Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Shoe-Leather Faith
Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12
Code: 52-16

It's always a highlight of worship to turn to the Word of our God because His Word is His response to us, the Spirit applies it to our hearts. His Word is also the revelation of Himself so that we know His way and His will and His purpose and thus can worship Him more perfectly.

As you know, for many, many months we've been studying 1 Thessalonians and we have been interrupted a bit in the summer, but we go back to it this morning. Open your Bible to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 verses 9 through 12...1 Thessalonians chapter 4 verses 9 through 12.

Someone has rightly said that Christianity is shoe-leather faith. That is, it affects our daily life. It's a walking faith. It's a working faith. It's a living faith. The religions of the world are not like that. While it is true that any system of belief should effect a change in the way one lives life, it is also true that no false religion can transform a person. And since no false religion can transform a person, no matter how high its ethical standards might be, they cannot really be attained. Only in Christianity is there the power of God to transform the life so that what we believe can literally become the way we live. We have a shoe-leather faith. What we believe touches the earth.

It should be obvious. What kind of Christianity would it be that was a system of beliefs that didn't impact the way we live? Christianity has always been eminently practical. It shows up in the simplest attitudes and the most mundane acts of life, as well as the profoundest of thoughts and deeds.

As we come to our text this morning we're going to talk a little about that shoe-leather sanctification, the simple, daily matters of life that are the outworking of our profound and eternal relationship with the living God. The context for verses 9 to 12 is really set back in verse 3. There the Apostle Paul says that the will of God is our sanctification. God wants us to be separated from sin unto Himself. God wants us to be holy. God wants us to be set apart.

And then beginning in verse 3 he talks about the practical way that that takes place. And so you have from verse 3 clear to the end of chapter 5, the end of the whole epistle, a listing of the various implications of sanctification in our lives. It affects dramatically the way we live.

The first impact we noted in our last study, verses 3 through 8. It has to do with sexual purity. God's will is that we be sanctified, which means sexually pure, morally pure.

Moving then from the issue of sexual sin, to which we gave some great attention, to the next category of discussion we come to verses 9 to 12. And here he simply reminds us that sanctification shows up in the simple duties of life. Follow as I read from verse 9. "Now, as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another. For indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need."

A very simple, straightforward, obvious injunction. What causes all of these verses to sort of hang together is that they have to do with the simple attitudes and duties of Christian living. This is shoe-leather stuff. It's not ephemeral or esoteric or ethereal, something off in space. It is very simple, very direct, very practical. And what Paul is saying is that this whole matter of sanctification touches the very basics of our life style. Christianity, of course, has always been doctrine that affects duty and creed that impacts conduct. And that's the way it must be. In fact, the Christianity that doesn't change the way you live is not the real thing.

While I was away last week I had occasion to be given a book, the title of it is The Frog in the Kettle. It's a book put out by the Barna(?) Research Organization, they do research across America, much like Gallup Poll or anyone else. Only their research is focused on spiritual trends, church trends and things like that.

One chapter in the book I found to be very interesting, its title, "Religious beliefs and involvements." What is the relationship between what people believe and their involvement, or how they behave, how they act. The opening statement of the chapter is this, quote: "Although Americans generally possess orthodox beliefs about God, Christ and Satan, the momentum is against integrating spiritual belief with daily behavior, end quote. The momentum is against integrating belief with behavior. Well that must mean that whatever this momentum is it's going in the opposite direction from true Christianity.

Further the author says, "There is an interesting contradiction between what most of us say we believe and what we do or don't do in response to those beliefs. The vast majority of Americans have orthodox Christian beliefs. They acknowledge the virgin birth, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the power of prayer, the reality of miracles by God, the importance of the church, the reality of Satan and hell and the life of the Holy Spirit in the believer. More than nine out of ten adults own a Bible and a majority of them even believe it is God's written Word totally accurate in its teaching. About three out of five claim they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ. But the research data says our actions indicate that our beliefs are not held to be significant. Less than half of all adults attend church. Loyalty to the church is dropping. Attendance in Sunday School is

diminishing. Membership in churches is waning. And willingness to assume a leadership role declining. Studies show we have become a nation of biblical illiterates, lacking knowledge of what is in the Bible, and showing limited commitment to applying its truth to our daily behavior." There's that same theme again.

