



VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

What Does It Mean to Be “A Christian”?

Ready: Strength for Today, Hope for Tomorrow | Part 7
Tim Badal | February 21, 2016 | 1 Thessalonians 4:9–12



We've been in this series entitled "Ready," and today we'll discuss how we need to be ready to share the love of Christ and His Word in ways we may not have thought of before. Last week we spoke on the subject of sex and your attention was right with me. Your eyes were open and you were listening with bated breath.

Today we're moving from being in tune with our culture to something that may seem a little boring. After talking about an issue as intense as sexual morality, we come now to the topic of loving and serving one another—how we live differently in our world and at our jobs—and that may seem like a let-down. But just as it's important to please God regarding our sexual purity, it is also important to live out the truths in 1 Thessalonians 4:9–12. So as we look at this text, we're going to ask: what does it mean to be a Christian?

This question was brought to my attention this week as I was watching a news program where they were discussing the evangelical vote in this political campaign. They said 75% of South Carolinians who took part in yesterday's primary election defined themselves as "evangelical Christians." The program anchor said, "Can we just stop and ask a question? What is a Christian? Because the way they vote, it seems the issues that are most important to them are all over the place." He was kind of frustrated. "Can someone tell me what a Christian is?" Someone responded, "It's a person who affirms the teachings of Jesus Christ."

I thought about that and knew there was more. After all, even the demons in some way can affirm the teachings of Jesus Christ. They know Who He is, and the Bible says they shudder at the fact that Jesus is Who He is. It's real in their lives. So being a follower of Jesus Christ, being a Christian, is a much larger thing than simply affirming His teachings. So I began to investigate on my own. The dictionary told me a Christian is one who adheres to the teachings of Jesus. That's the Webster's definition, but I knew there was still more. Is a Christian, then, one who goes to church? Who has been baptized? Who participates in communion? Who serves in the body? Who gives to the church? These most definitely are part of being a Christian—it's seen in our actions.

But then I realized a person could do all these things with no heart to truly follow Jesus Christ. They could do it because their mom told them to do it, or because it makes their spouse happy. We can do a lot of activities that we hate at the very core of who we are, yet do them to appease others or to play games. So it can't be simply serving and giving and all that. So what does it mean to be a Christian?

I'm wrestling with a definition that might not incorporate everything a Christian is, but I'm going to use this as a working definition. I would say **a Christian is someone who believes all the Scripture says about Christ and His sacrifice for us, who as a result walks with Him and seeks to please Him in all they say and do.** In other words, there is a level of belief. There are certain truths we have to affirm. But it's more than simply believing things or even doing things. It's taking what we believe about what Christ has done for us and allowing the ramifications of that to reverberate through our lives. I was a sinner in need of grace. God sent His Son Jesus to die on the cross for my sins, and through His death, burial and resurrection He has pardoned

my sin and has brought me into relationship with Him. As a result of that I live a life of gratitude for His amazing grace, and in response I'm going to walk with Him in intimacy and love, with a deep desire to please Him.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:1, Paul tells us we are called to walk with and please Christ. The word "please" is the Greek word *aresko*, which means to accommodate oneself to another's needs, desires and plans. So a Christian is one who affirms all that God has said in the Scripture about Christ and His sacrifice, and then makes it his goal to live this *aresko* kind of life. It's a person who says, "I'm second to You in all that I say and do. My will, plans, pleasures, desires and dreams are all secondary to Yours. I'm not going to speak until I know what I'm about to say is in line with Your will. I'm not going to do something unless I know it is going to please You. I will accommodate myself and my plan to Your will and plan." Thus, a follower of Jesus Christ reorders himself to follow Christ's leadership in every decision, in every word that is spoken, so he can please Him in all he says and does.

