

You're in the grocery store, walking down the aisle with all the breakfast items... because the next item on your list - is pancake syrup. ...Several choices are presented to you... Hungry Jack (\$3.00)... Aunt Jemimah (\$3.25)... and then there are the store's generic labels (around the \$2.50 range.) But then you notice a tiny bottle on the top shelf that has a \$9.00 price tag on it. The label says "pure maple syrup." You glance up at the tiny \$7 bottle of pure maple syrup on the top shelf. ...You briefly think about it... but you know that your spouse would frown and say in a scolding tone — *Seriously? ...in this economy?* — so you grab the larger \$3 bottle of Hungry Jack.

I am sure you all know why the real stuff is so pricy. ... It is produced through a slow and painstaking process...called "maple sugaring."

It is usually somewhere in the New England states... that workers venture deep into the woods (called the "sugar bush") and use hand drills to make small holes in the trunks of maple trees. ... A metal tube called a "spile" is tapped into each hole... and a bucket is hung on each spile. The sap that begins to drip into the buckets is thin and clear... like water... with only a hint of sweetness. ... On a good day... 50 trees will yield **30 - 40 gallons** of sap.

Next... the buckets are emptied into large kettles that sit over an open fire. The sap comes to a slow boil. As it boils... its water content is reduced and its sugars are concentrated. ... Several hours later... it has developed a rich flavor and turned golden-brown in color. Then it must be strained several times to remove impurities before being reheated... bottled... and

graded for quality. ... But here is the clencher: The end product of those 30 - 40 gallons of sap is only one gallon of maple syrup at the end. The (seemingly inefficient)... long process of maple sugaring... is why the tiny (and expensive) bottle on the top shelf... is so distinguished from all other bottles of cheap imitations.

When we came to Christ... like raw... unfinished sap... we could have been tossed aside as worthless. ... But God knew what He could make of us. ... He sought and found us... and His skillful hands are transforming us (over through fire) into something precious... sweet and useful. ... The long and often painful refining process brings forth a pure... genuine disciple... that is easily distinguished from cheap imitations.

Are you...? ... Are you easily distinguished from cheap imitation Christians... whose lives appear “good,” “moral,” and “wholesome”...?

Last week’s passage began our discussion (that we will continue today) about being “distinguished.” ... Being distinct... (set apart - being different than others)... is another way of saying “holy”... and “sanctification.” This is something entirely different than being able to say “*I am better than most.*”

1 Thes 4:1-3

Now don’t worry. Last week was the sermon on sex. But I do hope that you are not simply asking God to clean out the cobwebs in your life... but that you have gone about the business of killing spiders! ... Put out of your life the little compromises of an impure thought life. Remove yourself from

your areas of temptation. (For more help on that... please go hear last week's message online.)

Today... we will be considering how God is making us holy (or - distinguished) from others in our society... and becoming so – **more and more**... in a different area of our life. Last week it was sexual purity. Today's distinction is to be so... in your exercise of “filia.” (Some of you recognize that Greek word.) It means “brotherly love.” ... God wants these two areas of our life (sexual purity and brotherly love) to be a unique (much different looking) characteristic that sets us apart from the rest of the world.

Turning now to today's characteristic: Showing love to others – is **this** something you need to grow in...? Are you easily distinguished from cheap imitations...? ... Let me ask you a question that just might be an indicator.

Think back to the last time you had to call customer service for an issue you had with a product... and you had to strain your ears to understand through a heavy foreign accent. ... Were you as tolerant to that minimum wage worker (who was probably - barely making enough money to feed his family) – as Jesus would want you to be? ... Ouch! That hurts... doesn't it?

When all we want is to fix our product... we don't want to have to put out the extra effort that it takes to understand what they are telling us. Our brains are lazy. ... (Perhaps I should speak for myself.) My brain prefers the path of least resistance in getting my problem solved. ... (I am NOT proud to say this)... but I prefer convenience – to showing the love and patience that Christ wants as a distinction in my life. ... And if I am the

only one who needs to grow in this... then bear with me as I preach to myself today.

Are you willing to be inconvenienced – in order to love others the way Christ expects us to...? ... Loving others is inconvenient... isn't it? And it doesn't make it any easier if we primarily focus our efforts on those who are inside the church (our fellow believers.) ... Having a distinguished brotherly love is our topic today.

1 Thes 4:9-10

Interesting... isn't it...? Paul starts off by saying “*no one needs to write you about brotherly love... because you are already doing it...*” ... But then Paul continues with: “*do this more and more...*” ... You might ask: “*Hey Paul... if no one needed to write them about it... why is it that you do so...? Why did you turn around **and write them about it?***”

Paul did not need to write and tell them to love one another... but he did need to write and urge them to do this **more and more**. ... The evidence that they had learned the lesson of brotherly love was their deep... selfless... giving affection for Christians in others parts of their province of **Macedonia**. ... These were their neighbors in Philippi, Berea, and perhaps other towns where Christians lived.

