

1 Thessalonians 3:9-13 NRSV “What’s the status of your love?”

“How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? ⁽¹⁰⁾ Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith.

“⁽¹¹⁾ Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. ⁽¹²⁾ And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you.

“⁽¹³⁾ And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

Do you know what the Lord expects of you?

Though we suppose we know what the Lord requires, there might more than what we think.
Today’s text gives an example.

We tend to assume that we’re doing fine.

It’s the other person who needs to shape up.

In the late 1800s, a comedian and writer named Bill Nye feuded with an editor of a newspaper popular in Green River, Wyoming.

Nye accused the editor of lying about him.

Comedian Bill Nye wrote the following about that newspaper chief:

"Aside from the fact that he is a squint-eyed, consumptive liar, with a breath like a buzzard and a record like a convict, I don't have anything against him. He means well enough, and if he can evade the penitentiary and the vigilance committee for a few more years, there is a chance he'll end his life in a natural way, if he doesn't tell the truth a little more plentifully, however, the Green River people will rise as one man and churn him up till there won't be anything left of him but a pair of suspenders and a wart."¹ Nye



Though I confess to being guilty of similar spite in the past, I don’t wish that fate on anyone today.

Nonetheless, most of the time I consider that I’m right and others are wrong.

The greater question is: What does the LORD think of all the judging we do?

First, the Lord holds each individual accountable.

¹ Edgar Wilson ["Bill"] Nye (1850-1896), U.S. writer and humorist feuding with the editor of Wyoming's Sweetwater Gazette Laramie Boomerang (c. 1893)

God does not blame us for other people’s sins.

As Ezekiel stated:

“The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father’s iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son’s iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.”²

In the Lord, each person will give an account of his/her life.

Today’s text warns us of other duties.

My responsibility doesn’t end with me and your responsibility doesn’t end with you.

As you probably know, the Lord wrote the *Book of Revelation* to seven churches.

In those letters to seven churches, the Lord didn’t directly address individuals.

He addressed them as a group.

For example the Lord commended the church in Philadelphia, a city in ancient Turkey.

Jesus also praised the whole church in a city called Smyrna—also in ancient Turkey.

In a letter to the church in nearby Laodicea, Jesus didn’t give one word of praise.

The Lord rarely named names.

He talked to them as a group—as a church.

At times, individual behavior is worth noting.

Some of us older folks once tuned our radios to hear the former vaudeville comedian Fred Allen.

Night after night Fred Allen noticed an unsmiling, haggard looking musician in the orchestra pit of a vaudeville house in Toledo, Ohio. Finally, Allen stopped his act and called out to him,

"How much would you charge to haunt a house?"³

One sour pickle can ruin otherwise good potato salad.

Soured Christians can create bad stench in a church.

Sour sounds apparently didn’t occur in the Thessalonica church.

Paul wrote of their love:

“How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? . . . (12) And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you.”

The church people worked as a team.

They abounded in love for one another.



One of Bob’s old relatives

²Ezekiel 18:20 NASB

³ Fred Allen [John Sullivan] (1894-1956), U.S. comedian
From *The Ultimate Reference Book*

The church in Thessalonica began under amazingly adverse conditions.

Most modern churches form when groups of Christians get together and decide they want to worship in a certain way.

That's not how the Thessalonica church started.

When Paul and Silas got to town earlier, there was not one Christian in the city.

The city had a Jewish synagogue, but most of the people worshiped idols.

Paul taught in the synagogue a few weeks and convinced many that Jesus was the Messiah.

He even reached some upper society people.

Yet some others became jealous, hired a bunch of ruffians, and started rioting against Paul and Silas.

That's how the church in Thessalonica began.

The church group was new and inexperienced.

They'd worshiped together only a short time.

Paul commended them for their love.

If the Lord wrote to this church as he did the seven churches, I think the Lord would commend the church for many things.

Nearly everyone is involved in some way.

You are loving; you are thoughtful; you cooperate with one another.

As Paul said in our text:

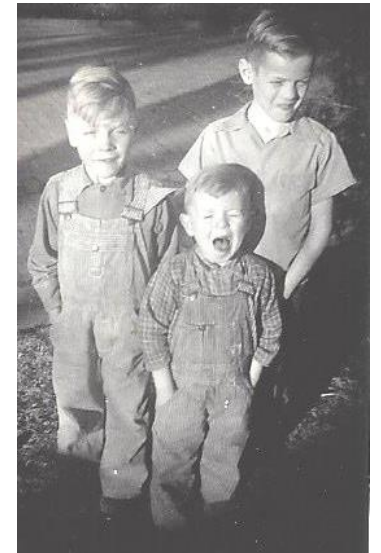
Above pic:
Young Bob (left) and his
"happy" brothers, Gary & Don.

