# The Hyper-Spiritual (vs. True Growth)

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

*Strong & Ready! (Books of 1 & 2 Thessalonians)*

Prepared by: Matthew S. Black

Wednesday, February 3, 2016, 7pm at Living Hope Church of Roselle, Illinois

**livinghopechurch.net**

**Introduction**: Open your Bible to 1 Thessalonians 4. I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: “The Hyper-Spiritual.”

“There is no pride so dangerous, none so subtle and insidious, as the pride of holiness.”

- **J. C. Ryle**

**Reading of Holy Scripture**

**1 Thess. 4:9-12**, “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, **11**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.”

In verses 13 and following we see that those in Thessalonica were concerned that the Second Coming of Christ had come already. An unsettling situation within the church at Thessalonica intensified his concern for the Thessalonians’ spiritual growth. The believers at Thessalonica had become so fixated on the second coming that they believed that they were excused from their **temporal responsibilities**. They were almost “too spiritual” for the **earthly duties** of this life. There is a bit of spiritual pride mixed in here as well as sincere naivety.

There is a possibility that we can become so “hyper-spiritual” that we stop doing the normal things of everyday living. We might make excuses for living a responsible life because we “love Jesus.”

**Example from College**

New Christians often have a tendency of leaning toward this type of thinking. For example, when I was in college, as a new Christian, I would have my devotions in the morning, beginning around 5:30 or 6am. On Thursdays I would have a leadership class at 7am. On a couple of occasions I missed that class because I was praying. I excused myself because I love Jesus. I wasn’t doing anything wrong, I was loving Jesus.

We must never use God’s grace in our lives as an excuse for laziness and irresponsibility.

**The Apostle’s Warning**

The apostle had taught the Thessalonians about the return of Christ, and they eagerly anticipated that glorious coming (1:10). However, they were apparently overly anxious about the Lord’s return and wanted to make sure they did not miss it. Their zealous preoccupation with Jesus’ coming led to the mistaken notion that temporal responsibilities no longer mattered in light of His return. Thus Paul had to give them substantial instruction to correct their misunderstandings and unhealthy responses to the promise of the imminent return of the Savior[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Further Explanation**

Paul explains further in **2 Thess. 2:1-5**, “Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered together to him, we ask you, brothers, **2**not to be quickly shaken in mind oralarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come. **3**Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, **4**who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. **5**Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things?”

**Outline**

Mature growth means that you:

* **love** genuinely, vs. 9-10
* **work** diligently, vs. 11
* **live** purposefully, vs. 12

**Show Leather Faith**

True Christians grow and change in Christ. Some called it “shoe-leather faith.” It means that what we learn in our head comes out in the shoe leather of our life.

Knowing Christ is not just ethereal and theoretical, but practical. You don’t get much more practical than this.

**God’s Chisel**

Because God is committed to our holiness, He will chip away at any imperfection and remove every impediment that keeps us from looking like Him. God is like the stone sculptor who, when asked how he could create such a beautiful masterpiece from an ugly piece of granite, replied, “I simply begin with an image in mind and chip away at everything that does not look like that image until the masterpiece remains.” That image is Christ. That vividly describes the process of sanctification. God’s ultimate goal for believers is that they will reflect the image and likeness of God.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Millard Erickson Quote**

Thus, as Millard Erickson writes, through the process of sanctification,

“one’s moral condition is brought into conformity with one’s legal status before God. It is a continuation of what was begun in regeneration, when a newness of life was conferred upon and instilled within the believer.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

Erickson is saying that what God did internally at salvation, He continues to do externally through sanctification. Through the ongoing work of sanctification, God’s glory is reflected in the life of a believer. Thus the only reliable physical evidence of a redeemed heart is a transformed life. Paul illustrated this vividly when he wrote, “Do everything without grumbling and arguing, so that you may be blameless and pure, children of God who are faultless in a crooked and perverted generation, among whom you shine like stars in the world” (**Phil 2: 14**).

