrain. It is better to have a little with contentment (and we'll get to that out of Paul's writing to the Philippians where he says that), than to have a lot and to be agitated and not be still and not be at rest.

Just think about the day and age in which we live, in which we all live; the environment we are in six days a week. When we come together on the Sabbath as God's people (or any other time we might come together with other of God's people but I'm thinking particularly of the Sabbath), are we bringing quietness into the body of Christ that other people can appreciate and they would find helpful after a very stressful week? Proverbs 15 and verse 16:

Proverbs 15:16 Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure with trouble.

17 Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a fatted calf with hatred.

The fear of God and love, that's what we have got to strive for in terms of leading a quiet life. Again, back to Philippians 4 and verse 11, where Paul said to the Philippians:

Philippians 4:11 Not that I speak in regard to need, for I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content:

Have we learned that? Do we strive for that type of quietness? The world that we live in is a consumer driven society; never satisfied, never having enough. Always wanting the next new thing, the next gadget. And we go through certain times of the year when consumerism hits great heights and drives and strives. Get out there, buy something new. Have this, you deserve this. Buy it for yourself. It's a consumer, get-driven society and 'get' does not produce peace. We need to learn to be content with what we have. Reduce our standard of living, at least in our minds, as we said within the Church years ago. Be prepared to lower your standard of living. Can we do that in order to be quiet and at rest? Philippians 3, verse 7:

Philippians 3:7 But what things were gain to me, these I have counted loss for Christ. (What are our values?)

8 Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ.

What's important to us? The physical things, "to get, get, get", or is it the spiritual things? Spiritual contentment will give peace and rest. And if we are in that frame of mind, a restful, peaceful frame of mind, we'll share that with other people in the Church as we come together with them. And you know, the reality of a stressful week. People will come to services and you talk to them and they're stressed out of their brain from all that they've gone through that week. They don't need to come in and be rubbed up against by somebody that's in a similar stressful frame of mind. They need somebody that will help them be calm and peaceful and restful.

Going back to Paul's words, we are to "mind your own business"; something we practice habitually, that which pertains to the self. Now, this is not advocating selfishness. It's simply getting on and doing the things you need to be doing. In 2 Thessalonians 3 verse 11 Paul writes:

2 Thessalonians 3:1 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies (sticking their noses in everybody else's business).

When other people's business is our business, the door is open for wrong actions. The door is open for judging. We're getting our nose into somebody else's business. We know more about what's going on with them than we should. We can judge. The door is open for gossiping, the door is open for comparing ourselves. But perhaps more importantly, if we are not minding our own business then we're probably not focusing on our issues, the things that we need to be dealing with. We're more concerned with the issues that we think somebody else should be dealing with in their lives. Looking at others will allow us to have a better opinion of ourselves than perhaps we should have.

Paul is obviously directing the members to increase in love and have concern for each other and to contribute to the body by their own spiritual condition. So, this 'minding your own business' is important. We don't go charging off trying to get involved in other people's lives to the point we've got to know every little detail of their lives so our minds have the possibility of judging them or condemning them or being critical of them.

Obviously we have to be concerned for other people and there are certain things we know because they will share those things with us and we quietly go to our prayer closet and we pray quietly about those things. We don't rush off to tell somebody else. We don't gossip, we don't get filled up with pride thinking, 'I'm not like they are. I'm better than they are.' We don't do that; we have brotherly love and concern and compassion which will involve, to a degree, the minding of our own business.

