

In our sort of major headings outline that I've been reminding everyone of, you might say, Hunter, why do you keep reminding us of this? Well, repetition is the key to remembering. The goal, at least for myself, maybe y'all remember too, is that we can get this outline in our heads so whenever we pick up the book of Thessalonians, we can know, okay, this is basically what it's about. And our four major headings have been, first, thanksgiving.

As Paul in chapter one gives thanks for the Thessalonians and the good work God has been doing among them. Second, we saw explanation in chapters two and three as Paul explains his conduct among them as well as why he hasn't been able to see them in person recently. And now we are, we have been, last time we began to talk about exhortation as Paul begins to exhort the Thessalonians on how they might live God-pleasing lives. And we're actually going to be moving next time into consolation, as Paul comforts them about the death, about those who've fallen asleep, as well as Christ's second coming. But in our last message, one of the things that we emphasized was how Paul was calling the Thessalonians to sanctify their bodies, to be holy, that they might be sanctified.

He began with this great thesis statement, for this is the will of God for you, your sanctification. And last time, sanctification meant abstaining, right? It meant abstaining from anything that is unclean. Well, in this chapter, if before holiness meant abstaining, now holiness means abounding. We are to abstain from what is unclean and we are to abound, namely, in brotherly love. In brotherly love. What does that look like? How do we abound in brotherly love?

Well, let's read the text and find out. Before we do, let's ask God's help in prayer. Our Father and our God, as we open up your word, we pray that what we know not, you teach us, what we have not, give us, and what we are not, make us, for the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen. Reading from 1 Thessalonians 4, beginning at verse 9. Reading in Jesus' name.

Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another. For that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire 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. This is the word of the Lord. May he have his blessing to it.

You'll notice in the bulletin that I titled this evening's message, Christian love is ordinary. Christian love is ordinary. Now, you may object for a moment and say, Christian love doesn't seem that ordinary. I mean, and let me explain myself here. What I don't mean is that Christian love's origin is ordinary. It certainly is not. Christian love does not come from the Christian. It's not natural. It is something poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit. It is a supernatural love. It is certainly not ordinary in its origin.

Nor am I saying, nor is Paul saying, that Christian love is ordinary even in its occurrence. To our shame as Christians, Christian love is often hard to find. Thankfully, that's not true in this congregation, but it's certainly true among Christians throughout history. We wish it was more ordinary for Christians to express this kind of love. But that's not the point Paul was making here. The point Paul was making here is that Christian love is ordinary in its expression. Christian love is ordinary in its expression. It's not something that comes out in bursts of extraordinary acts of miraculous power. Rather, Christian love is more mundane than that.

It comes out in the day-to-day, ordinary lives of ordinary people. And I don't know about you, but that's good news. That's good news for me, because by definition, most of us are rather ordinary, aren't we? In fact, if you were to say, no, no, I don't think most people are ordinary, you've kind of contradicted yourself in that statement. By definition, most people are ordinary. And so if brotherly love, if Christian love was only expressed in extraordinary ways, well, that wouldn't really help most of us ordinary people.

And so tonight, I want to address two major groups. The first is those of us who feel guilt simply for being ordinary. Many of us feel as though we hear in the culture how Christians need to be radical, Christians need to be extraordinary. We read stories of missionaries doing extraordinary things for God and we say, wow, good for them, but that's not me.

Maybe I can get into the kingdom by the skin of my teeth. Maybe God will be okay with my ordinary life, but surely he doesn't delight in it. He's more interested in those extraordinary people. And there's this sense of guilt in the back of your mind thinking, is God really pleased with my ordinary life?

And on the other hand, you have those who are obsessed with the extraordinary. Those who say, those who are in their zeal for Christ are looking for extraordinary ways to share God's love, and that's great. But oftentimes, they do so at the expense of the ordinary. They might be out doing quote-unquote extraordinary things for God, but look at their home life. Look at their everyday lives. Doesn't really reach back there.

And so the major point that I want us to gather from this text this evening is I want us to abound in ordinary love. Abound in ordinary love. How do we do that? Well, first we need to understand the power of this love. We need to understand the practice of this love. And we need to understand the purpose of this love. The power of this love, the practice of this love, and the purpose of this love. So first, the power of this love. Look with me at verse 9.

This teaching by God is actually a reference back to the prophecies of the Old Testament. If you read back, especially in Jeremiah, Jeremiah 31 to be particular, Jeremiah prophesies a day when God will make a new covenant with Israel, when he will write his word on their hearts, and when, in the words of Jeremiah, there will no longer be any need for teachers, saying, know the Lord, for they will all know me, from the greatest of them to the least. And what Jeremiah and others were prophesying was a time in which God himself would be the teacher of his people. God would directly come and teach his people.

