

September 17, 2023

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 ESV

9 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, *10* for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, *11* and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, *12* so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

Scriptures for further study:

John 1:12

Romans 12:5

Galatian 6:10

Ephesians 1:7

Ephesians 2:14-16

“The church assumed the function of a family, while the place of meeting, the house, served to reinforce the reality of Christians becoming members of the same brotherhood and sisterhood.”

-Gene Green

“While there is no evidence of grave division among the members of this church, as is the case with the Corinthians, it appears that the Thessalonians were properly aware of their own failings in the area of fraternal love.”

-Gene Green



Family

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

BIG IDEA: Since believers share the same household though not the same house, let our love for the body of Christ transcend boundaries.

OUTLINE

1. Our common household

2. Our uncommon response

“God has set believers within two families; but those families need each other. Churches need natural families, because they can show the church how to be a family; but natural families also need the church—no family can or should be spiritually self-sufficient. For this reason, churches should affirm natural families, but also encourage them to see themselves as part of the wider household of God...Every Christian of every age, whether married or single, needs to belong to a wider family of faith where spiritual brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts, and mothers and fathers, can share support, love, wisdom and accountability in true Christian community.”

-Harriet Connor

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

We’ve been looking at 1st Thessalonians over the last month, and we said that, in general, this letter was one of great thanksgiving. It is a cheerful letter. Paul wrote to express his joy and gratitude, perceiving that the church in Thessalonica seemed to flourish spiritually. We have looked at spiritual health and how Christ was the means and motivation of their growth in grace. Most scholars believe that the Thessalonians wrote a letter to Paul first. In that letter, they had some areas of concern they wanted him to address and clear up for them. And one of those matters is brought up here in our passage. It is about fraternal love or family dynamics within the church.

Praise to Jesus. Praise God that in and through the work of Jesus, you have been called into a spiritual family that transcends physical and temporal boundaries. Praise God that you have been brought into a kingdom and an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fail. You can also praise God for knowing the epitome of agape love in Jesus.

Repentance through Jesus. Confess the many ways that your love towards others is more self-seeking instead of self-giving. Confess that your love for our brothers and sisters in Christ is often weak and lethargic. Confess that you have a shallow view of your calling to a spiritual family.

Consecration for Jesus. Rededicate yourself to agape love out of your fullness in Jesus, which compels your heart to bless others for their sake only. Rededicate yourself to the local spiritual family that God has called you into by expressing love for that family through devotion to being present and serving alongside them.

DISCIPLESHIP DURING THE WEEK

These "Sermon Discussion Questions" are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. *Grasping the Big Idea.* Is there a television show family or movie about a family that you can identify with? What about the fictional depiction resonates with you?

2. *Thinking about the 1st point; Our Common Household.*

Do you see your church family as those you put up with each week or have been united to by Christ's blood?

3. *Thinking about the 2nd point; Our Uncommon Response.*

How is "agape" love uncommon? Reflect on your relationships. What percent of your relationships are with people you like, what percent are characterized by mutual giving, and what percent provide nothing to you in return for your giving?

4. *Thinking about the Conclusion.* "God is the one who gives all of us certain platforms by which we've been called to minister...some of us have been called to larger platforms, others to smaller ones. Paul is making the point here that, as believers, we do not seek the platform as if we need that to feel a sense of purpose and love. We are to be content to live quietly and mind our affairs because we already have all the purpose and love we could ever dream of and more in Jesus Christ...verse 11 describes Gospel contentment." - Pastor Bill
How does this challenge your understanding of ministry? In light of this message, what are the platforms for ministry in your life?

"Agape is the uncommon Greek noun used...to describe the self-giving love of God revealed in Jesus Christ, which is the motivating power and pattern of Christian living."

-The New International Dictionary on New Testament Theology and Exegesis

"Agape is not based on a felt need in the loving person or on a desire brought about by some attractive quality in the one loved...it rather proceeds from a heart of love...whether in relation to God or man, however, its keynote is not merely emotion but devotion, shown in commitment and measured through practical action and sacrifice."

-The New International Dictionary on New Testament Theology and Exegesis

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

1. To what does Paul refer in verses 9-10 that the Thessalonians were “taught by God”? (He talks of “brotherly love” in verse 9 and wrote in 10 that they “have been taught by God to love one another”. He also wrote about their love in 1 Thessalonians 2:1-12. He also prayed in 1 Thessalonians 3:12 for their love to increase.)

- a. Read 1 John 4:8 and talk about how God is unique in being able to teach us about love. (God is unique with His perspective of love since “God is love.” John reminds us that we are to learn about true love from God and not try to have God change our ideas about what love is.)

2. Compare Acts 17:6-9 and Paul’s instructions to the Thessalonians in verses 11-12 of our passage. (In Acts 17:6-9 the Jews that were angry at the new Christians in Thessalonica who were accused of defying Caesar’s orders and causing trouble. But in Paul’s instructions in verses 11-12, he wrote that they should “walk properly before outsiders”.)

3. What does Paul mean by instructing the Thessalonians to “to live quietly”? (Other translations say that they were to “make it their ambition to live quiet lives” (NASB and NIV). Paul is teaching them to have a calm peace among them. Make sure to talk about how we can only do this because God’s grace in Jesus Christ gave us peace with God.)

- a. In our world of anxiety and fear, talk with your children about how we can stand out in our world by living with God’s peace that surpasses all understanding (Philippians 4:6-7).

4. In verses 11-12 Paul wrote about how the Christian faith should affect how we live day-to-day and how we are to work. Talk and pray with your family about how the Spirit can empower you to work differently and live differently at school or in your neighborhood.

