

## LOVING LOUDLY AND LIVING QUIETLY

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Ben Janssen | 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 | November 22, 2020

<sup>9</sup> 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, <sup>10</sup> 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, <sup>11</sup> and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, <sup>12</sup> so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

What is the will of God for your life? It is such a big question that is not easily answered, except for this: It is God's will that you be sanctified (1 Thess 4:3). God wants you to be holy. Having been united to Christ by faith, a Christian not only receives by grace the gift of justification, the complete pardon of all his sins. He also receives by grace the gift of sanctification, the power of the Holy Spirit to make us holy, to become increasingly dead to sin and alive to righteousness.

But there are more specific questions about the will of God and our holiness. The Thessalonian Christians have written to the Apostle Paul to ask him about some of these things. "What is the will of God concerning..." What Paul says here and on through verse 11 of chapter 5 are his answers to questions these Christians have asked him to respond to, matters that they were concerned about and wanted to know what the Apostle would say about them.

I am summarizing these verses with the title of my sermon today. God's will is that we "Love Loudly and Live Quietly." The will of God involves how we love one another, how we labor for one another, and how we live around one another.

### HOW WE LOVE ONE ANOTHER

The first issue that they had asked about, it seems, is the subject of *philadelphia*, what the ESV translates as "brotherly love." In secular Greek, *philadelphia* is a word that is used to refer only to the kind of love that existed between biological siblings. In Judaism, one's "brother" would include not just biological family, but also those who shared Israel's national identity. But in Christianity, in the New Testament, the word *philadelphia* is used only to describe the love that exists between other Christians.<sup>1</sup> So what the Thessalonians have asked Paul to address is this matter of how we love one another in the local church.

### Relational Tension

But why did they ask him to comment on this subject? It's a good question since Paul says in verse 9 that they had "no need for anyone to write to" them about this and then goes on in verse 10 to commend them for loving other Christians so well.

But genuine love for others does not mean there will be no relational problems. We saw last week that some members within the church had committed adultery with one another and had thereby transgressed and wronged his fellow Christian (1 Thess 4:3, 6). In chapter 5, Paul addresses the need to respect those who were emerging as leaders in the church (1 Thess 5:12-13); the

importance of not despising the utterances of those who had a prophetic gifting (1 Thess 5:20); and responsibility to “admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, [and] be patient with” everyone (1 Thess 5:14).<sup>2</sup> Respect. Don’t despise. Admonish, encourage, help, be patient. These are the kinds of things we need and need to do in the local church because we really are a family, and relational tension will always exist.

### **Supernatural Enablement**

The fact is that people are difficult, so brotherly love is necessary. But for the Christian, *philadelphia* is not natural. It comes only through regeneration.

Verse 9 says that the Thessalonians had “no need for anyone to write to” them about this brotherly love, because “you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another.” Now what does that mean? Paul is alluding here to the prophecy of Isaiah 54:13, where God promises that one of the blessings of the messianic age will be the direct instruction of his people through the Holy Spirit rather than by human intermediaries.<sup>3</sup> In other words, it is the Holy Spirit himself who prompts new covenant believers to accept other believers as true family and to love them as true family.

If you are a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit, and the Spirit will tell you and teach you to love other Christians. It won’t be easy. It will, in fact, be impossible without this supernatural enablement. We’re talking here about the kind of love that exists only when you *are* family. That kind of love that somehow shows up when it is your child, your brother, your sister.

For example, in verse 10 Paul commends the Thessalonians for their love “to all the brothers throughout Macedonia.” He probably is referring to the financial generosity the Thessalonian believers had shown to other needy believers in the province.<sup>4</sup> In 2 Corinthians 8:1-2, Paul says that the Macedonian believers were known for generosity in spite of the fact that they were poor themselves. They gave generously even though they were impoverished, and that’s because they recognized these Christians as their brothers and sisters. When you give generously although you barely have enough for yourself, that is a pretty good sign of Holy-Spirit enabled *philadelphia*.

### **Growing in Brotherly Love**

So Paul recognizes that this church is a true church. They have evidenced brotherly love for one another. It is there. It is real. It is genuine.

But Paul does not just say, “I don’t need to tell you anything about brotherly love since you’ve already got it.” Instead he says at the end of verse 10, “we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more.” One commentator observes that Paul is saying that “Christian love should never become complacent, as though a certain level of love were sufficient to please God.”<sup>5</sup> We must never be satisfied with the love we’ve had with one another in the past. We must seek to love each other more and more in tangible, objective ways. Indeed, we’ll need to do so because of constant tensions we’ll experience.

