

January 10, 2021

Sunday Evening Service

Series: 1 Thessalonians

Community Baptist Church

643 S. Suber Road

Greer, SC 29650

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CONCERNING BROTHERLY LOVE

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

On occasion I still hear Dionne Warwick singing Jackie DeShannon's hit song from 1966, *What the World Needs Now is Love*. The opening lines go like this:

What the world needs now, is love sweet love.

It's the only thing there is just too little of.

What the world needs now, is love sweet love.

No not just for some, but for everyone.

I hear the song in the grocery store, the elevator, and generally the kinds of places older people frequent. If you have watched or listened to any news casts this week, you should probably agree with the sentiment of that song.

Of course, the debate has been and continues to question the definition of love, the right expression of love, the actual recipients of love. It's easy to say that we need to love everyone. A lot of public speakers and writers of blogs and books have been saying trite things like that for decades. But nothing seems to change. Probably almost everyone who talks about the need for love has some group of people or a person in their mind who is not going to qualify as a recipient of love.

What does God expect from His people? The story is told of a time when the famous Archbishop Usher was shipwrecked off the coast of Ireland. Having no provision, wet, wearied, and disheveled, he finally stumbled upon the cottage of minister. The cleric was obviously suspicious of this dirty man in tattered clothes who claimed to be a bishop and was reticent to offer help. The minister decided to offer a simple test to reveal the legitimacy of the man's claim or disprove it. He asked, "How many commandments are there." Usher

replied, "There are eleven." The minister was quite sure he had just proved his point and, with satisfaction, replied, "No, there are only ten." Usher then asked for a Bible to give him opportunity to prove his point. He opened the Bible to John 13:34 and read the words of Jesus, "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another*" (John 13:34). The minister was quick to get the point and offered the Archbishop all he needed to be comfortable.

The Lord's stated mark of identification is expected in all of His followers. In this letter to brand new Christians, Paul pointed out that God had already taught them to love each other. But also challenged them to increase the expressions of that love. It should be quite clear to us that we all have room to improve in this very important characteristic of Christ followers.

Love Commended (vv.9-10a).

God teaches us to love. Paul taught that when he wrote, *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* (v.9). A statement like that is bound to generate some questions. First, we need to check the context and realize that these words follow immediately after Paul's reminder that he and the team had instructed the believers about living for God's glory. They had received from them how they ought to live to please God (4:1). They knew the instruction Paul and the team gave through the Lord Jesus (4:2).

Okay, then why was it not necessary to instruct about brotherly love also? It is pretty clear that Paul said, *You have no need for anyone to write to you concerning brotherly love*.

Actually, it was necessary and that is exactly what Paul was doing. This is a good example of the literary device called *paralipsis* which emphasizes a thought by professing to say little or nothing about a subject. Paul gave another example of this when he wrote to his friend Philemon: *I, Paul, write this with my own hand: I will repay it – to say nothing of your owing me even your own self* (Philemon 1:19). Saying that Philemon should not charge Paul for keeping Onesimus for a while is exactly what Paul was saying.

Therefore, in our text, we learn that it really is important for us to be instructed about brotherly love. Brotherly love is the Greek word *philadelphia* which in pre-Christian times referred almost exclusively to love for one's siblings. However, God used the word in the New Testament to describe the very important trait He expects us to show each other. For the most part, it is not a love as intense as agape that willingly sacrifices in order to help others gain what is best (i.e. becoming like Christ). Which love, by the way, Jesus also requires of His followers – the same love He demonstrates to us. He taught, “*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another*” (John 13:34).

Brotherly love is an affection expressed by a genuine concern for fellow Christians. While not as strong or deep or costly as *agape*, this genuine affection motivates us to help, encourage, strengthen, build up our fellow Christians. The most obvious distinction between the two loves is when Jesus restored Peter who could easily admit that he held affection for Jesus but not the supreme love that is willing to sacrifice (John 21:15-25).

That they were taught by God on this matter leads us to another question. How and when did God already teach them? The term *taught by God* presupposes an existing relationship with the teacher, who in this case is God. That relationship is established at salvation when God indwells us in the person of the Holy Spirit (4:8). The same truth shows up in the letter to Christians in Rome. *And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us (Romans 5:5).*

Apart from the indwelling Holy Spirit, we are not taught God's truths from Scripture. *And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned (1 Corinthians 2:13-14).*

Intellectually astute people can read the Bible and understand the meaning of the words. But without the Holy Spirit's teaching us,

we can never understand how Bible principle works in life, how it changes us to be like Christ. It is the case for us as it was for the Christians in Thessalonica: By the Holy Spirit's ministry we are “taught by God.” Jesus promised, “*But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you*” (John 14:26). Teaching us is the ministry of God the Holy Spirit.

He teaches us to love one another. It is a critical part of our testimony because love is an outward manifestation of an inward reality. In our culture, professions about following Christ are sickeningly abundant. It is actually disheartening to see all the outward displays of having some kind of feeling about Christ. Some people wear cross jewelry but have never been sorry that their sins hung Jesus on the cross. Some wear the “fish” pin, or display the fish on a bumper sticker but are consumed with self-love. Many religious people post Christian kind of statements with beautiful backgrounds and pleasant (sometimes) music on social media.

But Jesus already taught us concerning the most accurate outward display of the inward reality. “*By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another*” (John 13:35). We are Christ's disciples because God pours His love into the heart of each person to whom He gives eternal life. Because His love is within, there will be manifestations of it without. How many times have you watched a young couple's affection for each other grow? At first you notice they talk to each other once in awhile. Then they begin talking more frequently. Then you begin to see them together a lot. By that point you might be tempted to ask them, “Hey, is something going on between you guys?” When the affection is on the inside, there will be signs of it on the outside.

