

## The Everyday Christian Life

1Thessalonians 4:9-12

There is a big difference between a profession of faith and faith that makes us alive in Christ.

If you have walked with and loved the Lord for many years you have likely seen the parable of the sower lived out before your eyes.

In the parable a sower sows seed on four different types of ground.

Some seed falls upon the path and birds come and eat the seed.

Some seed falls upon rocky ground it sprouts but is soon scorched by the sun and withers away.

Some seed falls among the thorns and when it grows it gets choked out by the thorns and does not survive.

Lastly there is the seed that falls upon good soil, that seed sprouts into a healthy plant that produces a good yield of grain.

When He told the parable the disciples are left scratching their heads and ask Him to explain its meaning.

He explains that the parable is about people and how they responds to God's word.

Some people hear it but don't understand it and Satan is able to quickly snatch it away from them.

Others hear and receive it, but at the first sign of difficulty turn away.

Some last even longer but are too tied up in the things of this world and those things eventually choke out the desire for God's word.

Finally, there are the people who keep their affection for what the LORD has to say, they both endure and make progress in the Christian life.

The purpose of the parable is to teach us the difference between a profession of faith and faith that truly saves.

Of course a profession of faith is really important.

No one can be right with God unless they confess their sin and accept Jesus as their personal Lord and Saviour.

But saying the right things by itself has no power to deliver us from the wrath to come.

True salvation means having a changed heart according to Ephesians 2.

It is God, by His sovereign grace, making someone who is dead in their sins alive in Christ.

Now, here is a critically important question, "How can we confident that has happened?"

Jesus tells us in the parable. He says, "The seed in the good soil produces grain."

In other words the word of God produces things in our hearts that get worked out in our lives.

[The Christian faith is something that gets lived out every day. Coming to church for worship, encouragement, and fellowship is an important part of that, but that must translate to our day to day lives. What does that look like practically speaking? That is what our text this morning **1 Thessalonians 4:9-12** points us to. In these verses the apostle Paul points believers to some things that we should be looking for in our day to day lives. These are some things that we are called to as Christians. Number one...]

**Point #1 – Christians are called to grow in love. (Verses 9-10)**

One of the most basic works of the Holy Spirit upon the heart of a believer is to constantly grow a devoted affection for others who belong to Jesus.

*Verses 9-10 show us that there is some really strong evidence that those belonging to the church of Thessalonica have truly been made alive in Christ.*

Multiple commentators believe the words ‘now concerning’ at the beginning of verse 9 indicate that Paul is addressing concerns/questions raised by these believers.

One of the questions they had was about ‘brotherly love’.

That is what Christians are. We are brothers and sisters because by being ‘in Christ’ God is our Father.

After belonging to the same church for a while it is easy to imagine people asking questions about the obligation they had to love one another.

*“Do I really have to love so and so in the Church?”*

Has that question ever crossed your mind? Some people are easier to love than others aren’t they? That is the nature of relationships in this fallen world.

Paul answers their question by writing that there is no need to answer their question because they already know the answer.

How do they know the answer? Look it says at the end of verse nine they have been ‘taught by God to love one another’.

It is important to remember what ‘love’ means biblically speaking.

It means to have a tender hearted desire for someone’s highest good.

God teaches that plainly in His Word, He teaches us that through the example of Jesus, and that is what the Holy Spirit is working to produce in our hearts.

*These believers know that because they have been living it out even beyond the walls of their own church and have shown love towards believers all over the region.*

Look again at the end of verse 10 it says, "...we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more."

That means every day we need to be seeking to love one another more and more.

When I was a young Christian someone said to me, "The bible says I have to love other Christians it doesn't say I have to like them."

I remember thinking at the time it didn't sound right and the more I have come to see in God's word what it means to love people the more convinced I am that we need to be tender hearted towards one another.

We need to joyfully put others before ourselves, care for practical needs, and point people to what is good for their sake because we actually care about them.

[When can I say enough is enough with my fellow Christian? Never. When am I free to stop forgiving a brother or sister in Christ? That is my ongoing obligation and more than that a heartfelt desire. We must always look on other believers with mercy, compassion, and affection because that is what being alive in Christ looks like from day to day. Rather than asking, "When can we stop loving one another?" We need to be asking, "How do we love each other better from day to day?" We are called to grow in love. Secondly...]

## **Point #2 – Christians are called to peaceful lives. (Verse 11a)**

Believing the truth that the LORD is present in and has power over everything should dramatically affect how we live in the turmoil of this present world.