Then he goes on to say, "If we can help the world to recognize that our faith is not a one-dimensional experience but it is a multi-faceted way of life which permeates every thought, action and experience, then Christianity would not only assume greater importance in the minds of people but would challenge non-believers to explore this faith in a new way," end quote.

And the point is this, if we live what we say we believe it might be more attractive to people, might have some credibility, might be something looking in to. And then the book says, "This means we will have to demonstrate the relevance of Christianity in a very...in every dimension of our lives. More and more emphasis must be placed on how we live those beliefs. Christians must communicate the importance of the faith by exhibiting a life style based upon a Christian philosophy of life." Now how obvious is that? Basic.

If you say you believe this, then you ought to live this. That's Christianity. It is frankly, to me, unthinkable that anyone would assume Christianity to be anything other than a way of life. It is not just a theological belief system. It touches the earth with daily behavior, right down to the most mundane, routine thing. Christianity is not just something to believe, it is a way to live. Our faith touches the world, touches the earth. It walks the streets. It is shoe-leather faith.

Now that's what's on Paul's inspired mind here as he is calling the people to sanctification. And he wants them to do the basics. There are four basic exhortations in these verses. Here they are: love each other more, lead a quiet life, mind your own business and work with your hands. Now how practical is that? How basic is that? Love each other more, lead a quiet life, mind your own business and work with your hands...that takes Christianity right down to the basics.

You say, "Well now wait a minute. You mean to tell me he has to write a letter to the Thessalonians to tell them that? Wouldn't you have imagined that he has already told them that?" Yes. Back in verse 1 he said that, "As you have received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God, just as you actually do walk, that you may excel still more." In other words, when we were with you we gave you all of this instruction. There's no question about that. We told you all of this. And at the end of verse 11 he says, "Just as we...past tense...commanded you." And again he reminds them we already told you all of this. Yes, when he was with them he must have told them about the great commission that Jesus said, "Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." So when he evangelized them along with Timothy and Silas, he certainly told them about life style Christianity. That is a Christianity that shows up in the way you live. Surely he told them that.

But they were a little thick, like some of us. They needed to be told again. And so he writes here and reminds them of these very basic things which he already once told them or maybe more than once, but has to remind them about. He knows human nature. He cares about them. Back in chapter 3 he said, "Night and day," verse 10, "he was praying earnestly to be able to see them face to face to complete what was lacking in their faith." He knew they hadn't arrived, they weren't perfect. And these were some of the matters that concerned him.

You say, "Well isn't it fairly obvious that this is how you ought to live?" It is, but as I say, he commanded them, he writes them again here because he knows that they could shirk this. By the way, would you turn to 2 Thessalonians 3 for a moment, I'll show you something interesting. A little while later he wrote them another letter, 2 Thessalonians. Guess what he says to them in this letter. Very interesting. Go down to verse 10. "For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order, if anyone will not work neither let him...what?...eat. For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all but acting like busybodies. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread." That's pretty straightforward. That's basically what he said in our text. And here he even says, "I used to tell you this...I wrote you this...now I hear word that I have to write you again about this. You're lazy, you're not working, you're busybodies, you're not quiet, you're eating someone else's bread."

You say, "What is behind all this?" These people were such a...when we first started this epistle, boy, they were such a commendable group. Back in 1:3 he says, "I constantly remember your work of faith, your labor of love, your steadfastness of hope. I know you're the elect and from you sounded out the Word of God." He just commends them in chapter 1, then he commends them in chapter 2. Now all of a sudden it seems like they're sort of blockheads. I mean, over and over and over he tells them...Look, work with your hands, be quiet, don't be a busybody... and these very practical things.

