

(1 Thessalonians) the Business of the Church

by Brian Brodersen

The business of the church is worshiping God, praying, building itself up in faith, and coming to know Jesus Christ in a deeper and more intimate way, and this is what makes the church most effective in the world.

Duration: 43:11

Scripture: Matthew 22:37-39, Galatians 5:22, 1 Thessalonians 4:9, 1 Thessalonians 4:12-14, 1 Timothy 1:5

Topics: "Church Life", "Christian Love"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of love as a sign of spiritual health, both individually and collectively as a church. The speaker references Paul's teachings on walking properly towards those outside the church and the purpose of the commandment being love from a pure heart. Jesus' commandment to love God and love our neighbor is also highlighted. The speaker encourages believers to focus on loving one another, minding their own business, seeking the things of God, and working hard, as these actions will serve as a testimony to the world and draw sinners to God's love.

Transcript

Let's go ahead and turn to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 this evening. And we're picking up our study in the ninth verse of the fourth chapter of Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians. And he says here in verse 9, but concerning brotherly love, you have no need that I should write to you.

For you yourselves are taught by God to love one another. And indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more love.

One of the main themes of the scripture and the great commandment, really, of the New Testament, that we love one another. You know, a few months back, my daughter, she overheard her son talking to his dad and he was saying, Daddy, I love you. And his dad would say, Well, Cade, I love you, too.

And then Cade would say it again. Daddy, I love you. Well, Cade, I love you, too.

And my daughter, Kristen, she was, you know, she was overhearing this and she was starting to get a little bit jealous. She was, you know, wondering why Cade hasn't told her that he loved her. And he just kept on going on with this.

And Michael kept responding, I love you, too, Cade. And then there was a pause and Cade finally said, Daddy, what does I love you mean? And, you know, that's kind of the way it is sometimes, you know, we

we say I love you. But do we know what that means? Are we really aware of the implications of the things that we say? And, of course, what God intends is really the big question when it comes to the whole issue of love.

Love is the chief characteristic of the Christian. Jesus said a new commandment I give to you that you love one another. By this, he said, all will know that you are my disciples.

The Apostle Paul, in another place, writing to the Galatians, actually, he said faith working through love is the final proof of our relationship with Christ. That's sort of a paraphrase. But that's that's the point that he was making.

He also said in his epistle to Timothy, he said the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart. And then Jesus, you remember, he said that the entire law was summarized in the commandments to love God with all of our heart, soul, mind and strength, and then to love our neighbor as ourself. Now, the interesting thing about the ninth verse is that it shows us something in somewhat of a subtle fashion.

I don't know if we would see it immediately, but if you ponder it for a moment, it shows us something that I think is significant and something that we need to concentrate on. You see, love is the sign of spiritual health. And that's true for us individually.

It's true for the church collectively. The fruit of the spirit we know is love. We're told that by the Apostle Paul, you see, love is the proof that the Holy Spirit is at work in our lives.

That's how I can really know if the spirit of God is really at work in my life in a way that he desires to be. If the love of God is a reality in my life, if the love of God is flowing from my life, the absence of love is indicative of a grieving or a quenching of the spirit. The absence of love shows that our hearts have become hardened and we're no longer sensitive to the Holy Spirit.

In other words, a lack of love indicates a deeper problem. You see, because what Paul is saying here to them is he's saying, basically, I don't need to talk to you about love. Why doesn't he need to talk to them about love? He need to talk to other groups of Christians about love, but he didn't need to talk to the Thessalonians about it, he said, because God himself is teaching you to love one another.

And it's evident by your attitude toward the brethren. And that testimony has gone out in the whole region. You see, here's the thing, the Thessalonians, they were basically, to put it in terms that we're familiar with, they were on fire for Jesus and in their great love and passion for Jesus, it manifested itself in their love for the brethren.

And so unlike the Galatians who were fighting and warring against one another, unlike the Corinthians that were battling against one another, the Thessalonians, they didn't need any instruction on love because their hearts were tender and the spirit of God was able to just flow freely through their lives. And the manifestation of that was love. You see, here's the beautiful thing.

