

May 5, 2019

The Church Family **1 Thessalonians 2, 7-12**

Our sermon text this morning is First Thessalonians chapter 2, verses 7 to 12. First Thessalonians chapter 2, verses 7 to 12. We will read from First Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 1, down to verse 12. Before the reading, we'll pray. Please join me in prayer.

Our Father in heaven, we pray that you would bless your word to us, and that our hearts would be made ready and willing to receive your word for that which it really is, for that which it truly is, the word of God. May we be given ears that hear, eyes that see, and hearts that understand and obey. We ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

As I said, sermon text, First Thessalonians chapter 2, verses 7 to 12. We'll read from chapter 2, verse 1, down to verse 12 to get some context. Starting at verse 1 of First Thessalonians 2:

“¹For you yourselves know, brothers, that our coming to you was not in vain.²But though we had already suffered and been shamefully treated at Philippi, as you know, we had boldness in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in the midst of much conflict. ³For our appeal does not spring from error or impurity or any attempt to deceive, ⁴but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts. ⁵For we never came with words of flattery, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness. ⁶Nor did we seek glory from people, whether from you or from others, though we could have made demands as apostles of Christ.”

And our sermon text is from now to verse 12. Verse 7: “But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. ⁸So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us.

“⁹For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. ¹¹For you know how, like a father with his children,¹² we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.” Amen. And may God bless His holy word to us.

At the end of God's work of creation, He created a man and He created a woman; in His own image, He created them. And then He told the man and the woman to go out and to have a family. He blessed them, and he sent them out, and He said, “Fill the earth. Fill the earth with your children. Grow. Expand the garden. Fill the earth.”

So God created creation, the universe. In the universe, He created the earth. Upon the earth, He created the Garden of Eden. For the Garden of Eden, He created a man and his woman, and He

told them to have children. He created a family. A family has been part of God's plan, therefore, from the very beginning.

The Old Testament is filled with metaphors concerning family relationships. For example, in Exodus 4:22, God says through Moses to Pharaoh, "Israel is my firstborn son. Israel is of my family."

In Numbers 11:12, Moses, with a little bit of frustration, asks God concerning the people of Israel, "Am I their mother? Should I be trying to nurse these people the way a mother nurses a baby at her breast?"

And in the book of Isaiah, Isaiah chapter 54, verses 5 to 13, the gathering of the people of God is spoken of as though children were being adopted into a family. And in that picture there, God is the father and the Church is the mother.

In the book of Jeremiah, where Jeremiah explicitly promises the new covenant, he speaks of the fact that to this day, His people have failed to keep covenant, "Though I was your husband," says the Lord. Though I was your husband. And in the picture in Jeremiah, the people of God are the wife of God.

So the Old Testament is rich in family metaphors, and it should not therefore surprise us that in our passage today, we find that Paul basically uses every possible familial relationship to describe his relationship with the Thessalonians, and their relationship with him. And so this must be telling us something.

We know, for example, from God's law in Exodus chapter 20 and verse 12, the commandment is, "Honor your father and your mother, that things may go well for you; that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you."

And in Malachi chapter 2, God chides His people for granting easy divorces, for destroying His plan for family. And He basically says to them, "When I put a man and wife together, I'm there in the midst of them. I'm the third thing. I give them a portion of my Spirit to hold them together, to bind them together, and what I'm seeking from that union is godly offspring." And God is basically saying to the people of Israel, or by the time we get to Malachi, that's been whittled down in a way to the people of Judah. God is saying, "You're breaking my plan for human society."

So it's possible here to make a mistake. It's always possible to make a mistake with any good thing. Any good thing can be abused. Any good thing can be made something that it was never intended to be. What would the mistake here be? The mistake here would be to assume, therefore, that the family is God's ultimate plan.

You hear people talk about “the family church.” The family church. Now I’m not saying that a church that calls itself the family is not necessarily a good church. Don’t misunderstand me. But that could mean there’s a problem there. It could. You see, ultimately, God’s idea with the family is that the family is a type for His ultimate plan *for* the church.