Why? There was a compelling reason. And the compelling reason is simply understood by carefully following the flow of the text. The next subject that he begins in verse 13 is the Rapture of the church, followed in chapter 5 by a discussion of the return of Christ and the Day of the Lord. And he spends a great portion of time discussing those events. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, again he spends an entire chapter talking about the return of Christ.

Now let me give you the scenario. The Thessalonian Christians had been given the gospel. And they believed and received Jesus Christ. And a church was formed and Paul was there long enough to get it started. And they were real and they were genuine and they were the elect and they were dynamic and they were aggressive and they were excited, they were enthusiastic about sharing the gospel so that the Word spread from them through Macedonia and all Achaia. It was a good church.

But the end of chapter 1 verse 10, it gives us a hint, it says, "They were waiting for His Son from heaven." Paul had taught them about the return of Christ. And they were waiting for the return of Christ. I mean, they were literally actually waiting for Christ to come. What had Paul told them? He must have told them they had reason to expect its possibility. Did Paul believe it could possibly happen in his life time? I can't imagine any other reason why he would tell them to wait, since even Jesus didn't know the hour of His coming, Paul didn't know. And they were waiting for the return of Jesus Christ.

Obviously they were enthusiastically waiting. In fact, they were so enthusiastically waiting that they thought, some of them did, they might have turned the wrong direction and missed it. And so he has to write a lot of material to sort of straighten out their understanding. They were disturbed.

Over in 2 Thessalonians look at chapter 2 verse 2. Well go back to verse 1. "We request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him," with regard to the coming of Christ in the Rapture, he says, "that you may not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us to the effect that the Day of the Lord has come." Then in verse 3 he says, "Don't let anybody deceive you. It won't come until..." and then he goes in to a long discussion.

In other words, they were in an anticipation of Jesus Christ to such a fever pitch that they were actually fearful that they might have even missed it. That's a lot of anticipation. And in the excitement and the enthusiasm and the zeal for the coming of Christ, they began to allow the mundane responsibilities of life to lose importance. Understood? I mean, Jesus is coming, why mess with these worldly issues? Get our pajamas on and get up on the root top and wait...He'll be here soon. And as often has been said they were so heavenly minded they were no earthly good. They had focused totally on the coming of Christ and lost all sense of responsibility. They were anticipating Him and that was right. Their realization had become so strong and so powerful that they were neglecting the normal duties of life.

This is an interesting thing to think about because we might expect Paul to say the Lord is coming very soon, so here are the five essential things you need to do. And the list would go like--evangelize the corners of the world, preach every waking moment on the street corners the gospel of Jesus Christ, pass out literature to every breathing human being, buy the billboards across town, paint it on the walls. He doesn't. Jesus is coming, what should we do? Love each other more, lead a quiet life, mind your own business and work with your hands.

What? That doesn't seem consistent with what's going to happen. God is never in a state of panic and God's people who reflect God's character shouldn't be in a state of panic either. And have we forgotten that the underlying foundation of all of our evangelism is the credibility of our living, right? I

mean, we live in an agitated, upset, disoriented, messed-up world so why world so why would agitated, upset, disoriented Christians have anything to offer it? The Christians who are characterized by love, who require peaceful tranquil lives, who mind their own business with great care and who faithfully discharge their duties as they were are going to show a life style to the world that may make Christianity attractive. Isn't that interesting? They were saying, "Hey, why worry about relationships? Why bother about loving anybody? We're out of here. When we get to heaven it will all be perfect any way, let's not worry about each other." And when they're talking about love, they're not talking about a feeling, they're talking about a duty, responsibility to serve someone in need. Why bother with a human need? Why bother with this stuff down here? We're leaving here. Why be concerned to take care of my job and my responsibility and my house and the business at hand? I'm not going to bother with that. We're going to heaven.