When we get our hearts right with God, love flows from our heart. Maybe you can remember when you first got saved, some of you, and you remember back then you just loved everybody. There was just this, you know, this whole world of love that unfolded before you.

And, you know, you just had this experience of loving people. But then as time goes on, what happens? That love starts to dry up and we start to get upset and angry and we start to hold on to things when we're

offended and we become bitter and develop animosities. And sometimes even what were at one time close friendships are broken up and things of that nature.

But you see, all of that, when that happens, it shows a deeper problem, that problem of a heart that's grown hard, a problem of a heart that's now clogged up with all kinds of different things. And the remedy is not so much, you know, somebody pointing the finger saying, listen, you need to love those people because that doesn't really do it. I mean, you already know that in a sense, or maybe you've come to a place where you're saying, well, I'm just not, I'm just not going to do that.

But that doesn't really help the problem. The way the problem is solved is just by getting back to that place where Jesus becomes the passion of our lives. And all of that that's sort of clogging our spiritual arteries is flushed out and the love of God is just able to flow from us freely once again.

That's where the Thessalonians were there. Their spiritual arteries, so to speak, were not clogged at all. They had a free flow of the love of God through their lives.

And so Paul says, I don't even need to really address this with you because the point is simply this. Love is the natural outcome. Of a healthy relationship with Jesus Christ, it's the natural outcome when you meet a person that's full of the love of God, you can know immediately that person.

They have a right relationship with Jesus, when you walk into a congregation and you sense God's love, you feel his presence, you know, man, this is a place where the spirit of God is at work. This is a place where the spirit of God is moving. This is a place where God is indeed present.

I remember so vividly when we were pastoring the fellowship in London and people would come to visit and afterwards they would say, my goodness, we just we just sense the love of God in this place today. And that was music to my ears. I just love to hear that.

And I knew it was true because I could sense it as well. That is the chief characteristic of the Christian individually, it's the chief characteristic of us as Christians, as we gather collectively. And this is this is the thing that is the most attractive thing in all of the universe.

Love is the greatest. You remember Paul in writing to the Corinthians talking about love in that 13th chapter, that great chapter on love. And in the end, you remember he says there are three things that abide faith, hope and love, he says, and the greatest of these is love.

And that's the greatest. Now, we often make the mistake of putting the emphasis on the wrong thing. Sometimes we we think that faith is the greatest thing.

And faith is certainly important, it's vitally important. We need to trust God and hope is an important thing as well. But Paul said the greatest of these is love.

And this is the thing that. Is to distinguish the church of Jesus Christ in the world. This is how the world is to know who are the people of God.

They're to know God's people by the fact that there's love in their midst. Now, unfortunately. When we think of the church collectively.

You know, there are times when the church can sort of develop a reputation other than a reputation for love. And I think in some ways, to some extent in our culture today, the church has developed somewhat

of a reputation. For things other than love.

And oftentimes, I myself have seen occasions where representatives of the Christian community are on television, you know, doing an interview or something like that, and they're speaking out about various social issues or, you know, governmental policies and things like that. And as they're speaking out, you sense a hostility, you sense an anger, you sense a desire coming from them for judgment to come on a particular group of people or, you know, things like that. And, you know, you look at that and think, man, that is not the message.

That we are supposed to be sending out to the world. The world ought to be getting a message from us that if there's one place on the planet we can go to find love, it's the church of Jesus Christ that we can go to. So we've got to be careful that we do not let things get into our lives personally or into our perspective congregationally that would block that flow of love.

You know, I've said this before. I'll say it again. One of the biggest quenchers to love is politics.

And when the church immerses itself in politics, when the pulpit becomes a place where it's more of a political platform and we're now from the pulpit, we're discussing all the different social issues and all of the different political things. You know, love just goes right out the door. And people come expecting to sense the love of God and have, you know, arms stretched out and a welcome.

But so often they've been turned off because the church has become political. And this has been repeated over and over again. Historically, it's a big temptation.

It's a huge temptation for the church to get sucked into the whole realm of politics. But, you know, it happens because we lose sight of something. We lose sight of the fact that the world isn't our home.