1. Mature Growth means you **love** genuinely, 1 Thess. 4:9-10

**1 Thess. 4:9**, “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.”

**LET YOUR LOVE SHOW**

**God-Taught**

 He says it would be superfluous, unnecessary for me to write to you.  There is “no need” for anyone to instruct you. You’ve been taught by the best. You have been taught by God Himself to love one another.

By the way, this is one of two times in the New Testament that word is ever used. A similar phrase to that is used in **John 6:45**, “It is written in the Prophets, ‘And they will all be taught by God.”

Paul is saying the same thing. He's saying you don't need external instruction, you don't need external motivation, external exhortation, you have an internal teaching, you're God-taught.

St. John says the same in **1 John 2:27**, “But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.”

**God is Producing the Love in You**

  Paul says God teaches you to do that so I don't need to write you about loving each other because God is producing the *agape* in you that ends up in the *philadelphia*.  You are taught inwardly by God who abides in you by His Spirit to love, and this love overflows to the brothers.

**Philadelphia: Those who Share a Womb**

The word *philadelphia*’s ancient meaning is to love those who have “shared a womb.” That is you who are saved have been birthed by the Holy Spirit. You have in essence “shared the same womb.” Wow!

**The World Knows Us by Our Love**

You remember the words of Jesus in **John 13:35**, “By this shall all people know that you are my disciples, by your love one for another.”

Grasping this truth will affect how we relate to all people, including those who seem unlovable. Sadly, however, Christians often spend more time quarreling than they do loving one another. The world often displays a more profound love for its own than God’s people do for their own. Church fights and church splits have become all too commonplace in the modern culture. The song “They Will Know We are Christians by Our Love” could very well be renamed “They Will Know We are Christians by Our Fights.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

**Your Love Shows by the Spirit**

**1 Thess. 4:9-12**, “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.” With the Spirit as their teacher, Paul saw no urgent need to give them any further instruction. As Marshall explains,

Exhortation is not needed because the readers have experienced an inward, divine compulsion to love one another. In other words, Paul ascribes their growth in love (1: 3) to the sanctifying power of the Spirit (cf. 4: 8).[[5]](#footnote-5)

**Yielding to God’s Spirit**

How then does this work in a Christian’s life? When the new birth occurs, you receive God’s Spirit. At that moment an exchange takes place: “old things” are replaced with “new things” (2 Cor. 5:17). One of the new things that you receive is God’s love. Paul tells us in Romans 5:5 that “God’s love has been poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” Our capacity to love others **does not come by trying harder**; it comes by **yielding** to God’s Spirit.

**A New Nature**

As a Christian, we love because the God who is love is one with us. And now we have a new heart and a new nature (Eze. 36:25-27; John 3:1-7). **Warren Wiersbe’s** insight about the “new nature” of a Christian is good:

“Fish do not attend classes to learn how to swim. . . . And birds by nature put out their wings and flap them in order to fly. It is nature that determines action . . . because a Christian has God’s nature (2 Peter 1: 4), he loves, because ‘God is love’ (1 John 4: 8).”[[6]](#footnote-6)

**LET YOUR LOVE GO**

**Thessalonica, Capital of Macedonia**

Thessalonica was the capital city of the Macedonian province. It was the Chicago and now Paul was planting churches in Roselle and Aurora and even in Lake Zurich. Their love was propelling his church planting ministry. St. Paul says something quite amazing for such a new church planting work: the testimony of their love was helping him to plant more churches.

**1 Thess. 4:9-10**, “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...”

The newly established churches in Philippi (Acts 16: 12-40) and Berea (Acts 17: 10-14) were reaping the benefits of the Thessalonians’ love.

The Thessalonians’ love went beyond their city; it extended “to all the brothers throughout Macedonia” (4:10). What a marvelous statement! Their love for the other churches literally went the distance.