Scriptures for further study:

Colossians 3:17,23-24

FOR STUDENTS

1. What command of God were the Thessalonians known for obeying? (4:9-10)
2. What ambition were the Thessalonians to pursue? (4:11-12)
3. Do you value as brothers and sisters—like blood kin—the people who have joined with you in professing Jesus Christ in your church? Are they the people with whom you feel most at home?
4. What is one thing you can do to love your Christian brothers and sisters more this week?
5. When might it be tempting for you to meddle in others' lives or to burden them unnecessarily? What would it look like for you to “live quietly”?
6. What is the result of living a quiet, respected, and responsible life? (4:11-12)
7. Paul's focus on loving other Christian brothers and sisters may seem inward-looking. But why is this so important for our witness and evangelism? Can you think of an example of this in your own life?

*Selected questions borrowed and adapted from *1&2 Thessalonians for You* by Ligon J. Duncan

FOR NON-BELIEVERS OR NEW BELIEVERS

1. Becoming a Christian automatically means becoming a part of the household of faith, a family of believers. This is why Paul refers to “brotherly love” in verse 9. If you are not yet a believer, know that becoming a Christian entails not only new obligations to others, but also provides wonderful new blessings.

Question: Would you say that your current depiction of the Christian life is more individualistic or communal? Can you envision and list some of the many benefits of becoming part of a spiritual family?

2. Becoming a believer involves learning new ways to please God (4:1), including new spiritual practices, new sexual ethic, new attitudes, as well as new love for your church family. Then, once we begin this life, it becomes a matter of growing “more and more.” Paul uses this concept/phrase repeatedly (3:12; 4:1, 10). We are to live a life that is abundant or abounding in these qualities.

Question: In what areas are you currently growing? In what areas would you like to grow more and more? Would you be willing to make this a matter of prayer?

3. Paul makes a paradoxical statement in verse 11, saying in effect, “Make it your ambition to be unambitious.”

Question: In what ways would it be okay for a Christian to be ambitious? In what ways do you think this passage is encouraging Christians to be unambitious, or to lead a “quiet” life?

4. Many times in this letter, Paul urges the believers to work hard and not be idle (as Paul himself had shown them by his example). He specifically mentions that they should work with their hands (v.11), which probably refers to the nature of the work most of these Thessalonians were engaged in (i.e., manual labor).

Question: Why do you think the Bible considers all forms of work to be important and dignified? In what ways do you see your own form of work as being inherently good? How are you bringing honor to God in your vocation?

5. In one sense, we are not to care about what the world (those outside the church) thinks about us as Christians. Indeed, 1 Thessalonians teaches that often times we will be persecuted by the world. But in another sense, verse 12 teaches that we should endeavor to win the respect of outsiders.

Question: Why is winning the respect of outsiders important? What are some ways, especially through your vocation (but also in other areas of your “quiet” life), that you can gain that respect?

6. Paul writes here of the importance of brotherly love, which surely included some members of the church family taking care of the needs of others in the church who were less fortunate. However, Paul also alludes to the fact that we do not want to be “dependent on anybody” (v.12).

Question: Christians are supposed to help one another in the church, but at what point can helping others create an unhealthy dependency, or cause people to become too reliant on the charity of the church?

A Surprising Gratitude: The Emergence of Faith, Love and Hope in Thessalonica



Sunflowers, Vincent Van Gough, 1888

About the artist and painting: In 1888, the Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh moved to southern France with a dream. He wanted to establish an art community where painters could live, work, and inspire one another. One of his mentors, a man he deeply respected, Paul Gauguin, agreed to come and live in this community. As a symbol of his thankfulness and happiness, Van Gogh painted a series of sunflower paintings and hung them in his room. The sunflower meant to reflect his surprising joy towards achieving a dream.

The apostle Paul was probably not an artist but he did produce a letter expressing his surprising joy, his thankfulness, and happiness. This letter was his “sunflower” to the church Thessalonica. It’s Paul’s verbal painting of Gospel Gratitude. What are things you a most grateful for in your life? Has the Gospel taken root in your heart? If so, what fruits of gratitude are being produced and overflowing in your life as a result of Jesus?

In his opening words from Paul to the Thessalonians, he writes:

2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers,
3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. The same faith, hope, and love that made a difference in the lives of believers then can make a difference in your life now. **“I’m excited for what God has in store for us First Presbyterian Church, as the Spirit washes us in these words of Gospel gratitude. May Christ be our hope for the world to come, our faith for today, and our love for a lifetime”** Pastor Bill Pardue

The purpose of 1 Thessalonians:

“A Surprising Gratitude: The Emergence of Faith, Love and Hope in Thessalonica”

"The purpose of 1 Thessalonians is for Paul to convey to the Thessalonians how encouraged he is by the good report about them and to deal with other aspects of the news brought by Timothy." - Cara, 1 and 2 Thess. 22-23

Paul writes to express his GRATITUDE for the firm faith of the church and their expression and commitment to brotherly love. At the same time, he desires to see the church grow in holiness and provides information and encouragement concerning the hope we have in the certain and imminent return of Jesus Christ.

"The concern Paul had for this congregation was so overwhelming he decided to send Timothy back to the city to 'strengthen and encourage' the believers in their faith and to 'find out about' their faith...1 Thessalonians was written after Timothy arrived in Corinth to report his findings to Paul...He brought good news of the faith, love, and steadfastness of the congregation despite hardships. - Green, PNTC, 52.