**1 Thessalonians 4:9-12**

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**Sinful Behavior in the Church**

***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.***

* Last week, in our examination of v. 1-8, we examined Paul’s exhortation and instruction to the Thessalonian church regarding the need for **personal purity** in their personal lives . . . specifically, the need to avoid falling into **sexual immorality**.
  + As Paul states in v. 1, while he is exhorting the Thessalonians to ***walk and please God***, **he does this not to correct their bad behavior, but to exhort them to continue in their present good behavior**.
  + Knowing that in their former pagan ways of life, Paul knew that the temptation to resume old practices of immorality would be enticing. And for this reason Paul exhorts and encourages his friends in Thessalonica to **continue to walk in a manner pleasing to God . . .** to continue in their present manner of life and not allow themselves to become distracted or moved off their present course of obedience to the teachings Paul and Timothy had brought to them.

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**From Personal Purity to Public Behavior**

***1 Thessalonians 4:9— 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;***

* Then, having exhorted his readers to continue in their godly behavior and to not fall back into their old pagan ways, **in the next section of instruction Paul moves from their personal purity to their public behavior**.
  + And Paul begins this section of instruction by instructing them . . . again . . . on the subject of ***love of the brethren***. Paul writes in v. 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***.
* As we learn in every other book in the New Testament, **love of the brethren is one of most important themes in regard to living the Christian life**.
  + Love of the brethren is one of the distinguishing hallmarks that defines whether a person is a true Christian or not.
  + Every writer of the New Testament gives instruction regarding what love is and why it is so important to the health of individuals and the church body, as a whole.
* But this instruction by Paul is not new. In the first chapter, in v. 6-7 Paul had commended the Thessalonian church for the very positive reports he had received from others in regard to their faithful imitation of Christ-like behavior and the love they were demonstrating that had earned them high praise from others.
* Now, in v. 9 of chapter 4 Paul returns to the subject of ***love of the brethren***. But in returning to the subject, Paul does so for the purpose of commending them that ***you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another***.
* This statement is high praise from the apostle. Here in v. 9 Paul is saying **2 things about the *love of the brethren*** that the Thessalonians were demonstrating.
  + **First**, in saying that ***you have no need for anyone to write to you***, Paul is saying that **what he was writing to them on the subject of *love of the brethren* was not instruction, but exhortation and commendation.**
    - In other words, I have taught you on this subject and you are implementing what I have taught you. Well done!
  + **And secondly**, here in v. 9 Paul is saying that **“I first taught you on the subject of *love of the brethren*, and you have properly implemented this instruction. Any further instruction you will receive on this subject with be *taught by God*** . . . that the resident Teacher, the Holy Spirit, was now responsible for continuing their Christian education as He did the work of sanctification in their lives.
* From Paul’s words here in v. 9 it is quite apparent that while there were some doctrinal deficiencies that he wished to correct . . . as we will see in the coming section. But on the subject of Christian love of the brethren, the Thessalonians needed no further instruction from Paul.
* Paul’s instruction here in v. 9 is very important for us to understand. **One of the most important aspects of living the Christian life is one of the simplest to understand and one of the easiest to implement.**
  + Evidence that a person is truly regenerated by the Holy Spirit is seen in the manner in which they live their life. Do you love the brethren or not?
* Remember, **love is demonstrated in sacrificing one’s own self-interests for the benefit of the interests of another.**

* + **It’s that simple. Placing the interests and well-being of someone else ahead of your own interests and well-being.**
  + It’s quite a simple concept. While there are many Christian denominations that disagree vehemently over points of biblical doctrine, **the one doctrine that every Christian denomination is in whole-hearted agreement is the instruction that “we should love one another as Christ loves us.”**
* But, while this instruction is easy to understand, it is difficult to implement.
  + The main reason it is difficult to demonstrate ***love of the brethren*** is because all humans are, by nature, selfish. We all inherently want what we want and what’s best for us. To put someone else’s interests and well-being ahead of your own is unnatural.
  + And because it goes against our natural inclination, unregenerate people are very reluctant to demonstrate love toward any but their closes friends or family.
  + In fact, in the Greek and Roman cultures of the time in which Paul lived, **the concept of self-sacrificing love for someone else was mocked and seen as a character flaw and the symptom of a weak personality.**
    - So, for the Thessalonians . . . and every church body that was formed by the apostles and evangelists of the first century . . . the transformation from being self-centered to self-sacrificing was truly a radical change.
    - But, at the same time, there was no better way to determine if a person was a Christian than to see if he or she had truly adopted this transformed lifestyle.