And so, they were so much anticipating the coming of Christ they were ignoring their normal life duties. So Paul has to write to them after already having told them and even after he writes this he writes another letter to tell them what he told them in this letter which he had already told him. That's how hot their zeal was for the coming of Christ. I wish we had some of that excitement. Sometimes I think we have the opposite problem. It's not that the church today is so anxious for the coming of Christ that we're ignoring our worldly responsibility, it is that the church is so indifferent to the coming of Christ it is consumed with its worldly activity. It's absolutely the reverse. Both are wrong.

By the way, having a zealous anticipation for the coming of Christ isn't wrong. Not at all. Even John said, "Even so, come, Lord Jesus." Right? First Corinthians 1:7 says, "The Corinthians were waiting eagerly the revelation of the Lord Jesus Christ." James had to tell his readers in James 5:7 and 8, "Be patient, be patient, hold it, be patient." Peter has to say, "You know it's coming, now wait a minute, here's how you live, godly pure lives..." It's easy for the church to anticipate that, it's right for the church to anticipate that if it's taught Jesus is coming. But the Thessalonians seem to lose their balance and as 2 Thessalonians 2:2 said, as I read to you, they were losing their composure and they were becoming agitated and excited to the point where they weren't really doing the duties that they should have done.

And by the way, they weren't the only people in history to have acted that way. Going back to the third century there's an interesting account written by Hippelates of Rome in his commentary on Daniel in which he talks about in Pontus at the beginning of the third century a bishop announced that Jesus would come by the end of the year. And many of his flock and people sold all their property and became absolutely destitute and just waited for Jesus to come. Well He didn't come, obviously. And there they were destitute. Shirked all responsibility and duty. And then, of course, they had to depend upon the church to sustain and support them.

I remember a man who came into my office when we were still meeting in the chapel not long after I had come to Grace Church and he came to tell me that Jesus was coming January 1. I think it was

somewhere around 1976 or 77, that Jesus would be here January 1. This was in November and he said, "You've got to act fast." He said, "I am a real estate developer and I've been in Orange County for a number of years and I have an estate about a half a million dollars and I've managed now to almost liquidate all of it."

I said, "Well what have you done with it?"

"Well," he said, "I've mostly bought Bibles and bought...this is hard to believe...praying hands that glow in the dark...would you believe?...which he was distributing to military bases," and all of this, "to call people to get ready for the Rapture." And he was sending Bibles everywhere and literature and other trinkets and crosses and it was a massive effort which he was engaged in with some of his friends who had bought in to his viewpoint that Jesus was coming January 1. Well, of course, January 2 was a major, major disappointment and all these people had liquidated everything they owned for the coming of Jesus.

Just about two years ago somebody wrote a book saying that Jesus was coming. Remember that? It swept across America. People bought in to that thing, liquidated their possessions, quit their jobs, sat down, did nothing. And you know what? Jesus didn't come. And so they then become dependent on society. Paul said, "Look, the last thing the Lord wants is a bunch of irresponsible busybody Christians who are doing absolutely nothing but running around in a frenzy about the coming of Jesus Christ. You back up, start loving each other more which means you start doing things in each other's lives to meet needs right here in this world, quiet down, settle down, sit down, stop running around, mind your own business, get out of other's and work with your hands.

This is reminiscent to me of Luke 19:13 parable. Jesus says that a certain nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself and then return. And he said to the ten slaves that he called together, "Do business until I...what?...come." Do business till I get here. What do you mean do business? Just carry on in your normal function in the world.

Christianity is so practical. Apparently their hope in Thessalonica had distracted them to the degree that they failed to stay with the duties of every-day life. Let's look at these four, okay? Just a reminder, they're just so simple.

To remind ourselves what we're supposed to be all about until Jesus gets here...number one, love each other more...love each other more. It would be safe to say, I think, that this exhortation to love, it's in verses 9 and 10 by the way, it would be safe to say that this exhortation to love is beautifully connected with what Paul had just written because he's just written about lust, even used the word in verse 5. He said lust is forbidden but love is required, very much like Ephesians 5:1 and 1 where it says we're to love in verse 2 and then immediately in verse 3 it says we're not to lust. Some people get those confused, lust and love.

