

*1 Thessalonians 4:9-12***PREFACE**

One word—the word that begins v13 in most of our translations (except for NIV)—sent me in search of a way to tie together vv9-12, and vv13-18 in this second half of the fourth chapter. That word in the Greek is *de*, which is translated “But,” which can also mean “and,” “now” (NIV), “moreover,” “therefore,” etc. Since he included this word *de*—and most versions translate this as “but”—how and why, I wondered, does Paul transition from brotherly love in vv9-10 to the redeemed dead in v13? It is indeed a different topic, but since he stuck in a “but,” how does he connect the two?

What I came up with is encapsulated in the outline in the handout—which covers the text from v9 to v18 (so is applicable to the next two sessions).

[\[see handout\]](#)

vv9-10

In our passage today we once again have Paul both affirming the obedience of the Thessalonians—and encouraging them to “excel still more.” He did this earlier in this chapter regarding how they should “walk and please God.”

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1.

And now Paul does the same thing regarding brotherly love.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10.

Brotherly love [*philadelphia*], as adopted by the Christian church, describes the horizontal love believers have for one another. It traces back to *adelphos*, which is the word translated “brethren” in v1 of this chapter. This is a wonderfully descriptive term which means, literally, “from the same womb” and was adopted from the more literal secular speech by the early church fathers to describe the unique familial bond that exists in the church. Every believer is *in* Christ; every believer has the Holy Spirit within them. So we are so closely related, we could have come from the same womb. In fact, it has been my experience that at times our brothers and sisters in Christ can be *closer* than our blood kin.

Paul has already given evidence, earlier in this letter, that the Thessalonians require no lengthy admonition regarding the expression of brotherly love. They have already been demonstrating such love throughout the Macedonian region, and Paul has been hearing about it.

Sidebar: While it seems clear in this context that Paul refers here to love of the *Christian* brethren, the case could be made that he perhaps casts a wider net. Throughout the NT love of *adelphos* can refer to brothers and sisters in Christ, our neighbors, and even our enemies.

A note about the verb in the second part of v9

Both the NIV and ESV have “for you yourselves **have been** taught by God,” which would seem to refer back to Paul’s teaching of them while he was in their midst.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

"Have been" implies that this happened before—i.e., via the teaching of Paul—but may not be continuing (since he is now absent from them). The better verb here is "are," as in "for you yourselves **are** taught by God to love one another." This teaching is *continual* for all believers.

Lange: ...not merely, that is, historically, out of God's word in the Old Testament, or from Jesus' commandment of love (John 13), or through the prophets among you (1Th 5:20), but inwardly through the Holy Ghost (1Th 4:8).

Robert L. Thomas: At conversion, believers become lifelong pupils as the Spirit bears inner witness to the love within the Christian family. No external stimulus is necessary. Mutual love among Christians is an inbred quality.

How important is this? How important is this that we not just demonstrate but nurture this quality in our Christian walk? Answer: It is so important that Jesus *commands* us to do it.

Read John 13:33-35.

When Jesus returned to the Father, He left us not only the Holy Spirit, but each other—and we are to love each other as Jesus loves us. Beyond the benefit *within* His kingdom—mutual encouragement and affirmation—there is the external benefit that this behavior *identifies* those in His kingdom to those without.

What does this look like? How far are we to go with this brotherly love? Answer: We are to outdo each other in living out this commandment.

I am currently reading a biography of Julius Caesar by Philip Freeman. And in the book he quotes from an epitaph a Roman man wrote for his departed wife:

*I competed with you, my dear,
in devotion, virtue, frugality, and love—
but I always lost.
I wish everyone the same fate.*

That is how we are to love each other.

Read Romans 12:9-13.

The phrase "give preference," or "preferring one another" can also mean "*outdo one another in showing honor.*" We love each other by always placing the other person before ourselves; the good of the other is to always take precedence.

w11-12

In the next two verses Paul counsels the Thessalonians further regarding their witness to those outside the family of Christ. Not only are they to love each other in an extraordinary way, they are to show themselves as hard-working, responsible individuals. [Verse 11 is a continuation of the sentence that begins in the second half of v10.](#)

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:10b-12 in NASB, NKJV or ESV.