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**The Far-Reaching Love of the Thessalonians**

***1 Thessalonians 4:10a— for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia.***

* And, as we see in v. 10, the Thessalonians demonstrated that they were truly transformed, as they not only demonstrated ***love*** toward those brethren they knew in Thessalonica, but ***you practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia.***
  + With this statement Paul calls to our remembrance his commendation in 1:6-7 . . . ***6 You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit, 7 so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.***
* Here in 4:10 Paul is praising the brethren in Thessalonica not only for demonstrating love toward one another, but for the self-sacrificing attitude they were demonstrating to the brethren in other churches in Macedonia . . . people they may have known very little about.
* As I said a few minutes ago, **love of the brethren is a hallmark of a true Christian.**
  + The willingness to go well above and beyond for the sake of a brother or sister in need is not a normal human response.
  + Even in our American society, which prides itself on being generous in helping those in need, many generous Americans feel that it is the job of the government to be generous . . . that social programs to help the needy should be paid for by the taxpayers. Very few advocates of expensive and bloated social programs actually open their own wallets. They want the government to open its wallet.
* But asking someone else to help a needy person is not the same as helping directly.
  + Compassion, sympathy and pity for the needy are not the same as love for the needy.
  + Compassion, sympathy and pity are emotions. Love is action. Love is seeing a need and doing something, directly and tangible, to meet that need.
  + Compassion, sympathy and pity, if not accompanied by action to alleviate a need are merely useless emotions that do nothing to resolve the need.
  + But, unfortunately, in our society compassion, sympathy and pity for the needy is usually accompanied by a demand that “someone should do something about this.” And by “someone,” they usually mean “the government” or “those rich corporations.” Personal acceptance of responsibility to help someone is replaced by a feeling that the government or some other wealthy entity is responsible for solving such social need problems.
  + But, just to assuage their consciences and refute what I just said, people who refuse to get involved personally to help others in need are quick to point out that, “just today, I gave the homeless guy on the street corner a dollar!” So, what they are saying is that the person least deserving of help . . . the able-bodied person who is too lazy to work . . . is the one person they decided to help? And the reality is that the only reason they forked over a buck is because they we stopped at a traffic light and felt embarrassed, not because they actually wanted to help.

**Two Positive Instructions**

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***1 Thessalonians 4:10b-11a— But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, 11 and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life***

* So, in v 9-10 Paul commends the Thessalonians for their well-known ***love of the brethren***. From there Paul then proceeds to present **2 points of positive instruction** in v. 10-11 . . . ***But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, 11 and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life***.
* In the **first** point of instruction Paul, when Paul says ***but we urge you, brethren, to excel still more***, he is encouraging the Thessalonians . . . and all believers who would read these words through time . . . not to sit back and rest on your laurels.
  + Instead, Paul exhorts his readers to ***excel still more***.
  + In other words, **continue what you are doing and strive to do even more.** Make it your continual action to increase and abound even more in your ***love of the brethren***.
* **Secondly**, in v. 11 Paul then exhorts his readers to ***make it your ambition to lead a quiet life.***
* To understand this second instruction it is first necessary to understand the meaning of the word that is translated ***ambition***.
  + The Greek word Paul uses here, *philotimeomai*, means “to be motivated by love of honor.”
    - In other words, Paul is saying that the readers should **“find it pleasing and honorable in leading a quiet life.”**

**A Problem in the Thessalonian Church**

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***1 Thessalonians 4:11b— and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you***

* Unfortunately, while the instruction to ***make it your ambition to lead a quiet life*** is a positive command, **the reason this instruction is necessary is because there were some among the Thessalonians who were not “leading a quiet life.”**
  + In the second part of v. 11 Paul then specifies the desired actions that were deficient in some in the church . . . ***attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you***.
* Here in v. 11 we have **1 command, comprised of 2 parts**. The reason I point this out is because **the first can more easily be accomplished if preceded by the second.** 
  + In other words, **attending to your own business is more easily accomplished if you are engaged in working with your hands.**
* As we read this instruction by Paul, it is necessary to understand that this was not a random or unimportant command. Paul gives this instruction because this was a problem in the Thessalonian church.
  + Apparently there were members of the church who were, what some scholars term, **“pious idlers.”**
  + In other words, there were people in the Thessalonian church who were choosing not to work. And because they had free time on their hands, they were beginning to cause trouble in the church by meddling in other peoples’ business.