As we work through this passage today... we are going to discover that there was a delicate situation among them... that I think every church faces from time to time. We certainly have. This was a problem that Paul needed to confront. ... It was affecting all the believers... but not all the believers needed to be confronted. ... And what we will see Paul do... is that he will couch his confrontation within the context of what the

Thessalonians – as a whole - were doing well. (Which is what we have already seen - in verses 9 and 10 – Paul already start to do.)

He did not need to teach them about brotherly love (in large part) – however there was one application of it... for which some of the members needed to be exhorted. “*You have room for improvement – specifically in this one area... There is a situation that needs to stop!*”

We will get to that situation in a moment... but first... let’s take a closer look at the astounding thing that Paul commends them for... in these first two verses.

The two words most used for love are *philia* and *agape*... and both of them are found in Verse 9. *Philia* love is the love of deep affection... such as in the strongest friendships... or even marriage. ... But *agape* love is the love God shows toward us. It is a supernatural love that is not simply based on feeling. ... It is expressed in our wills. Agape love treats others as God would treat them - regardless of feelings or personal preferences.

So... when Paul uses both *philia* and *agape* in verse 9... he is saying: “As for brotherly love... you don’t need to be taught... because you are ‘*theo-did-doc-toy*’.” (That means: ‘*God-taught ones.*’) That’s kind of cool... isn’t it? But here is what else verse 9 says: “You are *theo-did-doc-toy*’ about agape love – (the supernatural one)... not a love that is based on feelings... or personal preferences.”

Nobody had to teach the Thessalonians to love with agape love! God Himself taught them that behavior. Loving in this manner is proof that you have been born again and now possess the divine nature.

But let's consider this intriguing concept of being *theo-did-doc-toy*' ("God-taught") concerning agape love. How does God teach this to believers?

Of course God had taught his people in the Old Testament to love their neighbor... and Jesus had given His disciples a 'new command' to 'love one another'. ... But Paul's reference seems to be referring to what the Old Testament prophets had predicted. The prophets had promised that in the Messianic age... all God's people would receive the Spirit... be 'taught by the Lord' and know Him... and in the New Testament it was believed that this promise had been fulfilled.

God actually teaches believers today... how we are to love. He works within our hearts. ... He stirs us into action.

Philippians 2:13 (ESV)

¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

One of the ways He will do that is by arousing a loving thought within our mind. He flashes the thought across our minds... He pinpoints a specific loving action that He wants us to do – especially in loving our fellow believers.

But you know... as well as I do... what often happens when we get these thoughts. *"Naaah! I cant do that! It's too risky. I might run out of resources that I need for myself... .. I might be rejected... or misunderstood... or I might be taken advantage of... in the future!..."*

But God is saying in today's passage that "*more and more*" – we need to grab hold of those thoughts that God gives to us. We need to respond "*more and more*" to the stirring He puts in our heart. And I hope that you

make it a regular part of your life to ask God to make you a better discerner of what His voice sounds like. Pray for His voice recognition.

But don't be surprised if God purposely leads you to a situation where you will experience a difficulty with another believer. (You see)... He will be teaching you to love that brother or sister. ... He will give you opportunities of inconvenience for you to grow in your love. ... Yes... we are '*theo-did-doc-toy*'. ('*God-taught ones*.') He is teaching us to treat others as **He** (Himself) would treat them – love - regardless of feelings... or personal preferences.

And... I believe what we are talking about here... is a litmus test for whether or not you are a genuine believer. Is God teaching inconvenient selfless agape love in you? Do you love others – especially your fellow Christians...? Are you growing in it...?

1 John 4:7-8 (ESV)

⁷ Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. ⁸ Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

Paul encourages the Thessalonians (in verse 9 of our passage) that since they are *theo-did-doc-toy* about **agape** love... they need to exercise "brotherly love" toward other church members. ... Paul also wrote to the Galatian church...

Galatians 6:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.

The greatest threat to any church... is that of internal strife and divisiveness. It happens when there is no philia... (brotherly love.) ...

Nothing destroys the ministry of a church quicker than: criticism... grumbling... murmuring... gossiping... selfishness... cliquishness... and ambitiousness. All of these are signs that there is no philia.

No matter how much philia is here in our church... there will always be a need for more. Notice how Paul pointed out that the Thessalonian believers were famous for their love – not only in their own church... but also throughout the district of Macedonia! And yet Paul asked for them to grow even more in it.

As I mentioned earlier... Paul saw a particular application of brotherly love... which he had in mind... that they were to excel in... still more. Some (in that church) were not as loving as they should have been. (From time to time... we have also had to deal with this... and we need to be ready to address it... whenever it may come up again.) We are now ready to see what that is.

1 Thes 4:11-12

A certain group of believers in the church needed some warning. Apparently... some of the Thessalonian Christians had adopted a life of idleness. They were depending on others for handouts. The problem seems rather severe – because Paul admonished them again... when he closed the letter...