And this great promise is fulfilled in the sending of the Holy Spirit. How do we know this? Romans 5.5, Paul writes that the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. We are all God taught by the Holy Spirit. It is God the Holy Spirit who comes and directly teaches us. That's why he indwells us. And this is very important for us to understand. And it's the reason that a non-Christian, someone who does not trust in Jesus, cannot express the love we're about to talk about. It is utterly impossible. because the love does not come from them. It doesn't come from me, it doesn't come from you.

The love, that this Christian love that is expressed in ordinary ways, has a supernatural origin. It comes from the Holy Spirit, it comes from God himself. God is love. And his Holy Spirit, love itself, dwells within us. That is the principle by which we love one another. That is the power of this love. It comes from God.

Therefore, if you have not trusted in the Lord Jesus Christ, if He is not your Savior, if you have not first despaired of yourself and trusted only in the Lord Jesus Christ, you will never express this love. You might express an outward love, an outward concern for others, but you will never know the love of God. And so this love, it has this divine origin. But now you may ask, well, I'm a little confused, Paul. See, you say, you have no need for us to talk about this, for us to talk about this love, because you're God-taught, and then he proceeds to talk about it.

What's Paul doing here? After all, and if we're all God-taught, if we all have the Holy Spirit living within us, who is teaching us, even now, why do we need preachers? Why do we need teachers? What's going on here? Well, the answer is that the Apostle Paul does not see the teaching of the Holy Spirit and the teaching of a spirit-appointed teachers as in tension at all. Rather, the teachers that he has given the church are the means by which the Holy Spirit teaches his church. They actually, in fact, the fact that you have the Holy Spirit living within you who is teaching you is the very reason that preachers get up to preach in the first place. If I didn't believe that you had the Holy Spirit within you that was your teacher, you think I would be up here?

No, I wouldn't be. I have no, I could not get through to you. No one could. There's no way that a guy standing up here and talking about a book could teach anyone on its own. You need the Holy Spirit to be your teacher. You need the Holy Spirit to take the words that come from this book, that are proclaimed from this pulpit, and apply them to your heart. If you are not God taught, then you will never be taught at all. Not from this book. So these are not intention at all. Rather, they are complimentary.

It is God who teaches you, yes, by the Spirit. But that actually establishes the preaching of the Word. It doesn't undermine it. So this power of love, it comes from God, by the Holy Spirit that is poured out in our hearts. And second, it shows itself, it manifests itself, in works. In works. Look at the second part of verse 9.

For yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Now Paul has been routinely talking about this love that the Thessalonians have been sharing, and he keeps talking about how it's throughout Macedonia. And he doesn't really give a lot of concrete details about it.

However, based on what he does say about it, we can make a couple of, shall we say, sanctified guesses. Sanctified, educated guesses. First, it likely involved hospitality. Thessalonica was a very important trade city, and there were probably a lot of Christians coming in and out who needed a place to live. Hotels back then, the ones that did exist, were pretty expensive, and the ones that weren't expensive could be very dangerous. And so most often in the ancient world, if you could, you would stay with family.

And so the Thessalonians share their love for their brothers and sisters in Christ by opening up their homes, by being hospitable. This love will also likely have shown itself in generosity. While the Thessalonians were probably not very wealthy, there were certainly others who were far less wealthy, especially out in the country. And so like

other churches, especially since Paul was talking about their generosity, their love for the whole of Macedonia, that likely implies that they were financially helping people throughout Macedonia. So it showed itself in the way that they use their money. And finally, it showed itself in prayer.

Can a Christian really love someone if they never pray for them? No, of course not. Those of you who are in Christ know this. When you truly love someone, especially a fellow believer, you'll be praying for them. And so the Thessalonians were likely in prayer for their brothers and sisters in Christ throughout Macedonia.

Now, just in passing, one of the things about Christian love and the way it shows itself, its power, it shows itself in our works. Love, if someone claims to love someone, but never acts on that love, that's not love, that's sentimentality. Love always acts, always shows itself in actions, and that goes all the way back to God. How does God love us? And God demonstrated his own love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. That is the kind of love that God has shown us, and it shows itself in deeds. In the words of James, I believe, let us not love merely in word, but in deed. And so this love it comes from God. The power of this love, it comes from God.

