

1 Thessalonians

I. Introduction

- A. **1 Thessalonians 4:9-12** . . . Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; [10] for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, [11] and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, [12] so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.
- B. Two Sundays ago we concluded Paul's teaching on sanctification, with an emphasis on living a morally sanctified life. As I pointed out, any act of immorality is a selfish act. Today, our topic is love – love for one another – which when lived out as it is intended to be would prevent immorality from entering into the life of the believer and the church.
- C. Pray

II. Love is an identifying mark of a Christian

- A. Paul begins **vs 9** with “Now as to the love of the brethren . . .”
 - 1. As Christians, loving one another within the Body of Christ – be it our church or the church universal – is one of the most significant marks of a spiritually healthy Christian and a spiritually healthy church.
 - a. Jesus said this in **John 13:35**, “By this (*that is, by your love for one another*) all men will know that you are My disciples.”
 - b. And God's word says it this way in **1 John 3:14**, “We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death.”
 - 2. And though we are often told that love is a choice – and it is – loving our brothers and sisters in Christ is the will of God for us just as our sanctification is God's will for us. And as you may recall, when we speak of **God's will**, we are speaking of what God wants, what He commands, or what He requires.
 - a. We see the truth of such a command in **John 13:34** where Jesus says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another – even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”

- b. And as if to reinforce this message, Jesus is recorded as saying something similar two more times. The first is in **John 15:12**, where Jesus says, “This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you.” The second is in **John 15:17**, “This I command you, that you love one another.”
 - 3. The book of Acts gives us some practical examples of how the first Christians lived out Christ’s command to love each other.
 - a. We read this in **Acts 2:44-47**, “And all those who had believed were together and **had all things in common** (*they treated their personal possessions as if they belonged to the community of believers*); [45] and they began selling their property and possessions and were **sharing them** (*the cash received*) **with all**, as anyone might have need. [46] Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, [47] praising God and having favor with all the people (*living together in such love, harmony, and sharing that onlookers were favorably impressed and praised them*).”
 - b. Paul gives some specific examples of how to live out this kind of love within the church in **Romans 12:9-13**, “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. [10] Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; [11] not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; [12] rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, [13] contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.”
 - c. And we learn from church history, along with **Galatians 3:28** and **Colossians 3:11** that one of the manifestations of Christians loving each other was that they were all treated as equals – be they men or women, slaves or free, highly cultured Jews and Greeks or barbarians, and the circumcised or uncircumcised.
- B. **[9b]** Moving on to what might appear to be a new subject, but isn’t, Paul says, “(*Now as to the love of the brethren*), you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves **are taught by God** to love one another.
 - 1. I want to pause here and give you a bit of interesting history related to the words “**are taught by God**,” because here in Thesslonians, they are a translation of just one Greek word, **theodidaktos**.

- a. There is no known use of this Greek word prior to Paul's use of it here in **vs 9**. In addition, this is the only place in the NT where this word is used. So where did Paul get this word?
 - b. We don't really know. However, a similar use of two Greek words are found in **Isaiah 54:13** and **John 6:45**.
 - (1) In the Greek translation of the OT, we read in **Isaiah 54:13**, "And I will cause all your sons to be **taught of God**." The words "**taught of God**" come from two Greek words, **didaktous theou**.
 - (2) In the Greek translation of the NT, we read in **John 6:45**, "It is written in the prophets (*a probable reference to Isaiah 54:13*), 'And they shall all be **taught of God**.'" Here again, the words "**taught of God**" come from the same two Greek words as used in **Isaiah 54:13**.
 - c. My reason for referring to these two portions of scripture is because it is possible Paul reversed the order of these two Greek words, "didaktous theou," linked them together, and formed the new Greek word, **theodidaktos**.
2. With this history of the Greek word, "**taught by God**" in mind, I want us to consider the various ways God teaches us – with or without a pastor or teacher or leader. The reality is, whether you are in solitary confinement or being taught by a mature, biblically wise teacher who is able to apply God's Word in the most practical of ways, and whether you have a Bible or only nature, your conscience, and your intellect, God is your teacher.
- a. For example, God spoke to Moses mouth to mouth, and face to face – from a burning bush and in the Tent of Meeting.
 - b. We know from **Numbers 12:6-8**, **1 Kings 3:5**, **Acts 2:17**, along with other such scriptures that God speaks, directs, and enlightens through visions and dreams.
 - c. When speaking through Jeremiah, God said He would put His law within us and write it on our heart (**Jeremiah 31:33**), so that we can draw on this inward knowledge for daily living.
 - d. Both the OT and NT contain examples of God speaking and directing His people through angels.
 - e. In **Romans 1:19-20**, Paul says God has put an awareness of His existence – along with some understanding of His truth – within us, and that God reveals, or speaks to us about His invisible attributes, His eternal power, and His divine nature through what He has created.