According to Paul, pleasing God also involves *not* doing certain things. As we learned last week, pleasing God means we cannot be involved in sexual immorality. We cannot play games with our sexuality and think we're okay with God. He says, "*This is the will of God...abstain from sexual morality*" (1 Thessalonians 4:3). But with every "don't" in Scripture, there are multiple "do's." Today we're not going to hear any don'ts, but only do's. Do this. Do that. We aren't to respond simply through duty, but rather out of a heart of gratitude for the salvation God gave through His Son. Because we have been placed in a local church, we have the opportunity to not live in sexual immorality, but rather to love people, to live in light of the goodness of Christ and to be the best possible employees in our workplaces. This is what Paul articulates in 1 Thessalonians 4:9–12, so let's look at these verses:

⁹Now 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, ¹⁰for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, ¹¹and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, ¹²so that you may live properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

Let's discuss three things Paul tells us are part of what it means to be a Christian.

1. A Christian is one who loves greatly.

Paul is not articulating something new or something that is original to him. Rather, he is giving the Thessalonians—and us today—a reminder of what Jesus Himself taught His disciples in John 13:34–35. While hanging out with His disciples, Jesus is answering their questions and describing the life of His followers. He says, "*A new commandment I give to you.*" The eleven disciples would have readily understood what that meant. They were Jews and they knew what Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai: ten commandments. So when Jesus said, "I'm going to give you a new commandment," they knew this was big. This was coming from God. This was something they would have to live their lives in accordance with daily. The commandments weren't suggestions; they were requirements. If you were a follower of Yahweh, you had to live out those commands.

Now Jesus is saying, "I'm giving you a new commandment." Their ears are perked up. They're listening. What's the new commandment? John 13:34 says, "*Love one another.*" You need to love one another. This new commandment means love is going to be the embodiment of the Christian life. Whatever you do, wherever you go, no matter who you're involved with, love is going to be your response in all ways and in all things.

Jesus goes on to say, "This love includes the way you talk, the way you react, how you respond in your closest relationships—your spouse or children. Love is to be shown to your extended family, to the person you're casually engaged with and even to strangers." We're to love our neighbor as ourselves. We are to love our enemies. And Jesus tells them the reason He wants them to love is so the world "*will know you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*" (John 13:35). What Jesus is saying is that our greatest evangelistic tool is not our missions program, our Awana program, our Sunday School ministry, or the preaching of God's Word. It's a mouthful there, but He says none of that will be of any value if we're not loving one another. But the world will stand up and take notice when they see Christians loving each other.

Why would that be the case? Remember, Paul has just talked about sexual immorality. Specifically, he has warned us not to allow lust to destroy our relationship with God—or even to distract us from that relationship. We must not let it get between us and God. Well, what is lust? At its core, lust is selfishness. It says, "I have these feelings and desires, and I will do whatever it takes to please myself. I will do what it takes to make sure I feel good, that my desires are achieved and my wants are fulfilled."

Paul says the world lives with this kind of out-of-control desire, saying, "It's me—me—me—me." It's easy to see this in today's culture. Turn on the television. Look at the ads. It's about your comfort, your pleasure, all the things you want. "Buy this car and you'll be happy. Buy this home and you'll be happy. Buy this product and you'll be happy." It's all about you. It's all about me. Paul

flips this, saying, “You can’t live selfishly lusting after things—whether sexual pleasures or anything else. The job of the Christian is not to lust selfishly but to love sacrificially.” The way we look at life and the way we live our lives is through the lens of love.

Paul goes on to explain, “Here’s how I want you to live out love.” What kind of love is it? Is it romantic love? No, verse nine says it’s “*brotherly love*.” This is the compound of two Greek words: *phileo* and *adelphos*. *Phileo* is a certain kind of love and *adelphos* is brother. You put those together and you get the phrase *philadelphia*. We know the city of Philadelphia as “the city of brotherly love.” Paul says this is the love he wants them to have: the love of brothers, the love of family. Literally, *philadelphia* speaks of a love that comes from the same womb. In other words, there is a kinship. My brothers and I come from the same womb and because of that we’re family. “Blood is thicker than water” and we’re a family unit. We’re going to stick together in the good times and the bad times.

