

Walk In Brotherly Love

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

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In Thessalonians 4:9-12, Paul says, “But concerning brotherly love...”—there’s our theme—“...you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia.” That’s northern Greece. “But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more.” So he’s exhorting them to a growing and increasing brotherly love. “...that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly...”—or “honestly”—“...toward those who are outside...”—or “nonbelievers”—“...and that you may lack nothing.”

In chapter 4, Paul is encouraging us to walk in a way that is pleasing to God. In verse 1, notice that Paul says, “You received from us how you ought to walk and to please God,” and that “you should abound more and more.” Paul uses that same phrase when he says, “Love one another...and increase more and more.” So it starts in chapter 4 with a call to a pleasing walk, and that’s the overall, arching principle: all that we do, all we think, all we say should be with a desire to please the Lord. That should be our desire, our motivation; we want to have a pleasing walk before the Lord.

So exhorting us to holiness, in verses 3-8, Paul now exhorts us to harmony, in verses 9-12. From that we avoid sexual immorality, and we cultivate brotherly love; from chastity to charity. Someone said, “...from vice of the heathen world to the fundamental virtue of the Christian life, which is love.”

Paul has already prayed for the believers in Thessalonica in two areas. In chapter 3, verse 12, he prayed that they might “increase and abound in love,” and then in chapter 3, verse 13, “that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness. So we have a reference to love, in verse 12, and to holiness, in verse 13. Now in chapter 4, verses 9-12, Paul moves from walking in holiness to walking in harmony and love. He goes from avoiding lust to living in love for one another.

The background for the reasons Paul wrote verses 9-12 is that when Paul was in Thessalonica for just a few weeks he taught the believers that Jesus Christ was coming again. I believe he was teaching them about the rapture, in that eschatological section starting in verse 13 through the end of 1 Thessalonians. Paul taught them that Jesus’ coming was imminent. It could happen at any moment, and nothing had to transpire before the Lord raptured the church to take it to heaven.

In light of that, the believers became unbalanced. They got so excited, so pumped up, so thrilled that Jesus Christ was coming again that some quit their jobs and sold their possessions. Then they found out that the Lord wasn’t coming back as quickly as they thought. So they went to other people’s houses and asked to be fed and to stay there. Instead of being

independent, they became dependent. That's why later on in his second epistle, Paul said, "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread." They became unbalanced.

And the same thing can happen to us today. When people tend to believe that the Lord is coming again—and He is—they get so freaked out and say, "Well, let's quit our jobs! Let's sell our possessions! Let's put on white robes and go sit up on a mountain and wait for the rapture to happen!" That's not what the Bible tells us to do. Jesus said, "Do business until I come." So we don't just give up all responsibilities, all human jobs; we keep going, calm down and trust the Lord. We want to live a life independent of others, so we will have enough for our own needs and for the needs of others. So they became unbalanced with the prospect of the Lord's coming, they were sponging off of other believers, they were quitting their jobs and were sitting there idly waiting for the Lord's return.

So Paul gives them—and us—four, practical exhortations on how to live in light of the Lord's soon coming. This is "shoe leather" Christianity. Number one, we need to learn to love each other more. You need to be growing in your Christian love for your brothers and sisters in Christ. In verses 9-10, Paul says, "But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you..."—why?—"...for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do so..."—they were loving—"...toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia." But here's the exhortation. "But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more." Paul wanted them to have a growing love.

What kind of love is Paul referring to here? It's "brotherly love." The Greek word for "brotherly love" is "phileo." It means a love for those in the family of God. In our English language, we are limited in that we only have one word for "love": it's the word "love." I say, "I love my wife, I love my kids, I love my grandkids"—and I do. And then I might say, "I love peanut butter and jelly sandwiches"—and I do. And I love to sit on the beach on a nice, sunny day and read a book or go surfing or hang out. So we use the same word "love" for "I love my wife" and "I love peanut butter and jelly sandwiches." Obviously, my love for my wife is a different kind of love from my love for peanut butter and jelly sandwiches.

So in the Greek, which is a fuller language, they have four, basic words for love. There is "eros," from which we get our word "erotic." It's sensual love or lust. That word does not appear in the New Testament.

