

Faith Under Fire: Thriving in a Hostile World

The Lifestyle of God-Taught People 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

Introduction

At the beginning of chapter 4 Paul transitioned from talking about his prayers for the Thessalonian believers and his joy that they were thriving despite the hostility they were suffering. He turned his focus to the behavior and activity that genuine gospel believers display. He calls for a life of sexual purity in verses 1-8, and in verses 9-12 he underscores a second lifestyle hallmark of genuine believers: a loving work ethic attractive even to unbelievers.

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

1. Love Fervently: Responsibility toward Believers (9-10)

2. Work Quietly: Responsibility for Ourselves (11)

3. Live Honorably: Responsibility toward Outsiders (12)

1. Love Fervently: Responsibility toward Believers (9-10)

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Taught by God—one word meaning “God-taught”

God teaches us through His Word to love one another

But the focus here is on what the indwelling Holy Spirit of God teaches every believer. He has just highlighted this role of the Spirit in 1 Thessalonians 4:8

Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

That’s why Paul states they don’t need someone to teach them this truth. If they belong to God, the Holy Spirit who indwells them is already directing them to live with love toward their brothers and sisters in

Christ just as He moves them toward sexual purity.

This work of the Holy Spirit in them is why they're already showing love to Christian brothers and sisters throughout the whole region of northern Greece.

Brotherly love—philadelphia
Affectionate, loyal, family love

We urge you—exhort you; to call alongside; the Holy Spirit is called the Paraclete—the comforter or exhorter—based on the same word. Paul and his coworkers are coming along these believers in concert with the Holy Spirit's work in their lives.

To do so more and more—there are always more opportunities to show love and care for our Christian brothers and sisters

Any and every believer who is listening to the voice of God lives this way. But we all need encouragement to do so more and more. It's easy to slack off and sink into self-centered living instead of continuing to seize opportunities to serve the needs of others with affectionate love.

It is common for us to grow complacent about the needs of those we live with and see often. We become blind to their needs because

we're so used to having them around. We can come to view our spouse, our children, our parents as mere assets or liabilities to our own happiness, rather than people made in God's image and ransomed with the lifeblood of Christ. God has placed us together with them for us to do them good and build them up, not to use them for our own agendas.

Applications

- What evidence shows the believers in your sphere of influence that you have family affection and loyal love for them?
- In what ways does the Holy Spirit prompt you to treat the persons you know with warm, practical love?
- What do you see in your life that reveals a coldness toward others and their needs, and how can you make that right in the power of the Holy Spirit?

2. Work Quietly: Responsibility for Ourselves (11)

and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed (directives, orders, as from a magistrate or military officer) you,

This turn of direction may surprise you, but it demonstrates that there should be no disconnect between genuine love for others and taking personal responsibility for your own work. *Real love is not lazy. Selfishness*

is. Anyone who truly loves others rolls up his or her sleeves and works.

To live quietly—to be at rest, to be quiet, to remain silent

Love does not express itself in gossip, or meddling in the lives of others. It is not a bunch of talk. Love stays busy working.

So our ambition should be to mind our own business—literally, to practice our own things—that is to stay busy with our personal work responsibilities instead of wasting our time and the time of other people going about as gossips and meddlers. When we don't take care of our own responsibilities, we add to the workload of others.

This is especially obvious in the home. We live in a culture enamored with leisure and entertainment. It's easy to fritter away our time, but when we do so, we are wasting our lives. We are missing out on what they're for.

Husbands, if you find yourself sitting around while your wife moves about cleaning up after you and trying to keep up with household tasks, you aren't making a home with her the way God intended. Get on your feet and pitch in to help her get the work done. When the kids need attention, you shouldn't be leaving that all on her. You're the dad, and you

supposed to be setting the example of self-sacrificing service to others.

Mom, if you're wasting your days surfing the internet dreaming about a life that isn't yours, or gadding about with friends while your home falls apart, who's going to take care of it for you? Mind your own things first, then branch out from there as you're able. Anything that should be done can be done in its season.

Kids, especially those of you who have adult-sized bodies because you've hit your teen years, are you using your mind and strength to shoulder responsibilities you can bear? Why should your mom have to pick up your dirty socks or your messy room? You live there. How many steps would it take to put the dishes in the dishwasher or take out the trash? A five-year-old could do it with ease.

Are your eyes open to what needs to be done? Do you ever volunteer to help? Instead of complaining about not having enough freedom, why don't you use the freedom you have for good?

By the way, if you're up half the night playing games or watching movies, how do you expect to carry your own load at school, or take care of cleaning your room or mowing the lawn? You can't even stay awake let alone

do anything profitable. That's not living in a God-taught way.

In chapter 5 Paul will tell us to warn the idle. He elaborates more fully on what he means in 2 Thessalonians 3. Instead of being busy doing their own work, there were idlers who were busy-bodies, meddling in the lives of others. They had time to do so because they weren't taking care of their own responsibilities.