It shows itself and works. Third, briefly, it's always improving. It's always improving. Look at the second part of verse 10. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more. Do this more and more. I feel like a broken record, but that's only because Paul has been saying this again and again and again.

He has been complimenting the Thessalonians, saying, you have this love. You are being sanctified. You are being holy. You've made phenomenal progress. I'm so proud of you. God's spirit has been at work in you. I'm so glad. But you can abound more. But I wanna see you increase more. I wanna keep it up. Don't let up. Don't rest on your laurels. Keep working.

And that is the same message that God the Holy Spirit has for Second Presbyterian Church. Most all of y'all, in fact I would say all of y'all, manifest this love. You are a lot like the people in Thessalonica. except you're probably even further along. And it's wonderful, it's amazing. God has done a work in you.

And we should praise and thank God for that. But we should never rest on our laurels. A tree that stops growing is a dead tree, regardless how thick it becomes. We must continually be growing for it is in our growth that we show our life. Always be growing, always be abounding.

So this is the power of this love. It's from God. It shows itself and works and it is always increasing. But what does this love actually look like? What does it look like in practice? We move now from the power of this love to the practice of this love. What sort of practical applications does Paul make? Well, look with me at verse 11. But we urge you brothers to do this more and more and to aspire, pause for just a second, to aspire. Some translations say make it your ambition. I want you to think for a moment, how would you fill the next clause? You ask the world.

There are plenty of people on TikTok that will tell you what you should make your ambition, what you should aspire to. Aspire to make as much money as possible. Invest in the stock market, make sure you get a good percentage

you can live on, get that house, and you're set for life. Others will say, eat right, exercise, do all of these things, get as much life out of your body as you can. Aspire to that perfect body. You ask Christians how they would fill this in. And you'll get better answers.

You might hear, aspire to share the gospel with as many people as possible. A good aspiration. Aspire to live as holy as you can, to keep yourself as separated from the world as possible. Again, to a certain degree, in the right spirit, that's not a bad aspiration. But notice, that's not what Paul says. How does Paul fill this in? What does Paul say the aspiration of a Christian should be?

And to aspire to live quietly. To live quietly. This shocked me. How many, it seems in our world today, we're constantly told, live loudly, right? Wear loud clothes. Post your entire life on Facebook or Instagram so everyone can see it and compliment you. Live loud. Even you hear this from Christians. Live loud for Jesus. Live radical for Jesus. And in the right spirit, that's true.

But how often, how often do you hear Christians say to each other, live quietly? It's not that common. Live quietly. Friends, most of us live very ordinary lives, don't we? And as we said before, some of us feel guilt with that. We almost wonder, should we be louder? Should we be living more radically? And that can cripple us in our witness. It can cripple us in our assessment of ourselves. Satan can grab a hold of that and say, oh, you're not like David Livingston. You're not like even the pastor at your church. You're not like the missionary you support. Surely God is not pleased with your life.

Why even bother that much about it, about living for Christ in your own small ways? God doesn't care. But the word of our Lord, the word of our Lord Jesus Christ says God does care. God is honored by the quiet life. In fact, that should be your aspiration. Yes, there are times where God wants us to speak up. There are times where God wants us to confront, even to protest, if you're called to it. But that is not our default aspiration. That is not what a Christian is called primarily to do. A Christian is called to live quietly. And not just to live quietly. Look what else he says. in verse 11, and to aspire to live quietly and to mind your own affairs. To mind your own affairs. In this we see both a positive command as well as a negative command. The negative command Paul has to repeat with even more force in 2 Thessalonians.

Apparently, many in the church were given to idleness. They thought, Jesus is coming back soon. He could be back any minute. We're supposed to wait for him. That's what Jesus said to do. Therefore, we shouldn't be doing jobs. We shouldn't be going to work in the morning. We gotta prepare for Jesus. And for them, prepared for Jesus meant being busybodies, going from house to house causing trouble. And Paul is to tell them, don't be a busybody. Mind your own business. And that's part of what Paul is saying here. Mind your own affairs.

There is a time, yes, to confront brothers and sisters in Christ, especially if they sin against you. In fact, if a brother or sister in Christ sins against you and it sincerely bothers you, you are commanded to confront them, to reconcile with them. Leave your gift on the altar, go make peace with your brother.

But again, that is not our default command. Our default command is to mind our own affairs. Now, if we are in union with each other in the church, there's a sense in which each other's sanctification is our affair. But there's

also a sense in which which we ought to watch not being busybodies. So there's this negative command to mind our own affairs. There's also a positive element to it. We are to mind our affairs. Be mindful of our affairs. Be mindful of our business. Be faithful in what God has given us to do, is what that means.