As Christians, we’re not born of the same mother. We come from different backgrounds. That’s obvious in our varied skin colors and from the places and cultures where we were raised. It is evident in our preferences. We’re not monolithic in any way, shape or form as a people, yet we’re told to love one another as if we’d come from the same womb. Well, what’s the same womb we’ve come from? We don’t have the same mother, but we come from the same Father in heaven. We come from the same Spirit Who birthed in us the new birth, the regenerated birth. Living within us is the Spirit of Almighty God and because of that, you and I now have the unique opportunity to love in such a way that the world will say, “Wait a minute. I thought living in this world was taking care of self. I’ve watched you over and over again taking care of others.”

Amanda’s sister-in-law comes from a non-religious background and has no real interest in the things of God—but here’s the one place where we continually have an in-road in our evangelism to her. She is amazed by what she sees in the love relationships we have with the people of this church. It blows her away. She sees it on Facebook and places like that. She hears our testimonies, especially during Amanda’s cancer surgery, of how this church rallied around us and cared for us. She looks around and thinks, “I don’t see a world like that. Sugar Grove must be the nicest place in the world to live. People must be flocking to Sugar Grove because it’s full of loving people.”

We say, “Wait a minute. No. Sugar Grove is just as selfish as Buffalo Grove, where you live.” But the difference is that we are part of the body of Christ where people love us with brotherly love. We come from different places and backgrounds, but it doesn’t matter. They love us and we love them. We’ll go great distances to serve each other, to honor and minister to each other. My sister-in-law says, “I want that!” Then she’ll add, “But I don’t want Jesus with it.”

Here’s the thing: you can’t have one without the other. You can’t have brotherly love and not have Jesus being a part of it. Why? Because the Bible tells us God is love. You see, love is in the heart of God. It is who God is. We cannot get love from anybody else. We don’t conjure love up in our own selves. It comes from God. Even unbelievers, who in tainted ways love their spouses and their kids and their neighbors, show the imprint of God’s common grace to them, which they experience as a gift from God even to unbelievers. It’s an ability in some small ways to experience what love is.

But as believers—because the Spirit lives in us, because the God from Whom we are now begotten through Jesus Christ is love—He allows us to experience and express *agape* love, a God-like love. That means we have to be empowered by the Spirit of God. So maybe today you find yourself not loving your wife, not loving your husband, not loving your kids, not loving the extended family or the people in the church, the employees you work with, and you think, “Something’s wrong with me.” I would say, “Yes, there is. You’re not living out the fruit of the Spirit, which is love” (Galatians 5:22–23). We learned in verse eight that the Spirit of God is in you. So you have that capability. You’ve been empowered. You have to make a decision and I have to make a decision: I am going to love.

But how do we do it? We model what Christ modeled for us. How do we know what love looks like? “*God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*” (Romans 5:8). We don’t deserve it. We didn’t ask for it. In fact, we fought against it. But God lavished His love upon us, that He would make us His children. He demonstrates it for us. He empowers us with it. But how do we live it out?

I don’t have time to go there, but there are hundreds of verses explaining how to love one another. The Bible tells us that the way we love one another is by living out the “one another” commands throughout Scripture. There are dozens upon dozens of commands concerning what we are to do toward one another so that we might show love. Here are a couple things we need to know about the “one another” commands.

First, you cannot live these out in isolation. I cannot “one another” myself, right? I can’t do it. I can’t “admonish one another” if I’m the only person in the room. I can’t “encourage one another” if I’m by myself. So it reminds us that the Christian walk is not a

Lone Ranger walk, but a life that's lived in community. Maybe you say, "I love Jesus, but I can't stand His people." You've got a problem because you really don't know Who Jesus is then. You're saying, "I love Jesus and He's my priority, but the very thing He taught me to do I'm unwilling to do." We need to understand that to live out the "one another" commands means they're lived out in community.

The second thing about the "one another" commands is they remind us we are not to just love a certain group of people. It does not say, "And live out the 'one another' commands with people who look like you, people of the same age, same economic background, people with the same hobbies." It says, "One another." Well, who are the "one anothers"? They're the people in the church, the body of Christ. It means we need to increase our focus. Nineteen times in the book of 1 Thessalonians alone—and another nine times in 2 Thessalonians—Paul calls the people of Thessalonica "brothers." Not "people." Not "friends." Not "buddies." Not "Hey you." "Brothers." He says, "You have to be a priority if we're going to do this thing together."

