

Thursday, July 16, 2020

SERIES: CHARACTER OVER COMPROMISE

SPEAKER: NAT CRAWFORD

TITLE: Choosing Control Pt. 2

Yesterday we discovered that, as believers, we are expected to walk a certain way, and the first way Paul defined that walk, is to **walk in holiness**. Let's pick it back up in 1 Thessalonians, Chapter 4, verse nine (ESV), and let's see what else Paul has to say.

Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, ¹⁰ for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more. (Vs. 9-10)

In verses 9 & 10, Paul is simply affirming the Thessalonian church, and he encourages them to do more. He says, "Hey, brotherly love – *philia* love -- that deep concern for your brothers and sisters in Christ - you guys have got it. You've got it down. But it wasn't man who taught you that kind of love. It was God who taught you. This is because the Holy Spirit is living inside of you, that you can love each other with this kind of love. But don't just keep it inside the Thessalonian church. Let it spread to Macedonia and beyond." It is here in verses nine and 10 that we find that second way that we should walk. **We should walk in love**. Our walk should be measured in love.

I like what Paul says in Romans 12 (NLT). He says, *Don't just pretend to love others* - what a concept – *really love them! Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love each other with genuine affection and take delight in honoring each other. Be happy with those who are happy and weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with each other.* (Vs. 9-10, 15-16a)

You see friends, as Christians, we become brothers and sisters in Christ. It doesn't matter where you were born. It doesn't matter what you do for a living. It doesn't matter how old you are. It doesn't matter what skin color you have. Those things are irrelevant. It doesn't matter if you like country music or rock music. It doesn't matter if you have tattoos or a big beard. Those things simply do not matter. What matters is we are now children, brothers, and sisters in Christ, and we should love each other in such a way that those other things simply don't matter.

Why do you think that so many people today want to go and work for a company like Southwest Airlines or Google? Google has nearly 2 million applications per year from people who want to go work for them. Southwest Airlines has nearly 400 job applications for every introductory position. Why? Well for Southwest Airlines, one of their core values is to be fun-loving. You see, for Southwest Airlines, their whole culture, their whole environment, their whole work

community is based on the value of love. And they have fun doing it. There are so many amazing stories about how they take care of each other, and the people who fly with them. You see, that is why people want to work for a company like Google, or for Southwest Airlines, because they really, authentically care, and love for each other.

People are hungry for an authentic community, filled with love. And that's why so many organizations want to copy them and be just like them, because they want to have an environment like that. We as Christians should want the same thing. How we do this? How do we show each other brotherly love? **Well, the first way is in how we talk to each other.**

Do you have a genuine care and concern and interest for the fellow believers? COVID-19 aside, do you take time to get to know other believers? Do you find out what's happening in their lives? Do you weep with other believers when they weep? Do you celebrate when they celebrate? When someone is experiencing some type of pain and hurt, do you avoid them, or do you go out of your way to come up to them at church and just say, "Hey, didn't want to make a scene. But I heard about what happened. I want to let you know I'm praying for you, and can I pray for you right now?" See, that's how we do brotherly love with our words. We genuinely care for other people and we express it.

But **the second way that we can show brotherly love is through our actions**, how we take care of other believers, both financially and physically. Do you meet the needs of others in your church or in the ministries you love? There are people in your city – people you know– who are hit with great burdens. For example, they have a family member who has experienced a lot of medical bills. Do you see what you can do to maybe offer to pay just a little bit? If they've had a surgery, do you offer to take the meals to them for a month? What about the single mom who is working two jobs to make ends meet? Do you say, "Well, that's too bad." Or do you offer to take their kid to school in the morning, or pick them up and spend some time with them as their mom finishes her second shift? What do you do to meet those needs? We need to be serving and taking care of fellow believers, near and far.

When we do this, people are going to say, "Wow. Wow. I want to be part of something like that." So we as Christians, we should be walking in holiness. We should be walking in love. And finally, here's another way we should walk – this is found in the last two verses.

Paul continues ... and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you,¹² so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one. (1 Thess. 4:11-12, ESV)

What you may not realize here is that Paul is simply saying this: that we as Christians, we should walk in integrity. You want to talk about choosing character over compromise? This is a key factor here. We must walk with integrity to choose character. We need to be walking in integrity every day. But Paul tells us how: he gives us three very specific ways that we can walk in integrity. The first one Paul says, *aspire to live quietly*. Now that's kind of an oxymoron, isn't it? It's kind of like, you know, live loud in your pursuit of quiet living.

