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What Love Will Not Allow

Let me say a few words about divorce and remarriage. Remember, when you try to solve a theological issue your interest is in discovering what the text teaches, not reading into the text what you want the text to teach. This is not an easy issue to resolve textually. And the main reason it is not an easy issue to resolve is because our natural tendency is to read into the text what we want to see. Most people are not very good Bible students. They read the text to justify their actions not to discover the right action. People abuse the Scriptures because they want their actions to be authenticated by scriptural authority. Train yourself to read the Bible to discover what it means, not what you want it to mean. It doesn't matter what you want, it matters what God says. I have to approach the text that way because I have to instruct other married couples on course of action. So for me it's not merely a personal issue. It's other people's marriages that are at stake and so that alone helps remove you from what you might personally have at stake. Imagine yourself in my shoes and you have to instruct other married couples on what they should do. Are you going to tell them to follow your personal experience? Or are you going to tell them to follow what God says? Everybody thinks they have justification for their view. And there are four views:

1. No Divorce And No Remarriage
2. Divorce And No Remarriage
3. Divorce And Remarriage For Abandonment Or Adultery
4. Divorce And Remarriage For A Number Of Reasons

We have to find out what God says. What are the OT and NT teaching about divorce and remarriage? There is a harmony here of many passages that is difficult to reach without careful analysis. I didn't do this last week. I've done this over the past several years when I had to confront "real life" marital

issues. And when you do that you say, Lord, I have to understand what you're saying because these people need help and so you bounce around from view to view, you try this view on for awhile and that doesn't fit, then you try that view on and that doesn't fit, finally you do enough work and you find the view that fits. Here's a summary (and I can't defend everything I'm saying here, this is just a summary). But I'll give the summary and then I'll have a few more important words to say.

When all the grammatical, historical, theological and logical analysis is complete I believe the Scriptures teach view 2: Divorce and No Remarriage. Even though marital separation or legal divorce may be advisable under some circumstances, Jesus taught that his disciples should not remarry after divorce (Matt 5:32; 19:9-10) because it would be contrary to the nature of marriage as God designed it at creation, "the two shall become one flesh" (Gen 2:24) and a violation of the sixth commandment, "You shall not commit adultery" (Exod 20:14). If separation or legal divorce occurs, it should be done with the sincere hope and aim that reconciliation would be possible eventually (1 Cor 7:11). In the case that reconciliation does not occur they must remain unmarried. The New Testament allows Christians to remarry another Christian after divorce only in the event that the marriage has been dissolved through the death of one of the partners (see Rom 7:2 – 3; 1 Cor 7:39; 1 Tim 5:11 – 14).

That being said let me say a few words to those who are remarried. I think Christians who are remarried can get real emotional about remarriage because they think they are committing a habitual sin or are living in sin. The Bible doesn't address this issue directly. However, it is helpful for me to use David and Solomon as models to think through this and related issues. 1 Kings 11:6 states that in the final analysis David followed the Lord fully. Yet we have the record of what sins David did and the record is less than sterling. How can David have committed sexual immorality and murder and yet receive the divine analysis that he followed the Lord fully? David helps us understand what God is looking for in our lives. God is not looking for a perfectly sinless life, He only found that in One person, the Lord Jesus Christ. What He is looking for are believers who, when they sin, are sensitive to their sin, confess, get restored and persevere in the faith until the end of life. God is very interested in us persevering to the end. Paul himself prayed that he would keep the faith and that he would run the race to the end. When

he reached the end of his life he said he had finished the race, he had kept the faith. This is what the Lord is looking for.

As a contrasting example, it says in the same verse, 1 Kings 11:6, that Solomon did not follow the Lord fully. If Solomon did not and David did then what is the one distinguishing mark between David and Solomon? It isn't that one sinned and the other didn't. They both sinned. The difference lies in the fact that when David sinned he confessed, got with the program and persevered to the end of his life; when Solomon sinned he stayed down and did not confess and get with the program, he failed to persevere to the end of life. And I hope through that the remarried can find encouragement to press on.

If I were you and my spouse were still living I would not run around beating myself up and worrying if I were accepted by every other Christian. I would admit that remarriage is the sin of adultery and that when I became aware of it I confessed it. And now I am striving like David to persevere until the end in faith.

Most Christians didn't know what the Bible taught when all this happened in their life and so whatever happened, happened and now you're living in the fallout. That's why I say pay attention to David, that's what you're aiming for, not sinless perfection, getting back with the program and persevering to the end.