Then Paul says to “Work with your own hands as we have commanded you.” And Paul gave that example. A tremendous example of doing just that in Acts 20, verse 32:

Acts 20:32 "So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

33 I have coveted no one's silver or gold or apparel.

34 Yes, you yourselves know that these hands have provided for my necessities, and for those who were with me.

Paul worked to support himself. He didn't look to the membership to support him. He didn't put a burden on the membership even though there was an absolute right that he had to accept their tithes and offerings. He didn't burden them. He went when he needed to. He just went out there and worked, supported himself, not to place a burden on other people. In 2 Thessalonians 3 verse 7 Paul says:

2 Thessalonians 3:7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you;

8 nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you,

Work is good and we need to work to take care of ourselves. We need to work to take care of our families and have an attitude of not expecting a handout, not expecting others to support us, but that we do diligently what we need to do to provide for ourselves. And it's here in Thessalonians where Paul went on to say:

10 ...If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

That puts the responsibility back on us to be diligent in doing what we need to do to provide an income for our families. He says in verse 12 back in 1 Thessalonians 4:

1 Thessalonians 4:12 that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.

We are to be different. We are to “Walk properly”. In Romans 13, verse 13, Paul says:

Romans 13:13 Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy.

When you start to put certain thoughts together out of a number of Paul's letters, you'll see that what the Church in Thessalonica was dealing with was not just a “one off”. The Churches in that day all had very similar problems created by the environment in which they were in. And so do we today. So do we have to battle with the environment that we're in. And our brothers, it doesn't matter whether they're here with us in this congregation or in another country; another part of the world. This is where

the brotherly love comes in because we can equate to what each one is having to deal with.

But let us walk honestly, let us walk decently and properly, not getting engaged in the things that the world is doing; whether it be the sexual immorality or just plain immorality. Just stay right away from that.

Now, I want to stay here with the thought flow of Paul. He does deal a great deal with the return of Jesus Christ and the Day of the Lord, but I want to leave that subject as a separate subject. I want to follow on one of these thoughts, on the things that you and I are admonished to do, as he continues on in chapter 5 and we'll pick it up in verse 12. It kind of reads on from the end of the verse 12 that we just read out of chapter 4.

1 Thessalonians 5:12 And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

This addresses the relationship between the membership and the ministry. It's a vitally important relationship for the health of the body. And to be honest, it's a relationship we've been trying to improve. We're trying to get it right and probably we're not all yet where we should be because this is a two-sided relationship.

I think it fair to say that this is a symbiotic relationship. Given what we know about the Church being a spiritual organism I think we can truly say that it's a symbiotic relationship. In other words, mutually beneficial relationship. But it's a relationship in which both parties have responsibilities. Acts chapter 20, verse 28, where Paul is speaking here to the elders of the Church and he says, quite straight forward:

Acts 20:28 Therefore take heed to yourselves (and that's an admonition to the ministry that we in the ministry must take seriously) and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

And, if you understand all elements of that statement that Paul made here, it's powerful that members don't opt to join the Church. God calls people and if we respond to it, we are then purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ. We are no longer our own. That applies to membership or ministry. We are no longer our own. We belong to God and God sets up shepherds over His flock. And the shepherd needs to know who sets them up over the flock and the flock needs to know who sets the shepherds up.

"The Holy Spirit has made you overseers". That is a powerful responsibility that the ministry must take very, very seriously. It's an enormous responsibility upon the shoulders of those who have been called to care for the flock. Hebrews 13, verse 17:

Hebrews 13:17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive...

And again, that goes against the flow of the society and the attitude, the mindset, that we find in our society around us.

17 Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

This relationship that we're talking about between member and minister has taken a tremendous beating in recent time. It's the nature of the society in which we live to question authority; to be yourself and don't let anybody influence you or tell you what to do. It's a relationship that is important to God, so is therefore one that Satan wants to damage and he's done an incredible job.

And part of the division that we see within the Church of God today is based on a great lack of trust of the ministry because of previous abuses that have taken place. Nobody denies that there have been abuses that have taken place. Not all ministers were abusive, but there were some. And the government structure of the Church allowed people with an authoritarian attitude to be abusive, to lord it over. We know that, we understand that.

But we are working to change and correct that. And we're working very, very hard to do that, but we need to join hands together in this relationship which means, as those who have the responsibility of shepherding, striving to be good shepherds as Christ would want us to shepherd. You have the responsibility of responding to that. As it says, "Obey those that have the rule over you, and be submissive."

