

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning. Would you turn with me in a Bible to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4. We're looking today at chapter 4, verses 9 through 12.

If you're looking in one of the Pew Bibles, that's page 987. 1 Thessalonians 4, verses 9 through 12. Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another. For that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia.

But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands as we instructed you, so that you may live properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

Over 1,800 years ago, an ancient writer described an unusual new community that was rapidly spreading throughout the known world in these words.

[1 : 19] He said, They dwell in their own countries, but simply as visitors passing through. To them, every foreign land is like their native country, and every land of their birth like a land of strangers.

They marry, like everyone else, and have children. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They obey the laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives.

They love all people and are persecuted by all. They are poor, yet make many rich. They are dishonored, and yet in their very dishonor, they are glorified. They are evil spoken of, and yet are justified.

They are insulted, and repay the insult with honor. They do good, yet are punished as evildoers. This is from a letter written by a 2nd century writer named Methetes to a man named Diognetus. And it's a description of the early Christian church. And it's striking because the early Christians didn't fit into any of the existing categories. They weren't defined by an ethnic or national loyalty.

[2 : 23] They weren't pagans, but they weren't entirely like the Jews either, even though their faith had Jewish roots. And the most intense attempts to suppress and disadvantage them only made their distinctive character more evident.

Now today we're looking at the Apostle Paul's instructions to the Christian church about how to be a distinctive community in the world. A community that doesn't conform to the traditional stereotypes and the accepted categories.

A community that's shaped above all by the gospel of Jesus Christ. And that's what the book of 1 Thessalonians is about. It gives us a picture of a gospel-centered church. We've been studying it this spring, and we pray that as we look into this book, that we too would be shaped by the gospel of Jesus Christ into the church that he has called us to be.

The last two weeks we've seen that a gospel-centered church is to be characterized by two things. By holiness and by love. In chapter 3, at the end of chapter 3, Paul prays that they would increase and abound in love.

So that they would be established in holiness. Last week we look at how the gospel calls us to holiness. In chapter 4, verse 1 through 8. And today we see how the gospel calls us to love.

[3 : 38] As Paul says in verse 9, brotherly love. Now Paul's assumption here, the idea that's the foundation of this whole passage, is that the gospel of Jesus Christ creates a new family.

Every one of us is born into a family. And we're all born into the human race, the human family. But the human race, and each one of us individually, has turned away from God and alienated ourselves from him.

But the gospel message is that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, took on human nature and he became our brother. And as our brother, he didn't hold anything back from us.

He shared everything he had with us, even to the point of pouring out his life on the cross as a sacrifice. Even at that great cost. And on the cross, Jesus took on himself the death and judgment and alienation from God that we deserved.

So that in his resurrection from the dead, he could reconcile us to God the Father. So that we might enjoy life. That we might be welcomed into God's family.

[4 : 47] And so anyone who turns and believes in Jesus is welcomed into God's family. That's the assumption, that's the message that underlies this whole text. That the gospel of Jesus Christ creates a new family.

Brothers and sisters in Christ. Sons and daughters of God the Father. Nineteen times, just in this short book of 1 Thessalonians, Paul describes the Christians as brothers.

We might say brothers and sisters. It wasn't a gender-specific term. And that's why Paul uses this phrase, brotherly love, to describe the love of Christians for one another. The gospel of Jesus creates a new family marked by love for each other.

And in this passage, we'll see that that kind of love is expressed in two ways. Gospel-shaped love is expressed through generous sharing and through diligent working.

So we're going to look at each of these two things in turn. First, how the gospel produces generous sharing. And then how the gospel produces diligent working. So first, generous sharing. Now, Paul begins by praising the Thessalonian church.

[5 : 53] He says, you're already generous. You don't need me to teach you this. In fact, you've already been taught by God to love one another. Long ago, the prophet Isaiah spoke of a day when all God's children would be taught by the Lord.

And great will be their peace. In Isaiah 54. And Paul says that in Jesus Christ, that prophecy has been fulfilled. That day has arrived. Now, you might ask, well, what does that mean?