### The word 'and' is repeated three times in verse 11.

Each 'and' is tied back to the word 'urge' that we see in the second part of verse 10.

Just as he is encouraging us with all of his God given authority to grow in love so too he is encouraging us to some others things as well.

Let's look at each of these 'ands' one at a time. (**verse 10b-11a**)

Some translations say 'make it your ambition to lead a quiet life.'

The fact that we need to 'aspire' or 'make it our ambition' means this is something we need to actively work at.

### This is something different from being a person of few words.

I like how Matthew Henry puts it, he says, "[Living quietly] means being calm and quiet in the mind, having patience possess our souls, being meek, mild, gentle, peaceable, and not given to strife, contention, or division."

It means being people who are calm and collected when a situation is stressful or contentious.

[I recently watched a documentary on fighter pilot training. Talk about a stressful situation. Everything happens incredibly fast, there is a lot to keep track of from moment to moment, it is

always about life and death situations, and there is a tremendous amount of physical strain taking place on the body. If the pilot panics it is over, he/she has to keep in control in order to perform well. How do they get there? The train, they aspire, and they make it their ambition.]

That is the picture here.

I confess this a struggle at times for me.

How do we aspire to quietness in our souls?

I believe the two most important things we can do towards this end are know Who God is and trust in Who God is.

Just think of three important aspects of the nature of God.

Omnipresence, omniscience, and omnipotence.

God is present everywhere, He knows everything, and He has ultimate power over everything.

The Lord is not surprised by the turmoil in our lives and He is in absolute control over it.

When we are in a tough spot we must never think our greatest need is to change the situation.

Our greatest need is to trust in the goodness and power of God.

[Nothing quiets the soul like resting in Who God is and what He has promised those who belong to Him through faith in Christ. That will keep us from careless words and actions. It will keep us from anxiety, anger, resentment, and bitterness. How is the quietness of your heart and mind day to day? That is what we are called to. Here is a third thing Christians are called to...]

### **Point #3 – Christians are called to ordered lives. (Verse 11b)**

A believer must learn to avoid interfering in things which he should not and have great concern for the state of his own heart and home.

*In the middle of verse 11 we again see the word ‘and’.*

Believers are ‘urged’/‘called’ to more and more love, to quiet lives, ‘and’ Paul writes to these believers *‘to mind your own affairs.’*

Some translations say, “to mind your own business”.

One way someone might look at this is to see it as a command to stay out of other people’s lives.

There is an aspect of that to this command.

The Bible clearly and repeatedly tells us to avoid things like gossip.

Gossip is when we are circulating stories, usually bad ones, about people without any concern for their wellbeing or the truth of the matter.

I think the scriptures would also steer us clear of things like being domineering and controlling of other people.

Meddling unnecessarily in the lives of others is something to avoid.

But this command is about more than staying out of other people's business it is about ordering our own lives properly.

[One of Jesus' most famous quotes is from Matthew 7 where he says, "...how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye?<sup>5</sup> You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye.' His point is that if we condemn sin in others and yet excuse those things in ourselves we have the whole thing upside down.]

Why do we do that? Why do we so easily look down on others?

Because we like to deceive ourselves into thinking we are better than we are and focusing on others rather than ourselves feeds that delusion.

Should we be concerned about sin in the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ? Yes for sure we should! Jesus says take out the speck!

The bible says for us to turn each other away from evil things, but we have to be doing that in our own lives too!

[We should be striving to order our lives based on the Word of God. How is that going? Are we examining our lives? I want to encourage us all to ask a few basic questions, "How am I applying God's word to my everyday life? What sin am I fighting against in my life? What am I doing to fight against it? What aspect of holiness am I striving for from day to day? What tangible words, thoughts, feelings, and actions can I point to that demonstrates progress?" Asking and acting on those questions are practical ways to make progress in ordering our lives. Fourthly we see in this passage that...]

#### **Point #4 – Christians are called to live productive lives. (Verse 11c)**

Work is part of God's good design for life and should be embraced as an opportunity for worship.

There is one more 'and' in verse 11.

The apostle has called these believers to be growing love, to peaceful lives, to ordered lives, and, he calls believers *'to work with your hands, as we instructed you.'*

To see this calling in its proper light we have to understand the culture into which this is written.

Most commentaries on this passage point out that manual labour was looked down on in the Greek society of the day.

Commentators also point out that most of the people who belonged to the church would have been members of the working class.