If you ask me what I would have done 15 years ago I would have been very wishy, washy on these issues; I wouldn't have been able to make a solid, biblical case. If you were to ask me what I would do now that I've studied these and other related texts from a grammatical, historical, theological and logical perspective I would say: a) If my wife left me or we got a divorce for any reason whatsoever, including sexual immorality or abandonment or whatever, I would strive for reconciliation. If we could not be reconciled I would remain unmarried for the rest of my life because to remarry would be committing adultery. b) Only if my wife died would I be free to remarry and then I could only marry a believer.

If you request I will prepare a special lesson or lessons after 1 Thessalonians is complete on the issue of divorce and remarriage. I will leave that ball in your court.

Alright, if you would open your Bible to 1 Thessalonians 4 we want to look at the final call to excel still more by extending love toward others in the importance of keeping to yourself and not meddling in other peoples business and laboring so that you stay out of trouble. But before we get to these things let's review what Paul has to say about sexual immorality in 4:1-8.

Paul recognized that sexual immorality is a key battle field in the Christian life. And the early church also recognized it as the major battle facing the church. Today the church just wants to be silent on the issue even though we all know it's a major problem. I guess we're afraid of stepping on anyone's toes or that we might be labeled as politically incorrect. And if that is the case then our love of Christ has grown cold. Paul says, in verse 2, "For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. ³For this is the will of God, your sanctification;" and then he targets sexual immorality, "that you abstain from sexual immorality;" Paul taught abstinence from sexual immorality. That is, abstain from sexual contact, verbal or physical, outside of a marriage contract. The Greek verb "abstain" is in the middle voice, meaning "hold yourself back, distance yourself, it's a verb of distance and it means you have to make a conscious effort to distance yourself from sexual immorality. The reason is because it's so tempting, it's very alluring and it's easily accessible and if you think you can flirt with it you're wrong. You need to keep your distance because once you get close to it it can draw you in and then you get trapped and it's very difficult to get out of. Christians can and do get addicted to sexual immorality to the point it dominates their life and they struggle and fight all their life. It is very difficult to come out of once you've fallen into it. Difficult but not impossible. It is possible to get out by walking by the Spirit more and more and that's why Paul says excel still more. In other words, let's say you are enslaved to sexual immorality. First, you have to be convinced that it's sinful and it may take a lot of divine discipline to wake you up to that reality. Because when you get involved in these things you kind of black out that area of your conscience. You start trying to justify yourself, well, my spouse won't give me as much sex as I need and that's why I do it, and it's all excuses of the sinful flesh. It really may take a lot of divine discipline to wake you up to the fact

that hey, I have a serious problem here and I've got to get out. Then you have to confess and here we're talking about genuine confession. There is true and false confession in the Scriptures. False confession is just going through the motions, it's religious motion and it's just a bunch of words, hot air and baloney talk. And it will not result in restoration to fellowship, it's just religious motion. There has to be true confession, genuine heart confession that I sinned against God and God alone. Then you are restored and then you need to start growing spiritually, studying the word, articulating the Christian faith to others, and then do what Paul is saying, excel still more. What function does excelling still more do for us? It builds up a protective hedge around us. It shores up our faith and creates sort of an insulating barrier to protect us from falling into these sins. If we don't excel still more and get lax in the Christian life then you are opening yourself up to the dangers of sins like sexual immorality that destroys - to such a great degree - everything around us. So excel still more is Paul saying to stay on top of your game as a Christian, push further, grow more and that will help insulate you against these sins. By way of analogy, excel still more holds in the sports realm. I was an athlete and anyone who is any kind of an athlete knows that it is easier to reach the top than it is to stay on top. Becoming the number one ranked tennis player in the world is hard to do but staying the number one ranked tennis player in the world is much harder. And the reason is simple - everyone is gunning for you, they're hungry, you've already made it there so you can get lax and not practice as much, not work on your game, stop improving and then before you know it someone has knocked you off. So that's why if you see an athlete that is able to stay on top for a long time that's the guy to watch because he's not just going through the motions. Behind all that he's working hard, he's improving, he's excelling still more and that's why nobody can knock him off. You want to be that kind of a Christian, you want to keep on working hard to learn more of the word of God and to put it to work in your life, improve your game, learn to walk by the Spirit more and more and more because that insulates you from getting knocked off. That's Paul's point with this whole "excel still more" bit.

So let's see more of it in 4:9-12. Don't ever get complacent in the Christian life. You have enemies out there that want to knock you off; they're the world, the flesh and the devil and they're hostile to your sanctification. It's a never ending battle, they never let up until we either die or are raptured out of this

world. So don't get complacent because the moment you do you're going to get blind-sided. So excel still more.