So what does Paul mean by, *aspire to live quietly*? It's simply this: We, as Christians should be the most peaceful people out there. We should strive daily to live in peace and harmony with each other. Does that mean there won't be times when we're going to need some type of intervention, some type of natural, healthy conflict or discussion? No, of course not. We do need to do those things. We do need to speak up with other believers from time to time. But what he is saying is, that there are those type of personalities, and those behaviors, where we like to cause a little mischief. We like to cause some strife. We like to have arguments for argument's sake. Paul is saying, "Knock it off, aspire to live quietly and live a peaceful life".

The second way that we can walk in integrity is to *mind our own affairs*. Your version might say *attend to your own business*.

Have you ever experienced this before? "Do you know what your problem is?" Yeah, we all have, right? And what's our first response? "Oh, please do tell me. I would love to be humbled by you for your special insight. Tell me what on Earth I'm doing so wrong today!" That is what Paul is talking about. No one appreciates a busybody: that person who is constantly getting in your business and meddling with your affairs. Now again, does this mean that we shouldn't be concerned about other believers? No, of course we should. Does this mean if we see someone operating in a blind spot, that we shouldn't speak up? No, of course we should. But we should point out things when we see it, in love and in private. But if that is all you do with your life, Paul says, knock it off, knock it off.

Why is this type of lifestyle of being a busybody and being meddlesome, not healthy? It's because you neglect your own life. You neglect your own household. I have seen many well-intentioned and not well-intentioned people spend all their time worrying about other people, whether it's through ministry, whether it's through counseling, whether it's through social work or medicine. I see a lot of people give all their attention to everyone else, only to see their own lifestyle, their own household, and their own walk fail. Paul says that in order to walk in integrity, you have to maintain your household first, and mind your own affairs.

Then, the last thing Paul says is to *work with your hands*.

In a follow up letter to the Thessalonian church, Paul wrote this: Yet, we hear that some of you are *living idle lives, refusing to work and meddling in other people's business*.

So this was going to be an ongoing issue for the church. You see, the Thessalonian church had two separate issues going on. On one side, they had the Greek world influencing them: Because according to the Greeks, manual labor and work, they were above that. That kind of work was for your slave. As a free man or woman, you didn't need to pick up the brick – that was for them. But on the other side of the coin, they were thinking, "Okay, Christ is coming back at any moment", which is true, as we all should! But they were saying that, "I'm just going to sit back and retire, and I'm going to mooch off of somebody else." Paul is saying, "That is not the

preferred lifestyle; whatever God has tasked you to do - well, do it with integrity. Do it to the best of your abilities. Don't take shortcuts, and whatever you do, don't stop working. Keep on it.”

So why do we want to walk in holiness? Why do we want to walk in love? Why do we want to walk in integrity? We'll look at verse 12. Paul says, *so that you may walk properly before outsiders*. Or as the New Living Translation puts it, *Then people who are not believers will respect you*.

Why do we want to walk in such a way that shows that we are in control, regardless of life circumstances? It's so people will see the difference Christ has made in us. It's so we can be a witness to outsiders, so that they will say, “I want that. I need that in my life. How can I get it?”

Friends, we need to ask the question, “Where do we go from here? What do we do now with this information?” Friends, if we do not walk in holiness – that is living a life of Christianity – people are going to stop listening to our message. If we do not live differently than the culture, our message is null and void. We may as well not even speak up.

If you know that there is something sinful going on in your life, confess it. You don't have to stay there, confess it. Confess it; stop making excuses, find some help. Find someone to walk alongside you, to disciple you, to give you accountability. But friends, as Christians, we are called to walk in holiness.

If we do not walk in love, people are going to turn their backs on us. People want to be part of an authentic, loving community. Unless we are authentically loving each other, and treating other believers with love and respect, people aren't going to want to be part of it. They will find another group to join.

Last, if we don't walk in integrity, people are going to cry, “Hypocrite!” They are going to cry, “Hypocrite.” We are not going to do it perfectly. We know it. That is part of the deal. We're not going to do things perfectly, but we have experienced forgiveness. We can have humility, and we can repent, and apologize to people.

So today, if you are not living a peaceful life, if you are not maintaining your own household, if you are not doing work to the best of your abilities, start today! No matter how out of control life is, we can still be in control in His power: In His power, by walking in holiness, by walking in love and by walking in integrity. Why? So people will come to know him as Savior. That is why we walk this way.