Back here in 1 Thessalonians 5:13 it says:

1 Thessalonians 5:13 and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.

That takes the focus off the man and puts the focus on the job that he is doing, the work that he is doing. Paul urges the membership to know those who labor among you because they don't act purely as men. But look at the work and listen to what is being said from the word of God as the shepherds take the food, the good pasture, the clean water from the word of God and present it.

He does qualify something he says here about proving that which is right, so I'm not saying here we've got to be simple minded and that we don't question. But, we've got to have a certain openness, a certain child-like quality here of being taught and hearing things that we need to hear.

Pastoral oversight is not an option. It's not an option for those given the oversight. It's not an option for those who are under the oversight in that sense. God places shepherds and charges them to oversee the flock.

14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.

Compare this with Titus 1 verse 10.

Titus 1:10 For there are many insubordinate, both idle talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision,

Satan is going to try to disrupt the unity and the oneness of the body of Jesus Christ. There is no question that he will do that. There are many insubordinates, that is, people who will come in who are not subordinate to the ministry. They have their own opinions, their own ideas and they look for a platform in which to express them. And a part of the role of the ministry is to protect the flock from those things. Chapter 2, still here in Titus, verse 1:

Titus 2:1 But as for you, speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine:

And so you've got to be listening for those sound doctrines as they are being spoken. Dropping down to verse 15:

15 Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you.

And so there are times when the ministry has to exhort, when they have to rebuke with all authority. They are charged with looking after the ones that have been redeemed.

14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works.

So, to exhort means to call near. Warn means to put in mind. And unruly (let me go back here in Thessalonians as I refer to this): "warn those who are unruly". It's those, really, who want to be insubordinate. That's really what the word comes down to, those who don't want to conduct themselves in an orderly manner but who want to cause division, problems, strife by, primarily, promoting their own ideas. Call them false teachers; whatever you want to call them. But this occurs over and over within God's Church and sometimes the minister must deal with that. He doesn't want to and will probably go to the nth degree to avoid it. But if it has to happen; it will happen. Titus 1, verse 13:

Titus 1:13 This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith,

14 not giving heed to Jewish fables and commandments of men who turn from the truth.

Let's look at 1 Peter 5, just to remind ourselves of a very important aspect of the ministry.

1 Peter 5:1 The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed:

2 Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly;

3 nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock;

An elder is to submit to the Chief Shepherd. The members, in recognition of the Chief Shepherd, are to have an attitude of submission. Working together in a symbiotic relationship; it's a two-way street. Coming back to 1 Thessalonians and picking it up in verse 15:

1 Thessalonians 5:15 See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

This is a way to demonstrate brotherly love. "See that no one renders evil for evil." Proverbs 20, verse 22:

Proverbs 20:22 Do not say, "I will recompense evil"; Wait for the Lord, and He will save you.

It is not our place to recompense evil. As it says, "See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone." Turn the other cheek, whatever other principle comes to mind, but don't react and respond to evil in a similar attitude. Proverbs 24, verse 29:

Proverbs 24:29 Do not say, "I will do to him just as he has done to me; I will render to the man according to his work."

There will be offences in the body of Christ. We're human beings and there just will be offences. "I will not do to him just as he has done to me." We are to respond in a way that puts oil on the water, to calm things down and not retaliate and wear our emotions on our sleeve. And I can tell you that as a minister, one of the most difficult things to do today is to offer correction to anybody. There have been a lot of broken relationships and my personal experience in recent times when correction has been offered, when the person has absolutely rejected the correction and has become offended as a result. And so, there's a way to respond to correction. But when somebody offends you don't respond in kind. It's a way to express brotherly love within the Church. It's a way for quietness. Aspire to lead a quiet life. Calm things down; there are biblical principles. Put those into practice and let calmness reign in a congregation.

Now, the next three verses are very short statements, but I really put the three together. I think they do tie together very well.