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**Why the need for this admonishment?**

* As I read this admonishment of Paul in v. 11, I have to admit that I was surprised. Why was this church, which was being so highly praised by Paul up to this point, now being admonished in this way? Was this a pervasive problem or was it only an isolated problem?
  + Answering the second question first, we don’t know the degree of the problem that Paul identifies here, but it was obviously large enough that he addresses it in **both** **of his letters** to the Thessalonians. We read in **2 Thessalonians 3:11 . . .**

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***2 Thessalonians 3:11— For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies.***

* + So, it appears that the problem Paul is speaking of here was significant enough that it needed to be addressed in both of his letters.
* The other question I asked a moment ago was, “why was the Thessalonian church, which had been praised so highly up to this point in this letter, now being admonished in this way?”
  + The **answer** to this question is . . . the problem of the laziness of some people and their meddling in the personal business of others was disrupting the unity of the church.
* While we don’t know the magnitude of the disruption that was being caused, we can see from Paul’s statements in his second letter that his admonishment in this first letter was not strong enough to stem the problem. Consider Paul’s instruction on this subject in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 . . .

***2 Thessalonians 3:6-15— 6 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. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you, 8 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; 9 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. 10 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. 11 For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. 13 But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary of doing good. 14 If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame. 15 Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.***

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* + From reading this passage we can see that Paul felt it necessary to use **even more forceful language** in his second letter. Note the strongly worded statement in v. 10 . . . ***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.***
  + From this passage we learn that there were some in the Thessalonian congregation who were refusing to work. Instead, they were presuming upon the charity of the brethren to feed them, while, at the same time, stirring up trouble by ***acting like busybodies***.
  + Ultimately, Paul commanded the Thessalonian congregation to ***not associate*** with such people. With this command Paul makes it clear in v. 15 that this **“refusal to associate” or “socialize”** with such **“brothers”** was not for the purpose of excommunication, but for correction and restoration.
* Here, in this episode, we see the **correct** application of **biblical restoration**, as found in Matthew 18:15-20
  + Church discipline . . . or biblical restoration, as I prefer to call it . . . is not for the purpose of punishment, but for the loving correction and restoration of a sinning brother or sister.
  + And, as Matthew 18:15 states, the desired outcome is that ***if he listens to you, you have won your brother.***

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**What was causing these believers to behave in this manner?**

* In examining both 1 Thessalonians 4:11 and 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 the question emerges . . . **“what was causing these believers to behave in this manner?”**
  + Why would people who were gainfully employed suddenly quit working and behave in the manner described by Paul?
  + I believe the answer is found in Paul’s instruction in both of his Thessalonian letters and was one of the major points of doctrinal error that he was correcting in these letters.
* The **doctrinal error** that had led to this irresponsible behavior was the belief among some in the Thessalonian church that **since the return of the Lord for the church was imminent, concern for worldly responsibilities was no longer necessary**.
  + In effect, the Thessalonians believed the Lord’s return would occur within only a matter of days or weeks. So, with the return of the Lord at hand, some of the Thessalonians had abandoned all their earthly responsibilities and were **metaphorically sitting on their suitcases, waiting for the Lord to show up.**
  + And with the passage of time, these believers refused to change their behavior. Instead of going back to work to provide their own livelihood, they doggedly persisted in their behavior, depending on the charity of others to feed them.
  + And, as these mistaken brethren continued to be a drain on the resources of others, they also became a problem as they suddenly had too much time on their hands and felt it appropriate to meddle in the personal business of others.
* While they were busy working and earning a living for themselves, these men and women didn’t have the time to worry about other peoples’ business. But with nothing but idle time on their hands, they suddenly found themselves with ample time to insert themselves into the affairs of others.
  + And we can all imagine how that went over. If you’ve ever had someone butt into your personal business, uninvited, you know the feeling.
  + If a person approaches you and begins a conversation with the statement, **“I know it’s none of my business, but . . . .”** hang on. You might be in for a wild ride.
  + And even worse is the ***busybody*** who doesn’t even bother with the disclaimer . . . they just butt into your business, whether you like it or not.
* Paul recognized the problem of people who had too much time on their hands and their propensity for becoming meddlesome. In 1 Timothy 5:13 he instructs Timothy regarding the danger of the church providing continued financial support to young widows . . .

***1 Timothy 5:13— At the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention.***

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* + Here in 1 Timothy 5:13 and in 2 Thessalonians 3:11 Paul uses the term ***busybodies*** to refer to the actions of ide people. The word Paul uses . . . *periergazomai* . . . means “a person officiously inquisitive about other’s affairs.”
    - In other words, a person who inserts him or herself into the affairs of someone else.
* It’s amazing how quickly people with nothing to do will find their way into the affairs of other people.
  + And, unfortunately, once having discovered some juicy tidbit or something they personally disapprove of, a favorite human pastime is **talking about these things to other people** . . . **gossiping.**
  + And, also very unfortunately, it is amazing how quickly gossip can get out of control and cause great damage and injury. As James says, in James 3:5, regarding the destructive force of the human tongue . . .