Verse 9, **Now as**, and that's *peri de* in the Greek, *peri de* is Paul's common way of shifting the subject. The new subject is **the love of the brethren**. This is one word in the Greek text, *philadelphia*, and it was used exclusively in Jewish and Greek culture to refer to love between siblings; brotherly love, sisterly love, the kinship of blood; but Paul transferred it to the kinship of Christ, to love expressed between believers because he saw the new relationship we share in Christ as strong as blood. We are in a new family because of the blood of Christ. We are all kin in Christ. And Paul wants to show us not what love is but how to love one another in Christ. This section is about the manner of love, how to love.

Now as to the love of the brethren you have no need for anyone to write to you, he's commending them, but it's a nice way to enter into a gentle rebuke. In vv 10b-12 he's going to rebuke a subset of the church at Thessalonica. There is the majority of the church and they're practicing *philadelphia*, vv 9-10a, but there is a minority in the church that are not practicing *philadelphia*, vv 10b-12 and they're obnoxious, lazy, mooches and this is his first rebuke of them. He'll allude to this group of idle believers again in 5:14 and then in the second letter to the Thessalonians Paul gives them a strong rebuke because they still hadn't corrected their behavior, that's in 3:6-15. So we have a section that has as its great context philadelphia love; most of the church is practicing that but in that context certain practices are going on that are contrary to philadelphia love and Paul wants them to get that straightened out.

So the majority of the church at Thessalonica is addressed in vv 9-10a, **Now as to the love of the brethren you have no need for anyone to write to you**, and you say, well, if it's not really necessary to write this to them then why is Paul writing this to them? Exactly because he's setting up to rebuke the smaller element in the church. **for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another**; "taught by God," it's a word Paul coined, *theodidaktos*, used only here, it refers to the teaching ministry of God the Holy Spirit. When we come to faith in Christ God the Holy Spirit comes to indwell us and part of His teaching curriculum is that we **love one another**. This is a different word for love that is used at the beginning of the verse, first it was

philadelphia, a kinship love, now it's *agapao*. He's using them synonymously in this context, so it refers to an affectionate, familial love toward all believers. God the Holy Spirit teaches us to love one another.

For, and here he's giving an explanation or proof that God indeed teaches us to love one another. **For indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia.** How else could Paul explain their love toward all the brethren if God the Holy Spirit had not taught them this? One observation we want to make is that this is brotherly love outside of Thessalonica. Thessalonica was a city of about 200,000 people, it was a port city and a commercial center, and it was even the center of the Roman government in the province. So it was an influential city, a port city and many people from Macedonia travelled to Thessalonica. The map doesn't even show all of Macedonia. But it refers to Apollonia, Amphipolis, Berea, and probably Pella and Bitola. Paul had planted churches in several of these towns and the gospel trickled down from these towns into the surrounding rural areas. When these people travelled they went to Thessalonica and when they arrived they received hospitality from the believers at Thessalonica. Their hospitality was toward visitors whom they did not know personally, but with whom they shared kinship in Christ, was what led to their testimony described in 1:6-10 as having spread throughout all Macedonia and Achaia.

We should follow their example, we should love all the brethren, whether they be in Fredericksburg, Harper, Mason, Llano, Johnson City, Austin, San Antonio, or anywhere in the entire world. Believers come from all over the world to visit our town and on occasion they visit our church. Imagine all the believers that have passed through this church over the years. Some of them return year after year. What hospitality should we show them? What testimony of us will they carry back to their towns?

This is what God the Holy Spirit teaches us to do and this is what the Thessalonians were doing. Verse 10b, **But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more.** In other words he's been very nice, he's commended them, but there's this problem element in the church, there's a group that is not loving others. They were mooching off others, they were lazy, they wouldn't work so they became a drag on all those who did. Why might they not be working? We always have lazy people, but what might Paul have taught them that led them to be lazy? Answer, Paul's teaching that Christ could come at-any-

moment to rapture the church. Apparently some of the believers who heard this took it that it would be a waste of time to work, why work if you're going to be raptured next week. But this is a misapplication of the doctrine. We don't know when we're going to be raptured. It could be next week but it could be 2,000 years from now. So a Christian should never avoid his responsibility to work for the glory of God because he thinks Jesus is coming. That would be a wrong deduction from the doctrine.

