

Sermon Series: The Faith Family

Sermon Title: "Family Chores" (Responsibilities)

Sermon Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:9-28 (Additional Scripture References: Acts 17:28a, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, 2 Thessalonians 2:16-17, James 3:13-18, 2 Timothy 2:14-16, 1 Timothy 4:12, 1 Corinthians 9:22-23, Ephesians 4:1-7, Ephesians 4:29-5:2, 2 Peter 1:20-21, Philippians 4:8-9)

Sermon Summary: This message looks at Paul's encouragement and admonishment to the Church at Thessalonica. Paul had heard the people were worried about and focused on the second coming of Jesus and as a result were not doing the things they needed to do as a church family. Paul addresses these concerns and then in the latter part of the letter he gives some very important instructions to them in the form of family responsibilities or chores. There are four basic responsibilities, two of which have an extensive sub-list of chores. We are told to respect our leaders and live in peace, to seek one another's good, to pursue the will of God, and to trust God's sanctification process!

Full Sermon Notes

"I've searched the world for a love that could fill my heart, Nothing compares to the wonder of who You are." And now that we've found the love of Jesus and been adopted into His family, we have the awesome responsibilities that come along with family membership! Yes there's a list of chores, but as we will discover this morning, chores that are awesome and meaningful to our lives. Let's pray and ask God to help us understand the importance and beauty of family chores! Pray!

In the last three weeks we've talked about the awesome privilege to be a part of the family of God! No longer living as outcast! That we are being built into a house of living stones. A house that lives and breaths and is mobile and has a purpose. In fact the Scripture puts it this way...

'For in him we live and move and have our being.' ... Acts 17:28a (NIV)

We've talked about how wonderful and how vital it is to get together with the family to spend time fellowshiping, praying, and studying God's Word. This morning we're going to talk about the family chore list! Yes, there are chores! They're not bad chores, but they are so important!!

Our chore list is found in 1 Thessalonians chapter 5:9-28. Before we read our text, I want to give you some really important background information. The Apostle Paul came to the city of Thessalonica on his second missionary journey around AD 50. The city was the capital of Macedonia. It was a melting pot of people because of the trade routes. It was prosperous and thriving. There was also a relatively large Jewish presence, and they had their own temple. In the book of Acts, we learn that Paul went there and debated with the Jews at least three times about the death and resurrection of Christ. Some of them believed the gospel and joined Paul. Also, many devout Greek men and women believed and were added to the church. Paul began to teach them and help them grow in their faith in the Lord as a church. But, the unbelieving Jews got so angry about this that they raised up a riot and eventually Paul had to leave the city.

The new converts were now without their leader, and began to experience intense persecution: isolation, ostracism, and attacks from society.

So the church at Thessalonica endured some really tough times. On the one hand they were surrounded by practitioners of paganism, and on the other hand by Jewish leaders willing to persecute any who followed Christ. Paul himself had left Thessalonica in an atmosphere of persecution. Paul later sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the church there. When Timothy joined him in Corinth he gave his report, which included the fact that some Jews had been making false charges against Paul. However, Paul was thankful to hear that the believers were holding true to the gospel message, so he wrote them a letter, 1 Thessalonians. In this letter he did several things. He defended himself against the accusations levied against him by the unbelieving Jews and he encouraged the believers to stay strong in the face of persecution. He brought out the beauty of Christian morality over the depravity of the pagans of the culture. He also "sought to calm anxieties related to the return of the Lord." (Broadman commentary) You know how it is when you are anxiously awaiting for something important to take place: You begin imagining scenarios, asking questions, having doubts, and the "what-ifs," kick in! This seems to be happening again in our world! People are getting anxious and worried about the end times and trying to figure out how it's going to happen and when! Paul knew exactly what the people of Thessaloniki needed to do, and I believe his prescription is just what the doctor would order for us today! They needed to get busy doing the things they were supposed to be doing as followers of Christ and as members of the faith family of God! If we get busy doing what we're supposed to be doing and let Jesus take care of the end time stuff we'll find ourselves a lot less stressed out and a whole lot more effective at being the church! In fact Jesus once told His disciples this:

Matthew 24:44 So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Matthew 24:45 "Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time?"

Matthew 24:46 It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns.