How exactly had they been taught by God to love one another? Well, there are at least four different ways that they and we can be taught by God to love. Well, first, we can be taught by God to love simply through Jesus' teaching.

Jesus said to his disciples, just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this, all people will know that you are my followers. If you have love for one another.

But second, we can be taught through seeing Jesus' example. John 13 says, having loved his own who are in the world, he loved them to the end. And Jesus demonstrated his love by washing their dirty feet.

[7 : 02] Taking on the role of a lowly servant when nobody else wanted to do it. And ultimately by going to death on a cross. Taking the punishment for our sins when no one else could do that.

So we can be taught by God to love through hearing Jesus' teaching, through seeing Jesus' example. And third, through receiving Jesus' provision. Jesus promised that after he left, when he went back to heaven, he would send the Holy Spirit.

To produce and cultivate love in our hearts. Paul says God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit whom he has given us. In Galatians 5, the fruit of the Holy Spirit is love.

And finally, we can be taught by God to love through knowing Jesus' Father. You see, the love of Jesus and the love of God the Father can't ultimately be separated. Jesus says, as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

From all eternity, God the Father has been pouring out his love on Jesus' Son without ever ceasing or stopping. And this overflowing love of God the Father has extended even to sinful people like us.

[8 : 12] Perhaps the most famous verse in the Bible. God so loved the world that he sent his one and only Son. Gave him that we might not perish. That anyone who believes in him might not perish, but have everlasting life.

As Paul says at the beginning of 1 Thessalonians, chapter 1, verse 4, he says, You're brothers and sisters loved by God. Loved with an everlasting love. Loved by God even before the foundation of the world.

And for the Thessalonian Christians, this understanding and this experience of God's love for them in Jesus Christ. And their union with one another as brothers and sisters in God's family.

It resulted in an outpouring of generous love for one another. You know, they treated each other like a family. You know, back then they didn't have public buildings like this to meet in.

So they met in their homes. Like a family. They sat around the same table and shared their food. Like a family. They offered hospitality to one another.

[9 : 17] And when somebody needed a place to stay. Like a family. They prayed for one another. Bringing their thanksgiving and their concerns before their Heavenly Father.

And they supported one another when some of them were rejected. Or had tension with their natural families because of their new faith. This was just a normal everyday part of life in the early Christian church.

Living as a loving family. You see, for the Thessalonians, this experience of being a Christian was in some ways like the experience of being an immigrant. In a foreign land.

And just as an example, if you were born and raised in Korea. But you came here to the United States to study or to work. It's common to sometimes feel a little out of place. In the majority culture. But if you meet another Korean. You have an immediate connection with them. Right? You share something so deep and significant with one another. You share a common homeland and a history that you take pride in.

[10 : 19] You share a common hope. That one day North and South Korea will no longer be two separate countries. You share a common language. And so you can express your hopes and dreams and fears and longings freely.

And you share a common love for good Korean food. For bulgogi and kimchi and sundubu jigae. Right? And all these things create a common bond between you.

And Paul is saying if you're a believer in Jesus. You share something with every other Christian that is so significant. And so deep that it unites you.

That it creates a deep and everlasting bond between you. In Christ we share a common Lord.

Jesus. Our brother. Who loved us and gave himself for us.

In his death on the cross. And triumphed over sin and death and his resurrection. In Christ we share a common history. The history of God's dealings with his people. Recorded throughout the Bible.

[11 : 21] And even in the history of the church. In Christ we share a common destiny. In the eternal city of God. The heavenly Jerusalem to come. In Christ we share a common longing that the family of Christians.

Despite our many failures and divisions. Would one day be reunited. And perfected. Worshipping around the throne of Jesus. In Christ we're brothers and sisters.

In the family of God. That's what we are. And the Thessalonian church they got it. Now they weren't perfect. In fact they had just been following Jesus for probably less than a year when Paul wrote this.

You know they were still figuring some things out. That's why Paul had to write a letter to them. To instruct them and guide them. And even correct them in a couple of ways. Their church was diverse. Including Jews and Gentiles.

Rich and poor. Slave and free. Free citizens and foreigners. Male and female. In a group like that there's always some potential for misunderstanding. But this church became known for their love.