Think of this. A question that people often ask is, “How will I be happy in heaven if my family are not with me? How will I be rejoicing in heaven if those whom God judges, amongst that number that God judges and casts into the lake of fire, I see my own brother, my own sister, my own father, my own mother, aunt, uncle, grandparent”—all those have someone like that in our family at this moment. Some of us have got more than one. “How could I possibly be happy in heaven if this is happening before my very eyes?”

Well, my friends, the thing is, our families—by simple natural progression, natural regeneration—our families upon this earth come to us from the line of the first Adam. If you want to think of it, they come from the past to the present. But God’s plan for His church, in the future, is that the family comes from the second Adam, from Christ. It comes from the future to the now; or, from the future to the present.

The simple fact of the matter is, when we leave this world, however this should be, death or the return of the Lord Himself, we will be amongst the people of God, and they will be our mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins, any relationship you want to name. They will be our family, each and every single one of them, because they are born of God as we are born of God. And our worship for God our Father through Jesus Christ our Lord will be of such depth and of such intensity that we will rejoice in all of His good deeds, and all of His good works, and all of His good acts. And it is good that He judges sinners.

The spiritual relationship that we are born into as Christians will become the totally overriding relationship from which we draw all of our identity. All of our identity will be drawn from God, through Christ. We will consider ourselves to be sons of the living God, daughters of the living God. We will consider God Himself to be our Father and our only Father. We will love God with such intensity that the love that we have known in our families here on the earth, and I’m not trying to belittle it, but the love that we have known in our families here upon the earth will fade. It will seem to be so much less than the love that know in the presence of our Lord Jesus, in the presence of our God.

So the family, a well-run Christian family, is a beautiful thing. It’s a blessing. The greatest blessing that I have upon this earth is that I have a wife and four children, and I have no reason to suspect that my four children are not faithful. When we’re all together, I’m sitting in the midst of the gathering of the saints. It is honestly the greatest blessing that God has given me, beyond any other. Outside of salvation in Jesus Christ alone, that’s it.

A well-organized, worshiping Christian family is the most beautiful thing upon this earth. It is. It is the most beautiful thing upon this earth, which is what makes a dysfunctional family, a

perverse family, the most painful and ugly thing upon this earth. That's why family problems cut so deep and hurt so much. It only makes sense.

But though I count my family the greatest blessing that I have in this life, apart from life in Jesus Christ Himself, the day will come when my relationship with those six people will be no closer than my relationship with anyone else in heaven. It will be no deeper. It's not as though in heaven I'm going to give preference to one of my worldly born sons when I'm surrounded by the sons of God. The family is God's plan for society. The family is God's greatest gift to the church, to humanity in general, outside of Christ Himself.

Yet the family points to the future. Interestingly, Paul takes that which is of the future, the perfection of Christian fellowship in the eternal state, and he says that blessing which we know is going to be ours in the future, that blessing should be evident in our midst *now*. What we're heading for should be changing us now, even as we head toward it. The journey and the destination should be intimately associated. What we're heading for should be changing us.

And as Paul speaks to the Thessalonians, he uses every possible family relationship that can be used. And there's one there that our English Bibles don't quite bring out, but every possible relationship that can be used, he uses in our text this morning. So let's start having a look at our text, verse 7:

"But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children." In most of your Bibles, I think you'll find there's a footnote attached to the word "gentle." In my Bible, it says "see footnote number 5," and if I go to footnote number 5, it tells me, "some manuscripts, *infants*." Okay. "Some manuscripts, infants." Most manuscripts, actually. Most of the ancient manuscripts. So it actually appears that Paul is mixing a metaphor, okay? And that's not unusual for the Apostle Paul. What he's saying is that "we were childish among you." We were children.

If that's what he's saying, he's obviously speaking of childishness, or being child-like, in its most ideal, biblical sense. He's speaking of the fact that they were, towards them, without guile. They were open. They were innocent. They were loving. "We were childish among you." It could be "gentle"—much the same effect. But the whole passage is filled with family metaphors, and I can't help but think that that's what it should say. "But we were childlike among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children."

Now you say, "Okay. How is being childlike being like a nursing mother?" Well, watch your mother with a newborn baby. Watch the way she speaks to the baby. She speaks childishly, all of us who've had babies, and they're on the way for some: "Blub, blub, blub, blub." You know, you don't get your two-month old and recite the Apostles' Creed to your two-month old. You make silly noises. "Blub, blub, blub, plewhh. Blub, blub, blub." They're the sort of things you say—anything to get a smile out of this child's face.