So how do we do it? The Scriptures are chock full of the "one another" commands. Let me list what it means to love greatly. I want you to see all the different ways we are called to love one another. And as we go through them, ask yourself how you're doing.

- Are you welcoming one another?
- Do you greet one another?
- Do you agree with one another?
- Are you patient with one another?
- Do you comfort one another?
- Do you serve one another?
- Do you submit to one another?
- Do you admonish one another?
- Do you sing to one another?
- Do you fellowship with one another?
- Are you kind to one another?
- Do you not grumble against one another?
- Do you forgive one another?
- Do you confess your sins to one another?
- Do you bear burdens with one another?
- Do you do good to one another?
- Do you care for one another?
- Are you humble toward one another?
- Do you keep loving one another?
- Are you truthful to one another?
- Do you not judge one another?
- Do you pray for one another?
- Do you honor one another?
- Are you devoted to one another?
- Do you live in harmony with one another?
- Do you love one another?
- Do you teach one another?
- Do you show hospitality to one another?
- Do you live in peace with one another?
- Do you encourage one another?
- While eating, do you wait for one another?
- Do you build up one another?

Take a moment and ask yourself: do I really love the people who are sitting around me? Now, I get that there will be times in your life where you'll have more opportunities than this. But I want you to know that even in the small things we do, in the welcoming and greeting of one another, we're showing the brotherly love Paul was calling us to in 1 Thessalonians. Some of it has to do with the heart. Some of it has to do with actions.

Here's the final thing about the "one another" commands: they force us as Christians to recognize the truth that love simply cannot be expressed only through words, but must be exhibited in actions. I can't tell my wife or children I love them, and then not exhibit that love. Otherwise, the second time I say, "I love you," and then treat them like trash, they'll say, "Wait a minute. You're a liar. You don't love me."

So the "one another" commands give us ways to put our money where our mouths are, proving that we truly do love one another. We don't just simply tell people we love them, but we live it out. What God wants us to know in this passage is that love is to be a verb. It is to be lived out. We are to love greatly. That's what it means to be a Christian.

2. A Christian is one who lives differently.

Paul moves on to his second point, which is that Christians live differently from the world. Paul has already said we don't live like the pagans who do not know God. We live controlled lives. We control our sexuality. And now as we live differently, it's going to impact how we engage the world around us.

In Paul's first point, he is focusing on the church. Now he's asking us to look at our response to and engagement with the world. Verse 11, "*Aspire to live quietly.*" In other words, make your ambition to have no ambition. That just seems odd. What a paradox! What he's saying is, "You live in such a way that whatever your ambition is, it's really God's ambition. You're willing to fall in line with whatever He says." This idea of living quietly speaks of a Sabbath rest, a cessation of work. It speaks of a peace plan that ends warfare. It speaks to the end of conflicts.

These words help us understand what it means to live a quiet life. "Tim, you've suggested that I should take somebody out to a movie about the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. You told me to be bold. Now you're telling me to be quiet. You're sending mixed signals here." What Paul means by living a quiet life is we are to keep from doing things that will cause us harm. Consider these three points:

A. Living differently keeps us from being impetuous. Impetuous means to not be imprudent or impulsive. Christians sometimes lead imprudent and impulsive lives. I know this because when our staff asks, "Would you mind ministering in this way for the gospel of Christ?"—whether serving in a particular role or being part of some ministry—the number one excuse we hear is, "I'm too busy." Now, I get that there are things we need to be doing, but our calendars shouldn't be so full that the One we say is our priority is the One Who gets the scraps in our calendar.

If I was to ask, "What is the tyranny of the urgent in your life?" many of you would look at your calendar, at all the activities and all your comings and goings over this next week. I too live a very busy life and I ask myself as well, "What are we accomplishing?" I read biographies of people back before modern technology and one of the things I'm always amazed by is how much they actually got done. They had to walk everywhere! They didn't have cars. They didn't have electricity. They had to hunt for their food—they couldn't drive up to a window and get it. Yet they had sweeter times with God. They did more for the Kingdom of God.