I believe this is why Paul delves into family matters within the church and gives them a chore list! But before Paul gets into the chore list, he seeks to calm their fears concerning the second coming. One of the questions Timothy brought back to Paul from the Thessalonian church was concerning some who had already died. They anticipated the return of the Lord to be soon and were concerned about those who had "fallen asleep." Let's look back just a few verses. Paul said...

1 Thessalonians 4:13 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.

1 Thessalonians 4:14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

Paul assures them that God would never forget those who have already passed away. In fact he said, "The dead in Christ will rise first!" So Paul is emphatically saying to stop worrying about the end times details, which they couldn't do anything about, and to get busy doing the things that would make a real difference in the church and the world! He says...

1 Thessalonians 5:1 Now, brothers, about times and dates we do not need to write to you,

1 Thessalonians 5:2 for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night.

Paul is reminding them no one knows the time. But he goes on to say...

1 Thessalonians 5:4 But you, brothers, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief.

So we're not in darkness spiritually, therefore we will not be totally in the dark when it comes to the end times, it won't surprise us, and it shouldn't concern us. Why would I say that? Because of what Paul says in verse 8-10...

1 Thessalonians 5:8 But since we belong to the day, let us be self-controlled, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet.

1 Thessalonians 5:9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.

1 Thessalonians 5:11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.

This does not mean that Christians will not suffer persecution in the end times at the hands of men, but we don't have to worry about facing the wrath and judgement of God and we know that God will be with us no matter what the world throws at us! God is bigger, God is greater, God is more powerful, God is almighty and God is our Savior and King! In the meantime, we have a job to do, chores to finish, a mission to complete and we do this together as the family of God. It was with this in mind that Paul closed his letter with some very important instructions. Paul would live to write a second letter to them, but he wasn't so sure at the time, so in Paul's mind he may have felt he was writing the last thing this church would ever hear from him. So these words carry great weight. Andrew and I were talking about this message and he shared with me something that one of our first church members, and leadership team members, had shared with him. I have permission to share this: Andrew said, "On his deathbed, Tom Holden grabbed my hand, looked me in the eye and said, "Andrew, the Lord's hand is upon you and you are going to do great things for him if you keep your eyes on Jesus. If you keep your eyes on yourself, you will mess it all up."

Folks that's a good word for all of us!! And with that in mind, let's look at Paul's final instructions to the church in his first letter to the Thessalonians. His final instructions give us four responsibilities as members of the faith family of God!

Responsibility #1 - Respect Leadership and Live in Peace (5:12-13)

1 Thessalonians 5:12 Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you.

1 Thessalonians 5:13 Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other.

“The leaders of this early church were called by God to lead during tumultuous times. Can you see the comparison to today? Paul is telling them to recognize those who have the gift of leadership and to respect them! At first glance, this may seem a little self-serving, since I'm one of the ones who have been called to admonish our church. First, let me remind you that respecting your leaders does not mean you have to agree with them on everything or every decision they make! It would be unrealistic and unhealthy for a church to not have certain standards and core values they ask people to follow, but to demand unquestioned allegiance to a leader or group of leaders in the guise of respect is not healthy and is actually scary! There is a respectful way to disagree and let your voice be heard. We are big on this at Northshore Church. We are very transparent and welcome input and advice from our church members and we recognize we each have a gift or gifts from the Spirit of God to bring to the family table! We also acknowledge God has given some the gift of leadership and teaching. I've often said if someone desires the responsibilities of leadership and is not called by God to leadership, somethings wrong with that scenario! The Bible is clear that those who are in leadership are held at a higher standard of accountability. The late John Walvoord said this: “When we recognize that God is using a man to lead, in the end it is a recognition of God and his sovereign choice to give divine grace and gifts, not to recognize the man himself. The glory must remain with God even though we recognize the instrument. We should be discerning to know if a leader is leading or teaching in a way contrary to the Word of God. Any criticism should be in love and to further the work of God. (John Walvoord, The Thessalonian Epistles, 90-91)

This kind of love and respect within the faith family is essential for there to be peace, and Paul says to live in peace with each other! The Book of James puts it this way...

James 3:13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom.

James 3:14 But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth.

James 3:15 Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.