So, Paul says the first principle of sanctification...don't lust. The second one...do love, love. And if anything is to characterize the church it is purity on the one hand and love on the other hand. Pure moral conduct and love go together.

The little phrase at the beginning of verse 9, "Now as to..." that's just a frequent phrase Paul uses to indicate a change in subject. He'll use it in 4:13 and he'll use it again in 5:1 to change subjects. And so changing the subject from lust and sexual sin, I want to talk about the love of the brethren. That's one word philadelphiafrom philos, love of affection, adelphos, brother...brother love.

I want to talk about philadelphia, originally meant affection for someone from the same womb. But it's used five times in the New Testament to talk about Christian affection, Christian to Christians. So let me talk about you Christians loving each other. And again, remember this, this love is always expressed in service, meeting needs, caring for people. And apparently...apparently some of this had kind of slipped because they were not worrying about any earthly things, they were so anxious for the return of Christ and thinking it to come any moment. So he says let me talk about this love of the brethren.

He says, "You have no need for anyone to write to you." That's interesting. He says it would be superfluous, unnecessary for me to write to you. He says that same thing, by the way, in chapter 5 verse 1. He says my purpose is not to write to you to tell you to love each other, that's superfluous. Why? "For you yourselves," that means without me, emphatic, "you yourselves apart from me," I love this, "are God-taught," that's one word in the Greek, theodidaktos, you are God-taught to love one another. Boy, what a statement...what a statement that is.

He says, "Look, I don't need to write you and tell you to love one another, you're God taught." By the way, that's the only time in the New Testament that word is ever used, a similar phrase to that is used in John 6:45 but only here is that word used. He's saying you don't need external instruction, you don't need external motivation, external exhortation, you have an internal teaching, you're God taught.

You say, "You mean if I'm a Christian nobody needs to teach me to love my brother cause God will do that?" Yes. "How?" I'll show you how, Romans 5:5, it tells you exactly how God does that. Romans 5:5 says, "The love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us." Did you hear that? The love of God has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. So how are we God taught? By the Holy Spirit. God the Holy Spirit comes to live in us when we're saved and He teaches us to love.

You say, "Well what if a Christian doesn't love?" Not possible, absolutely not possible. The Holy Spirit comes, the Holy Spirit is a teacher, He teaches you to love. It's impossible not to love.

Christians will love Christians.

First John will show you that, chapter 2. Notice 1 John chapter 2 verse 9, "The one who says he's in the light," that is he's saved, he says he's saved, "and hates his brother is in the darkness until now, he's lying...he's lying." How so? "The one who loves his brother abides in the light." That simple. The one who loves his brother is in the light. The one who loves his brother abides in the light. Flip it over. The one who abides in the light...what?...loves his brother. It's innate. It's built in to our new nature. Go over to chapter 3 verse 14 and here it is explicit. First John 3:14, "We know that we have passed out of death into life." How do we know that? How do we know we've gone out of death into life? Here's how. "Because we love the brethren and he who doesn't love abides in death." Very simple.

If you don't love the brethren, you're dead in your sin. If you're a Christian, you love the brethren. Look at chapter 4 verse 7, "Beloved, let us love one another for love is from God and everyone who loves is born of God." Everyone who loves is born of God. It couldn't be more direct. "And knows God." Verse 8, "The one who doesn't love doesn't know God." That's simply stated. Verse 12, in the middle of the verse, "If we love one another, God abides in us and His love is perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us because He's given us of His Spirit." Now we're back to the Holy Spirit who brings the love and moves through us to cause us to love. Every Christian had a basic inherent attitude of love toward other Christians produced by salvation. And if it isn't there, salvation isn't there.