**Application**

The local church was never intended by God to be an island in its community or the “Lone Ranger” in God’s work. God has called believers to do His work together. We are not in competition. We are all one in the Body of Christ. We are to always be making connections with other healthy churches. Pray for unhealthy churches as well, that God will work in spite of their errors. Remember that all born again believers are one in Christ. Pray that the true power of the Gospel will expand by your testimony of love!

**LET YOUR LOVE GROW**

**Love More and More**

What further encouragement can be given to a church that was already excelling in its love for one another? Paul continues, vs. 10b, “But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more.”

We never arrive in the Christian life. We have to listen to the urging of St. Paul and to grow “more and more.”

**A Love with No Limits**

Our love must also have no limits or boundaries. It may be easy to love the “Macedonians” when we think they deserve it, but what about when they do something that offends us? Sure, it’s easy to love people in your church when they agree with your ideas and go along with your plans, but what happens when they question your ideas and resist your plans? We can never take a break from loving others, even when we think they don’t deserve it. We cannot obey God’s command to love one another “even more” if we selectively choose whom we will and will not love.[[7]](#footnote-7)

**Thick Skin and a Big Heart**

We like to say on the elder team that we need to have “thick skin and a big heart.” Sometimes sheep bite each other. Sometimes they bite the shepherds. Don’t let that discourage you. It’s going to happen. Don’t let your heart grow cold, but instead, let your love grow “more and more.” Let your love grow because you know God is conforming His family to the image of His dear Son.

1. Mature Growth means you **work** diligently, 1 Thess. 4:11

**1 Thess. 4:11**, “and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you.”

**1. LEAD A QUIET LIFE**

Paul says if you are really growing and changing, you will “aspire to live quietly.” Live a quiet life! That’s different. You might have thought he would have said, you need to be loud, give the Gospel to everyone. He’s not denying that we give the Gospel to every created being, but what we points to is the integrity of our lives.

**Don’t Be Ostentatious**

We need to work diligently to have a life of integrity and not be ostentatious. This is the opposite of Donald Trump. In other words, don’t call attention to yourself, because it’s not about you.

There are people who live their Christian lives in such a way that they draw attention. They are strange. They are beyond just being separate from the world, they are weird to the point of drawing attention to themselves.

I’m not talking about the three Hebrew children standing alone – that was not ostentatious. They did not want to draw attention to themselves.

**Why Would the World Listen to an Obnoxious Christian?**

The world is so loud and self-serving and anxious about everything. Why would they want to listen to a Christian who is also loud and self serving and obnoxious?

Christians must make it their ambition to live in such a way that they project a “quiet” confidence in the God they serve. Christians live such a drastically different life from that of the rest of the world. Paul reminds his readers of this as he brings Christianity down to workplaces, schools, and neighborhoods.[[8]](#footnote-8)

**2. MIND YOUR OWN BUSINESS**

**1 Thess. 4:11**, “and to aspire to live quietly, and to **mind your own affairs**, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you.”

The admonition to **attend to your own business** was a common one in secular Greek writings but used only here in the New Testament.[[9]](#footnote-9)

**Don’t be a Busybody**

Paul issued them a follow-up exhortation in **2 Thessalonians 3:11–12**: “For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. **12**Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.” Those who did not **attend to** their **own business** were “acting like busybodies” (*periergazomai,* “wasting their labor”), running around meddling in everyone’s problems.[[10]](#footnote-10)

Paul’s antidote for such unwise, undisciplined behavior was that the Thessalonians work diligently and faithfully at their jobs (cf. Prov. 27:23–27; Gal. 6:5; Eph. 4:28; 6:5–7; Col. 3:22–24; 1 Tim. 6:1–2), stay out of other people’s business, and lead quiet, unobtrusive lives that serve fellow believers and glorify the Lord before unbelievers.[[11]](#footnote-11) Work as unto the Lord! Keep busy with what God has called you to do, and you will have no time for gossip and being a busybody.

