

Message #10

I Thessalonians 4:9-12

When one reads the Scriptures, there is absolutely no doubt that one of the responsibilities we have toward one another is to have “brotherly love.” Hebrews 13:1 says, “Let brotherly love continue.” I John 3:14 says, “we know that we have passed out of death into life because we love the brothers.” II Peter 1:7 says that we are to add brotherly love to brotherly kindness. So it is clear that we do have a responsibility in this Grace Age to maintain brotherly love. But the real question is, “What is it?” What is brotherly love? Is brotherly love a love of total toleration? Is brotherly love a love of total acceptance? What exactly is brotherly love?

We get one clue in observing that **verse 9** begins with a conjunction “now” (δε). This is a very sharp contrasting conjunction that sits in direct contrast to the pagan lust which pursues immorality.

So we could conclude that the love that is to be demonstrated by Christians for one another is totally and completely different than the love demonstrated by the lost world that is given over to immoral things. If we love our brother, we will not be immoral with another person’s mate. That certainly is part of this, but there is more and in this text Paul develops that for the Thessalonians. What Paul says here is this:

BELIEVERS ARE TO DEMONSTRATE A BROTHERLY LOVE FOR ONE ANOTHER AND THAT LOVE MANIFESTS ITSELF IN SOME VERY SPECIFIC WAYS.

Now as we have seen, in Greek there are various words that may be translated “love.” There is erotic love (ερος), family love (στοργη), friendship love (φιλια) and brotherly love (φιλαδελφος). It is the “brotherly love” (φιλαδελφος) word that is used here.

Now the actual word “brotherly love” comes from two Greek words put together. One is the noun “brother” (αδελφος), which refers to another brother or sister in Christ. The second is the prefix “love” (φιλια) that refers to a friendship-type of love for a brother or sister in Christ. Now it is clear by using the word “brotherly love” and the words “love one another” in the same verse, that God is after a very specific kind of love in the church.

The specific kind of love that he wants demonstrated is agape (αγαπη), which is God’s love. This is the kind of love that God wants us to have for one another in the church. It is the highest kind of love that one may have.

One of the great little epistles of Scripture that discusses this kind of love is II John. In fact, in that letter John says that we are to have a love for one another, just as Paul says here. But John is very careful to qualify this kind of love. **This kind of love is always based on truth (II John 1) and has a serious dedication to the Word of God (II John 6).**

So loving a brother or sister in Christ at an agape level means that you carefully think through the Scriptures and relate to that person or situation in a way that is consistent with what God reveals. This kind of love relates to others in both word and action. That is what agape love actually is.

Let me give one biblical example of this which comes from I John 3:17. If we were at church and we were blessed by God with a lot of “worldly goods” and we saw a brother or sister who had a real “need,” then the biblical thing to do would be to reach out and help the brother or sister. Now remember everything is based on truth. So this would be a real need. We are not talking about helping someone who has thousands of dollars in the bank. But if we knew it was a real need, we would have the responsibility to do what we can to meet the need.

Now I want us to notice how Paul begins this section. In **I Thessalonians 4:9**, he begins by saying now concerning this specific kind of love, “brotherly love,” you do not have need that any one write you about the necessity of it. What does that mean? If they did not need someone to write to them about it, why is Paul writing about it?

The answer to this question is found by the two conjunctions “for” (γάρ) which follows the statement. One is in **verse 9** and the other is in **verse 10**. This explains what Paul means. What Paul means is that I don’t have to write to challenge you to pursue a brotherly type of love for two main reasons:

(Reason #1) - Because you have been taught by God to love each other with this love (**4:9b**).

Now carefully notice what the purpose of writing is: “teaching.” **The purpose of the written Scriptures is to teach us God’s truth.** The goal of the church is supposed to be to teach the written Scriptures so people may learn what they actually say.

When Paul says you have been “God-taught,” what he means is that the moment these Thessalonians believed, God put within them to love one another in a brotherly, agape love kind of way. As we will see, this is a specific love, not some sloppy-type love.

(Reason #2) - Because you have demonstrated that love to all the brothers in Macedonia. (**4:10**)

From the moment they trusted Christ, they became the premier example of a church who loved the Word of God and one another in that context.

Paul had no need to write just to challenge them to love this way. **However, what he did need to do was to write about this kind of love and refine and develop their understanding of it.** Paul wanted them to “excel” in their demonstration of brotherly love. He wanted them to super-abound in demonstrating brotherly love and in order to do that there were three stipulations.

Now before we look at the stipulations, notice how this subject begins in **verse 11**: “make it your ambition.” Now this is an interesting word (φιλοτιμεομαι). This particular word means to be very ambitious to seek after love at an honorable level (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 471).

So the stipulations that Paul develops are necessary stipulations if we are to super-abound in brotherly, agape love.

STIPULATION #1 – Brotherly love seeks to live and lead a quiet life. **4:11a**

This word means that real brotherly agape love seeks to live a quiet, silent life as opposed to a loud, obnoxious life (*Ibid.*, p. 201). Spiritual people are quiet people. They are not loud, they are loving.

I love something Dr. John Walvoord said: “Many people, especially in our modern world of cell phones, text messages, twitter, and emails, are too busy and frantic in life to have time to slow down and love others. Our culture of busyness and overload is not conducive to growing love. Stop and think about it—how often do you feel loved by an excessively busy, restless person?” (*I & II Thessalonians*, p. 62).