Now back to 1 Thessalonians. So when the Apostle Paul says in chapter 4, "You have no need for anyone to write to you, you don't need me to tell you to love, for you yourselves apart from me are God taught to love one another," and there he uses the term agape, the purest, highest, noblest love of the volition, love of the will. He says God teaches you to do that so I don't need to write you about loving each other because God is producing the agapein you that ends up in the philadelphia. And he says in verse 10, "For indeed...for indeed, in truth, in reality, without question you do practice it." There's no question about it. It's fact. It's reality. You're saved, you love. "You practice it and you practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia." It isn't just for people in your town, it isn't just some local affection. You practice it toward all of the believers. Thessalonica was the capital city of Macedonia. And there were, remember this, other churches being founded in Macedonia. Paul, according to Acts 16:9 to 12, was in other parts of Macedonia. Silas and Timothy who had been in Thessalonica were in other parts of Macedonia. Other churches were being founded and Christians were coming to the trade center which was Thessalonica meeting the Thessalonian church and finding them full of love and taking the message back. And everybody in Macedonia knew the Thessalonians loved. Everybody knows that and it's not even selective, you're just loving all the Christians.

Not only had their faith spread abroad, according to chapter 1 verse 8, so had their love. They loved. And the church knew about it. They showed hospitality. They showed kindness. They washed feet. They showed mercy to people in need. They were sacrificial. They were generous. They did everything that expressed love. And I'm not talking about sentiment and emotion, although there is emotion there. I'm talking about deeds of sacrificial service and kindness.

You say, "Well look, if they were doing all that, what's the injunction?" End of verse 10, "But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more." Remember our little phrase, you're doing fine but you could do better. I mean, they loved but the love wasn't perfect. They had faith but the faith wasn't perfect, as we noted in 3:10. He wanted to strengthen their faith. He wanted to strengthen their love. As wonderful as your love is, you could do better, you could improve, you could...well, super-abound. That's what "excel still more" means. You could abound to a greater degree. There's plenty of room for improvement. You haven't reached perfection, by the way. You could love to a greater degree.

In fact, over in chapter 5 verse 15 there's a good indication of that. Actually back to verse 13, "You're to esteem your leaders highly in love, you're to live in peace with one another. And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient with all men and don't repay evil for evil but always seek that which is good for one another and all men." Those are just ways to love. So he says you could love more, you could love to a greater degree. That's Christianity. Peter called it "fervent love," ektenes, stretched love, reaching to its limits. Jesus is coming. What should we do? Jesus is coming. Why don't you love each other more, not less...why don't you concentrate on more on meeting people's needs, hospitality, a place to stay, a meal to eat, washing their feet, taking care of them when they're ill, providing what they don't have. Take care of them in this world, that's where love expresses itself. That's what he's talking about. Don't ignore this world cause Jesus is coming, take a greater look at the people around you and love them more.

Hmmmm, love them more? I mean, why don't we just ignore this world and wait to go to glory? No, he says, love them more.

Second injunction, lead a quiet life...lead a quiet life. You say, "Now wait a minute, Jesus is coming, shouldn't we lead a loud life? Shouldn't we be all over the place screaming and yelling and hollering and marching and protesting and doing whatever we need to do, wake up the whole world?"

No, just lead a quiet life. This is a very interesting statement because it says in verse 11, "And to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life." Those two verb forms are tied in to "excel still more." How? By making it your ambition to lead a quiet life. That is a...that is an almost contradictory usage of two verbs. The first one means to be zealous and to strive eagerly...be zealous and strive eagerly to be quiet. A little bit difficult. Make a major effort to do nothing. Make a major effort to rest, relax, remain silent.

That word there is used in the New Testament of a number of things...keeping your mouth closed and not saying anything; quieting down when you've been speaking. It's used of resting. But it has the idea in all those usages of a tranquility, calm tranquil, peaceful. The root has that idea...quiet, peaceable. One noun form literally means to keep your seat, sit down, relax. Christians are to live quiet, relaxed, restful, peaceful lives in face of persecution, in fact of anticipation of the Lord's return.