This leads us to the doctrine of vocation. This was one of the great doctrines from the Reformation that Martin Luther especially emphasized to his people. His point was in a world, in the medieval world, there were two kinds of professions. There were the sacred professions and the profane professions. If you were in the sacred professions, if you were a priest, if you were a monk, then that meant you had a vocation.

You were called by God to do that thing. You were one of God's special people. And if you had a different profession, if you were in the secular world, well, you know, you just kinda just do it. God is okay with that. He really wishes you would take a vocation, but you know, do what you gotta do. Someone's gotta make the bread, I guess.

And in a world like that, Martin Luther from the text of scripture said, no, that is not the biblical model at all. The biblical model is whatever you do in word or deed, do it in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Every calling is sacred. Every job that you have, every vocation that you have is sacred before God. If you're a mother, If you're a grandmother, your role as a mother or grandmother is sacred before God in the way that you conduct yourself in that relationship. If you do so to the honor and glory of Christ, God is as much glorified by that and as much pleased with that as if you were a missionary in the West Indies. If you have a job, say it's a monotonous job, putting bolt A into port B, and you feel like your job is worth nothing. No, your job is sacred. You have been called by God to that job. And if you do it to his honor and glory, he is pleased with you. He is sincerely pleased with you. He is pleased with you, again, as if you were a preacher preaching on a Sunday evening service.

We all have our callings. We are to mind them. We're to be faithful in our callings. We're to be quiet. We're to be faithful. Third, we're to be working. Be working. Look again at verse 11. To mind your own affairs and to work with your hands as we instructed you. To work with your hands.

Paul here is referencing manual labor, particularly. It applies more broadly than that, but that's narrowly what he has in view. And what this text establishes is, again, the doctrine of vocation. Manual labor is honorable. It is holy in the sight of God. It's good. What was the first task that God gave man in the garden? Cultivate the ground. Cultivate the garden. Manual labor. Manual labor is sacred before God. Often it can, especially in the church, manual labor can seem almost like a secondary thing.

Like, you know, do it if you have to, but you know, the real work for the kingdom is done, you know, in the white collar jobs. Gotta be careful for that. That is certainly not the case. In fact, a blue collar job is actually closer to God's original calling for man than a white collar one. Important to note, we are to be faithful in this working.

We're not to be lazy. Laziness is not just something to laugh about. Laziness is sinful. God wants us working. God wants you to be diligent. Now that doesn't mean you never take a break. There's a godly place to take a break, especially on his day. He commands you to take a break on his day. There is a godly stewardship of your body. You need to take a break. Some of you need to be told, hey, you can take a break. But others of us need to be told that not to be idle, not to be lazy.

And that applies even if you're retired to a certain extent. Yes, you might be retired from your main career, but as long as you still have breath in your lungs, God has work for you to do. Might not be the same kind of work. It might not be difficult work. There's always something. God does not want us to be idle. So what is the practice, what does the practice of this love look like? Well, it means being quiet, being faithful, and being working. But what's the purpose of all of it?

Why does Paul point out these things in particular? This doesn't seem that much like brotherly love. When I think of brotherly love, I think of, you know, being kind to other people, tolerating them, being able to forgive them, and scripture talks about those sorts of things, but that's not what Paul highlights here. Why does he highlight these particular things when he's talking about brotherly love, love of neighbor?

Well, let's look at the purpose of this love. Look at me at verse 12. So that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one. First, we have a public purpose. The public purpose of this command comes down to, again, this love for a neighbor, particularly a love that expressed itself in wanting to be a witness for Christ to them. There's a sense in which Christians should be concerned about what the world thinks about us. I know that seems almost like a radical statement.

I grew up at Disney Channel, and basically the theme of every episode of every single sitcom at Disney Channel was, don't you care about what other people think? Be yourself. Let other people think what they want. Be authentic. And you know, there's some wisdom in that. Obviously, God doesn't want us to be fake. But there is a dark side to that. It can lead us to not care what other people think. And we ought to. There's a sense in which we should guard our witness as Christians.

Because when you are known in your workplace, in your family, in your community, as a Bible-believing Christian, People, whether you want them to or not, are going to look at your life and say, does that really make a difference? What is this Christianity stuff about? There's a famous poem, I can't remember the whole thing, but I remember a couple of the, I remember the last couple of lines. You're writing a gospel a little each day by the things that you do and the things that you say. And then it ends, so what is the gospel according to you?

