

Gospel Love

1Thessalonians 2:8-12

Most folks who grew up in Sunday school or who have attended church for a while are probably familiar with the apostle Peter.

Many consider him to be the leader of Jesus' closest disciples.

He is the guy who often spoke up first and ended up with his foot in his mouth.

He is the guy who got out of the boat to walk on the water with Jesus.

He is the guy who drew a sword and chopped off the ear of a servant of the high priest when they came to arrest the LORD at Gethsemane.

A short time after that, according to what Jesus had predicted just hours earlier, Peter denied even knowing Jesus three times, the third time calling down curses on himself along with his denial.

Do you remember what happened in that moment?

Just as Jesus had foretold the rooster crowed, then the LORD looked at Peter and Peter remembers what his Master had said about denying Him and he immediately leaves and weeps bitterly according to Luke 22:61.

Thankfully for Peter and for us, there is more to the story.

After Jesus is raised from the dead, He confronts Peter with a question one morning after breakfast.

You can read about it in John 21.

He asks, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"

Peter responds with, "Yes Lord you know that I love you."

I believe his answer is genuine and yet Jesus asks him the same question two more times.

Two more times Peter responds with "Yes Lord you know that I love you."

All three times Peter confesses his love for the Master, Jesus gives him a command.

"Do you love me Peter?" Peter replies, "Yes LORD!" Jesus says, "Feed my lambs", "Tend my sheep", and "Feed my sheep".

No doubt many things could be said about those commands, but whatever else might be said it is crystal clear that Jesus makes a very strong connection between loving Him and caring for His people.

I fear many live under the lie that faith in Christ is only about personal salvation.

It is absolutely true that faith in Christ is a deeply personal thing.

If you are in Christ your faith has saved you and all the goodness of God's nature is being directed towards you on account of Christ.

We could not be more wrong, however, if we take that amazing truth and use it to justify having nothing to do with the church.

[The very nature of what it means to be born again by the power of the Holy Spirit is to have a deep and abiding love for Jesus and if we love Him we will love His people. Now that raises an incredibly important question. The question is, "What does that look like?" That is the question that our text for this morning **1Thessalonians 2:8-12** can help us answer. Like Peter, the apostle Paul knew what it was like to be forgiven and restored by Christ through the power of the gospel and in this text he reminds the Thessalonians of how the gospel being at work in his own heart stirred up his affections for them. These verses give us three practical examples of how gospel love gets worked out in the lives of believers. If you want to know what it really looks like to love Jesus, then you need to pay careful attention to the example given to us here. Firstly, we need to see that...]

Point #1 – Gospel love drives selfless living. (Verses 8-9)

Truly caring for the people of God means spending something of ourselves in serving them.

Verse 8 continues Paul's recounting of the gospel ministry that happened when he and his co-workers Silas and Timothy first came to the city of Thessalonica to preach the gospel and plant the church.

In verse seven he speaks of the attitude of the ministers towards the people being like a nursing mother and to that he adds this...**verse 8.**

The word translated 'affectionately desirous' here not found anywhere else in the New Testament according to commentator Gene Green.

He also points out that the word is rarely used other literature of the time period.

Where it has been found it is used to express the deep longing that a parent has for an absent child.

I find it very interesting that Paul would use such a unique word here.

When he first came to the city all of these people were separated from God on account of their sin.

Such was the burden in his heart for these people that he felt towards them like he would a son or a daughter that had been taken away from him.

If you are a mom or a dad here this morning try to imagine a child being taken away from you.

Some of you don't have to imagine, you know what this feels like.

What would you give to have them back?

That is how these gospel ministers felt towards the people they are writing to.

What can end their separation from God and the spiritual distance between them and these ministers?

"The gospel of God".

The gospel of God is the invitation made to every human being who hears it to acknowledge that they have broken God's laws and deserve His eternal wrath, to accept what the LORD has done for us in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and on account of believing that Jesus died in the place of sinners, the sinner can be forgiven and welcomed home as a son or daughter of the King.

For the apostle this is more than the telling of information, this is a message to which the whole of his being is connected and invested.

We are doing more than giving you good news, he says, we are sharing/giving you 'our own selves.'

That phrase indicates the giving of their entire selves. Today we might say they were 'all in' for the Thessalonians because they had become 'very dear' or as some translations say, 'beloved' in the eyes of these gospel ministers.

Verse 9 reminds them of how this deep affection rooted in the gospel was put on display during their ministry.

We know that Paul was a highly educated man and we also know that he worked with his hands.

We are told in Acts 18:3 that Paul was a 'tentmaker' which many commentators take to mean that he worked at the trade of taking animal hides and making them suitable to use in making all sorts of things including tents.