As an aspect of our sanctification, real, tangible love for each other in the church will grow because it is a gift we've been given by the Holy Spirit, a benefit we have received because of our free and gracious union with Jesus Christ who taught us to love one another as he loved us (Jn 13:34).

### **HOW WE LABOR FOR ONE ANOTHER**

Now when we come to verse 11, it may look like Paul changes topics, for now he urges the believers “to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands.” This is not a new thought but an explanation of how the believers can abound in love for each other.<sup>6</sup> It's found in how we labor for one another.

The word translated “to aspire” comes from the noun *philotimia*, literally, “loving honor.” It frequently described those who sought honor through devotion to public service and to philanthropic causes.<sup>7</sup> So now the connection is clear. Love for one another (*philadelphia*) is to be evident in our aspirations (*philotimia*) to benefit one another.

#### **The Quiet Life**

But what comes next is a surprise, for Paul does not say we should aspire to public service, as we might expect from the ordinary meaning of *philotimia*. Instead, he says we should aspire “to live quietly.” To be “ambitious” about “living quietly” is an oxymoron.<sup>8</sup> But it is also the Christian way of living that benefits others, that evidences love for one another in the family of God.

What is this “quiet life” that Christians are to seek? Some who read these verses will inevitably conclude that Paul is commending hard work in our vocations. The “quietness” he commends is achieving financial security in our vocations—after all, he commends here manual labor (v. 11) and financial independence so that we are “dependent on no one” (v. 12).

But the manual labor Paul commends in verse 11 was the kind of work that the average person would do. So some see Paul here as urging Christians to keep a low profile in society, practicing contentment and confidence in God's provision and doing just enough work, however hard it may be, to just get by. After all, the “quiet life” was readily understood as withdraw from public affairs where one was free to mind his own business.<sup>9</sup>

Most of us probably think of the “quiet life” in essentially one of these two ways, either stressing the call to action in the verb “to aspire to” or stressing the call to rest in the verb “to live quietly.” But we have to keep the two together. There are two things to keep in mind here: the connection between the “quiet life” and brotherly love, and the concern Paul had for these believers in the midst of a hostile political climate.

#### **Unnecessary Attention**

To take the second one first, you'll recall that by embracing Christianity, the Thessalonians were accused of “turning the world upside down.” So when Paul ties “the quiet life” to the phrase “to mind your own affairs,” he is discouraging them from unnecessarily gaining more attention from a hostile society. The Christian is not to seek honor from other people by aiming to impact society.

You don't have to be a somebody on social media, to comment on everything in the news and cause a Facebook fight.

But this does not mean that you are to keep your faith private. Christianity is not a private religion. It affects every aspect of our lives and cannot help but touch on the relevant issues in society. The "quiet life" in Paul's day was usually for one who devoted himself to "contemplation and cultivation of personal growth."<sup>10</sup> It did not coincide with one's day job. But for the Christian it absolutely does. The "quiet life" for the Christian is not to be sought in withdrawing from society but from constant engagement with it in our ordinary vocations.

### **The Issue of Brotherly Love**

This brings us back to the connection between verse 11 and verses 9-10 and the call to increase in brotherly love. Christians were called to the "quiet life," but "brotherly love" required them to earn their own living and not become a burden on each other.<sup>11</sup> They were not to stop working and end up depending on the labors of others in the Christian community to provide for their needs.

So while Paul encouraged the Christian community to love one another in practical ways, including supporting one another financially as any good family would do, he did not want this brotherly love to be exploited by anyone in the community.<sup>12</sup>

This means that Christians ought to value work and vocation, not just for economic value for yourself but as a matter of brotherly love. As Paul writes elsewhere, we are to do "honest work," not so we can be wealthy, but so we can "have something to share with anyone in need" (Eph 4:28).

And this also means that for Christians our own personal growth comes not through withdraw from society but through constant engagement with it. Christians are to pursue their own personal growth while remaining engaged with society and with relationships.

### **HOW WE LIVE AROUND ONE ANOTHER**

Now when we get to verse 12 we can see what Paul has been aiming for all along in these verses. What began as a question presented to him, something like, "How do we love one another in this church when there are so many relational problems?" now ends with Paul's hope that Christians will live "properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one." His concern is how we live around one another, around Christians and non-Christians alike.