As I read these biographies, I think, "Wait a minute. We have all this technology. We're able to multi-task in all these different ways." Listen to what multi-tasking is. I heard this definition and I like it: "Multi-tasking is the ability to do a ton of things and accomplish nothing." So we multi-task. We have in the palm of our hands more technology than what put men on the moon. Did you know that? More power, more memory—and we don't accomplish anything more than we ever did before. We're just distracted. It causes us to be impetuous. We're going here, we're going there, and we think we're accomplishing all these different things. But in the end we're just spinning our tires.

Paul tells them, "Live quiet lives." Well, how does living a quiet life keep you from being impetuous? It reminds you that God has a will and a plan for your life. So when you look at your calendar this week, ask this question: "What is God's will and plan for me?" Now, does that mean you scratch out all the basketball practices? No. But it may cause us to pull back from some things. Maybe instead of just going and being part of those things, we start looking at the gospel opportunities that are inherent within them.

You know, basketball games and baseball games and kids' events (which are quite frequent in the Badal schedule) are great for the Kingdom of God, because they give you great opportunities. Instead of sitting in your car waiting for your kid to come out, go reach out to your neighbors. Instead of just bouncing from place to place and not really caring—seeing your neighbors as a bunch of boats passing in the night, going to and fro—actually engage in the life of that coach or choir director or other people who are engaged with your kids.

Instead of running from place to place as a salesman, see your calling as more than just getting the sales call done. Seek to have an impact in the lives of the people with whom you're trying to do business. "How can I honor these people? How can I care for these people? How can I minister to these people? Instead of impetuously going from activity to activity, how can I put God's stamp of approval on it?" By living a quiet life.

B. Living differently keeps us from being anxious. Instead of constant worry about the ups and downs of life, a quiet life is a life at rest, knowing God is in control. Trials teach us this. I had no greater understanding of this truth than when my wife was given bad medical news. There was nothing I could do about it. Either I could yell and scream, or I could say, "God, You've got a plan and I'm going to get in line with this plan—even if it hurts at times—because I know it's better to be hurting personally with You than to live a life of luxury without You."

So I'm going to put myself in there and not be anxious, not be worried about the ups and downs, not thinking, "What about this? What about that?" I'm going to trust God, that He knows what is best. A quiet life tells the world that you believe in the sovereignty of God, a God Who controls everything and Who has great plans for you and the ones He loves.

C. Living differently keeps us from being obnoxious. As Christians, we can be obnoxious and we need to be careful. “But we have the gospel” you say, “and we’re supposed to share the gospel of Jesus Christ with everybody we come into contact with.” I’ve got to be honest with you; I don’t see that in Scripture. What I see in Scripture is, “Lord, make a way for us. When the opportunity is right, help us make the most of that opportunity.” Listen, our job is not to shove the Bible down everybody’s throats or to tell them they’re sinners and on their way to hell.

If that was what our job was, Jesus’ ministry would have been very different. He would have had a much larger ministry than the area of the Palestine foothills. As the Son of God, Jesus should have known better than anybody that there were a whole lot of people in the Far East who needed to know about His gospel. But He recognized that He had been placed in a certain region by the will of the Father and given the task of engaging with a certain group in His surroundings, in a particular cultural setting.

Now, this doesn’t mean the Lord might not call us to world missions. But we need to realize God has placed us in a specific place and time for a particular purpose. So, what is your mission field? Your mission is to be the best person you can be in the surroundings in which you find yourself, so that when the gospel opportunity comes you’re ready to present it. You live your life in a quiet, godly way, knowing that when God gives you an opportunity, you are ready to give the reason for the hope you have (1 Peter 3:15), in gentleness and respect.