**3. WORK WITH YOUR HANDS**

**1 Thess. 4:11**, “and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you.”

While in Thessalonica, Paul had set the Christians an example to follow by working hard to earn his keep. The best way to prepare for Christ’s return is not to become a loafer in an ivory tower, but to be faithful in everyday duties and to work hard for the benefit of others.

The outcome of such a way of life will be to ‘win the respect of outsiders’. Those who do not believe in Christ will respect the way we live and be more ready to spread a good report about Christianity. A great deal of harm is done to the gospel because fanatical Christians neglect their daily work because of some religious excitement. We should behave according to the Scriptures and so not prejudice our cause in the eyes of the world.[[12]](#footnote-12)

**The Greek View of Work**

In his book Every Good Endeavor, Timothy Keller offers some insight on the Greek view of work:

“[the Greeks thought] ...work was a barrier to the highest kind of life. Work made it impossible to rise above the earthbound humdrum of life into the realm of philosophy, the domain of the gods. The Greeks understood that life in the world required work, but they believed that not all work was created equal. Work that used the mind rather than the body was nobler, less beastly. The highest form of work was the most cognitive and the least manual. (Keller, Every Good Endeavor, 71).

**Work and the Image of God**

Many of the Greeks thought that to arrive at the highest life was to cease from work. This is the opposite of the New Testament and God’s view of work! We are to work as unto the Lord. God worked in creating the world in six days, and so are we to work. Work is part of God’s image in us.

1. Mature Growth means you **live** purposefully, 1 Thess. 4:12

In this verse Paul makes two significant statements: God never intended for the church to be isolated from its world, and God never intended for His church to be dependent on the world.

**1. MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN YOUR WORLD**

**1 Thess. 4:12**, “**so that you may walk properly before outsiders** and be dependent on no one.”

**Churches are More than Buildings**

God established His church to be more than buildings dotting the landscapes of towns, cities, and countrysides. In fact, God never intended for His church to be a building at all. To be sure, church buildings are important and necessary, but Jesus did not die on the cross so that we could build buildings. He died on the cross to redeem a people. Peter describes the purpose of His redeemed people:

“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for His possession, so that you may proclaim the praises of the One who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.” (1 Pet 2: 9)

He has called out a people to make a difference in His world by proclaiming His praises. While no Christian would disagree with that statement, not every believer understands how this is supposed to happen.

**2. DON’T USE YOUR CHRISTIANITY TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OTHERS**

**1 Thess. 4:12**, “so that you may walk properly before outsiders and **be dependent on no one**.”

Paul’s concluding instruction, to “not be dependent on anyone” (4: 12), fittingly sums up this section. A church that is a drain on its city is not going to make a positive impact in its city.

As Marshall puts it,

“Christians should avoid bringing themselves into disrepute by failing to live up to the accepted standards of the society in which they live. . . . Christians must aim not to be dependent on anybody, especially those outside the church who will take a poor view of them if their religion makes them a public nuisance and burden.” (Marshall, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 117).

Lazy, non-working, unproductive, and inconsiderate Christians who depend on others to meet their needs will be doing little to meet the needs of others. Paul’s corrective to this kind of lifestyle is straightforward: love each other genuinely, do your work diligently, and live your life purposefully.

**Conclusion**

Hyper spiritual people are really struggling with carnality. Let us overcome and impact the world we live in!

1. MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2002). *1 & 2 Thessalonians* (p. 116). Chicago: Moody Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Howell, Mark (2015-01-13). Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (pp. 91-92). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Erickson, Christian Theology, 980. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Howell, 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Marshall, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Weirsbe, Be Ready, 177. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Howell, 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid, 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. MacArthur, 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid., 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Shenton, T. (2006). *Opening up 1 Thessalonians* (pp. 84–85). Leominster: Day One Publications. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)