We start thinking that this is our home and we start, you know, getting comfortable here and we lose sight of heaven. We lose sight of the fact that we are citizens of another kingdom. You know, Paul goes on to say here, interestingly, he says to the Thessalonians, as he carries on, he says, he says that you would also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your own hands as we commanded you.

You know, sometimes I think that the church would be a lot better off if we would aspire more to be quiet. Instead of ranting and raving about everything that we don't like. That we would aspire to be quiet, take our concerns to God.

Because God listens and God is sympathetic with our concerns. Because we have similar agendas. Ours, of course, is not identical to his because ours is flawed.

But at least we know with God we're somewhat on the same page. You know, generally speaking, we can come to God and know that, OK, God, I know you want to glorify yourself ultimately so I can pray in accordance with that. But, you know, when we take our complaints to the politicians and, you know, the different people within the culture, most of the time they're not at all sympathetic with our position.

Most of the time they don't pay any attention to what we say. Most of the time they simply do what they want to do. And in the process, people come along and point the finger and say, hey, look, look at these Christians.

They're the ones there. They go again. They're all upset about this.

And they're against everything. And it is true to some extent today. I think sometimes the case is a bit overstated, but it is true to some extent that a lot of times today the church is known more for what it's against than what it's for.

And I think that's the wrong position. It's putting the negative first rather than the positive. The positive is to be put first.

The gospel is to be put first. If somebody came and listened to us, you know, preach week after week, the impression they ought to walk away with is that we love Jesus. We're trusting in Jesus.

We believe that he's coming. We believe that he has a kingdom. We're part of that kingdom.

We want anybody and everybody to come and be part of that with us as well. And occasionally, of course, we'll address things that would apply, you know, beyond ourselves out into the culture, not saying that we shouldn't speak into the culture, but I think we've sort of lost the balance. And I think that Paul's advice here is good advice for the church in general to be considering today that we would aspire to lead a quiet life.

And to mind your own business. To mind your own business. Now, this, of course, has a very personal application.

You know, as Christians, we're not to be gossiping, as Christians, we're not to be busy bodies in other people's matters. As Christians, we're not to be slothful, we're to be hardworking and diligent. And that's the personal application.

But I'm kind of taking it out of the realm of the personal for a moment and and looking at more in a collective sense for us, you know, thinking of the church. Paul says, mind your own business. What is the business of the church? The business of the church is worshiping God.

The business of the church is praying. The business of the church is building itself up in our most holy faith by meditating on the word of God. The business of the church is to come to know Jesus Christ in a deeper and a more intimate and a more significant way all the time.

I'll tell you what, if we would mind our own business. If we would concentrate on those things, I guarantee we would have a greater impact on the world than we could ever have by meddling in the affairs of the world. You see, the apostles were brilliant in this area.

They did not meddle in the affairs of the world. And when you find Christians today that are all tangled up in the affairs of the world, trying to control the world, trying to control the government and all of this kind of stuff, you find that these Christians do not have. A New Testament example that they're following, they're not following apostolic Christianity for the most part, they are reaching back to the Old Testament period.

And they're using Old Testament examples to emulate. But see, that's a mistake, because the Old Testament was a completely different situation for the people of God. They were what you call a theocracy.

They were a kingdom that was directly under the authority and the reign of God. But the church age is a different situation. There is no human government that is a theocracy today.

The only theocracy in the world today is the Church of Jesus Christ. The Church of Jesus Christ is under the direct lordship of Christ. But the kingdoms of the world, the nations, the governments of the world, these are not theocratic.

And, you know, we've heard quite often, many times we hear references being made to the United States being a Christian nation. But it never has been a Christian nation. Never has it been.

It's been a nation in which the church has had a prominent role. It's been a nation that was established on biblical principles to some degree, but it's never been a Christian nation in the sense that Israel was a nation. But here's the thing.

There are people and some of the early founders of the country, they were confused on that matter, and they actually thought that they were setting up a theocracy here in this country because they were confused theologically. Instead of seeing Israel as a distinct thing in history, Israel as a theocracy, they believe that the church had replaced Israel and the relationship that Israel had with God was now the relationship the church has with God. And just as Israel had a civil element to it, as well as a religious element to it, so they sought to implement that into the situation here in this land.