[12 : 32] And their love didn't stop at the door of their church. It didn't stop at the border of their city. It extended to their whole region. Paul says to all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia.

They embraced their role as a crossroads church. And their love overflowed throughout their region. Now how did they express that love?

Well we don't know all the details. But we do know that some people went out from Thessalonica.

Proclaiming the gospel. Sharing their knowledge of Jesus. With others throughout their region.

Others offered hospitality.

To believers from other cities. Who came and needed a place to stay for some time. Surely they prayed. For other Christians. And other churches. They also gave money.

So that the gospel could be proclaimed. And so that poor Christian believers could be assisted. Just a couple of years later. Paul wrote in 2nd Corinthians. And he was boasting.

[13 : 30] About the generosity. Of the churches in Macedonia. Including Thessalonica. He says in a severe test of affliction. Their abundant joy. And their extreme poverty.

Have overflowed in a wealth of generosity. They gave according to their means. And even beyond their means. Of their own accord. Paul points to them and says. Look at how generous they were.

They weren't extremely wealthy. But they were extremely generous. With what they had. Now what about our church? Do we see this kind of generous sharing.

This overflowing love. For one another. And even for other Christians in our region. You know what would this look like in our context? Well it might look like a mom.

Who already takes care of two young kids. Making two crock pots worth of food. And bringing it to two other moms. Who just had new babies. As well as a med student. Studying for her boards. Or it might look like two or three families.

[14 : 31] And individuals. Banding together. To provide a place to live. For three months. For two women. In the church. Who had been homeless. And had run out of time. And couldn't stay at the homeless shelter.

Any longer. Or it might look like an older couple. Taking a day off work. To help a young family in the church. To paint and clean their home. Or maybe somebody who had.

Been to church on and off. Throughout the years. But never felt. That anyone really cared. And then she came here for the first time. And was warmly greeted. Engaged in conversation.

And remembered. When she came again. In the following weeks. Or maybe it would look like.

Having 30 people over. On Easter Sunday. After church. Intentionally including.

Both core church members. New visitors. And visiting extended family. Even though. Your house was maybe not built. To host 30 people all at once. Well all of those things.

[15 : 27] Have happened in this church. Just in the last couple months. The last one actually happened. At two different houses. And so we praise God. Because he's teaching us.

To love one another. And to share generously. And brothers and sisters. I want to urge you. As Paul did. Do this more. And more. Let the teaching of Christ.

The example of Christ. The indwelling Holy Spirit. The love of God the Father. Motivate us. Impact our hearts. And minds. And schedules.

And budgets. So that we share more. And more generously. With one another. What would that look like. To do that more and more.

Well Pastor Nick said two weeks ago. You can't love people. Who you don't know. So the first step might be. Just getting to know some other people well. So that you can love them well. That's why we have fellowship hour.

[16 : 24] Every Sunday after the service. An opportunity to connect with people. And get to know them better. So that we can love one another well. And then once you know somebody. Pray for them.

Pray for this church. Pray for other churches. And other ministries too. Pray that they. Pray for other churches in New Haven. That they would grow. And be fruitful in their ministry.

And be faithful to God. You know it's easy to become suspicious. And assume the worst sometimes. Of other ministries and leaders. Especially if we haven't spent the time.

To get to know them well. But let's be kingdom minded. Let's do all that we can. To promote healthy. And truthful. And loving relationships. Throughout the body of Christ.

And finally. Let's look for ways to be generous. With our material wealth. You know. If you're making your budget. For the year ahead. Or if you're thinking about. How do. How am I going to spend my tax refund.

[17 : 22] Ask yourself. How can I. Be generous. How can I structure my budget. So that I give away. More than 10%. You know.

10% is a good place to start. That was the law. In the Old Testament. Actually. It might have even been more than that. But. It's a good place to start. We don't have to end there. How can we. Seek to be more.

And more. Generous. Or maybe put a line item. In your budget. For hospitality. For providing. And paying for meals. For other people. And not just for yourself.