So it could well be that what Paul is saying is, “We were childish towards you, the way a mother is childish towards her newborn baby. We were children among you, the way a mother acts childishly toward her baby.” You see what he’s saying? He’s saying, “We were innocent among you.”

Remember, this is an extension of his defense. The last time we read in First Thessalonians chapter 2, Paul was defending himself. It seemed that he was defending himself, not against particular accusations, but the general accusation that they’re just the latest religious pretenders, raking in the money, stirring people up, getting what they can out of them. And Paul is saying, “No, no, no, no, no—we were like members of your own family, and you are like members of our own family. We were childish. We were like mothers, a nursing mother, taking care of her own children.”

This could well be a reference, actually, back into the passage in Numbers that I mentioned earlier—Numbers chapter 11, verse 12, where Moses complains that he can’t breastfeed these people. Isn’t it interesting, Paul is saying here in the new covenant, under the preaching of the gospel, we *can* breastfeed these people. If it is a reference, that’s what he’s saying. Under the new covenant, we can do what Moses could not do. We have the help and the power of the Holy Spirit to do it, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.

Reading on then into verse 8: “So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. With the affectionate desire of self-denying love, we gave you the gospel, and our very selves.” That’s a paraphrase. With the affectionate desire of self-denying love, we gave you the gospel, and our very selves.

People who are truly preaching in the power of the Holy Spirit not only bring you the good news, and they not only bring it to us clearly, but they are communicating the love of God. The love of God works through them. The love of God works in them. There’s more to gospel communication than content. There’s something affectionate there. Paul says, “We were affectionately desirous of you. We longed for you.”

Scripture says our God is a jealous God, and Paul, I think in a way, is capturing that and saying, “And we preachers are jealous preachers. We’re jealous for you.” He’s using it in a positive way. “We’re jealous for you. We’re jealous for the health of your souls. We’re jealous for your eternal life. We’re jealous for your purity. We’re jealous for all of the good things. We don’t want you to be mixing with any of the bad things.”

We were “affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel, but also our own selves”—an open house. An open house is the picture that he’s giving. You came to their house, you were received as a family member, you were fed as a family member, you were cared for as a family member.

You know, a particular minister springs to mind here. I won't mention names, won't mention places, but he separated himself from his congregation. He made absolutely certain no one knew where he lived because he did not want anyone to come near him and his family. In other words, he had the exact opposite attitude to that of Paul and Silvanus and Timothy. He set himself apart from the people, not making himself one *with* the people. He didn't want to give his own self.

“—Because you had become very dear to us.” Think who's saying this: the Apostle Paul. Remember the Apostle Paul? A Pharisee of Pharisees, church-hating, Christian-hating, persecution machine. Had a letter from the elders in Jerusalem of the Jewish nation to go to other places and there put Christians basically in prison or to death. And now Paul is preaching the gospel to all and sundry, Jew and Gentile, and those people are very dear to him.

Our gospel love must overcome boundaries—the boundaries that we would otherwise be setting for ourselves. We have to be prepared to share not only the word, but our own selves with people that, under normal circumstances, in the world we would have nothing to do with. That is a challenge. That is a great challenge.

It is so very easy to write people off and to assume that you can't—you can't, you shouldn't, you don't have to, you don't need to—share the truth with them. We have to love our enemies enough to pray for our enemies, we have to love our enemies enough to share the gospel with our enemies, we have to love our enemies enough to actually care about them. Paul says they have become very dear to them—it's in the plural.

Does that mean that we don't recognize the differences? No, it doesn't mean that at all. Does that mean that we pretend that we are one with the world around us? Once again, no, it does not mean that at all. But we must understand that those who are called out of the world into the kingdom, they indeed are our brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers. They indeed have a family relationship with us. We can't escape that consequence.

Let's move on and into verse 9: “For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.” Once again, this is in the idea of a family. An ancient family was usually in and of itself an economic unit. Everybody contributed, especially in the Jewish context where the family was built around an inherited block of land that their family received when the promised land was conquered.

