3/14/21 - 1 Thes. 4:9-12 - "Excelling in Sanctification"

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Preacher: Brenton Beck

[0:00] As we continue and studied last week, Paul has arrived at sort of a hinge in his letter to this young church plant in Thessalonica.

And in that, he begins now, starting last week and going into our section today, to instruct this church in somewhat of a manner of providing direction.
We see that through words like, we urge you and we ask you. These are words that mark a paranesis of encouragement, of exhortation, of instruction for ethical behavior.
And within last week's instruction, it was kind of weighty, I would say, discussing sexual immorality.
We had an intense discussion around the dangers and the issues surrounding sexual immorality.
And we spoke about the dangers of the physical engagement of sexual immorality between one person and another person, but also even something that our culture has sort of numbed us to, and that being the virtual engagement of sexual immorality, especially through pornography.
[1:13] And the emphasis was centered around that the church is called to be set apart, sanctified, remember last week. And this is to be done not by signs and wonders to say we're not of this world, but simply by abstaining from sexual immorality, draws a demarcation line of where the world ends and where the church begins.

And there's many demarcation lines that the church has, and this being one of them. And today we're going to continue along the same lines, only looking upon two additional paranesis of exhortation, of encouragement, of instruction, and that being excelling in Christian love and Christian work or conduct.
And we're going to do this today in two sections within this passage as Paul provides a great structure and layout for the text. We're going to see how these two instructions from Paul have actually echoed all throughout Scripture.
It doesn't just begin. It's not a new idea. It's something that's being fulfilled in the canon of Scripture, and it's linked all the way back into the Old Testament, just as sexual immorality, abstaining from sexual immorality was.
So let's pray before we begin our time and preaching of the Word today. And we're going to break this up into two sections for any note-takers. Let's pray. Father, we are thankful to be gathered here today.
[2:49] We're thankful for sunshine. We're thankful for just the seasons that we're able to experience in this life and just the natural revelation of your glory shining through nature.

We are just blessed by our community here at Youngstown Metro Church, our assembly. And we just pray at this time. You don't need to teach a child how to be bad.
It comes natural. And this being linked in the Christian theology, being linked to the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3, where all sin has been tainted by the effects of that sin.
And we don't need to be taught necessarily how to sin. And similarly, but on the reverse end, there's something naturally occurring in this church.
This church's love was flowing naturally out from them. And Paul says, you have no need for anyone to write you.
[3:50] For you're being taught by God. This is the mystery church of original sin and regeneration.

Regeneration. Regeneration. Because it was from the first Adam that mankind is compelled then to sin. And then in regeneration, it's from the second Adam, being Christ, that mankind is compelled, therefore, to love.

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And therefore, our love is a testimony of the Holy Spirit's act within us as Christians in regeneration. You want to know if you're regenerated? Let's see how you love.
And so, this isn't something that had to be taught as explicitly as Paul taught the church in Corinth. They had to be taught, I mean, a couple chapters there of what it meant to love, right?
And here he's saying, I don't need to write you. You guys are excelling at this. Love was abounding, and it took nothing but the power of the Holy Spirit to change and transform this church, to equip them with the greatest testimony the church has concerning its faith, and that being how they love.
[5:04] This made me think of iron working. It's not the most random thought that comes to your mind, but, I mean, a couple of random thoughts come to my mind sometimes when I'm reflecting on a passage, and this one, the Holy Spirit equips them.

He equips them to live that out, specifically in their midst. This isn't something that just happened to be so, church. Because when we look upon the Old Testament, this is actually promised that this miracle that's happening within this church would occur.
The Old Testament often teaches us a great deal about who God is, and who man is, specifically God's faithfulness, and man's complete failure much of the time, right?
And the Old Testament foreshadows God's plan of redemption for his children, as we're seeing carried out here. And we see that it was promised in Isaiah 54, 13.
That reminds us that the New Testament church would be instructed by God himself. That says in verse 13, All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children.
[6:17] And the Old Testament also reminds us of the forgetfulness of Israel, right? Of God's great acts on their behalf, the miraculous interventions on their behalf.