From what I have read it was a very labour intensive task with a fairly meager pay.

When it says, "we worked night and day" it likely includes both the manual labour and the ministry of the gospel.

His point being that they spent themselves out of love for these believers.

This gospel affection that they felt for the people to whom they ministered drove them to self-sacrifice.

[I think that is why Paul uses the illustration of the parent child relationship so much in this chapter. Just think of it for a moment. Imagine times are tough and groceries are slim. What is a good parent going to do if it is a choice between them eating and their children? A good mom or dad is going to go without a meal so that the children can eat. Why? Because the love of a parent drives them to self-sacrifice when it comes to their children.]

That is what believing the gospel is supposed to do in the heart of believers!

The affection that the Holy Spirit puts in our hearts for people drives us to put others before ourselves.

That is what makes the follower of Jesus stand out as a follower of Jesus.

The LORD said, “*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.*” (Jn. 13:35 ESV)

How is that going? I fear too often people bearing the name Christian judge local churches with a self centered attitude.

The question top of mind for many is, “What about me!!!”

That is upside down if we look in the Bible and read what it says about the love that is produced in the hearts of those that believe the gospel.

[Let’s all ask ourselves a very hard question, “What have I given up recently for someone else because I love Jesus?” Those of us with families have hundreds of opportunities every day to do that. Those of us with jobs have hundreds of opportunities every day to do that. There are plenty of opportunities for that in the church. Just attending church regularly is an opportunity to worship rather than do something self-centered. I can tell you brothers and sisters most of the problems in the home, the workplace, and in the church are the result of a ‘me first’ attitude. I want to challenge all of us here this morning to give up one thing this week for someone else in the name of Christ. One thing, and pray that God would cultivate in our hearts more gospel love. Imagine the powerful difference that would make in your home, in the church, and in the world! Here is something else gospel love drives...]

Point #2 – Gospel love drives holy living. (Verse 10)

Having a deep affection for those that belong to Christ means having a deep concern for fighting against the evil that is in our hearts and desiring to feel and to live out what is right in God’s sight.

There is more to the affection that Paul has for these believers than simply hard work.

In addition to working and giving of themselves, Paul points out that they also had a great concern for their manner of life.

Before he tells us about how they conducted themselves in their labour and life, he says this at the beginning of verse ten. **(Verse 10a)**

Multiple commentators suggest that Paul has Deuteronomy 19:15, which talks about the need of two or three witnesses to establish a charge against someone in a legal matter.

That idea can also be used to establish a positive testimony.

It is one thing to say, “I conducted myself properly” it is far better for multiple people to say he did what was right.

The vast majority of the people in the church had spent enough time with Paul and his co-workers that they were able to closely observe how they lived.

In addition to their testimony, the apostle calls the LORD as a witness to their conduct as well.

Only fools call God as a witness in a flippant way.

The apostle knows there is no fooling the LORD. His continual presence in every part of creation and His complete knowledge of absolutely everything means He knows exactly what is true and what is not.

His perfect justice means He evaluates every situation exactly right and perfectly fair in everything He does.

It is therefore an immeasurable offense to attempt to call God as a witness to something that is false.

Paul knows that and let's remember Paul has seen and been terrified by the glory of the Risen LORD Jesus so he knows as much as anyone the seriousness of what he is writing to these believers.

His point is that what he is about to say is based in objective reality rather than his own opinion.

(Verse 10)

It is important that we take something off the table about these verses.

This is not Paul's self-righteous Pharisaical past resurfacing in his life.

He knows full well he is a desperate sinner in need of the Gospel of God every bit as much as his hearers are.

In 1Timothy 1:15 he refers to himself as the 'foremost'/'chief' of sinners.

Rather than a holier than thou type of attitude, the way Paul, Silas, and Timothy conducted themselves is the outworking of the gospel affection they had for these believers.

It is their love for the LORD and for those they ministered to that drove the way they lived.

Their conduct is described as holy, righteous, and blameless.

Their observable behaviour was being governed by God's commands, they acted rightly in God's sight, and there was nothing anyone could point to in their conduct that could be used to accuse them of wrongdoing.

They laid their lives before people like open books and when closely examined their life lined up with their preaching.

[I have a question for the children in our service this morning. Who remembers the prophet Daniel? What story is Daniel most famous for? That's right, the lion's den. He ended up there because King Darius was planning to put Daniel over the whole kingdom and his co-workers

didn't like it? They tried to dig up dirt on him but came up empty because of his faithfulness, so they got the king to make a law about worship knowing that Daniel was so faithful to God that he would disobey the new law and get into trouble.]

That faithfulness is the kind of conduct Paul and his companions had among those they were ministering too.