There are some people who are loud train wrecks. Every time you see them coming you cringe. You know they are going to run their mouths and you will not be able to quiet them down. One of the greatest needs in the church today is the need to teach God’s people to be quiet. Sometimes you would just like to say, will you please shut up. Mouthiness is not the mark of spirituality, quietness is.

J. Vernon McGee told the story of a woman who ran into a religious leader who asked her if she would be interested in speaking in tongues. The wise woman of God said, “I am interested in losing about 40 feet off the tongue I have in my mouth right now.” She was not interested in speaking more, but speaking less and quieting down. That is the way it should be for one who really wants to please God.

STIPULATION #2 – Brotherly love seeks to mind one’s own business. **4:11b**

That word “attend” (πρασσω) means to focus your mind on what you are doing. The emphasis is on our own life, our own performance, our own business, and our own accomplishments (*Ibid.*, p. 376). In other words, one of the best ways to love a brother or sister is to mind our own business and work on our own life.

The real danger with some people in the church is that they are more interested in minding someone else’s business than their own business. Biblical love is not interested in meddling in someone else’s business. God wants his people keeping their noses out of other people’s business. Frankly, God never wants people in his church to be a bunch of busybodies always trying to find out everything that is happening in a person’s life.

Now let's keep in mind that Paul is actually saying this in a context that has to do with moral and immoral behavior. He had addressed the subject of defrauding a brother by being involved in adultery. He believed that the sufficient motivating factor that would prevent this was the warning that God will avenge those who do it. He did not believe that the church was to be a busybody Gestapo that followed people around always spying on them. When a sin issue occurs that is not handled properly, God will surface it. It is not our job to pry into other people's business.

Many years ago, there was a major movement called "Promise Keepers" that got caught in a major focus on what they called accountability. They promoted the idea that men ought to get together at meetings and hold each other accountable. When I first learned about this I thought it was weird. Well a man who was at one time in our church had relocated and he went to one of these accountability sessions. He said at those sessions they started asking strange questions about different kinds of things. One of the questions had to do with intimacy with your mate. He said, "I got up and walked out."

Now you may think that you really love someone by nosing into their business, but God's Word does not say that. God's Word says just the opposite. Brotherly love minds your own business and seeks to stay out of other's business.

Frankly, it is appalling when some people are always sticking their nose into other people's business, as if they have to be in the know.

We should strive to mind our own business. Don't you have enough to work on in your own life? Do you really think when you get before God, you will hear Him say well done because you invested your life sticking your nose into other people's business? I don't think so.

STIPULATION #3 – Brotherly love seeks to be self-supporting. **4:11c**

God-honoring people are not moochers, they are hard workers. God-honoring people work hard at what they do so they may earn an honest living and pay their own way. They don't want to be a drain on someone.

It is a great demonstration of brotherly love to work hard yourself. The idea of "working with your own hands" is the idea of each person doing whatever work he has himself. No matter what your job, you do have to use your hands. If it is a physical labor job, you have to use your own hands to build or do your work. If it is a clerical job, you have to use your hands to record data. If it is a factory job, you have to use your hands to run machines. The point is a person who loves properly works hard at his job.

Now the Apostle Paul, who is writing this epistle, is writing this at a very early stage in his apostolic career. He would eventually be supported full-time, but at the time he wrote this, there were times he had to literally use his hands to make tents.

Sometimes he would get to a city and run out of funds. When he did, he did not write a bunch of deputation letters trying to generate support from the Christian community; he went to work with what he knew he could do. He earned money to keep going by making tents.

There are some believers who are perfectly content to not work, but to be on welfare. They know how to work the system. These believers are not going to get before God and have Him say, "Well done good and faithful servant." Many people live by the code of let's see how little I can do to gain as much as I can. That does not demonstrate brotherly love. It is not the mark of brotherly love to make people give me what they have worked hard to earn themselves.

Now it would appear from I Thessalonians 5:14 and II Thessalonians 3:6-12 that some of the brothers in Thessalonica had a problem with this issue. It is possible that they were so focused on the coming of Christ that they didn't think they even needed to work hard at any job. They were becoming a Christian parasite on other believers. Paul says if you are a Christian parasite, you do not love the brothers the way you should. There are three reasons to be hard workers:

Reason #1 - Because this is an apostolic command. **4:11b**

We now come to another one of those Grace Age commands. One is to stay away from immorality and the other is not to stay away from work. We need to be people who work for a living and do our jobs to the glory of God.

Reason #2 - Because this demonstrates proper behavior to outsiders. **4:12a**

The lost world is not impressed with a bunch of Christians who do not pay their bills or do not work hard at their jobs. The lost world is not impressed by a bunch of emotional hype or religious extremism.

The lost world is impressed by a Christian who works hard and does good honest business with people. The lost world is impressed with Christians who pay their bills on time and live their lives with business integrity.

One thing that has always rubbed me the wrong way are ministers who go into a business and ask if they can have a clergy discount. There is a motel chain that actually offers a free room to ministers who identify themselves as such. I will not ever ask for some clergy discount because I don't think it is fair to the business. When the outside world sees that we work and we pay our own way, it makes a statement to them.

Reason #3 - Because this will eliminate any need. **4:12b**

Brotherly love and biblical sanctification is designed to affect every aspect of our lives. Our relationships with one another are to be relationships of integrity, not immorality.

Brotherly love leads a quiet life, minds one's own business and does one's own work. The greatest example of love is Jesus Christ. Think what He has done for us and think how He puts up with us.