But the New Testament reminds us of the promise being fully revealed in the Word of God, written and recorded. So when this church is being reminded and taught of God's faithfulness, it's coming through the proclaimed Word of the Word of God.
It's on the foundation of the apostles and of the Old Testament prophets, as Ephesians 2, 20 reminds us. And Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of this message that this church is being taught. And that alone is marking this church out in love. And we also see that it is by no coincidence that they are equipped in order to do this.
We see there's a difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. Jeremiah 31 details it great, but I'm not going to get into it specifically. But the law of God was engraved upon stone tablets of the Old Covenant.
[7:33] If anybody's going through our church Bible reading plan that we're all going through, everyone's up to date on I'm six days behind, but I'm catching up. I preach on Sunday morning.

Give me a break. But the law in Deuteronomy was written on stone tablets, right? And now in the New Covenant, the law of God is written on the heart of God's people through regeneration of the Holy Spirit in this New Covenant.
And as a New Testament church, God's people are now temples of where his presence dwells and whose existence is lived out as living stones.
That's a little background of what's going on here. Now consider that whole redemptive historical narrative of what God has been doing for centuries and look back upon verse 9 and 10.
I hope we understand something vital, church. That the love of this church was a seal. It was a stamp that set this church apart.
[8:45] And the chief expression of the gospel within this church was love. Thessalonica was full of love.

It's just as John wrote in John 13, verse 34, a new commandment I give to you, says Jesus, that you love one another just as I loved you.
And you also are to love one another. But by this, all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another.
And that love is not just a mindless ritual, just like, well, Jesus told me to love, so here we go. This love has a certain quality in it.
This love is written with a quality written in Romans 12, verse 9, where let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil. Hold fast to what is good.
[9:49] Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. As we analyze our own lives, are we finding more reasons to hate our brothers and sisters in the faith or disagree with them, rather than finding reasons to love them?

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Isn't Jesus Christ's example good enough for us as a New Testament church? Do we not have the Holy Spirit living and dwelling within us in that very existence, in that temple that we are all embodying, that Holy Spirit?
It's not love being the stamp of authenticity, that we are the real deal. The measure of growth or absence of love will either support or contradict our very own conversion.
And yeah, that is some hard terminology there. And that fact, the simple fact that if we're not loving well, we might not even be truly saved.
And that will either enhance or distort our witness of the gospel. Without love, we're gone, as Paul told the Corinthian church.
[11:24] It was love that drove Jesus to the cross. And likewise, we are called to model that mold. And to crucify ourselves in love for others, not crucify others in love for ourselves.

I know, it's a hard message, baby. But it's true. It is true. And the most unloving thing that I can do is stand up here and say it's okay to be a loveless Christian.
As we look upon the mirror of our lives, is love setting us apart? We saw of sexual immorality creating a demarcation line between the world and the church.
Is love creating that demarcation line? Or is our hatred? Is our forgiveness marking that demarcation line? Or is our grudge holding?
Is our humility causing that demarcation line? Or our pride? Hospitality or hostility? Generosity or greed?
[12:36] Are we building up or are we tearing down? Are we gentle or are we abrasive? The list can go on. If you want me to, I can finish our time here with a great list of self-reflection.

But is love the chief expression of the gospel in Youngstown Metro Church? If you want to ask me, honestly, I would say yes.
This church, love. You love. And I believe it is in this church. And I encourage us, just as Paul encouraged this church in Thessalonica to not become comfortable with where we're at, but to be excelling, as he says in this verse, that we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more to continue to love.
And that'll be locally expressed and that'll also be regionally expressed all around Youngstown, as it was in Macedonia during this time. And we see a second section of this passage of excelling in conduct.
Verse 11 continues with another element of that boundary line. And it says in verse 11, continuing from the flow of thought of continuing and abounding more and more in love.
[14:07] And he says continuing in here in verse 11, to live quietly and to mind your own affairs and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

Maybe you've heard of the tale of the Christian hobbit. This is a simple guy who minded his own affairs.
He looked at 1 Thessalonians. He decided to just live in the hills. To do as it instructed, live quietly. To mind his own affairs.
Everyone looked kindly upon this Christian hobbit. He was, I mean, he seemed a little disconnected from reality at times.
But he was quiet. He was peaceful. He didn't cause much trouble. So, most people love this Christian hobbit. Living in the hills.
[15:17] Minding your own business. Man, this is the introvert dream. Right? The introverted dream. Let's just move to the hills. I'm going to tend to my land here and that's how I'm going to live.