One of the reasons the genealogies that were held in the temple were so important is that attached to the genealogies were, you might think of it this way, the title deeds to the inherited lands. Now obviously, the Jews, being a conquered people, were not able to truly administer that old covenant the way it was administered in the time of Joshua, for example. But this was still their ideal. So every family was built around a block of land that they had inherited from God. In the book of Joshua, it's very clear they received their portion in the promised land, not from Joshua, but from God. And the whole family contributed to the wellbeing of the whole family.

One of the things about the prodigal son in the story of the prodigal son in the gospel of Luke, is he was just about the most wicked, terrible, horrible Jewish son you could imagine. He really was. Remember he said to his father, “Give me what’s mine, I want to go.” In the Jewish mind, he’s basically saying to his father, “I wish you were dead. Give me the money already. I’m out of here.” He was a horrible son. (His older brother was also a horrible son; that’s actually the point of the story). But he was a horrible son, a wicked son. He did not want to contribute to the wellbeing of the family. He actually wanted to take from the family and spend it upon himself.

Paul is saying, “As though we were a big family unit, we worked night and day. We worked.” What would that look like? Well turn in your Bibles to the book of Acts, in chapter 18. We’ll just read the first four verses.

“¹ After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² And he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had commanded all the Jews to leave Rome. And he went to see them, ³ and because he was of the same trade he stayed with them and worked, for they were tentmakers by trade. ⁴ And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and tried to persuade Jews and Greeks.”

Paul took the trade which he had, the ability to earn income which he had, which was tentmaking—a recognized trade in those days—and he worked with his brothers and sisters in Christ to contribute to the wellbeing of the whole family, in order that he would not be taking from them. Paul’s thought concerning this was very simple: If you are able to work and contribute, work and contribute. If you are disabled for any reason, well then receive the support of your family around you. If you are in illness, if you are in weakness, if you have been incapacitated, well then you receive the help of your family around you. But when you can work, you work. When you can contribute, you contribute.

Later on in the letter to the Thessalonians, Paul says, “The one that does not work, let him not eat.” “You want to eat? You get it be the sweat of your brow,” is what Paul is saying, and it’s what he’s saying to anyone who can contribute. Contribute! And he lived out that example before them. “Our labor and toil, we worked night and day.”

I think what he’s getting at there is that while they were awake and could be taught, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy were available to teach them. And whilst they were asleep, Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy worked to pay their own way, in order, as he says, “not be a burden to any of you.”

We contribute. Everyone. The Scripture says, Contribute what you can, how you can, in the way that you can. And this in itself is sanctified by God. All of our work, all of our labor, all that we do, all of the common jobs that we have, in a family, they’re serving God. In God’s family, we’re serving God through the things that we do. “While we proclaimed to you the gospel of God.” So Paul’s using his own physical labor to make it possible to preach the truth to

them. It appears he had—what do they call it, a mixed ministry?—a tent-making ministry. He had a tent-making ministry.

I'm going to stop there, because I could go off into some fairly critical and sarcastic remarks concerning many people who are in the gospel ministry. I won't. I'm sure you know what I'm thinking here. We'll just leave it there. We're supposed to contribute to the family.

Let's go on to verse 10. "You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers." Now once again, Paul reminds them of something: "You actually have the facts. You know exactly what happened. You were there. You saw it." Remember this is part of Paul's defense: "When those who slander us speak to you, remember this—when we were among you, we didn't come cleaning out your house and home of money."

You know, I was listening to an interview of an older believer, and back in the day—this is way back in the day—he spoke of the fact that when he went to church, he decided that he would only take a certain number of coins, three coins. Why? Because they'd run three collections every church service. So the bag would go around, and he'd put that one coin in the bag. And then literally, in the middle of the church service, the church treasurer would walk to the front of the church, pour the bag out on a table and count it, and say, "Not enough." And so they'd sing a song, and then they'd pass the bag again. And the same church treasurer would pour the second bag out and count it, and say, "Still not enough." And then they'd sing a song again, and the same church treasurer would count it and say, "One more time."