So he's appealing to this lazy element in the church, and he gives them four imperatives in vv 10-11, they are really infinitives in the Greek but they're functioning as imperatives. In v 10, **we urge you to excel still more**, and here he's looking back to verse 1 because in verse 1 he used the same verb **we urge you** and the same command, **excel still more**, and so there are obviously some in the church who are not doing anything like loving others; they're taking advantage of the others who are loving. What we have here is not what you would expect. With all the positive things Paul has said, the commands here don't fit unless you have this element in the church. So in v 11 he commands them, **make it your ambition to lead a quiet life**, people who are lazy and don't have jobs tend to disrupt everyone else. They have a lot of dead time on their hands and they get bored and then they're knocking on your door and they're bugging you and you can't get anything done because this person is a nuisance. So Paul says make it your ambition or consider it an honor to live a quiet life, it's the idea of a peaceable, orderly life. He's saying get your life in order and then he's going to explain how because as it is right now they have no order in their life and they are disrupting the order in everybody else's!

And to attend to your own business, we'd say, "mind your own business," butt out, get out of here, go make use of yourself; these people were in everybody else's business and that's not loving. It is not loving people to be sticking your nose in their business all the time. Part of loving others is staying out of their business and attending to your own. This is one of those gossip passages. Don't be a gossip. If you've got to know the latest and the greatest and you've got to be on facebook or twitter every five minutes to peer into somebody else's life, you need to go get a life.

And then he says, to elaborate, **work with your own hands**, "get a job," these people had all kinds of time on their hands and it wasn't because they

were wealthy and they didn't have to work a job, it was because they quit their jobs and were mooching off those who did work and were generous enough to support them. Paul says get busy, do something productive, produce something for a change. When you have time, time, time on your hands you are going to have trouble, trouble, trouble. If you want to get yourself into trouble as fast as possible, quit your job, don't go to school, move home with your parents, do nothing. You're asking for it. The worst thing fallen men can have on their hands is time, because all they're going to do is use it to bother everybody else. It's one of the blessings of the curse that there's an inefficiency to labor. If there was no inefficiency we'd be able to finish all our work in about 1 hour a day and then what would we do the rest of the day? Stir up trouble, gossip, bother people, we'd be a real annoyance.

Then he concludes v 11, **just as we commanded you**. This wasn't new. Paul already commanded this, they just weren't obeying it. Around here the same thing goes on. You give the word and people just stare at you, they're not going to change, they're going to do the same old thing. Oh, that was a command! I'll get to that later, when it fits my schedule. C'mon, get with the program.

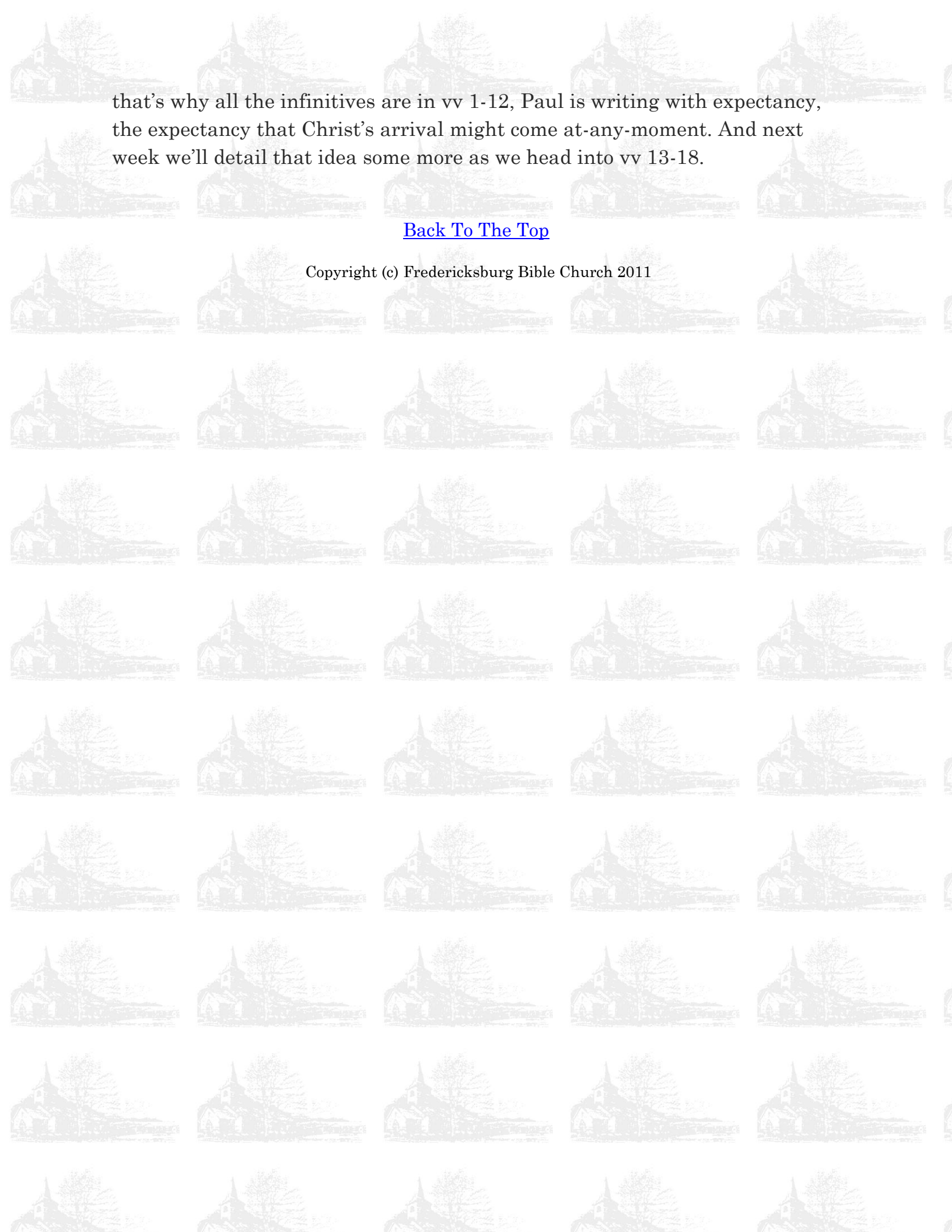
Why? Verse 12, two reasons, two purpose clauses, **so that you will behave properly toward outsiders**, that's your witness to the world, you know, because they're watching, and the world should be watching the church. They should be watching to see if what we believe makes any difference in our lives. And if all we do is gossip and slack off what kind of a testimony is that? You're not going to win anyone to Christ doing that. And if you try to tell them about Christ someday at lunch, oh, Jesus died for your sins and they're going to laugh in your face because they can do what you do with Christ without Him. So why do I need Christ? They're going to brush you off and I don't blame them one bit. Live an ordered, quiet life, mind your own business and work hard, then you're in a position to share Christ, then you'll have something more than just some empty words.