Retirement plan. Right? Maybe that sounds enticing to you, not because you're introverted, but maybe just because you're exhausted. And you're just exhausted. You've been laboring diligently for the Lord and you've been witnessing like crazy, preaching to the world, preaching to your neighbors, taking the gospel everywhere you go.
So, we got to be reminded, while this life through the eyes of a Christian hobbit might seem appealing, we often misread this verse as if it should bring about a silent Christian living.
And I'm going to explain that in just a second. But where we sort of like, people think that this encourages us to live in our Christian bubbles and not stir up too much of the pot a little bit and just mind your own business and people will love you for it.
There's a saying out there that makes the hair stand up on the back of, on the spine upon my back.

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[16:47] It goes like this. It says, preach the gospel and when necessary, use words. Hmm. Ligon Duncan says, this is a flawed anti-Christian disposition.

It's essentially similar to saying, feed the hungry and when necessary, use food.
You understand the fallacy behind this sort of Christian bubble life of preach the gospel when necessary, use words?
Because we know something about the gospel that when Jesus commanded the disciples to go and make disciples of all nations, this is no quiet endeavor. This is no silent endeavor.
And where most people can look at this passage and I think have a flawed approach of that actually silencing us in which our conduct is very quiet, kept to ourselves, the gospel is all but silence.
[17:54] It's all but silence. It's a witness to the watching world. It's a message and a witness. It's not only just a message, it's in our conduct.

It's our character. It reverberates through our lives. It sounds a lot like if you've been tuned in with this series since chapter 2, a lot of what Paul contended for.
The message, but also his conduct and also his character. The only power a voiceless gospel has is elevating works and egos.
It's literally moralism masked as the gospel of just be a good person and when necessary, use words. The gospel is words. You understand? It has nothing to do with Christ crucified a voiceless gospel on behalf of sinners.
Without words, the power of the gospel is stripped of its power and is actually no gospel at all. It's moralism. And so, what exactly does this verse mean?
[18:59] All right, Brenda, lay it on me. It doesn't mean that. What does it mean? This verse informs of a tactfulness for the church. That as we are loving, as we are carrying out our lives, that we are aspiring, if we're aspiring to live quietly as this verse instructs, to live quietly and to mind our own affairs, this is done in a tactful manner.

This should indicate that there's no silencing going on, but there's a volume control at various times. I want you to consider the context. Challenge me on it. Consider its leaders, Paul, Silas, and Timothy.
They were just forced out of this region. Forced out of this region. I'm sure that they didn't put up too much resistance through their submitting to authority as they walked out of Thessalonica.
But consider the landscape after they were forced out. They were marked as greedy people not to be trusted. Remember in chapter 2, which we were speaking about?
They were accused of civil treason. And I'd imagine that this government was watching this Thessalonian church like a hawk, looking for every reason to disband them just like they did Paul, Silas, and Timothy.
[20:26] So, could it be that in Paul instructing this church on living quiet lives and minding their own affairs, that they would be able to distinguish which battles are worthy of fighting at which time?

This takes wisdom, church. Often, we as pastors here at Youngstown Metro Church, we consider this something called a theological triage.
And it's simply something that is looked at as you enter into a hospital. And obviously, somebody who's having cardiac arrest and symptoms of cardiac arrest are probably going to go in first before somebody with a broken finger.
Now, the person with a broken finger might be frantic, like, we got to do something. Yeah, we can do something, but we got to take care of something essential first. And so, as pastors at Youngstown Metro, we have something called a theological triage.
And this gives us an indication of, okay, what is the issue at hand? Is this essential to the faith of what it means to be a Christian, or is this a non-essential, a first-tier issue, or maybe a second-tier, or sometimes in church life, if you're talking about painting, you know, if we're going to repaint the walls, that's like a third or fourth-tier issue.
[21:46] That has nothing to do with people being saved. It's all preferential, similar to that being like songs that we sing in preference and style, not in content. So, when we're looking at this passage, we should be looking at it from a viewpoint and a perspective of, Paul is trying to call this church to be tactful in how they can conduct their affairs.

And could this verse be redirecting this church's attention? Because, obviously, if they've just sent Paul and Timothy, yeah, that could be aggravating, that they just got out.