Paul, I think, would not have approved of such behavior. "Our conduct was holy, righteous, and blameless. You know it and God knows it. We weren't there taking advantage of you. We weren't there cleaning your money out. We didn't walk into someone's house and make a list of possessions, work out what their wealth is—"Hmm, this person's got plenty of money, I think they could hand some over to me. This person appears to be doing very well. Why aren't they putting more in the plate, the bag, whatever? Why aren't they giving more generously?"

Paul is saying, "We weren't like that. We paid our own way. And furthermore, holy, righteous, and blameless. We didn't put any pressure on you. We didn't seek anything from you that was not holy and righteous. We weren't seeking glory that should be given only to God. We weren't seeking gold. We weren't seeking girls," for example, the three "G"s. They say if a pastor falls, there's going to be at least one of the three "G"s: girls, glory, and gold. He either got greedy, or he started to take the glory to himself, or he got filled with lust and he started to chase the girlies. Girls, glory and gold.

Paul is saying, "No. You know that that's not the way we were among you. You know that weren't lustful and greedy among you. You know, God also knows, that our motives among you were pure. What did we ask for from any of you that you should not have been willing to give?"—and Paul is making the point, obviously—Nothing. "We worked to preach the gospel to

you. We brought it to you free of charge. If anyone gave anything, it was of their own free will. We did it free of charge.”

Then along to verse 11: “For you know how, like a father with his children,” and there we have it again, the whole family connection—“like a father with his children.” Like a father with his children. Let’s work on this, and I’ll borrow a line of application I heard from another preacher many years ago.

In the church, here’s how it works—If it’s a girl and she’s younger than you, consider her to be a daughter. If it’s a woman and she’s older than you, consider her to be a mother. If it’s a woman and she’s about the same age as you, consider her to be a sister. If it’s a boy and he’s younger than you, consider him to be a son. If it’s a man and he’s older than you, consider him to be a father. If it’s a man and he’s around about the same age as you, consider him to be a brother. Let this be your guide in all of your relationships in the church.

The question that often gets asked by youth, and it’s a long time since I had anything to do with any kind of church youth group, but I do remember the question just kept coming, coming, again and again and again and again. The question they kept asking is, “What are we allowed to do?” In other words, “What can we get away with? What’s the line? You know, we’re young boys, were young girls, we’re going out, we’re getting romantically involved. What’s the line?”

Well, here’s your relationship with church members—mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers. Mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers. That’s it. They’re the only possible relationships you can have in a church, except for one relationship. There’s only one thing that breaks that mother, father, sister relationship—or changes the nature of the relationship. It’s called a marriage covenant. When you’ve got a marriage covenant, you’re then husband and wife.

So outside of the husband and wife relationship, what do you get away with? What can you do? You can do anything that you would do with a mother, father, sister, or brother. It puts a different light on relationships. Brothers and sisters should not exchange deep and passionate kisses. Brothers and sisters should not be naked in each other’s presence, for example. Fathers and daughters should not exchange deep and passionate kisses and embraces. That’s what Scripture tells us.

Everyone in the church is a mother, father, sister, brother. Our relationships are to be governed by what the Scripture says concerning family relationships. If you want to change that relationship, you need a marriage covenant, in which case you are now husband and wife, and God’s command to go out and multiply and fill the earth applies. It’s as simple as that.

“For you know how, like a father with his children,”—fathers, listen. Open your ears here. Those who want to be fathers, listen. Listen. Open your ears here. Those who are fathers, listen and be convicted of your sins. Paul is about to tell the fathers of the world, through example,

speaking here to the Thessalonians, what it is that the fathers should be doing. What should a father do? A father should exhort, encourage, and charge.

“¹² We exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.” Like a father with his children, we exhorted. We exhorted. The word there “exhorted”—basically if you broke it down into its composite words, Paul is kind of saying, “Call you from alongside. We were with you, we walked with you, and we called you to keep coming. We called you from alongside, we called you to follow with us, we called you to walk with us.” It’s in the plural, so he’s saying that “we spoke to each and every one of you. We exhorted you. We called you. We set the path before you, whilst we were alongside you.” Notice how strong this idea of one-another relationship is in our whole passage.