James 3:16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

James 3:17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

James 3:18 Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

Wow! A harvest of righteousness. If we are living in peace as the family of God, respecting one another and not being controlled by envy and selfish ambition, the result will be a harvest of righteousness. Why is this? Because instead of spending all our time fighting, and disagreeing, we will spend all our time doing the work the Father has for us to do. The family of God chore list! We will be building up and not tearing down! So there should be acknowledgement of the leaders that God has gifted to lead the church, and that each church member has the responsibility to do his own work and not the work of someone else.

Paul's second responsibility on the list has a list within the list!

Responsibility # 2 - Seek One Another's Good (5:14-15)

1 Thessalonians 5:14 And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

1 Thessalonians 5:15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.

Warn those who are idle!

My Grandmother used to say, "An idle mind is the Devil's workshop!" Paul knew there were some who were not helping do the work of the ministry. They were recipients, but not givers of ministry. These people also loved to quarrel over Scripture. Paul gave Timothy this advice...

2 Timothy 2:14 Keep reminding them of these things. Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.

2 Timothy 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

2 Timothy 2:16 Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.

Encourage the timid and help the weak!

Listen to Paul's encouragement to young Timothy...

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.

1 Timothy 4:12 (NIV)

This was a big deal to Paul and he practiced what he preached...

1 Cor 9:22 To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some.

1 Cor 9:23 I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings.

We should be champions of those who are weak! Seeing their needs and seeking to help them in the name of Jesus, and with the power and resources of Jesus! Are you an encourager or a discourager? Do you build up or tear down? When you talk to others or about others, what is your message? How do you come across? Have you asked yourself the question, "Will this encourage or discourage?" "Will this build up or tear down?" You might say, "How can I encourage when I'm discouraged? How can I build up when I feel so down?" I think maybe this question came up, because Paul writes this in his second letter to the church at Thessalonica and tells them the source of encouragement...

2 Thessalonians 2:16 May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by his grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope,

2 Thessalonians 2:17 encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.

Paul realizes this is not an easy task and that it takes time so he says...

Be patient with everyone!

And I love the way he puts this in his letter to the Ephesian church...

Ephesians 4:1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Ephesians 4:2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.

Ephesians 4:3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

And speaking of the bond of peace, Paul brings up a chore that could be a sore subject with some of the church members!

Don't repay evil with evil!

1 Thessalonians 5:15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.

In other words, Paul says, be nice! Be kind to each other and to everyone else. But you say, "Pastor Larry, Paul couldn't have meant 'everyone else!' You just don't know what they've done and what they've said." No, I don't, but Jesus does and He says this...

Luke 6:27 "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,

Luke 6:28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who ill-treat you.

Luke 6:29 If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic.

Jesus didn't say, love what your enemies have done, but to love them. Why? Because without the grace and forgiveness of Jesus, we would be in the same boat, doing the same things. It's kind of like a song Mylon LeFever wrote years ago.

Without Him, I could do nothing Without Him, I'd surely fail
Without Him, I would be drifting Like a ship without a sail
Without Him, I would be dying Without Him, I'd be enslaved
Without Him, life would be hopeless But with Jesus, thank God I'm saved

Responsibility #3 - Pursue God's Will (5:16-22)

"Okay, Pastor, but how does one go about pursuing God's will?" Good question and Paul has an app for that! It's an app with a list, another list within our list, and it's a powerful formula for finding and doing the will of God! Paul says we are to...

1 Thessalonians 5:16 Be joyful always;

In other words, God wants us to enjoy the chores rather than dread the chores. Chores are always more fun when you decide to enjoy them rather than dread them and avoid them. Now I know some of you just checked out. You thought to yourself, that's just insane. No one can always be happy and I'm certainly not happy about some of the circumstances in my life right now! But notice, Paul didn't say "be happy always, but be "joyful always!" Is there a difference? Yes and a very big difference. Happy is based on circumstances and they can be good or bad and ever changing! Joy is based on the promises of God and they are always good and never changing! So that's why we can be joyful always, even when things are really bad. More on this in just a moment, but when you're struggling, do the next thing on Paul's list for pursuing God's will...

1 Thessalonians 5:17 pray continually;

Now I know some of you just got frustrated again! "Come on Pastor Larry, really? Pray without ceasing? That's just unrealistic! I go to school. I work. My job involves talking to other people and my wife hates it when I give her the silent treatment, so, this is definitely not practical!" Oh, but it is more practical than you could ever imagine! How many times do you think your other conversations would have been more effective and less hurtful if you had been in an attitude of prayer and in constant communication with God on a spiritual level? In other words, praying without ceasing is about being in an attitude of prayer at all times, and being aware of God's presence with you at all times! And praying without ceasing is not only for yourself, but for those in the family and outside the family, who need prayer!