And your family. You know. If you want to share. If you have time. If you have skills. If you're not sure where to start. Look in the bulletin. Or look on the website. There's a page called.

Opportunities to serve.

Or talk to your small group leader. Or call the office. If you want ideas. Gospel shaped love. Is expressed in generous. Sharing. That's the first point.

[18 : 18] But the second point. Is that gospel shaped love. Is also expressed. Through diligent. Working. This is verse 11 and 12.

The Thessalonian church. Was so generous. In their sharing. That it seems. That some people. Were taking advantage. Of their generosity. The problem. Was some people. In the Christian community. Had become disruptive. And dependent. They become. They were meddling. In other people's business. All the time. And they were mooching. Off other people's generosity. In particular. They were relying on. What was known back then. As the patronage system. In Roman society. Almost everybody. Was either a patron. Or a client. If a patron. Was a high status person. Somebody who had. Money. And power. And connections. And if you were a patron. You try to increase. Your social status. By accumulating. [19 : 15] As many clients. As you could. People who are dependent. On you. And the more clients. You could. Support. Support. The more important. You would appear. Now the emperor.

Of course. Was the ultimate patron. Because everybody. In the whole empire. Depended on him. And everyone. Looked up to him. Now if you weren't a patron. If you weren't a high status person. You try to attach yourself. To one. Or maybe more than one. So you could get favors. From them. To get food. Or clothing. Or legal representation. Or support. A public support. For your cause. So you might. Show up every morning. In front of your patron's house. To greet them. As they went off to work. And pay them compliments. You wouldn't actually. Do anything very useful for them. You just make them look. And feel important. Now the problem was. The whole system was fake. Even secular Roman writers. Made fun of it. [20 : 13] If you're a client. You'd appear to give honor. To your patron. But really. You just want him. To give you a free meal. Every day. And if you were a patron. You'd give your clients. Weak old leftovers.

And then expect them. To praise you. For your generosity. For giving them something. That you'd never eat yourself. And Paul says. This whole thing. Is fake. And it's contrary. To the gospel. It's a false generosity. And it's a false honor. Paul says. The gospel is a message. About a self-giving savior. Who generously. Poured out his life. Who humbled himself. To die on the cross. So that others might live. And when that gospel. Begins to shape our lives. It produces real generosity. And not. Real self-giving generosity. And not self-seeking pretense. Of generosity. And at the same time. Paul says. The gospel of Christ. Produces people. Who work diligently. In order to serve. [21 : 12] And contribute to society. Instead of only depending. And taking. From others. Ephesians chapter 2. Paul says. We are God's workmanship. Created in Christ Jesus.

To do good works. Which God prepared in advance. For us to do. And that's what Paul instructs us. To do here. Instead of being disruptive. And dependent. To be peaceful. And diligent. In light of the gospel. In light of what Christ. Has done. For us. So instead of being disruptive. Paul says. Be peaceful. As he says in verse 11. He says. Live quietly. Now living quietly. Was a well understood concept. In the ancient world. It meant living peaceably. Or respectably. Now one ancient writer. Described the opposite. Of living quietly. As the man whose life. Is one. Long. Restlessness.

[22 : 09] He haunts marketplaces. Theaters. Law courts. Council halls. And every group. And gathering of men. His tongue. He lets loose. For unmeasured. Endless. Indiscriminate talk. Bringing chaos. And confusion. Into everything. Because he has not been trained. To that. Quietness. Which in season. Is most excellent. Paul says to the Christians. Through the gospel of Jesus. Through Jesus. Death on the cross. You've been given peace. With God. And because you're at peace with God. You can be at peace. Within yourself. Love. You don't have to live. In one. Long. Restlessness. Going from one event. To another. And one place. To another. And one experience. To another. And one relationship. To another. And never really being satisfied. Jesus said. Come to me. All who are weary. And heavy laden. And I will give you rest. Learn from me.

[23 : 05] And you will find rest. For your souls. And because you're at peace with God. You don't have to keep. Talking all the time. Do you know. People who. Talking.

Or keep talking. Talking. Talking. Talking. Or always talking all the time. Why do they. Why do people do that? Well usually. It's because they're insecure. Or self-absorbed. Or both.