So every day you live your life is a gospel day. Whether or not you’re doing the good job of proclaiming the gospel, you’re still portraying a gospel. My neighbors are seeing a gospel. And do you know when they’re seeing it? Listen, it’s not right now. Oh, I could wish they would watch my sermon videos on the internet. But they don’t know to do that. They know every Sunday I go to church. They know I’m a preacher. But they don’t know much more than that. Here’s what they do know: Does Tim love his wife? How does he treat his kids? Are they living quiet lives, or are they obnoxious people? Do we hate that the Badals live next door to us? Or are the Badals a blessing? When Tim goes to work, is the guy in the cubicle next to him angry about that? Does he wish he could find a different partner? Are his employees at 5-B’s thinking, “I wish I had a different boss because that guy’s obnoxious. Every time we talk about anything, he’s got to shove the Bible down my throat. I just want to work for a living and provide for my family, and this guy’s on a Billy Graham crusade.”

Listen, the best affirmation I ever got was in a conversation with an employee of mine named Danny. Danny will tell you he thinks you all are weird. Danny will tell you, “You guys have lost it. You’ve fallen off your rocker. This whole Jesus thing—are you kidding me? You’ve blown it. You’ve missed it.” But when Danny had a problem in his life, he came into my office to talk. Some of you know Danny and this will shock you. Danny was hurting, so he sought my advice. Then he said, “I’ve never said this before. I don’t buy your Jesus stuff, but I sure am glad you do. It makes you a better boss. You care about us. You go the extra mile for us.” I wanted to hug the guy, but if you know Danny, you don’t hug him. He’s a tattooed kind of guy.

I want it to be your goal to live a quiet life—settled, not impetuous, not anxious, not obnoxious—because God promises that gospel opportunities are going to come. And in that moment when you articulate the truth of Scripture, will they look at you and say, “Wait a minute. What did you just say? Are you the same guy, the same girl, who has been sitting next to my cubicle all this time? Because I don’t hear that coming out of your mouth any other time. You want me to go see some Jesus movie? You went to go see that other movie. Wait a minute. This doesn’t balance out.”

Live quiet lives. And then Paul adds, “Mind your own business.” How often have we wanted to tell somebody that? People ask us nosy questions or butt into private conversations or give unsolicited advice, and we want to yell at the top of our lungs, “Mind your own business! Get out of my life.” In the second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul tells the people he’s heard that many of them are busybodies. What’s a busybody? The manifestation of being a busybody is that they gossip. If you love to hear what’s going on in other people’s lives, you’re a busybody.

I’ll get flack for this, but Americans love being busybodies. Some of our biggest TV shows are reality shows where we’re involved in the lives of other people. We have this weird, voyeuristic idea that we like to watch other people. We hate fighting with our family, but we sure do love watching other people fight. I hated getting spankings as a kid, but man, I really enjoyed it when my buddies were going to get it from their mom and dad. Get me a chair. Let me watch!

We’re busybodies. We don’t mind our own business. Why does Paul say this?

Number one, being a busybody means you’re getting into the lives of other people. And whether you know this or not, other people’s lives are filled with garbage just like your life is. When we get into other people’s lives, we start picking through their trash. Let me ask you: when was the last time you went out to your neighbor’s trash can and started looking through it? “Oh, this

is wonderful. Oh, look! They had pizza the other night. Oh, this is wonderful. This comes from the bathroom.” Why don’t we do that? Because it’s gross, right? We want to just drive away from all that kind of garbage. We’ve got our own trash.

Paul says, “Don’t get involved in another sinner’s trash. You’ve got your own stuff to worry about.” We tell our children this all the time. “Mind your own business. You’ve got enough to worry about on your own.”

Paul tells us this so we’ll focus in on what is primary, that is, our own walk in this world with Christ. Then, as God gives you the opportunity, be engaged with others. As an elder, God gives me incredible opportunities to wade through people’s garbage—and it’s hard. Ministry isn’t easy, because most of the time you have to deal with other people’s issues and struggles. These might be the result of their own doing, or it might just be the trials and tribulations of life, but I enter into the garbage of other people’s lives.

Here’s the thing. At times, God will call you to be like Jesus. He was made flesh and made His dwelling among us. He got involved in our garbage. But you’d better make sure you’re called to it. The Bible says when you get involved in someone else’s garbage, be careful that you don’t fall into that garbage yourself. Don’t be there because of morbid curiosity, but rather be there to pull them out and bear their burdens. Outside of that calling, live a quiet life and mind your own business.