And that has caused a lot of the confusion that exists still to this very day. And what happens is we find that many Christians in the country and many Christian organizations, instead of concentrating on our own business, the things that we talked about a moment ago, they're always getting entangled in the affairs of the world because they actually think in their mind that that's what they're supposed to do. Theologically, they have a view that the church is supposed to bring about the kingdom of God by infiltrating the governments of the world and by taking over and establishing the kingdom.

Some of them even think that Jesus isn't literally going to come back to the earth and establish a kingdom. The church is going to do it for them. And this has caused a ton of confusion, and it's also, I think, brought the wrong impression to many, and we need to get back to what Paul says here, that free flow of the spirit amongst ourselves, the love of God flowing in our midst and flowing out from us, that that we're not out protesting and up in arms about everything, but, you know, we're quietly going about the business of the kingdom.

We're minding our own business. And, you know, I'll just share with you guys on a personal note. It's something interesting that I've sort of been going through.

The Lord has been taking me in a direction away from many of the things that I have been reading for a few years. For a few years, I've been reading a lot of material from people who are constantly concerned about engaging with the culture and coming up with, you know, the ultimate apologetic for all the different issues that we have to battle with in the culture and all that. And I'm not saying that there isn't any room for that or a place for that.

But what I'm saying is that sometimes we can get consumed with that. And the Lord, for me recently, has been challenging me to put that stuff down and to just get back to my Bible and get back to some of that great literature that's written really more just in regard to the scriptures themselves and the person of Jesus or the work of the Holy Spirit or those kinds of things, you know, just getting back to. The essence of the faith.

Minding our own business, looking into our own things, because, you know, there are so many Christians today. Who are totally up on all the social issues and all of the different things that we need to be battling against in the culture, and they've studied all of the different isms and they've they've got an apologetic for all of that. But, you know, when it comes down to it, they don't have any real deep knowledge of Jesus himself.

They don't have any real deep communion with the Lord himself. They haven't really been minding their own business, they haven't been minding the business of the church itself, which is the Lord himself. That's the business of the church.

And that's what we want to be about. And here's the thing, and I've said this before, but I want to say it again. The thing is, when we mind the business of the church, that's when the church is most effective in the world.

That's when the church is most effective, that's when it's the most attractive, that's when people look on and see, hey, there's something worth joining there, there's something that I want to be a part of. They're being drawn in because the love of God is there. It's not just another political perspective.

It's not just another angry group of people about things not going a particular way. No, it's people who they seem to be disconnected. And, you know, this has been I'll tell you, this has been a battle within the church for ages.

There has been a battle in the church. There are many people that are very in the church. There are people who are antagonistic toward Christians who believe in the rapture.

Christians who believe more that you should go out and share the gospel and lead people to Christ rather than go out and try to reform society. There's there's a conflict in the Christian community over this and it's been like this for a long time. I read a book some years ago where a well-known Christian leader was very critical of D.L. Moody.

He felt that D.L. Moody had brought in this whole different perspective. He had taken he had taken the focus off sort of reformation. And he brought the focus back down to simple evangelism.

And a lot of these people see this as a huge mistake and a great act of irresponsibility. And you can see a number of people drifting in that direction today. And when anyone talks about, you know, hey, we're just trusting the Lord, we're waiting for the rapture.

And in the meantime, we're just leading people to Christ. Oh, that's irresponsible. Oh, it's escapism.

There's no rapture. What do you mean leading people to Christ? Now, look, we've got to form a Christian culture. We've got to go back to the 16th and 17th century.

We've got to do what the reformers did. And they'll say things like, you know, at one time the church led the culture and the church should be leading the culture today. And they see people who have the simple view of just leading people to Christ and giving them the hope of heaven and focusing their hope on heaven and teaching them just to live, you know, quiet lives in the world and mind their own business.

Oh, this is a huge mistake. But the New Testament isn't backing their opinion. Again, they're drawing their view from the Old Testament a lot.