1 Thessalonians 5:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ *And we urge you, brothers, **admonish the idle**, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.*

It is important (I think) to use another Greek word here... because it will help you understand the problem that Paul is addressing. In 1 Thes 5:14... Paul writes: “*admonish the ‘atok-toy’.*” They are to be warned

(admonished) – not helped... not assisted... not given what they were asking for. This group of people... who Paul calls the *atok-toy* did the exact opposite of *philia*. These disruptively idle people were taking advantage of those who were showing *philia*.

In classical Greek the word *atok-tos* was applied to an army in disarray... and to undisciplined soldiers... who either broke rank instead of marching properly... or were insubordinate. ... It then came to describe *any kind of irregular or undisciplined behavior*.

The *atok-toy* that Paul is addressing in the Thessalonian church had given up their work and needed to be exhorted to go back to it. ... It still seems probable that the *atok-toy* had misunderstood Paul's teaching about the Second-coming of Christ... and had stopped working... in the mistaken belief that they did not need to continue in all things until He returns.

This was such a problem... that Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians was not enough to correct the matter. The *atok-toy* (the disruptive idle) did not stop. So Paul got even **stronger** in his second letter to them.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-12 (ESV)

⁶ Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, ⁸ 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. ⁹ It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. ¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. ¹¹ 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.

Every now and then... a church like ours will experience some atok-toy. They take advantage of the loving nature of our church. We love to help people who have **genuine** need. It is great to watch the love that God is teaching us being expressed. ... But when the atok-toy come... they exhaust the willingness of the church to show brotherly love. The disruptive idle will suck the loving nature right out of any caring church.

Therefore the elders... the deacons... and I... have followed our instruction here in 1st and 2nd Thessalonians... on occasion. We have had frank discussions with atok-toy. And the response is usually fairly predictable: *“You are not being a good Christian... because you told me ‘No!’”*

But Paul instructs us to **admonish** the atok-toy. They threaten to destroy the brotherly love in the church. Eventually the loving people get worn out. They stop being loving – even when legitimate needs arise.

But we are to admonish the atok-toy for being a bad testimony for Christ. A free-loader presents a bad image of what being a Christian is. So we need to take them to the passage we are studying today.

Verse 11... we need to admonish them to aspire to live quietly. That means “avoid unnecessary contention... do not intrude on the lives of others by becoming a burden to them. Stop disrupting the lives of others by being atok-toy...”

Next... according to verse 11... we should admonish them to mind their own affairs. Busy yourself with your own work... so that you don’t have to

depend on others for sustenance. Paul finally say (bluntly) “*work with your own hands.*”

Why...? Because of verse 12...

1 Thes 4:12

Your testimony to those outside the church is at stake. You are being watched... and it is a poor testimony. ... You have been commissioned by Christ to be a light in a dark world!

But verse 12 is NOT just for the atok-toy. It is the reason we need to give serious attention to all that is written in this week’s and last week’s passages.

Christian... you and I must always bear in mind the impact of our conduct on those who are outside the faith. We need to keep in mind that we are Christ’s ambassadors. We are His ambassadors – even to the phone rep who does not speak good English.

We need to live a holy life... a distinctive life... one that has sexual purity.

We need to live a holy life... a distinctive life... one that loves others (especially fellow believers.)

We need to live a holy life... a distinctive life... one that works with his own hands... not stirring up unnecessary contention by taking advantage of loving Christians.

When unsaved people see Christ magnified in this kind of a life... they will either oppose it... or envy it with a desire to have it for themselves. Either way... God is glorified.

Is your life distinctive enough in these three areas...? Can an unbeliever look at you and say: “*There is something different...*”?

Richard S. Halverson (the former U.S. Senate Chaplain) used to challenge people with the following image:

You're going to meet an old man [or woman] someday down the road—ten, thirty, fifty years from now—waiting there for you. You'll be catching up with him [or her]. What kind of old man are you going to meet? He may be a seasoned, soft, gracious fellow—a gentleman who has grown old gracefully, surrounded by hosts of friends, friends who call him blessed because of what his life has meant to them. Or he may be a bitter, disillusioned, dried-up old buzzard without a good word for anyone—soured, friendless, and alone.

That old man will be you. He'll be the composite of everything you do, say, and think—today and tomorrow. His mind will see the man from a mold you have made by your beliefs. His heart will be turning out what you've been putting into it. Every little thought, every deed goes into this old man.

Every day in every way you are becoming more and more like yourself. Amazing but true. You're beginning to look more like yourself, think more like yourself, and talk more like yourself. You're becoming yourself more and more. Live only in terms of what you're getting out of life and the old man gets smaller drier harder crabbiere more self-centered. Open your life to others, think in terms of what you can give, your contribution to life, and the old man grows larger, softer, kindlier, and greater.