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But are they more concerned about the mission that still lays ahead or advocating for a just cause of that they were just forced out of Thessalonica? What battle are you going to fight?
Paul is saying, just live quietly for a moment of time in order to advance the gospel in the long run. And so, think, when you're falsely accused, there's nothing more frustrating than the impediment of just causes, isn't there?
When people aren't supporting and rallying upon things that we should be rallying upon, we get frustrated, right? And think, when you're falsely accused or misrepresented, it takes almost everything in us at times to not serve ourselves as justice warriors, to go and set the record straight.
[23:15] Right? Looking back on chapter 2, we see that Paul was contending for his character. And the tense situation that was unraveling in Acts 17, we see that Paul is also informing this church to instill boundaries of concern.

That, in other words, Paul is saying that, let the only accusation that stands against you be that you simply just love people like crazy.
this is exposed in a combination of words and actions, just as 1 John 3.18 reminds us, little children, let us not love in word or talk, but in deed and truth.
If actions play any role in our lives, they ought to embolden our message that we witness. Just like Paul's character, who Paul is, reinforced and emboldened his message to the Thessalonians.
Similar to how our faith, the authenticity of our faith is expressed through works. You know, faith without works is dead, basically meaning that if you have faith and you're still going on sinning and not making progress, not convicted of your sin, do you have any faith at all?
[24:34] If you come to know Jesus Christ, he's going to express itself in good works. And this verse encourages us, too, to also carry out the mission of the gospel wisely.

And it varies at various times in levels and frequency. Tactfulness. This passage calls upon Christians to be not only diligent in love in verse 9 through 10, but to enact healthy boundaries of concern in verse 11 and to be devoted exclusively to God regardless of accusation or affirmation.
If the world wants to lock us up, church, let's put a real life example for us. If the world wants to lock us up, if they want to lock the church up, or even blot our lives off the face of the planet, so be it.
This is the gospel we're talking about. Our duty is obedience to the word of God, and the world will answer to God, not us.
Okay? Simply saying for us today, we stand up for essentials of the gospel. And if the world has a problem, they can be assured that we'll open the door ourselves on the way out if they want to reject that message or accept it.
[25:58] It's up to God in the first place. Quietly. Minding affair. Verse 11 also reinforces the church's obedience and attitude through the work, and it leads into verse 12.

And it redirects our attention even in that instance of talking about to aspire to live quietly and to mind our own affairs and to work with our hands as we instructed you so that you may walk properly before outsiders.
Paul is bringing about the credibility of the gospel to outsiders, and that being that we're not just going around with our Christian machetes and slicing and dicing people for just things that, how dare you say that we have to paint the church blue?
What? Heathen. I don't think that's a plan. I don't want to talk to the deacons here. But you know what I'm talking about? Choosing your battles wisely.
Standing up for the gospel and that being that of who Jesus is and why he came on this earth. Working with our own hands. Not delegating off to other people.
[27:10] Not saying, Paul, go ahead and you do the hard laboring. No, every member of this church is a witness of the gospel. And this all conglomerates into a picture of what it means to be a church and living for God and not man on this earth.

This is further reinforced. If there's work to be done, we act. We don't strive for an easy Christian life. We strive for a faithful life. We don't strive to be that Christian hobbit in the mountains where, you know, I got, you know, me and God got it going on.
You know, I'm good with the man upstairs. Oh, what does Matthew 28 say? Oh, go and make disciples. Well, I mean, that was for them.
That doesn't apply to me. Yes, it does. We're not called to an easy Christian life. We're called to a faithful life. And that faithfulness will often be met with worldly hatred.

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I hate to put it that way. And if it's met with hatred, we simply say, you can accept or you can reject. Our hands are washed clean of that. Oh, you want to reject it?
[28:21] I'll open the door on my way out. Quietly. Reminding our own affair. So this is the main point. The world has no power to dictate how the church ought to exist.

Only the gospel has that kind of power. And we see that in this passage. And the Holy Spirit has the power to give us that throughout the mission on this earth.
In verse 12, most of all, the gospel expresses itself in love and it calls us to obedience and conduct that reinforces where our highest concern rests and that's God alone.
I want to ask you a question as we sort of wrap our time up today and wrap this section up and it's going to challenge us a little bit. how focused are your eyes set upon God?
I want you to think slowly about that. How focused are your eyes set upon God?
[29:39] because it's under my belief that this section of passage realigns our gate to be solely fixed upon God in three different realms of realignment.