But in Christ. We are secure. We're secure in his love. In his acceptance. For us. And in his word. Spoken over us.

So we're free to stop talking. And listen. And listen. As an act of love. To our neighbor. One of the reasons. Paul gives.

In verse 12. For why we should live quietly. Is so that we may walk properly. Before outsiders. Now as we've seen before. The Thessalonian church. Was living in a hostile environment.

[24 : 01] When Paul came to Thessalonica. And started preaching about Jesus. Some people hired a mob. And drove him out of town. Some people were. Just had it out. For the Christians. And they were looking for any opportunity.

To get them. Now I don't know how you feel. I don't know what environment. You're in throughout the week. But if you feel like. Some part of your life. Has lived in a hostile environment. If there's somebody.

Who just has it out for you. Or if you feel like. Somebody just has it out for Christians. One of the best ways. To commend the faith. Is not to complain. But to live quietly. Now that doesn't mean. Being silent. And never talking about Jesus. Out of fear. No. It means living peaceably. Living respectfully. Showing. Through your example.

The security. And confidence. And freedom. That Christ brings. Paul says. Instead of being disruptive. Be peaceful. And second.

[24 : 59] He says. Instead of being dependent. Be diligent. Mind your own affairs. And work with your hands. So that you may be dependent. On no one.

Now what does it look like. To work diligently. In light of the gospel. Paul's very practical here. So let me attempt. To be very practical as well. For our context. Five groups of people.

If you're a student. Number one. If you're a student. Do your own work. And don't plagiarize someone else's. Because when you stand before Jesus. On judgment day. He won't rebuke you. For having B's. Instead of A's. On your transcripts. But he will rebuke you. For being dishonest. Or lazy. Or idolizing your grades. Two. If you're preparing to graduate.

Find your deepest identity. In Jesus. And not in your future job. Now even if you go to Yale. You will probably not find. In your first year out of college. Your dream job.

[25 : 54] That uses all your skills. Has reasonable work hours. Pays a decent salary. And makes a difference in the world. I've seen a lot of students graduate.

I've been around for a long time. It doesn't happen. The first year out of college. For most people. We live in a fallen world. And work is often frustrating. And incomplete. And even if you think you got it.

It probably won't last. In the same way. Very long. Only God's kingdom lasts forever. So make that your first priority. Third. If you have a job. Do it well.

To the glory of God. No matter how prestigious it is. Or isn't. Paul's advice. He says work with your hands. And that was counter-cultural advice. Because back then.

People looked down. On manual laborers. They said manual labor. Is fit for only slaves. And so if you're not a slave. Don't debase yourself. By taking a manual labor job.

[26 : 50] But Paul says no. There's dignity. In all honest work. Genesis 2. God himself is portrayed as a gardener. Who plants a garden.

And gets his hands dirty. And forms Adam out of the dust of the ground. And so if you're mopping a floor. Or if you're sterilizing hospital equipment. Or planting a garden.

You're reflecting the image of God. And you're being a channel of his loving provision to the world.

And so work in your job with that vision. Fourth. If you're unemployed.

Be diligent in your search for work. Being unemployed can be lonely and discouraging. And you can only fill out job applications for so many hours every day. So don't go it alone.

As long as you're unemployed. Find another Christian. That you can meet with every week. To pray together. And for mutual encouragement. Fifth. If you're disabled or if you're retired.

[27 : 49] Consider yourself freed. To be in full time Christian service to others. Without the constraints of a boss. You might never work a paying job again. But God has still created you in Christ.

And prepared good works in advance for you to do. And that promise doesn't end. When you. If you get injured. Or when you turn 65. So don't waste your retirement.

Or even your disability. Use it for God's glory. And for others good. You see in a life shaped by the gospel. Generous sharing and diligent working. Aren't opposed to each other.

They reinforce each other. The purpose of generous sharing. Is to enable other people to become diligent workers. God generously poured out his grace on us in Christ. So that we might live a life. Characterized by good works. So if you're generously sharing your resources with others. But not calling them into a life of diligent work. You're not actually loving them.