1 Thessalonians 5:18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Before you think Paul has lost his mind, go back and read what he says carefully! He didn't say give thanks for all circumstances, but in all circumstances! There's a big difference! I don't thank God for sickness, hardship, financial difficulties, or tragedy, but I thank Him in those times for being with me, giving me strength, providing for me, giving me His divine peace and comfort! In fact Paul told the Philippian church something that I remind myself of all the time. You've heard me say it many times...

Philippians 4:6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.

Philippians 4:7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

And did you know that being thankful for the blessings of God in the midst of otherwise tough circumstances can cause you to be joyful always? See how this thing works? It's amazing. It's kind of like the old hymn...

When upon life's billows You are tempest tossed
When you are discouraged Thinking all is lost
Count your many blessings Name them one by one
And it will surprise you What the lord has done

1 Thessalonians 5:19 Do not put out the Spirit's fire;

The best way to keep the fire of the Spirit going is to not put it out. Quenching the Spirit is like pouring water on a campfire. Paul told the Ephesian church how to keep the fire going...

Ephesians 4:29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.

Ephesians 4:30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.

1 Thessalonians 5:20 do not treat prophecies with contempt.

In the New Testament the word prophetes means "to speak before" or "to speak for." Thus it refers to one who speaks for God or Christ. Prophets were also called pneumatics (pneumatikos), "spiritual ones." I believe the church today should base its proclamation of truth on the inspired Scriptures! If we do not have this foundation, we could find ourselves in deep trouble. Back in 1970 a man by the name of James Smart wrote a book called "The Strange Silence of the Bible in the Churches." Listen to what he said...

"Any open attack upon the Bible as a whole, or even upon the Old Testament portion of it, or any attempt to reduce it to a subordinate status in the church, would undoubtedly meet with almost universal resistance. But let the deed be done unobtrusively, not by any concerted plan of any faction but as the result of factors that are at work unconsciously in all of us, and let the

surface appearance be maintained so that what has been happening below the surface escapes the notice of most people, and we could awaken one day to find ourselves a church almost totally alienated from the Scriptures!”

In other words, if we allow our culture or our personal desires to interpret Scripture they will be misinterpreted and we will be misled! Peter spoke to the validity of Scripture...

2 Peter 1:20 Above all, you must understand that no prophecy of Scripture came about by the prophet's own interpretation.

2 Peter 1:21 For prophecy never had its origin in the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.

1 Thessalonians 5:21 Test everything. Hold on to the good.

Test what others tell you. It's okay to ask questions. If you are ever around a teacher or preacher who does not want to be questioned, run fast away from that person. A genuine, Spirit led teacher or preacher, welcomes scrutiny of his words to see if they hold up to the test of Scripture. Remember, The Holy Spirit will never contradict Holy Scripture! Never!! Paul told the church to hold on to the good teaching.

1 Thessalonians 5:22 Avoid every kind of evil.

We must hold on to the good, while avoiding the evil! How can we do this? It's a matter of setting your priorities. Paul gave the Philippian church the following wisdom...

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.

Philippians 4:9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Paul then concludes his letter and gives us the secret to a successful completion of the chore list...

Responsibility #4 - Trust God's Sanctification

1 Thessalonians 5:23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:24 The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

God will help us accomplish our chore list. He is our strength, our wisdom, our guide. He will sanctify us through and through. Sanctify is to make holy, to purify. I have no holiness apart from Christ! God is the One who sanctifies, not you or me! And when we let God do the work of sanctification in us, you can be assured of these things...

It will be complete

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

We will be blameless

1 Thessalonians 3:13 May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

He who calls is faithful

Psalms 117:1 Praise the LORD, all you nations; extol him, all you peoples.

Psalms 117:2 For great is his love towards us, and the faithfulness of the LORD endures for ever. Praise the LORD.

He will do it

Psalms 37:5 Commit your way to the LORD; trust in him and he will do this:

Psalms 37:6 He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun.

So I guess you could put it this way: Let's take care of our God-given responsibilities as members of the faith family and let's trust God to take care of His responsibilities to those of us who are members of His faith family!

Let's Pray!