They're drawing their view from the writing of the early church fathers. They're drawing their view from the reformers. They're not drawing their view from the New Testament, because what were the apostles doing? They were not going around trying to fix the society in the sense of meddling with the government.

They were going around saying, hey, there's a whole nother kingdom that you can be part of. Come and be part of this kingdom. There's another king, Jesus.

Now it's what they were accused of all the time. These men have come. They say there's another king, Jesus.

That's our message. That's what we're to be taken up with. And my whole point in all of this is this.

When we have that focus collectively as the church, then we're free just to love. We're free to love all the sinners. We're free to love the immigrants that maybe snuck across the border.

We're free to just, you know, we can just love. We don't have a political agenda. And I think it's a huge mistake when the church gets caught up in this stuff, because, as I said, love goes right out the door.

God wants us loving each other. He wants us loving the lost. He wants us looking at them with compassion and mercy.

Dan Wooding told me a story last week about a man in Peru, the Quechua Indian tribe, and this man's family members were murdered by the Marxist guerrilla group in Peru, the Shining Path. And as you can understand from a purely human standpoint, the man was a Christian. And his initial response was to form a militia to defeat this guerrilla group.

He's a Christian man. And these guys were involved and have been involved in killing Christians. They've killed some several thousand Quechua Christians.

In the past 10 years, they've murdered 800 pastors. And so this man, Joshua is his name, he was moving in the direction of forming his own militia to contend with these guerrillas. And the Lord spoke to his heart and said, Do not pick up a gun.

Pick up my word. And he was so convinced by God that God was calling him not to fight them with guns, but to fight them with the word of God and to pick up the word of God and to simply go forward in the proclamation of God. The gospel.

And in the process of doing that, they've started 200 churches in that region. And multitudes of people have come to Christ. And eventually what happened with this particular group is that the government, of course, was battling this group as well.

And they finally apprehended the leader and the group pretty much dissolved. It's still, you know, there's still remnants of it and there's still some activity and there's still some problems. But God took care of that problem in a different way.

And. You know, we have to realize it's not our place to pick up guns and to form militias, our place is to pick up the word of God. And go forth and proclaim it, God has all these other resources that he utilizes.

You know, the other day I was I was thinking about just the world that we live in and we've got terrorism and we've got all of these insane things going on. And, you know, a question comes, you know, Lord, how

do we deal with this? And and a question that I have quite often is how do you even pray about this stuff? I don't even sometimes know how to pray about it. And the other day as I was praying, I just the Lord was reminding me that he uses.

Nations, he uses armies, he uses kings. And I was thinking about in the history of Israel, he used the Assyrians, he used the Babylonians, he used the Egyptians, he used all all of these different people. God was using them to fulfill his ultimate purposes.

And it suddenly struck me that that's what happens today as well. And so I could pray, Lord, use whatever group you need to use in the world to get your plan accomplished, to get your purposes fulfilled. And this whole thing in the Middle East, all of this chaos, all of this insanity over there.

God used the different groups involved. To glorify yourself somehow and to bring about a furtherance of your gospel. And in coming just to that perspective, I suddenly had a great peace.

I was no longer all tense inside that we got to do something that why aren't they doing this? And they should be thinking that. And I can't believe that, you know, because that's the kind of stuff we go through. You know, sometimes we looking around at the world and we're thinking, man.

Look at all these sinners, they're multiplying, they're coming out of the woodwork. I don't remember all these sinners being around as much as they are today. And, you know, sometimes we're just sort of, you know, I've said this before, but sometimes I feel like as a church, we're just sort of wringing our hands saying, oh, no, what are we doing? We're surrounded by sinners.

But, you know, think about this. When the apostles went into the world. It was a completely heathen world.

Completely heathen. The Jews had lost the plot. They didn't know they had rejected their own Messiah.

And here's this band of what initially 120, you remember, that were gathered in the upper room. I'm sure if you collected everybody at the time that was a believer in Jesus, you probably, you know, a few thousand people, but they were scattered all over the land. But that initial group was 120.