Come on, we live in Ohio. You know what realignments are right after a pothole season of winter. This section of passage calls us to three realms of realignment.
And I believe the first one, the first realignment is that we're realigned towards service to God, not man. We're realigned to service to God, not man.
You see that in verse 9 through 10. The cross of Christ is the motivator of our love. It's not for attaboys. It's not for public recognition.
It's not for ego fueling pride in this life of how good of a Christian we are. We do it for the glory of God. And we hope that the only accusation that the world can ever conjure up against us is that Youngstown Metro Church love people like crazy.
[30:55] And it doesn't make any sense. love people love people who are going to love people to love people to love people to love people. Love people together. This isn't just some obligatory affirmation of one another.

Like, well, I'm going to love you. Jesus tells me to. No, there's a quality, as we saw, in that love. And that quality is defined by Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is true, perfect love.
He is the expression of obedience, of perfect love, and it drove him to the cross. And so, when we talk about loving one another, it has Jesus Christ at the center of it.
And if we're loving the world, hear me today, we're putting Jesus Christ at the center of that love. This makes me think of the Thanksgiving Day outreach, the Thanksgiving outreach we did.
That when we're doing this, we're not doing things to get people into our building or get a following. We're calling people to say, hey, we are loving you selflessly, and we're going to keep loving you, and it's not going to make sense.
[32:04] And yeah, if you want to know more about this love, I've got a story to tell you. Right? That Jesus Christ is the center, and we're not just doing a mindless ritual of doing a good thing for the world and humanity.

We're doing things for the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is the gospel of Jesus that fuels our service to God and not man.
When we are hitting the streets, knocking on doors, speaking to people out in Wick Park, going down to YSU's campus and talking about Jesus, we're not doing that out of service for man.
We're doing it out of service for God. This is what we're called to do. And this will lead us to suffer. because the world does not want Jesus, right?
And are we willing to suffer for Jesus Christ? The second realignment today is that we are realigned toward responsibility to God, not man.
[33:11] We see that in verse 11. A life lived in devotion to God will know which battles to engage in. And what hills are worthy to die on as Christians?

And in this, we can evaluate the battle at hand. We can take things instance by instance. Is this a hill to die on? Does all Christian life and the truth of the gospel, is it weighing in the balance over, I like this hymn or I like that hymn?
Or is this an essential spiritual, that Jesus was just a man? Or that the word is just a couple good sentiments of how to live a good life and how to have a little life enhancement, life improvement plan, and that the Bible is not actually a closed book.
There's a couple other books that aren't in here that were revealed through a dream. Those are hills to die on church. So, I have a challenge.

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Do you enter into these battles? Or do you resort to that Christian hobbit life, living in the Christian bubble, minding your own business, allowing people to perish?
[34:26] Or maybe on the other side, do you find yourselves with that machete in your hand, fighting every battle, big or small? You're that hospital worker coming in, somebody's having cardiac arrest, somebody has a broken finger.

Come on, both come in, I'll work on you, one with my right hand, one with my left, and I'm going to do it all. I'm going to fight every battle and make everyone believe everything that I believe.
This is not obedience, that's absurdity. You must remember that the gospel defends itself.
Spurgeon put it that it's a caged lion. All we have to do is open the cage and it will defend itself, release the lion.
It is the power of God that illuminates and defends. And in this, we handle ourselves wisely.
Tactfully. The world may force us to adjust our tact, but never our mission.
And then the third realignment today. We are realigned towards dependence upon God and not man. And we see that in verse 12.
[35:32] A life dependent upon God will remain steadfast throughout all things. Persecution, suffering, accusation, chain us up, take my life, everything. Whatever you want to do, world, because my dependence is upon God alone.

And whatever I have to suffer because of that truth is worth it. You can ask each one of the martyred disciples if it was worth it, and they will say, absolutely. A life dependent upon God will remain steadfast through all things.
God knows our heart. The world can throw accusations, but God knows the heart, just as Paul says in this letter in Thessalonians. And God is our refuge.
He's trustworthy. He's helpful. He supplies all of our needs, physical and spiritual. He never leaves us, war forsakes us. And so I have a challenge.
Are you steadfast even when the world might scoff and laugh at you? Or maybe on the other side, are you steadfast even when the world isn't applauding you?
[36:39] Yeah, I'm pulling on some heartstrings of ego here. We must remember, we live for the approval of God alone. Church. We are his church.

And this means that we are tactfully vocal, that we can adjust our volumes wisely at times in order that the gospel may advance over a prolonged period of time.
And we love sacrificially, and our testimony boldly proclaims, great is our God here at Youngstown Metro. Let's pray.
Amen. Amen. Amen.

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