### **A Commendable and Contributing Life**

Yes, the world will hate us for what we believe (Lk 21:17). But this is no excuse for us to not behave decently around them. Regardless of how they treat us, we must live like Christians. If we suffer as a Christian, 1 Peter 4:16 tells us, there is no shame. But let none of us suffer for being evildoers in the world (1 Pet 4:15).

Our lives are not the gospel, but our lives as Christians, according to Titus 2:10, are meant to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior. Thus the Bible tells us to submit to our "authorities, to be obedient,

to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people” (Titus 3:1-2). We can live this way only because “the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared” and he “saved us . . . according to his own mercy” and justified us by his grace (Titus 3:4-7). The Bible insists that those who have believed in God must be “careful to devote themselves to good works” since “these things are excellent and profitable for people” (Titus 3:8). Paul’s concern for the Thessalonians, and for you and me, is that we “be regarded as excellent members of the surrounding society, with [our] conduct being a key element of their testimony.”<sup>13</sup> We are to be “dependent on no one” but contributors to society.

## **The Way of Jesus**

But before we go get after it, let me urge us back to the quiet life. You cannot live as verses 11-12 command without it. You can try, but you will fail.

You see, you don’t have to be a Christian to try to live like this. Verses 11-12 don’t sound particularly Christian, after all. But that’s only true if you do not think of the quiet life as the Christ-life. As the kind of life that Jesus lived and calls us to live as his disciples.

In his book, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry*, John Mark Comer reminds us of what so many of us have lost sight of, “that the way of Jesus is just that: a way of life.” It is “a lifestyle.”<sup>14</sup> He cites the late Eugene Peterson who said, “Jesus as the way is the most frequently evaded metaphor among the Christians with whom I have worked for fifty years as a North American pastor.”<sup>15</sup>

Now if you think of the Jesus way as a way *to* Christ, as a means to earn your salvation, you’ve missed the whole point. The Jesus way is the *result* of coming to Christ, a gift you receive freely if you will but trust him.

And this way that he gives to us is not an escape from the difficulties and hardships of life. That is what the world is seeking, but the best it can offer “is a temporary distraction to delay the inevitable or deny the inescapable.”<sup>16</sup>

Jesus offers us something more realistic and something so much better. He offers us, not escape from this life but equipment for it. What Comer calls the secret of the “easy yoke.” If you come to Christ, you can have it, the quiet life you are seeking. What he will give you is:

... a whole new way to bear the weight of our humanity: with ease. At his side. Like two oxen in a field, tied shoulder to shoulder. With Jesus doing all the heavy lifting. At his pace. Slow, unhurried, present to the moment, full of love and joy and peace.<sup>17</sup>

It’s a way of living around one another that profits not just yourself but your neighbor, too.

So come to him, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and he will give you rest. Take his yoke and learn from him, and you will find true rest, rest for your souls. For the yoke of Jesus is easy and his burden is light (Matt 11:28-30).

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<sup>1</sup> E. Plümacher, *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (EDNT), ed. Horst Balz and Gerhard Schneider, 3 vols (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), [3:424](#)

<sup>2</sup> These are mentioned by Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002), [202-203](#).

<sup>3</sup> G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), [779](#).

<sup>4</sup> Green, *Letters to the Thessalonians*, [206](#)

<sup>5</sup> Charles A. Wanamaker, *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), [162](#).

<sup>6</sup> Abraham J. Malherbe, *The Letters to the Thessalonians: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 32B, ed. David Noel Freedman (London: Yale University Press, 2008), [246](#).

<sup>7</sup> Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, 3d ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), [1059-60](#).

<sup>8</sup> F. F. Bruce, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Word Biblical Commentary, ed. Bruce M. Metzger, David A. Hubbard, and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas: Word Books, 1982), [90](#).

<sup>9</sup> Abraham J. Malherbe, *Paul and the Thessalonians: The Philosophic Tradition of Pastoral Care* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1987), 97.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>12</sup> Wanamaker, *Epistles to the Thessalonians*, [163](#).

<sup>13</sup> Green, *Letters to the Thessalonians*, [212](#).

<sup>14</sup> John Mark Comer, *The Ruthless Elimination of Hurry: How to Stay Emotionally Healthy and Spiritually Alive in the Chaos of the Modern World* (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook, 2019), 84.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 84-85.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.