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***James 3:5— So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire!***

* + The human tongue, when not restrained, can be very destructive. And when a church congregation is set afire by the gossip of an unbridled tongue, the harmony and unity of the brethren can be severely tested.
* Most of you have heard the phrase, **“Idle hands are the devil’s workshop.”**

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* + I was curious if this was a biblical proverb or a “folk proverb.” In looking at various Bible translations I found that this proverbial statement **is** found in **The New Living Translation** of the Old Testament. In The New Living Translation of Proverbs 16:27-28 we read . . .

***Proverbs 16:27-28— 27 Idle hands are the devil’s workshop;***

***idle lips are his mouthpiece.***

***28 An evil man sows strife;***

***gossip separates the best of friends.***

***Proverbs 16:27-28— 27 A worthless man digs up evil,***

***While his words are like scorching fire.***

***28 A perverse man spreads strife,***

***And a slanderer separates intimate friends.***

* While The New Living Translation is far from a literal translation of the Hebrew text, the sentiment in the translation does a good job of conveying the warning of Proverbs 16:27-28 . . . when people with too much time on their hands get bored and go digging, it usually results in them digging up evil.
  + And after having dug up their evil, when they begin to talk about what they’ve dug up, their ***words are like scorching fire*** . . . their words set fire and consume all that they come in contact with.
  + In both translations v. 28 clearly states that a person who engages in gossip can not only be divisive within a group, but he or she can destroy long-standing friendships.
  + And throughout human history the wisdom of Proverbs 16:27-28 has been proven to be tragically true. Idle hands and evil words can be very destructive.

***1 Thessalonians 4:11— 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,***

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* Knowing the destructive power of idle hands and evil speech, Paul’s corrective action for the Thessalonian church, as stated in v. 11, is ***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.***
  + The person who is busy with the affairs of living his own life and earning an honest living barely has time to attend to his or her own business and is much less inclined to become a ***busybody*** and stir up trouble.
  + It is apparent from the final phrase in v. 11 that Paul had previously given this instruction while he was with them, but there were some who did not heed Paul’s command.
  + And from what we read in his second letter, this evil continued to be a major problem within the Thessalonian church.

**Two purposes for this instruction**

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***1 Thessalonians 4:12— so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.***

* Then, to conclude this section of instruction, Paul gives **two very practical reasons for this instruction beyond the destructive effect it had on the unity of the church body.**
* The **first** reason Paul lists in v. 12 is ***so that you will behave properly toward outsiders***.
  + In this statement Paul makes the point that the church is constantly being observed and evaluated by unbelievers.
  + Unbelievers love to justify their unbelief and their refusal to attend church by pointing to the evil and hypocritical behavior of some within the church.
  + The common refrain of people who are critical of those in the church they observe doing evil is, “why would I want to go to your church? I see your people acting like the rest of the world. If that’s the way Christians act, you’re nothing but a bunch of hypocrites!”
  + And, tragically, such sentiment is not wrong. Why would an unbeliever go to a church where its members are behaving like the world?
  + So, Paul’s first point here in v. 12 is that we must demonstrate to the world that Christians are different from the world. It is our responsibility to ***behave properly*** so that ***outsiders*** will not be given cause to speak ill of Christ or of the church.
* The **second** point Paul makes in v. 12 is that by obeying his instruction in v. 11, those Christians who have fallen into the error of refusing to work and becoming busybodies may ***not be in any need***.
  + As D. Edmond Hiebert states, *“for members of the church to be parasites and continue to live off other members of the brotherhood is morally degrading. Those who deliberately impose upon the generosity of others are not living in love.”*

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* Now, that being said, **there is a huge difference between those brothers and sisters who have fallen on hard times** and are working to get themselves out of a difficult situation and those who make no attempt to help themselves.
  + There are many legitimate needs that arise every day within the church, and we should not be reluctant or critical of brethren who need our help.
  + But when I see an able-bodied person standing, day after day, on a busy off-ramp of the interstate, holding a sign begging for money, I see a person who is making the choice to beg, rather than to work.
    - In fact, he has decided to work . . . he’s decided to work as a professional beggar . . . and I refuse to reward or encourage such slothful behavior.
* **Here in this passage this morning** **Paul is pointing to a problem that existed within the Thessalonian church that was endangering the unity of the church**.

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* + Some of the brethren were behaving slothfully and were becoming a significant problem because their idle hands had led them to become ***busybodies***.
  + As I said earlier, Paul comes back to this problem with a more strongly-worded rebuke in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 . . . ***if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either***.
  + While this sounds harsh, it is the proper action to dissuade lazy behavior and to protect and preserve the unity of the church.
  + Sin, left unchecked and uncorrected, will have a very serious and damaging effect on the health and unity of the church, and we cannot permit that to happen. If an able-bodied person refuses to work, the consequences, whatever they are, are of his own doing.