- f. Paul goes further with this kind of speaking and teaching from God in **Romans 2:14-15**, where we learn that “when [unbelievers] who do not have [a Bible] do instinctively the things [taught in the Bible], these, not having [a Bible] are [a Bible] to themselves, [15] in that they show the [truths of the Bible] written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them.”
 - g. In **John 14:25-26** Jesus said, “These things I have spoken to you while abiding with you. [26] 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 said to you.” In other words, God teaches us through the enlightening, revealing, and instructing work of the Holy Spirit within us.
 - h. Finally – though God is free to teach us in any other ways He chooses – we do know God teaches us through His Word (**2 Timothy 3:16**), His apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (**Ephesians 4:11**), our parents, siblings, godly books, and Christian music.
3. In other words, Paul’s statement about “no need for anyone to write you because you are **taught by God**,” fits into a context – a context which included being taught by Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy both in person and through subsequent letters.
- C. [10] for indeed you do practice [love] toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to **excel still more**,
- 1. Paul begins this section by commending their growth, commitment, and practice of loving one another, and then he urges them to **excel still more**.
 - 2. It is one thing to know what to do, another to do it, and quite another to be committed to improving and maturing so that you progressively do it better and better. “Progressively loving one another better and better” is what it would have meant for the Thessalonian believers to excel still more. And the same is true for us today.
 - 3. Someone asked, “When have we loved enough?” In my opinion, as long as we can excel still more, we have not gotten to the place of having loved enough. If that answer is not good enough, then consider this: Until we love each other with the same quality of love and to the same degree of love with which Christ has loved us, we have not gotten to the place of having loved enough.

4. May we, as Christians, be committed to loving every member of the Body of Christ as Christ has loved us.
- D. From this exhortation to excel still more in loving each other, Paul proceeds to list three specific and practical ways to show love for one another. Interestingly, each one is built on the qualities of humility, respect for others, and being responsible. The three ways Paul promotes for showing love are:
1. Lead a quiet life.
 2. Attend to your own business.
 3. Work with your hands.
- E. [11] make it your ambition (*that is, intentionally, purposefully, and eagerly*) to lead a quiet life
1. Paul does not clearly state what he means by leading a quiet life, so we are left to apply this truth the best ways we can, given our lives and culture today.
 - a. However, we do know that the Thessalonian believers were living in a culture and time when Christians were looked down on, discriminated against, mistreated, and even persecuted.
 - b. Putting ourselves in their place, we can only imagine what some of us might be saying on public forums like Facebook and Twitter about the unjust and cruel treatment of Christians by liberal politicians, city leaders, businessmen, and neighbors.
 - c. Add to that the exaggerated views, unsubstantiated opinions, false beliefs, derogatory comments, demonizing of opponents, and loud, passionate, argumentative discussions between some of us and those who support mistreating Christians. And add to that speaking disrespectfully about the governor or president and joining in on the attack of the capital.
 - d. These examples might be some of the things Paul would be saying to **STOP** doing and instead lead a quiet life.
 2. In writing to the church in Rome, Paul speaks of what a quiet life should look like. We read this in **Romans 12:14-19**, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. [16] Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. [17] Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. [18] If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. [19] Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room

for the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord."

3. The important truth here is that love is humble and shows respect for others. And if we only treat those inside the church with humility and respect, we do not yet know the true meaning of love, humility, or respect, which in turn means we do not know the way of the Christ-like life.

F. **AND** attend to your own business

1. Or as Peter says, "don't be a troublesome meddler" (**1 Peter 4:15**).
2. Paul elaborates on attending to your own business in **1 Timothy 5:13**, where he speaks against going from house to house, gossiping, being a busybody, and talking about things that don't concern you or aren't any of your business or that you don't need to know.
 - a. A **busybody** is someone who pries into peoples' personal lives and affairs by asking questions or pushing for more and more information from them or from those who know them.
 - b. A **gossip** is someone who takes what they have learned from prying and shares it with others who have no need to know or right to know.
3. There is no love for anyone but yourself when prying, gossiping, or talking about things that don't concern you. Therefore, when such things go on within the Body of Christ, it is a sign that love for one another is not there and that those who participate in such behaviors care little for the honor of God and the good reputation of Christians as a group.

G. **AND** work with your hands, just as we commanded you,

1. Within this context, to work with your hands means to provide for yourself through some form of gainful employment or business rather than looking to others in the church to provide for you.
2. Remember that when Paul wrote this, it was common for believers to treat their possession as if they belonged to the community and to generously share their financial resources in the same way.
3. However, as with many good things, there are those who will take advantage – including those who consider themselves Christians even though such behavior is selfish.
4. It appears that this kind of selfishness within the church got so bad that by the time Paul wrote **2 Thessalonians**, he said in **3:10-12**, "When we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone

is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either (*that is, he is not to share in the food made available to those in need*). [11] For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. [12] Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread.”

III. Conclusion

- A. [12] so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.
 1. Paul concludes this section by pointing out that our behavior toward one another within the church has a significant effect on how we behave toward those outside the church.
 2. If we are irresponsible, lazy, selfish, and willing to take advantage of our brothers and sisters in Christ, we will be the same way toward those outside the church – and this to the harm of the churches public reputation, and that to the dishonor of God’s name among unbelievers.
 3. Unbelievers will not only look at our behavior toward each other, they will look at our business dealings, work ethic, family life, social interactions, internet presence, and political actions.
- B. Therefore, may we live as Jesus says to live in **Matthew 5:16**, “Let your light shine before men in such a way (*that is, loving one another within the church and living godly toward those outside the church so*) that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”