1 Thessalonians 5:16 Rejoice always,

17 pray without ceasing,

18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

I think, if we put those three things together, they work very well. “Rejoice always”. Well, the rejoicing is not always going to be in physical factors. It’s what we see are the spiritual, important issues of our lives. Hope is something that comes up over and over again. “The hope of the resurrection” “the hope of the return of Jesus Christ”. Rejoice in the spiritual knowledge and truth we’ve been given. Rejoice in the relationship we have with the Father through Jesus Christ.

Paul gives substance to rejoicing in the book of Romans when he talks about hope. Hope is something to rejoice over. It may not equate with the social or the physical conditions of your life at the moment, but it does relate to the hope of the future. And of course, Paul spends a great deal of time talking about that.

Prayer: it says “pray without ceasing”. It’s a frame of mind. It turns our focus to God. And, as we turn our focus to God there’s a lot to be thankful for. “In everything give thanks.” From that mental outlook there comes a spiritual quietness and there is a different view of life. We deal with the physical issues in a little better way. So these things do tie together. Look for things to be thankful for. I don’t mean in the physical things, but look for what God is doing in your life, what He’s given you, the wonderful blessings you have. And be very thankful for them, rejoicing always and constantly in an attitude of prayerfulness, talking with God.

19 Do not quench the Spirit.

How can we quench the Spirit? Ephesians 4, verse 28:

Ephesians 4:28 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.

29 Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers.

30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (How do you grieve the Holy Spirit of God, other than what he just mentioned here?)

31 Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice.

32 And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.

That is how you do not quench the Spirit. You build it, you strengthen it. Wrong actions, evil actions, sexual immorality will quench the Spirit. So, stop doing those things that quench the Holy Spirit and do the things which feed it and strengthen it. It says then in verse 20:

1 Thessalonians 5:20 Do not despise prophecies. (I would also link verse 21 together with that very quickly where it says):

21 Test all things; hold fast what is good.

Because prophecy can take you out on a limb very, very quickly. But it says “Don’t despise prophecies.” Now, some of this, I think, is two-fold. One is: inspired speaking is referred to as prophecy. So don’t despise the inspired speaking. And he’s just talked about the role of the ministry here.

But also, the Church is built on the foundation of the apostles and the prophets. So, the prophets of old carry a message that’s important for us. We don’t despise them. We look to that and we learn from that. But, again, we test all things and hold fast that which is good or that which is honest. We don’t let prophecy get out of bounds, we don’t put our own interpretation on it. We don’t set dates on it. We look for the warning, we look for the message that we can learn from those prophetic statements.

22 Abstain from every form of evil.

Because it destroys your holiness, it destroys our sanctification, whether it be in marriage, whether it be in our personal, spiritual lives.

23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely...

We go back to chapter 4, verse 3, where we were earlier in this study, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification.” That’s what God wants. People who are sanctified, who are set apart from the world in which we live; the morality of this world, the way of this world.

... sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is the goal. That’s what you keep your eye on: the return of Jesus Christ, the promise of a resurrection and the formation of the spiritual, eternal God family to which we have been called. We keep our whole being and our whole life and mind focused on that. Then we’ll ride through all of these rough patches that Satan manages to create for us in our lives.

24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

Absolutely Jesus Christ will return; absolutely you have been called to salvation; absolutely, if we do what we need to be doing, you will be there in the God family. God

is faithful. That's the covenant He has made with you at baptism. It's the covenant He has made with the Church, it is the covenant He made with Israel.

25 Brethren, pray for us.

Pray for the ministry, pray for those who have the responsibility of the oversight of the flock, pray for each other.

26 Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.

27 I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.

And so, it wasn't just for the Church in Thessalonica. As I said, there are many aspects that apply to other cities. Ephesus, Corinth come to mind readily. So the lessons are there for us today.

28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

We must heed some of these things, brethren, and realize that this is very contemporary instructions for us. Peace is a result of our relationship with God. We are to grow in that relationship and have peace and contribute peace to the Church!

So, this leaves, then, just one area that I'd like to set apart and take more time over. And that is the return of Jesus Christ and the Day of the Lord. We will come back to that section here and then lead into 2 Thessalonians next time. ♦