Then the last reason, so that you will **not be in any need**. You know, every Christian is supposed to carry his own load. It's not that there aren't times when we need to carry one another's burdens, there are times like that, but generally speaking each needs to carry his own load so we're not a burden on everybody else. Even Paul himself, when he was in Thessalonica, he worked

to make tents, in 2:9 he talks about how hard he worked among them so as not to be a burden. And we shouldn't slack off just so we can get a goodie from someone else who's working their tail off day in and day out. It's wrong to slack and mooch and we have a lot of problems with this today - boys living at home until they are 38, no job, they play video games all day long, they are very good at them, they're child men and their mooches. You've got to cut them off or they'll never grow up. They'll just keep slacking, mooching and sleeping till noon. The work ethic these days is a wreck. It's not wonder we're having economic problems.

In conclusion, Paul is commending the body at large from Thessalonica for their love for all the brethren, their testimony is fantastic, but one small group in the church is taking advantage of the others. They bother everyone, they're a bunch of gossips, they meddle in everybody's business and they won't lift a finger to earn a living. That's not love, that's abusing those who do love and Paul is upset with the abuse. But like so many believers guess what? They're not going to do anything about it. They're going to keep on and Paul is going to have to get nasty in the next letter. So I guess that's what you do, if believers don't get it when you're real nice about it then you might have to get nasty with them.

Finally, it's not fair to you if I don't comment on one more thing as we conclude. This section is chock full of infinitives and the reason is because these are all urgent. Why is Paul so urgently appealing to them? Because this letter is about the coming of Christ. Christ can come at-any-moment and that means you need to be living like this today, not putting it off till next week, next year, whenever it's convenient. Paul lived every day like it was the day Christ was coming. And if you do that you have nothing to be ashamed of at the judgment seat of Christ and everything to look forward to. 2000 years later we've lost that sense. Oh, Jesus probably isn't coming today, that's our attitude, that's the way we live, and you know something, it shows, you can tell. And every one of you knows that, I'm just pointing it out. We've lost that sense that Jesus Christ is coming back today and I'm going to wake up today and I'm going to live like He is coming today. But if we did that every day I guarantee you it would make a tremendous difference. The productivity level of our lives would skyrocket. We wouldn't be sitting on the couch eating and watching TV for five hours a day. I can guarantee you that. We'd be out like Paul preaching the gospel, preaching the good news of Jesus Christ. Anyway,



that's why all the infinitives are in vv 1-12, Paul is writing with expectancy, the expectancy that Christ's arrival might come at-any-moment. And next week we'll detail that idea some more as we head into vv 13-18.

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