That is why God's people do show love. *For that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia* (v.10). Obviously, the Thessalonians practiced love. Very quickly they became an example of believers all through the region (1:7,8). That doesn't mean that they suddenly gained a reputation for quoting the Bible, or singing the right songs, or wearing the right apparel. Rather, brotherly love is what they were doing. They were showing concern for, encouraging, building up, stirring up to love and good works, to ALL the other Christians in Macedonia. It must have been pretty

impressive to make such an impact that Paul heard about it while he was in Corinth.

And we too love, right? Maybe. Sometimes. Maybe not. Too often professing Christians are so busy doing whatever it is they do that they don't have time to show concern for others. Sometimes we are under intense pressure to demonstrate love that we are not convinced is really an expression of love. These days we face great pressure to tolerate outright sin and claim it is "loving the brothers." You live in an age where if you, serving as any kind of authority whatsoever, say, "No," you are not only unloving, you are oppressive and maybe even abusive. There is no way possible that many people in our society can even process the idea that the word "No" is an expression of love.

Then, too, we can struggle with the uncertainty of how to maintain boundaries of propriety and still show Christian love. It is very obvious that Paul and his team showed brotherly love for Priscilla, Lydia, Phoebe, Mary, Junia and other women mentioned in Paul's letters. And surely the *philadelphia* was reciprocated. But sometimes such relationships get awkward or sketchy.

Furthermore, we may not show love the way we should because brotherly love makes us vulnerable to hurt and emotional pain. We show concern, we try to encourage, we attempt to build up, all of which requires time and energy. And then we are attacked or suddenly rejected for reasons that are never articulated. It is easier to just crawl in a hole and commune with God. Worse is the number of professing Christians who never even try to show concern for others.

Love Recommended (vv.10b-12).

Love is practical and that practical love ought to be growing. *But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more (v.10b).* The verb translated "urge" is that familiar Greek word that means "to call alongside, to encourage." The present tense indicates that this is a necessary and ongoing challenge. It is great to show concern for fellow Christians, but . . . we need to build, increase, do it more and more.

"More and more" is one of Paul's favorite expressions for progressive sanctification. We need to live to please God more and

more (4:1). We need to love each other more and more (4:10). Our love needs to abound more and more (Philippians 1:9). Conversely, Paul also warned that irreverent babble leads people into more and more ungodliness (2 Timothy 2:16).

The desire for others to grow to love more and more leads to this question: "How do we do that?" Or we might wonder how we are to know if we are having more and more love for fellow Christians? The answer is that it is obvious. Growing love is clear, plain, and standing out for all to see. We express it in typical daily relationships. The direct object of growing more and more is *to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you (v.11).*

In this verse we find three statements that describe ordinary life: Aspire to live quietly; Mind your own business; Work. Why did Paul suddenly switch directions of thought without warning? He was teaching about brotherly love and now suddenly he challenged us about minding our own business and being diligent. Paul didn't switch trains of thought. How we live in everyday life is the expression of our brotherly love.

Love is not always a matter of you taking the initiative to provide what others need. Yes, that is an expression of love. But you taking responsibility not to become an unnecessary burden to others is also a way to show concern for others. This is one of the most neglected, common-sense principles in our culture. And when we neglect personal responsibility, it causes unnecessary tension. For example, are you ever made to feel guilty because you are expected to feel the burden to take care of a person who refuses to act responsibly? That is the mantra of our society. But which is the greater expression of love, to give a person a loaf of bread or teach him how to bake? Baking a loaf of bread requires personal responsibility. God teaches that we show love by learning how to bake bread so that we have a loaf to give to someone who is needy due to circumstances beyond their control.

We each need to bear our own burdens because there are times when people are forced into circumstances beyond their control and we all need to be in a position to help the truly needy. People suffering physically or materially from the pandemic or people in

Croatia who have lost possessions and opportunity to work are truly needy. That is to show brotherly love.

But we know from experience that if we offer admonitions toward personal responsibility, we will likely be rebuffed and ignored in a “life is about me” kind of culture. “Life is about me” is the exact opposite of brotherly love. That is why professing Christians need to increase in brotherly love more and more.

The fact that Paul was compelled by the Holy Spirit to repeat this instruction indicates there might have been a problem in this area. *For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living (2 Thessalonians 3:7-12).*

Finally, God teaches us that love is proper. We need to learn to show love by exercising personal responsibility, *so that you may live properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one* (v.12). The Bible defines proper living. Throwing money at a problem is not an expression of love. Tolerating someone’s sin is not an expression of love. Withholding good advice or instruction because you don’t want to make someone feel poorly is not an expression of love.

If you discovered on a dark and stormy night that a bridge over a creek on a country road had washed away, what would love compel you to do? You would not back up and go a different direction without offering a warning. If you have love for people traveling that road, you would position yourself up the road beyond the bridge in order to stop people and warn them. If the people respond angrily to your warning, they are foolish. That is the picture of the Christian life.

We live in a balance of dependence and independence. We must depend wholly, completely on God as He provides grace to live each day. It is good for us to depend on others to work like iron that

sharpens iron in our lives. It is also good for us to be self-disciplined and to bear our own burdens so that we do not cause unnecessary burdens to others.

Brotherly love is a critically important practice for each of us. No one is exempt from showing it and learning to show it more and more. Genuine concern for others does not mean that we tolerate sin and rebellion. Genuine concern desires to help make others more like Christ. And genuine concern is accepting of the help of others. Brotherly love is a wonderful two-way street that walks a balanced line between depending on God, depending on others, and yet not becoming a burden to others unnecessarily.