We don't know...we don't know what these Christians were doing they shouldn't have been doing, we don't know where they were going and what they were involved in. We don't know how they were manifesting this lack of composure and upheaval. But he says back off, sit down, relax, settle down, calm down, be quiet, be tranquil, be peaceful. Very much like Paul's instruction to Timothy to give the church at Ephesus, tell them to lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. Don't make trouble for the king, don't make trouble for the governors, don't upturn...overturn the culture. Interesting commands, aren't they?

First one, even though Jesus is coming very soon, make sure you do loving things to meet the needs of other people, physical needs, earthly needs. Second one, lead a very quiet life, stay out of the public eye, get back, settle down, be quiet.

There's a third one, mind your own business. That communicates, doesn't it? Mind your own business. That's been quoted a lot by folks, "Attend to your own business." But this is the only time this word is used in the Greek in the New Testament. It's common in secular Greek, it's only used here. We don't really know what he was speaking to because we don't know what the issues were if there were any. It may have been a general exhortation. He is saying don't get into somebody else's affairs, either the affairs of other Christians, the church leaders, the society, whatever...stay out of that stuff. Just take care of your own business. Concentrate on your own life. Concentrate on how you live. Stay out of other people's matters, stay out of other issues.

Over in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 he said, "Don't be a busybody." What's a busybody? Well that's exactly what it says...a body that's busy. Somebody who is para peripatetic from the Greek verb peripateo, to walk around, who is all over the place all the time. Don't do that. People who are undisciplined who don't work but act like busybodies, just running around sticking their nose into everybody's affairs. Keep doing what's necessary for your livelihood. Don't be running off trying to solve everybody's problems in the world and straighten out everybody's issues. Mind your own business, no place for gossip. Take care of you and just keep doing what you've always done.

Work, he says in Colossians 3:22 to 24, to please your master whether he's good or not. Do whatever you do for your master, the guy who has employed you heartily as unto the Lord. Just keep doing what is necessary to your life and stay out of other people's affairs. Keep to yourself. Keep your own life, your own business, the matters that concern you. Lead a quiet unobtrusive, gentle,

peaceful life and make sure you give yourself in sacrificial love to one another in the matter of meeting worldly needs.

And then, fourthly, he says...work with your hands...work with your hands. The free Greeks believed that manual labor belonged only to slaves. So they had the slaves do all of it. Freemen should never stoop to do manual labor. It was degrading, said the free Greeks. And consequently it led them to idleness, indulgence. But the Christian community dignified work as an honorable effort and no doubt most of the Christians were workers. In fact, most of the Christians were slaves, probably. So they're exhorted to keep at it.

And you say, "Well what may have happened?" Well something like this, these slaves, or these employed people would say, "Now we've come to know Jesus Christ, we're free in Christ, that catapults us over our masters. We don't need to work especially in the coming of Jesus Christ. We're not going to do their work anymore, we're not going to apply their trade while they rake in all the profit, we're just going to back out and wait for Jesus to come."

And that's exactly what he wrote in 2 Thessalonians. "I heard some of you were living undisciplined lives instead of quiet peaceable lives where you mind your own business. And some of you are working not at all..." And he says in 2 Thessalonians, "And if you don't work you shouldn't...what?...because what had happened was Christians waiting for the Second Coming were unconcerned about the needs of the people around them, first of all. They were troublesome busybodies who were not living quiet and peaceful lives and they had become deadbeats. And they were depending on Christians with resources to sustain them instead of working with their own hands. So anxious for the Second Coming they couldn't bother to take care of this life.

Paul made his living by making tents with his hands. Jesus made His living by making things out of wood with His hands, probably laying bricks. Christianity has always dignified labor. Since most of them were workers who worked with their hands, he says work with your hands, don't flip out into some spiritual dimension where all you want to do is sit and discuss theology...work.