The evidence seems to indicate that, unlike Paul's admonition regarding brotherly love, this admonition spoke to a failing on the part of some in Thessalonica. Note in v11: "just as we commanded you." There seemed to be a problem of discipline in the Thessalonian church, one he addressed with greater fervency and detail in his second letter to them.

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12.

and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life

What does a quiet life look like? Paul isn't speaking of decibels or volume, but of a life of decency, dignity and humility.

Read Colossians 3:12-13.

Read Romans 12:16-18.

And remember what Jesus said about this in Luke 14:

And He began speaking a parable to the invited guests when He noticed how they had been picking out the places of honor at the table, saying to them, "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for someone more distinguished than you may have been invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this man,' and then in disgrace you proceed to occupy the last place. But when you are invited, go and recline at the last place, so that when the one who has invited you comes, he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher'; then you will have honor in the sight of all who are at the table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." (Luke 14:7-11)

There are any number of ways this can be applied to the life of a believer. A few that occur to me are

- be respectful of others
- don't always be the first to speak
- listen to and consider the opinions of others
- leave time for meditation and contemplation (especially of God's word)

attend to your own business and work with your hands ... as we commanded you,

There is an attractive, yet dangerous pitfall built into our service in the name of Christ—aka, "ministry." When one participates in any endeavor that accepts, even *invites* support from others, one is tempted to rest in that external support, and not carry one's own weight. Whether from laziness or, as might have been the case in Thessalonica, anticipation of the soon return of the Lord, we are not to be dependent on others.

Paul did not stop at commanding against this sort of behavior; he *modeled* it.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:9.

Read 2 Thessalonians 3:7-9.

attend to your own business

"Attend to your own business" does not just refer to labor, but includes the idea not to be busybodies, preoccupied with the lives of others. The two go hand in hand: idleness breeds mischief, whereas hard work leaves little time for idle gossip. This is not in conflict with the idea of brotherly love.

(F. F.?) Bruce: There is a great difference between the Christian duty of putting the interests of others first and the busybody's compulsive itch to put other people right.

...so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need (or be dependent on no one).

Notice how the *sphere* of this behavior is not sharply delimited: we are not to behave one way in the church, and another way in the world.

- Verses 9-10 speak of "brotherly love," and even if we restrict this to brothers and sisters in Christ, Jesus told us that this will be noticed, and have an effect on those *outside* the church.
- Verses 11-12 speak more to our daily life in the world, our interactions with people *not* in our spiritual family—but not exclusive to that. Within the family we are to have these character traits, and, once again, if we do, this speaks well of those who are in Christ to those without.

Both of these admonitions—brotherly love and industry—speak both to family life within the body of Christ, and to our witness to those outside the family.

CORRECTION

In part of **Session 15, our study of 1 Thessalonians 3:6-10**, I explained Paul's extraordinary concern—even fear—for the well-being of the Thessalonian church on the lack of evidence that that brand new church had any in-place leaders. No pastor, deacons, elders, etc. But this week I found some evidence I had missed before, so I need to make some adjustment to what I said at the time.

Near the end of this letter, in Chapter Five, Paul writes,

But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.
(1 Thessalonians 5:12-13a)

So even though it *was* a very young church, and because of this Paul still had reason to fear for their integrity, it would seem that there were indeed at least some resident leaders in-place.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:9-18

Verses 9-18 : The Living and the Dead

vv 9-12 : Our Relationship to the Living

vv 9-10 : Brotherly Love (giving to others)

vv11-12 : Discretion and self-reliance (not requiring help from others)

vv13-18 : Our Relationship to the Dead

vv13-14 : Though Dead, they are not Forgotten by God

v15 : They will see Jesus before we do

vv16-17 : This is how it will happen

v18: So be comforted by this

Sessions 20 & 21