Good to ask ourselves. There's a love for neighbor in the sense of being a good witness. There's also a love for neighbor in loving our brothers and sisters in Christ. There's a safety element. This was very relevant for the Thessalonians. They are in a hostile climate. A climate in which it's their standing, not just their livelihood, but their very lives hang in the balance. And there are plenty of slanderers. Remember why Paul had to leave Thessalonica so quickly? Because the Jews were slandering him. And they were starting to persecute him, he had to leave.

And so in a world where there are people ready to slander the church, it becomes important for the safety of your brothers and sisters in Christ, for them to be able to live peaceful and quiet lives, for you to guard your witness. For Thessalonians, that meant, hey, if you're idle, if you're busybodies, if you're just not working, if you're constantly butting into other people's affairs, you're gonna give the church a bad name and we're gonna get persecuted.

And we won't be persecuted for the right reasons, we'll be persecuted for the wrong ones. And Christians, that has application for us today too, doesn't it? Yes, it's normal for the world to hate us because they hated Christ first. But let's not give them good reason. We want the testimony of the apostles. The apostles who wrote that we have to live in this way in order that those who accuse us may have nothing bad to say about us. We want to confound them.

Remember the scenes and acts that we read about whenever Paul was dragged before the authorities and the guy's like, why have you dragged this guy here? And a few times, they're like, I don't know, I don't like him. I don't like this Christ guy he's talking about. My favorite scene of that is with Gaius, where they start accusing him and Gaius is like, okay, You are just speaking rubbish. Get this Paul guy out of here. I don't even need to talk about it. In fact, flog the head of the synagogue because he's wasting my time.

That's the kind of witness we should strive to have so that they have nothing bad to say about us. And in doing so, we express a love for our brothers and sisters in Christ. We want them to be able to fulfill this text, don't we? What you say and what you do reflects on the whole community, reflects on all Christians. particularly those in your church. So there's this public purpose. There's also a pragmatic purpose. Pragmatic purpose. Look again at verse 11. So that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

See, the thing about these idlers is that in Thessalonica, they still had to eat. We all still have to eat. And for them, because they still had to eat even though they weren't working, they became dependent on others in the church, on the generosity of those in the church, to feed them. And it got so bad that by 2 Thessalonians, Paul has to cut them off. He has to say, if a man will not work, let him not eat.

So how does that, this seems kind of harsh, what does this have to do with brotherly love? It applies particularly to the idler. If you are idle, if you are making yourself dependent, then you are sinning. You are not expressing a love for your neighbor. You're making yourself dependent.

Now, again, this does not apply to those who are legitimately dependent, who legitimately cannot work, who legitimately need help, but like the help of the Spirit of God, like grace, like the grace of Christ, like the charity of Christ. The charity of the church is there to help us in our weakness and our affliction, never to excuse our laziness. And there is a sense in which you express love for your neighbor in cutting him off in certain instances. because you're stopping him from sinning. Eventually, you'll have to get a job. You'll have to fulfill this command. That's good.

So we see here this public purpose and this pragmatic purpose, and we've seen both of them are ultimately motivated by love. All of these commands that Paul has given, they flow out of a love for our neighbor. And this love has been poured out into our hearts by the Holy Spirit. And I don't know about you, this love is extremely practical,

isn't it? When people talk about love, sometimes it can seem just like sentimentality. But it's boots on the ground stuff. So we've seen the power of love. It's ultimately from God. It expresses itself in works. And it's always increasing.

The practice of this love, what does it look like? It means being quiet, being faithful, and working. What's the purpose? There's a public purpose that we might defend the reputation of the church and we might potentially draw people in. And there's a pragmatic purpose. We don't want to make ourselves dependent on our brothers and sisters in Christ whom we love. And all of this, friends, is fueled first by the love that Christ has first shed toward us.

Jesus, who lived the ordinary life perfectly. Think about that. The vast majority of Jesus' life was pretty ordinary, wasn't it? He spent the first 30 years of his life before his ministry began as a simple carpenter in Nazareth. You think he didn't have ordinary days? Mundane days? Of course he did. But in that time, in all those years of mundane life, he did it perfectly.

So that even though we sin, even though we sin in ordinary ways, Christ's righteousness covers our ordinary sins. And his extraordinary death atones for them. Praise the Lord that we have an extraordinary Savior for our very ordinary lives. Let's pray. Father and our God, we thank you that you are pleased with the ordinary Christian life. That's because that's what most of us have. And that you bless it, that it's good, and that it is pleasing in your sight. Lord, help us to be faithful in our ordinary lives, to express this brotherly love to your honor and glory. In Jesus' name, amen.