The Christian church is no place for a lack of love, it's no place for a loud, boisterous people who are involved in all kinds of things they shouldn't be involved in. Back off, live a quiet life, a peaceful life, stay out of the public eye. Mind your own business. Work with your hands.

You say, "But, John, that seems so mundane when the work is so vital, the work of evangelism and if you believe that Jesus is coming soon." That's just his point. Go to verse 12. "So that...here's the purpose...so that you may behave properly toward outsiders." Stop there.

Now wait a minute, he's talking about evangelism here. The key to evangelism is not a..is not a strategy that unfolds in a pamphlet, or a tract, or an evangelistic technique or a programmed service.

The key to evangelism is the integrity of t he lives of Christians who manifest to a troubled, agitated, messed-up world a behavior that is filled with love and peace and tranquility and privacy and diligent work. And when Christians live that kind of a life in the world, people say you're different. Everything is stirred up and troubled and agitated and you're perfectly calm. There's anger and hostility and bitterness and hatred and you just love all these people. You're generous. While everybody is running around trying to get the scoop on everybody else. If you don't believe that, just read the newspapers and the tabloids and all of that. Some people in our culture just literally thrive in feeding themselves on somebody else's affairs. And all you people want to do is take care of your own business. My, everybody else is looking for the quickest way out and you want to work hard. What makes you tick?

See that's the platform of integrity that makes the message believable. And so if we're going to behave properly, behave means walk, daily conduct, properly means in good form toward outsiders, not Christians, this is the way to live. He doesn't say shirk your job, shirk your responsibility, get noisy, go out and do this. No, just keep living your life and unbelievers will see it. It's how you live. Shoe-leather faith toward outsiders.

And then he adds this in verse 12. "And not be in any need." Furthermore, he says, I want you to behave that way toward outsiders and I want you to behave that way toward insiders so they're not always having to meet your need. Non-Christians, first of all, should have no basis for thinking Christians are unloving, troublesome, nosy deadbeats. But I'm not sure that's always the case. I think there are a lot of apparently unloving troublesome, nosy, deadbeat Christians around. But we will commend Christianity to the outsiders by the diligence and the beauty of our life style. And then he says, "And you'll not be in need," which means you'll also conduct yourselves properly toward those on the inside. You make your living, you work with your hands, you live your life, you don't shirk responsibility so that you have to depend on some more industrious Christian to provide your livelihood.

Anticipation of the Lord's return, beloved, was no excuse for irresponsible living. All the future analysts say the church is in trouble. This book did, that I read, the one I mentioned in the beginning. It said the church is in trouble because it isn't relevant. It's got to be relevant.

How does the church get relevant? By using contemporary music? By using contemporary theater, drama, whatever? By using contemporary Madison Avenue marketing technique? How does the church get relevant? By giving people what they want?

No. The most relevant thing the church can do is live the life of a Christian in every dimension of daily life, right? So that we close any existing gap between our faith and our feet, right? That's what will make us relevant. Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank You for again the privilege we have of living sanctified lives in the world so that men in seeing our good works will glorify our Father who is in heaven, as Jesus said. May we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that the relevancy of the church is not related to its cleverness, it's related to its character. It's not related to its...its contemporary theatrics, it's related to its credibility, its integrity as Christians live their life in the world. And help us to know that the first step of effective evangelization is our own lives, our own lives. Help us to start there. We know Jesus is coming and we are waiting for His return. But help us to understand that until He comes we have to be about this business of living life in a lovely and gracious way, a way that generously meets the needs of those that we love and a way that is quiet and tranquil and peaceful, not troublesome, in a way that causes us to focus on the things that are our own responsibility and not someone else, in a way that causes us to work hard and do what we do heartily to the Lord. And then the world will watch and say you're different. You have love, you have peace, you have focus, you have purpose. Perhaps the door will open then for us to tell them who it is that has made that a reality. Give us that kind of relevance. We thank You for the privilege of these responsibilities as we wait for Your Son. We say with John, "We wish He would come soon." Until then, we pray in His name. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2014 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).