He is not claiming sinless perfection, he is saying that the love they have for the LORD and for His people drives them to strive for obedience knowing that when we fall short God grace abounds through repentance and faith.

That is the power of the gospel at work in the heart.

That is so important to get right and it is so powerful.

Self-righteousness is really self-deception.

All of us need to realize that thinking we can make ourselves right with God on our own is saying to the LORD that Jesus died for nothing.

It makes a mockery of God's holiness and perfection.

Striving for what is right out of a love for God which has been planted in our hearts through the power of the gospel is life giving and glorious, not only for our own lives but for those around us as well.

[The most loving thing we can do for those around us is to do everything we can to pattern our lives according to God's ways. If your life was examined up close and personal what would people see? Can we call God as a witness to testify that our conduct is right towards people? That is what gospel love ought to drive us towards. It ought to drive us to selfless and holy living. Here is one more thing Gospel love does...]

Point #3 – Gospel love urges believers to live a transformed life. (Verses 11-12)

Those that truly belong to Jesus have been called into God's kingdom and therefore must be instructed to live like citizens of heaven.

Verse 11 begins with that important little word 'for'.

Part of why Paul can say that these believers can testify to the holy conduct of the gospel ministers is because of this (**Verses 11-12**).

He returns again to the illustration of a parent child relationship and this time he is using the picture of a father to make his point.

Brothers and sisters we need the reminder in our day of the importance of fathers.

I would suggest to you that there is a crisis of fatherhood in our society and the pattern of fatherhood in the Bible ought to be shining forth in these days of moral and spiritual bankruptcy.

I am so thankful for the men in this room who take that call seriously.

Some of you though need to in grave humility, open your bibles, and look to Jesus as your example for how to act as a husband and father.

Gene Green shows in his commentary that in the time and place where Paul is writing, it was the general view in society that the father was primarily responsible for the moral instruction of his children.

In our day the experts would probably chalk that up to a wrongheaded belief in a male dominated society.

While I would be the first to admit that men have abused their authority in terrible ways, it is simply wrong to abandon the idea of the need for fathers to be responsible for their home and in particular the instruction of their children.

Our society pits fathers against mothers, but God's design doesn't do that. God design calls dads to serve, protect, and provide for their wives and children.

That tender hearted strength is the picture the apostle wants us to have in mind as we get to verse 12.

“Just like a father with his children we exhorted, encouraged, and charged you.”

We made an impassioned plea, we did all we could to build you up, and we were clear with you that this is necessary in your lives as followers of Christ.

The exhortation, the encouragement, the charge is to ‘walk in a manner worthy of God’.

No doubt someone is thinking, “That’s impossible”!

On our own that is absolutely right. Apart from grace this command makes absolutely no sense because only one person has ever truly lived in a manner worthy of God and that is Jesus.

Paul hasn't forgotten the gospel! He is applying the power of the gospel to the lives of believers.

As a follower of Christ we have been called by God into His kingdom and glory it says here.

Commentator Gene Green reminds us of something very important about God's kingdom, he says, “God's kingdom is not a territory but the rule of God that is exercised in the present and will be revealed in the future in all its fullness and glory at the time of Christ's royal coming.”

God's kingdom is everywhere brothers and sisters, the question is do we want to live under His rule.

Yes we stumble and fall in many ways, especially I think, in our thoughts and feelings, but do we want to live under God's rule or do we want to rule our own kingdom?

God has called His people into His glory, is that where we want to live?

Gospel love calls people to live like they want to go to heaven rather than being satisfied in this present creation.

[I have a friend who is extremely allergic to peanuts. If the tiniest bit of peanut makes him swell up like a balloon. Because that is the case he knows to stay away from peanuts. But imagine he came over to my house and said, “Mike give me a peanut butter sandwich because I’ve always wondered what it would taste like!” If I care about him at all I am going to say, “No way man, you can’t have that it will hurt you.”]

That is exactly what it is like to encourage or enable a person to continue to walk in ways contrary to the commands of the LORD, it hurts people.

True gospel preaching tells believers that they have been called to life by God the Father, through the Person and work of God the Son, in the power of God the Holy Spirit.

Listen, there is abounding grace for the sinner who is striving to walk in a manner worthy of God and it is precisely because of the grace of the gospel that we ought to exhort, encourage, and charge one another to strive for obedience to the LORD and in so doing live a transformed life.

As we close this morning I want to ask you to look into your heart.

Is there any gospel love for others there?

Do we have any drive to live selflessly?

Do we have any ambition for holy living?

Do we love one another enough to urge one another to live a transformed life?

How amazing it would be if people could look at us and see these things clearly in our lives.

If they could they would know that we really do follow Jesus to the glory of His name.

Let’s pray and strive together towards that end.