3. A Christian is one who labors effectively.

One final imperative Paul gives us is to labor effectively. We won’t spend a lot of time here because we’re going to deal with this in 2 Thessalonians after Easter. But Paul says in verse 12, “Listen. You need to work with your hands.” That doesn’t mean you all need to be blue-collar workers. I know we come from different backgrounds. Some of us are working with our hands; others are using their minds. We’re all working in various ways.

What Paul is saying is whatever work you find yourself doing, do it with all your heart. He isn’t saying there aren’t exceptions for disabilities or that there isn’t a reason for a welfare system. What he is saying is that in every possible way you’re able to work—work. It might be in the home or in the workplace. It might be a Christian vocation or a secular job. But your job is to work. Over and over, Paul reminds us we work for the favor of Christ, not for the favor of our earthly boss. You work unto the Lord.

He says you need to labor effectively so you’re not a drain on society, but rather are serving those around you, showing them love. I work so I can provide for my family. By working, I show them I love them. In 2 Thessalonians 3:10, Paul says, “*If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat.*” You’ve got to be working. God’s called us to work. He did so in the Garden of Eden, even before sin. It’s our way to fellowship with God and our way to care for His creation. It’s our way to love our neighbors as ourselves. And it’s our way to find fulfillment in this world.

So let me ask this: You’re going to go to work tomorrow and I want to go with you. I want to ask your fellow employees and your employer, “Hey, tell me about so-and-so. Did you know he’s a follower of Jesus Christ?” Would there be shock, laughter and an uneasy response. “Wait a minute. That’s not the guy or gal I know.” How do we show the gospel in our workplace, if it isn’t throwing tracts everywhere?

Let me tell you the first steps of how you share the gospel. You get up tomorrow, you clean yourself up, you get in your car and get to work on time. The moment you clock in until the moment you clock out, you give your boss and your company all of who you are. You devote yourself to accomplishing whatever has been given to you, and you do this while living out Christ’s love, Christ’s life and Christ’s labor. You work with all your might unto the Lord. You do this so that when the opportunity comes, you have cultivated the ground.

In a few weeks, we’re going to see farmers start planting their crops. Do they just go out and start dropping seeds on hard ground? Or do they begin by breaking up the soil? They’ll spend weeks tilling the ground, preparing and cultivating it. Then they’ll throw the seed in the ground, spending the rest of the summer fertilizing it, caring for it, pulling the weeds, so at some point they’ll receive a harvest. As Christians, we need to cultivate the ground, then we care for the seed that is planted by living quiet, godly lives of love in the church, in our workplaces and communities, so that when the gospel goes forth it finds fertile ground. You may not feel that you’re an evangelist. Well, tomorrow you will be. Every day you are because you’re among unbelievers who are watching what you’re doing.

Why do we do this? Let me close with two answers. We do this so we will win the respect of others, so that we “*will live properly before outsiders*” (verse 12). Listen, we don’t have a gospel to share if we are not viewed by those outsiders as people worthy of

respect. So we'd better live in a God-honoring way. We should do this to make sure they see Christ in us, our hope of glory, and not ourselves.

Secondly, we should live in a way in which we *are* "dependent on no one." "Dependent on no one" doesn't mean we're not depending on each other to live the life of Christ in the body of Christ. What it means is that we are not a drain on people, being lazy while other people are working for us and serving us. God has given us two hands, two feet and the capacity of working, and He says, "I want you, as a creation of Mine, to live out your purpose and plan." That means you're going to love greatly, you're going to live differently and you're going to labor in a way that's effective.

Examine your heart today: am I a Christian? I'm not asking that from a salvation standpoint. I'm asking that from a logistical standpoint. Are people seeing you as a follower of Jesus Christ because they're seeing these things lived out in your life? If not, then pray and confess that, and starting today and moving into tomorrow, pray that you would live differently as a result.

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All Scriptures quoted directly from the English Standard Version unless otherwise noted.

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