"May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all."

How do we increase and abound in love?

A) We overlook the little things.

Jack headed for the church building, planning to spend the entire afternoon helping the worship committee clean out cupboards and closet. Just as he came through the front door, he heard a loud, splintering crash. Wondering what in the world might have happened, Jack raced past the pews, leaped all else in a single bound, and plunged



through the door into the back room. **"Is everyone all right?"** he yelled as he brought himself to an abrupt halt. **There stood Mr. Kilgore scowling at Mr. Sanders, who scowled back. Between them was a large, decidedly empty cardboard box.** Apparently, until quite recently, it held plastic, disposable communion cups. Now those cups were scattered from one end of the little room to the other. **"I told you it was too heavy for us to pull off the shelf by ourselves,"** Mr. Kilgore accused. **"I told you we needed to wait for the others to get here to help. Now we have even more work to do!"** **"Ummm ... Hi, Mr. Kilgore. Hi, Mr. Sanders,"** Jack interrupted. **"Looks like**

I got here just in time." "Just in time?" Mr. Sanders questioned with an acid tone. "Yep!" Jack answered. "Just in time to help you two pick up this mess - and just in time to keep two people who've been friends since before I was born from getting into a rip-snorting argument. The cups are what's disposable here - not your friendship."⁴

That’s one matter I’m still working on—to overlook the little things, and to laugh at them.

B) Here’s a second thing we need in order to:
“increase and abound in love for one another.”

We see ourselves as a team.

Our society often focuses on individuals. But the Lord expects us to work as group—as a body—as a team.

The Lord has each of us here for a reason. Each of you has a gift for you to use in love.

“Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.”⁵



You mean that I should be a team member?

We work happily and humbly with one another.

We love one another as members of God’s family. Following the recent rains, the mosquito population exponentially increased. On my evening walk a few nights ago, those persistent insects attacked me. **The repellents I’d applied seemed worthless.** Norma observed me swatting those creatures with my cap and swiping at them with full energy. Every part of my body became engaged in defending against those marauding pests.

In the same way, a church body should defend and help each member.

In Christ, we belong to one another.

The world should say of us, **“We want the unselfish, caring love you have in this church.”**

“May the Lord make us increase and abound in love for one another and for all.”

Finally, in love, we warn others of the Lord’s judgment. Not only does God hold us accountable for our individual behavior, he gave us all a watchman’s responsibility.

Watchman keep an eye out for danger and warn the people.

If he notified them of the danger, he’d done his job.

If the watchman told people of the danger, and they didn’t listen, the people were responsible.

⁴ From Emphasis Magazine

⁵ Romans 12:4, 5 NIV

You’re possibly thinking, “Bob, are you intimating that we are supposed to be watchmen or lookouts today? I’m not a prophet or a preacher.”

You can hardly turn on your iPhone, or TV that you don’t get a warning about something:

Drink responsibly; use your seat belt; eat lots of veggies and fiber; exercise; drive with caution. watch for the warning signs of cancer.

A nasty truth stands behind all of these warning.

You know I refer to the reality of death.

Beyond the grave, we face eternal damnation or salvation.

As the Bible says, we are “destined to die once, and after that to face judgment,” Hebrews 9:27 NIV.

Some prefer to deny that reality, yet life itself gives us strong evidence of the Judgment’s truth.

Few of us realize it’s our job to be a lookout or a watchman to warn others of judgment.

Jesus taught that we’ll all give an accounting of our lives—whether we lived unselfishly or greedily—whether pure thoughts or lust dominate our lives— whether anger or love control us—whether we glorify our Creator.

Jesus wants us to go a step further.

He sent us his disciples out with this message:

“Go teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all I have commanded you.”

We’re responsible for warning others that God holds them accountable and telling them that they need to believe in Jesus, change their lives, be baptized for the remission of their sins, and await Jesus’ return from heaven.

He never told us to change the world; only to warn folks that they must account to God.

“Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself. . . Be saved from this perverse generation!” **Acts 2:38-40 NASB.**

God doesn’t want anyone to perish. He wants all people to change and accept his love in Christ.

God holds you and me accountable for participating in His rescue operation.

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