That's not the kind of love the Holy Spirit teaches us. It just creates trouble. *Our culture's addiction to social media has made meddling big business, and many people waste their lives minding everybody's business but their own.* Paul would say to us, "Stop talking so much. Be quiet. Focus on working to fulfill your own personal work responsibilities. There's work God has assigned you to do."

"Working with your own hands"—*the Greeks looked down on manual labor, but Christ and His apostles practiced and promoted it. Adam and Eve were gardeners, following the pattern of God Himself who planted the enclosed paradise of the Garden of Eden for them to cultivate. Christ was a carpenter. Several of the apostles were fishermen. Paul was a tent-maker, working in the leather trade.*

Beware thinking that somehow it's more noble or important to work your brain than your body. You need to work both. It was the Greek pagans who belittled the material body and manual labor and exalted the mind and soul. God created the material world and the immaterial world. God made us integrated beings of body and soul. If you are truly spiritual in the sense of being under the Holy Spirit's control, you will use soul and body for His glory and for the good of your fellow human beings.

You may be quite a philosopher, but you need to work with your hands. You might find out that half your philosophy is based on an imaginary world instead of the real one.

Gifts and talents don't free you from hard work; rather they indicate where you ought to be focusing your labors.

There is great value to working with your hands, and even what we call "white collar work" requires disciplined, determined physical output to keep doing it well. If you just play at your work or do it only when you feel like it, you'll accomplish very little that benefits anybody.

Proverbs 28:19

Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will have plenty of poverty.

Proverbs 14:23

In all toil there is profit, but mere talk tends only to poverty.

Ephesians 4:28

Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need.

Parents, one of the best things you can do for your kids is to teach them to roll up their sleeves and do physical work. Get them helping in the house and in the yard. Teach them the value of sweat and labor. Build their muscles and their grit. Train them to be quick to respond to whatever needs they see instead of just watching from the sidelines to critique or expecting someone else to serve them. Show them how to take responsibility instead of making excuses, to do what they can do rather than whine about what they can't do. Rescue them from growing up into overly sensitive, lazy know-it-alls. Even if the topic is theology.

The world does not need a bunch of Christian parasites. They need Christians who show love to others in the way they take care of

their own responsibilities, rather than mouthing off about how bad everyone else is.

In verses 13-18 Paul is going to talk about the coming the Lord. Evidently some of the believers were so obsessed with the topic of Christ's return that they were neglecting their own work, leaving idle time on their hands. It was harmful to others and to themselves. Idle time and slothful hands will always get us into trouble in ways that dishonor the Lord.

Any of us can drift into this kind of unprofitable living whenever we yield to our flesh rather than yielding to the Spirit.

Applications

- What responsibilities are yours to take care of, and how are you keeping up with them?
- In what areas are you expecting others to serve you rather than your taking action to benefit them?
- What are some things you waste life talking about that really are none of your business?
- What are some good ways you can labor with your hands to show love for others and bring glory to God?

3. Live Honorably: Responsibility toward Outsiders (12)

so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

Walking properly means to live your walkabout life in a way that is decent and becoming, attractive, pleasing.

Outsiders are those outside the church. Clearly it's a way of life that the general community can observe. *Your neighbors and friends can see whether you keep up with your own responsibilities. Your own property. Your family. Your obligations at home and at work. Do you pay your bills? Do you live within your means? Do you make good on your promises? Can people count on you?*

The Scriptures frequently address this topic: Proverbs 24:30-34

³⁰ I passed by the field of a sluggard, by the vineyard of a man lacking sense, ³¹ and behold, it was all overgrown with thorns; the ground was covered with nettles, and its stone wall was broken down. ³² Then I saw and considered it; I looked and received instruction. ³³ A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, ³⁴ and poverty will come upon you like a robber, and want like an armed man.

1 Peter 2:12

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable (good, in the sense of being

appropriate, beneficial, beautiful), so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

1 Peter 2:15

For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

We undermine the credibility of the gospel when don't show ourselves to be humble, self-controlled, and industrious. Christians who are truly on mission cannot let themselves become lax about their own responsibilities while they meddle and gossip about the lives of others.

We harm the cause of Christ when we make ourselves dependent on others bailing us out when faithful labor on our own responsibilities would have taken care of the need.

Applications

- How can you work in a way that opens doors for the gospel rather than closing doors?
- What work do you need to take care of so that rather than depending on others you could give help to those in need?
- If your own affairs are not in order, what steps can you take to get them in line with what would commend the

gospel to those who aren't believers yet?

- What church members do you know could help you manage better to achieve this God-honoring goal, and how soon can you get with them?

Conclusion

Live as God-taught people:

1. Love Fervently: Responsibility toward Believers
2. Work Quietly: Responsibility for Ourselves
3. Live Honorably: Responsibility toward Outsiders

Closing Song: Light of God

Summary of Applications: This week use these for your discussion questions.

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