And this 120, they go out into a completely heathen world. That's what they went out into. Now, as bad as our world might be today, it's not completely heathen.

There's still plenty of Christians. There's still plenty of light. There's still a powerful testimony in many, many places.

So, you know, it's not as bad as sometimes I think we're thinking it is or as it's presented to be. And it's certainly not as bad as it was when the church began. Because they had an entire world of paganism that they went out and faced.

But they understood that that's what the gospel came for. That's what the gospel was all about. The gospel was for those very people, so they could come out of darkness and out from the power of Satan into the kingdom of light and under the authority of God.

And that's what we have to keep in mind. And the great factor in all of this that God uses to turn his enemies into his followers is his love. His love poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit and reaching out to the world around us.

And so let's not get our spiritual arteries clogged up with all of this other stuff. Let's be tending to our own business. Let's be seeking Jesus, worshipping him, getting to know him and love him more and more each passing day and see what God will do with the church in these days.

Let's make sure we're doing that individually because, of course, the church is, you know, just a collection of individuals. But let's make sure that the love of God is flowing from our lives. And if there is a blockage, if there is something that's come in that stopped that flow of love out to your brothers and sisters and beyond that out to our desperately needy world, go before the Lord and say, Lord, change my heart.

Lord, bring me back to that place where I'm so, I'm just so thankful to be saved and so full of praise to you that I can't help but just have your life and your love flowing through me. You know, I was reading in Matthew today and you remember the story Jesus told about the man who had a great debt and his Lord just forgave him outright of his great debt, a debt he could have never paid. And that man had someone that was indebted to him.

But instead of dealing with that man the way God had dealt with him or the way his master had dealt with him, he goes to the man and he demands payment. And the man says, Oh, I'm sorry, I don't have the payment right now. Can you just give me a little bit of time? And it says he grabbed him around the throat and said, No, I'm going to throw you into the prison until you can pay it.

And then word got back to that man's master of what he had done. And Jesus told this story and he said, Now, let me tell you, this is what's going to happen to those who fail to forgive others. Because they've been forgiven.

We've all been forgiven a debt that we could never pay. Anybody that's indebted to us, their debt to us is less than the debt that we owed God. And God has flatly forgiven us.

And he says, You need to do that too. You need to do that too. And Paul would say that later.

He would say that as God in Christ has forgiven us, so we need to forgive each other. Bitterness, unforgiveness, those are the kinds of things that will come in and block that flow of love. We need to go to the Lord and say, God, forgive me.

Forgive me for my sins. Forgive me for my attitude so that that love can flow and we don't need to have when that's happening. So, you know, we don't need so much to have sermons every week on.

You need to love each other because that's just what's happening, because we're so filled with God and God is love and he's flowing from our lives. And so Paul said that you may walk properly toward those who are outside and that you may lack nothing. That's it.

Walking properly toward those who are outside. How do you do it? Just keep loving each other. Just aspire to be quiet.

Mind your own business. Seek the things of God. Work hard.

And all of these things will work together for a great testimony to the world outside and people, sinners like us, like we formerly were, will be drawn in through that irresistible power of God's love. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you that you loved us and you loved us while we were sinners.

You didn't wait for us to get our lives together before you started loving us. But Lord, while we were sinners and enemies, you sent Christ to die for us. Oh, how we thank you for that.

And Lord, may we be freed from those things that would block that flow of love through our lives. Lord, may your love have free course running through our spiritual veins. Lord, help us to aspire to be quiet.

Help us, Lord, to mind our own business. Help us, Lord, to immerse ourselves in Jesus Christ and worshiping him and getting to know him more deeply. Help us, Lord, so that we might properly represent you to the world that we live in.

Lord, we thank you that you are coming again, that you are going to set up that wonderful kingdom wherein righteousness dwells. Lord, the glory of the Lord will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea, a kingdom of righteousness and peace. You sitting upon that throne, thank you that you're going to do that.

But Lord, thank you that you do that already in our hearts, that your kingdom comes to us and you set up your throne right in our hearts. Oh, Lord, reign in us. We pray for your glory in Jesus name.

Amen.

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