It is easy to imagine people becoming dissatisfied with being looked down on and mistreated by the upper crust of society.

It is easy to see some people adopting the attitude of ‘If I can live off others why should I bother to go to work at my miserable job?’

*Paul exhorts them in the opposite direction, he says ‘work with your hands’.*

The best way to understand that is to be productive at the job that you have.

There is no morally good job that is beneath the Christian and we should lean into whatever task is before us for the day with the best effort that we have.

Physical labour is a pre-fall command.

God put Adam “in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”

The very first job in creation was the manual labor of farming and gardening.

Of course on this side of the fall work is much harder, but when done to the glory of God it still retains its goodness.

[I’ll never forget when I was a boy how much I hated working. I’ll never forget when an older man said to me, “If I die working I’ll die happy!” I thought to myself, “That is the last thing in the world I want!” I couldn’t understand for the life of me why he would want that. Many years later I realized what he meant. He meant if he still had the ability to work till the day he died he would be happy because he would have good physical health.]

That thought is right, but we need to take it a step further towards worship.

We should pray every day, “Lord thank you for giving me a job! Lord thank you for giving me the health and strength to do what is before me today! Lord thank you for meeting my needs through these labors, help me to be content with what you provide, and generous with the abundance of your blessings.”

It is ungodly to despise work and it is ungodly to be lazy.

While our abilities vary from person to person and without a doubt diminish with age we should never despise or waste what God has granted to us on any given day.

[God calls His people to be productive to His glory. Now all of these exhortations are for a very important purpose. The apostle has a reason for urging us towards growing love, towards

peaceful, ordered, and productive lives. He gives us the purpose in verse twelve and shows us this fifth lesson, that...]

**Point #5 – Christians are called to display the power of the gospel. (Verse 12)**

While we will always fall short of living a perfect life, we must be living a changed life.

Verse 12 begins with the words ‘so that’.

We are being authoritatively encouraged to grow in love, to live quietly, to mind our own affairs, and work with our hands ‘so that...’ **verse 12.**

The word ‘walk’ in the bible is often used to refer to a person’s manner of life.

That is what it means here.

Paul’s concern here is that the manner of life of these believers be a proper reflection of the effects of God’s grace in the gospel.

It needs to be said here that living out the effect of God’s grace is important to the preaching of the gospel but it is different from the preaching of the gospel.

1Peter 3:15 says, “...but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect”.

No Christian was persecuted in the early church because they loved people, lived with peace in their soul, were disciplined in their personal lives, and worked hard at their jobs.

They were persecuted because they believed that Jesus died for their sins, conquered the grave, and that He lives and reigns as LORD over all.

Our manner of life is something distinct from preaching the gospel, but it is critically important to the good news of the Bible because it demonstrates the power of God’s grace at work in our lives.

God’s grace both saves us and changes us.

Besides our manner of life he also mentions here ‘depending on no one’.

This is most directly related to the instruction to ‘work with your hands’.

If you read commentaries on this passage they will likely mention the patron/client system in the Roman world.

Wealthy people (patrons) would pay lower class people (clients) to be at their beckon call for whatever they wanted.

It was a way of making money without having to ‘work with your hands’.

Here’s the catch, you had to do whatever was asked of you and unbelieving patrons would ask people to do things contrary to the gospel.

Being in that kind of dependent relationship harms the witness of the gospel.

*Beyond that, the call of the Christian is the serve rather than be served.*

It is to be generous rather than greedy.

It is to contribute rather than take. Paul is not speaking here of people in genuine need, he is speaking of taking advantage of a system because you are lazy.

Socialism and the bible are contrary to one another.

Getting stuff for nothing breeds entitlement and idleness which are not good for humanity.

That does not display the power of the gospel it displays the corruption of evil upon the human heart.

*God calls us to far better things as believers.*

He calls us to consistently cultivate a tender affection for the highest good of others, which is love.

He calls us to peaceful lives, being calm in the midst of life's storms because we know and believe in the power, presence, and promises of the LORD.

He calls us to live ordered lives, concerning ourselves first and foremost with obeying His commands for ourselves and encouraging one another towards the same.

He calls us to live productive lives. To be people thankful for what the LORD enables us to do and work at something to His glory day in and day out.

He calls us to all these things so that the power of His grace might be effectively displayed to the world.

This is the everyday Christian life. It is an amazing way to live.

May God in His mercy help us to live this out so that we might be filled with joy and the name of Jesus be glorified in all the earth.