[28 : 49] You're only enabling them. Paul says real love is tough love. And in 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 verse 10. He's addressing a similar situation.

He goes so far as to say. If anyone is not willing to work. Let him not eat. Now he's not talking about people who are disabled. Or people who are looking for a job.

But can't find one. But people who aren't willing to do. What it takes. To find a job. And hold it down. And he says in that case. Don't give them handouts. Don't promote an unhealthy cycle of dependence.

Because that's not truly loving. Don't give free room and board. To your 23 year old son. So that he can play video games half the night. And sleep until noon. Every day.

Right? Or on a bigger scale. This has been the tragic flaw. Of many well-intentioned attempts to help the poor. Everything from foreign aid. And international development. To social welfare programs.

[29 : 48] And even some short-term mission trips. Right? The intent is to help people. But if generous sharing. Isn't accompanied by. A call to diligent working.

The effect is simply a vicious cycle. Of dependence. Now if you're working in public policy. Or if you're working in social work. Or one of these fields. Look for ways. That you can both.

Continue to be generous. And not just become jaded. But also to call people into a life. Of diligent work. Step by step. The goal of generous sharing.

Is to enable people to become diligent workers. And in turn. The goal of working diligently. And not being dependent on others. Verse 11 and 12. Is so that.

Is to enable us to share generously. Right? What Paul's already commended them for. In verse 9 and 10. So we can reflect the character of Christ. Paul's not simply. Commending self-sufficiency.

[30 : 44] He's not just. Promoting an ideal. Of being totally self-sufficient. And stopping there. He says no. Don't be dependent on anyone. But instead. Work diligently.

So that you can share. With people who are truly. In need. As Paul says. Ephesians 4.28. He says. The one who has been stealing. Must steal no longer. But instead labor.

Doing honest work. With his own hands. So that he may have something to share. With anything. With anyone. In need. And in 2 Thessalonians. Only three verses. After Paul says.

If anyone's not willing to work. Let him not eat. He turns to the Christians. And he says. As for you. Brothers and sisters. Don't grow weary. In doing good. In other words.

Don't stop being generous. Because there are some people. Who have abused it. Don't become so jaded. That you simply become a sinner. In some ways.

[31 : 40] It actually was. A good problem. That the Thessalonian Christians. Were so generous. That some people. Were starting to take advantage of it. And Paul had to remind them. Call them. Into diligent work.

So that they too. Can one day. Generously share. You see. Gospel shaped love. It doesn't fit. The typical stereotypes. It's not just. A liberal emphasis.

On sharing. With little responsibility. To work. Nor is it just. A conservative emphasis. On work. With little responsibility. To share. Gospel shaped love.

Produces an upward spiral. Of generous sharing. And diligent working. So brothers and sisters in Christ. May we be shaped. By the gospel of Jesus. To experience.

And live out these realities. More and more. Finally. Maybe you're here today. And you're not a follower of Jesus. But consider this picture. Of a gospel shaped life.

[32 : 34] Of love. Characterized by generous sharing. And diligent working. Is this an attractive picture. To you. Does it seem wise. And good.

And admirable. To live such a life. Have you perhaps even seen. This kind of generosity. And diligence. And peacefulness. In the lives of some Christian. That you know.

Is there something here. That you want. But to be honest. You don't yet have it. If the answer. To any of those questions. Is yes. I urge you.

Turn. To the source. Of this gospel shaped life. Turn. To the person. Of Jesus Christ. Himself.
Consider him. And turn.

And believe. In him. Let's pray. Lord Jesus.

[33 : 36] Lord Jesus. We thank you. That. In your generous love. For us. Though you were rich.
For our sake. You became poor. That we. Through your poverty.

Might become eternally rich. Lord Jesus. We thank you. For the gospel message. And how it
shapes us. Into people. Who don't fit the categories.

Of this world. How it shapes us. Into people. Characterized by generosity. And by diligence. We
pray. That that would be true. More and more. We pray.

That we would be a church. Characterized by those things. That people might see. Your glory. Even
displayed in us. In your name we pray.

Amen.