N: Now, let's turn to Arnie and Cara for some practical insight. Cara, give us an example of an individual, or a maybe a family, who exhibit what it means to lead a peaceful life. What does that look like?

C: Well, I have a lot of them. Your family, Nat, I think you lead a pretty peaceful life, despite

all the stuff you guys have been through. There's one lady though, that was just called home, out of my Bible study group. And her name is Helen Weber. And I just loved her so much, because she would just sit there, and you'd just feel the peace dripping off of this woman. And this is a gal that had an unsaved child. She also lost a child to cancer. Man, there's just a lot of wisdom there; just a level headed, very peaceful in her reactions to things, to whatever circumstance she was experiencing. So Helen, I'll just miss her, but I know I get to see her again. It's really exciting.

N: Yeah. It's a combination of both what's expressed verbally, but also how people live. And when we can speak that and live it, it has a great impact on the people around us; like you've been impacted by Helen and others. Arnie, in a world where integrity is sometimes hard to find, talk about the importance of what you refer to as, “resist the darkness and engage the light”.

A: What I'm talking to is: Everyone has their own darkness. Pick your poison and we've studied - I think we're over 500,000 people - everybody has a darkness that they fight, and some people's darkness is different than others, but all of us have this darkness that can overcome us. And what it does is, it blocks us from moving closer to Jesus today than yesterday. And for a lot of guys that I used to work with, I would tell the guys, “You think that if you think something, it really doesn't hurt anybody, and you can go down this road with pornographic thoughts, and those kinds of things. And getting that inner darkness, to realize it's snuffing out the light inside of you. And regardless if anybody else knows it, or all of that, it has a tremendous impact on you and your spiritual life.” And that's why we say, *resist the darkness*, because we all have it, and *engage the light*, the light being Jesus Christ, the Light of the World.

N: I think that's so helpful, because so many people who are listening today, they probably feel like, “I'm the only one with this darkness. I'm the only one with this struggle.” The reality is, you're not alone. There are plenty of other Christ followers who are listening today, who have the exact same struggle. And one thing we would encourage you to do is, use our social platforms through our app, and through our goTandem platform as well. Because there, you can get on there, and share your prayer requests with us once a week, or actually every day. You can talk about what you're going through, and we, as the body of Christ, will come alongside of you, encourage you, and pray for you. So you don't have to resist the darkness alone. You get to do it, obviously in the power of the Holy Spirit, but you also get to do it with the body of Christ around you.

Cara, let's talk about minding your own affairs. Do you think that means the same as, “live and let live”?

C: No, I don't think so. If I'm understanding the question correctly, I can't be walking with God and be a troublemaker at the same time. So if you're living a quiet life, you're minding your own affairs. There's a pretty good chance you're not going to stir up any conflict with people. If your life is “live and let live”, I'd say you're going to cause a lot of people to question your devotion to Jesus. And you may even encourage them to question God.

N: Yeah, the whole minding your own affairs has nothing to do with being complacent or indifferent towards sin around you. But what it really is talking about is, again, making sure that we are right with God first, and then looking at helping our brothers and sisters in Christ, but not being a critical person, trying to tear them down, but rather helping them becoming all that God has called them to be. Arnie, for someone listening today, who is disappointed with their past, but in their heart, they really do desire to live like Jesus going forward, can that happen for them? And if so, how?

A: First of all, you have to stop thinking about your past, because that is the one thing you can't change, no matter how hard you try. Yes, you can try to make amends, but in your mind, focusing on the past is probably going to define your future. And the more you focus on it, the more you become your past. It's just like a vicious circle. And that's the big lie that Satan has for people that focus on their past. They can't forgive themselves; they can't forgive others. It's you can't change the past. No, you can't travel backwards. No matter how hard you try, no matter how big of a screw up, you just can't. So to me, focusing on Jesus, the future, is so much more powerful.

N: You are so right. So many people hang on to their past, and Satan would love for them just to focus on that. And he knows that if they do that, they're going to ditch the car. I mean, you've heard that analogy. It's like driving forward, while keeping your eyes focused on that rear view mirror. The rear view mirror is so small. The windshield is so big, but if you focus on that little rear view mirror the whole time, while moving forward, guess what? You're going to drive off the edge of the road, and probably you're going to get killed in the process. And that's kind of what happens in our faith. Listen to Arnie Cole. He knows what he's talking about. Do not let your past dictate your future; instead lean into God's grace, because it is sufficient for you. And thank goodness, it is sufficient for me.