“We exhorted each one of you and encouraged you.” Encouraged—once again, break it down into its composite words. Now we think of encouragement as saying good things to a person. “You know, you’re rather good at that, and if you work on it, you’ll get better.” Well, that’s kind of built into it, but the actual literal sense of it is, “We gave strength to you. We strengthened you in it. We strengthened you in your walk. We did things that made you more able to do the things that God wants you to do. We were enablers. We brought power alongside you.”

“And we charged you.” What’s the word there, in “charge”? Well literally, call or testified. “We charged you, we testified to you.” Built into the word is the concept of martyr. Now we know what a martyr is in modern language. A martyr is someone who gives good testimony to the point of death. A martyr is someone who dies for the name of Jesus. In its literal meaning, it simply means, “We witnessed, testified, shared with you the things that we know. We spoke the truth to you. We spoke to you the words that we have received from God. We charged, we testified, we actually laid a burden upon you.” My friends, sometimes in the church you have to be willing to accept the burden, and you have to be willing to actually speak of the burden. We’re under a burden. We are. The burden is that we do things that are worthy of God. We do things that are worthy of God.

It was so trendy, you know, in years before in the church, and it’s still probably trendy in many places. It was so trendy to say, “We don’t have a religion, we have a relationship.” You know that? You’ve heard that, I’m sure. “We don’t have a religion, we have a relationship.” Look, we have a relationship, and that relationship implies and requires that we have a religion. Not all religion is a bad thing. Not all religion is a negative thing. In the book of James, James says, “Now true religion is this...” And he goes on to speak of visiting the poor and visiting the orphans, etc., etc. True religion.

We do have religious obligation in this life. I mean, I’ve already spoken to you of many of them, and that is, How are we to relate one to another? Remember? Brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers. We’re of the family of God. We have an obligation to do things in a way that gives glory to God, to do things in a way that is worthy of God. That is a burden that God lays upon us.

The good news is that He also gives us the power and the ability through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit to keep the obligations, to do the things that please Him. None of us ever gets to say, “I couldn’t do what was right.” You know, in one of the Narnia books, there’s a picture where one of the children was looking into the face of Aslan, and started to try and make an excuse, and suddenly realized, “No excuse works. I actually don’t have an excuse. There’s nothing I can say.” Well, that’s our situation before God.

If you are a Christian, my friend, you have been blessed with the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit. You have been blessed with the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit to do any number of things, and one of the things that we’ve been given the Holy Spirit for is that we may obey God and do the things that are pleasing to Him, that we may walk in a manner that is worthy of Him, of the name Christian. We’ve been enabled. That is our obligation. That is a burden that has been laid upon us.

When Jesus spoke of His yoke being easy and His burden light, He wasn’t saying there was no yoke, and He wasn’t saying there was no burden. He was saying that Satan and the world and sin’s burdens, they’re so heavy they drag you down to the grave. They kill you. They destroy you. They enslave you. That burden is a burden that utterly destroys. It’s a result of the judgment of God. Furthermore, it draws down the judgment of God. “But I’m laying upon you a burden that is the burden of eternal life. I’m strengthening you, enabling you”. This burden enlivens you!

In Romans chapter 8, the Apostle Paul speaks of the fact that the Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead will now give life to your mortal bodies, through His Spirit that dwells in you. We do have a burden, and we have the power to obey, to keep, to carry, to do the things that are obligated of us.

We have a true religion, and we can keep the obligations of this true religion. The true religion is not foolishness, and it’s not idolatry, and it’s not praying on your knees as you go up steps, seeking indulgences, and all that other stuff. It’s living a life that is pleasing in the sight of God and that is worthy of God.

Paul exhorted, encouraged, and charged; Silvanus and Timothy exhorted, encouraged, and charged. Now there is more to being a Christian father than doing those three things, but there’s not less. Christian fathers, we must be exhorting, encouraging, and charging our children. And now we’re in a church relationship, and so, as I’ve already said, I’m a father to those who are younger than me. What is my duty? To be exhorting, encouraging, and charging—“to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory.”

Notice there, it says God calls them. If you look at the end there of verse 12, you “walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls *you* into his own kingdom and glory.” Let’s ask the question. It says there, God calls the Thessalonians into His own kingdom and glory. How is He calling

them? What is the means by which He is calling them? And the answer is, in the Scripture, and it's in the book of First Thessalonians. Paul, Silvanus and Timothy are the means by which God is calling them. Other Christians. God is using other Christians.

Can God work through amazing, supernatural means? We know the answer to that. It is, Yes. He can. He can call people with no one else around them. He can call people who are isolated and alone. He can call people anytime He wants, in any way that He wants. But I'm not talking about exceptional circumstances, I'm talking about our everyday lives in the Lord. How does God in normal circumstances call people? How does God in normal circumstances speak to His people? How does God in normal circumstances exhort, encourage, and charge His people? He does it through other Christian people.

How does the gospel get preached? Nine hundred and ninety-nine times out of a thousand, it gets preached through the lips of a Christian. Every now and then, something amazing happens and someone hears the gospel in a dream or from an angel. I'm not saying such things cannot happen. But I'm saying that those things are so unusual that we should not expect them to happen. Those things are purely the sovereignty of God, operating according to the will of God.

The usual means—the usual means is mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, obeying the word of God. The usual means is people like you and I doing the things God has told us to do—Fathers exhorting, encouraging, and charging. Calling. In the book of Acts we find the phrase, “Commanding men everywhere to repent and believe.” Commanding.

Now I don't think we can take that as a hard and fast rule that every gospel presentation must be a command. But it certainly does tell us something. Every gospel presentation need not necessarily be a pleading. It can be a command. It is actually a command. When God calls people to repent, He's commanding them to repent. When God calls people to faith, He's commanding them to have faith. When God works by His Spirit, He enables His people to repent and have faith, using the words that are spoken by His people, and using the words of Scripture, the very word of God itself.

And so, as we just apply this last little portion, and it's already pretty well applied, my friends, part of this burden therefore that has fallen upon us is that we have to be putting out the call, the gospel call. We have to be those who speak. We have to speak of the God who saved us. We have to speak of the Savior who died for us. We have to speak of the fact that we were lost, until we were found by God.

There's a requirement upon us that we also exhort, encourage, and charge, just as we ourselves have been exhorted, encouraged, and charged. That which has been given to us has been given to us that we may give it on, that we may pass it on, that we may share it around. And it's infinite. You can't give away too much of the gospel. You can't give away too much of the love of God. You can't offer people too much, in terms of salvation.

Now, I'm speaking of the true gospel. I'm not speaking of some false, namby-pamby nonsense that sometimes gets called the gospel. You know what I mean. I'm hoping you understand what I mean. We've been called into God's own kingdom and glory. His kingdom. What's a kingdom? It's a place where a king rules. Where does He rule? He rules over His church. Does He rule over all of creation? Yes, He most certainly does. But where is God's visible rule in the earth today? It should be here, in a church. It should be in churches.

Where does God's rule become evident to the world? It becomes evident to the world in His people who obey Him. And we've been called into His own kingdom and glory. We've been called into a relationship with God who bestows glory upon us who are His children. Are we ever going to be Gods? No, we're not going to be divinized. We're not going to be made Gods, in terms of a capital "G"—it's not going to happen.

But we are going to be made perfected human beings, and inasmuch as we are able, we will be perfectly bearing the image of God, so much so that any who look upon us should see the imprint of Christ through us. We've been called into God's kingdom and glory. We've been called to faithful obedience. We've been called to be those who reveal the goodness of God upon this earth. We've been called to glory.

There are things in Scripture that are beyond our complete and true comprehension. I like to speak about the goodness and the blessings of heaven, but then I want to tell you the truth—I'm not even a tenth of the way to understanding it. I doubt I'm even a hundredth of the way there. There's more coming for us than we can possibly understand. But it's coming. And it's going to be glorious. And we're going to share in that glory. Amen. Let's close in prayer.

Father in heaven, we do indeed thank you that you have made us fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, your children in Christ, and that our true family is to be found in that second Adam, who died for our sins and washed us clean with His own blood.

We thank you and praise you, Father, for your goodness toward us. We thank you and praise you, Father, that you have loved us so much that we may enjoy fellowship one with another, through Jesus Christ our Lord, and that we may know the love of God one with another, through your work through each and every one of us.

Father, we pray that we would indeed walk in a manner worthy of God, and that we would indeed walk in a manner that reveals to the world that we have been called into your own kingdom and glory. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.