The second word in the Greek is the word "storge." It is a family love. It is a love of parents for their children. It is a love of grandparents for their grandchildren. We had our kids from Hawaii with us all month at the house. And we had our newest grandchild, John, with us, who is six months old. We held him, kissed him and played with him. I'm convinced he smiled at me more than anyone else. I had such a great time with him. I had that instant bond that you feel for a grandchild. It's so wonderful. And this love, storge, is also not mentioned in the New

Testament.

The third word is “phileo.” We get our word “Philadelphia” from it, which means “The City of Brotherly Love.” And that’s the word in verse 9. So when Paul says, “brotherly love,” he means “phileo.” “But concerning brotherly love...”—or “phileo”—“...you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love...”—or “phileo”—“...one another.” This is a love for those in the family of God, brothers and sisters in Christ.

The fourth word is “agape,” which is God’s love. It is used all throughout the New Testament. John 3:16 is a prime example: “For God so loved...”—or “agapéd”—“...the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” So where it says in the New Testament, “God is love,” it’s “God is agape.” It’s a divine, spiritual, fervent, sacrificial, giving love. It’s best defined as “it seeks the highest good of the object being loved.” God always seeks our highest good; it’s not self-centered or self-focused.

So when we read in verse 9, “brotherly love,” it’s called “phileo” love that we’re to have one for another. Back in chapter 1, verse 3, Paul had already said they had their “work of faith,” they had their “patience of hope” and they had their “labor of love.” The word “love” in verse 3 is the word “agape.” But now in verse 9, Paul wants this brotherly love to grow and increase.

Notice the source of this kind of love is God, in verse 9: “You yourselves are taught by God to love one another.” This phrase “taught by God” appears nowhere else in the Bible; it’s unique only to this passage. It has the idea that God teaches us intuitively, as Christians, to love other people.

And there are other ways that God teaches us to love. In John 13:34, it says, “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another...”—then He qualified the kind of love we are to have—“...as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” Jesus said, “a new commandment.” In the Greek, it’s “a renewed commandment.” It’s not new; it goes all the way back to the Old Testament, to Leviticus. But it’s been renewed with a new dimension or quality: it’s that sacrificial, self-denying, giving kind of love. It’s commanded by God.

Secondly, God is an example that we are to love one another. In John 3:16, it says, “God so love the world that He gave.” God is an example. Someone said, “God the Father has taught us to love one another by giving us His Son. And then God the Son has taught us to love one another by giving us His life. And God the Holy Spirit has taught us to love one another by giving us new life.” So when the Holy Spirit comes into the heart of the believer, the believer is born again and He gives you God’s love.

Have you ever noticed that when you got saved, you went from darkness to light, and you also went from hate to love? He took out your “heart of stone,” and He gave you “a heart of flesh.” You actually started loving people. You felt a love for everyone, even for unbelievers, because “The love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us,” Romans 5:5. It’s the result of being born again or being regenerated. So the minute we are

born again, we have the Spirit living inside us. And He pours God's love into us.

In 1 John 4:7-8, it says, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love." God, in His very nature, is love.

In Galatians 5:22-23, Paul says, "The fruit of the Spirit is love." Have you ever noticed that "fruit" is singular? It's not "fruits"; it's "fruit." I saw a bumper sticker one time that said, "God wants spiritual fruit, not religious nuts." I like that. There are a lot of religious nuts, but we want spiritual fruit. That comes from the Holy Spirit. So you have to be born again. And if you're born again, you need to be filled with the Holy Spirit. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." All the other fruit of the Spirit—"joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control"—are the characteristics of that agape love that are "poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit." So you need Ephesians 5:18: "Be being filled with the Spirit," as it says in the Greek.

Thirdly, I want you to note the expression of this love in the believer's heart, in verse 10. It says, "Indeed you do so." "Indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia." So they were a loving congregation, but they needed to grow in love even more.

How did they express this love? The following verses tell us how. Galatians 5:13 says, "Serve one another." Ephesians 4:32 says, "forgiving one another." Peter instructs us in 1 Peter 4:8-9, and verse 9 says, "Be hospitable to one another." Galatians 6:2 says, "Bear one another's burdens." Romans 14:13 says, "Let us not judge one another." Colossians 3:9 says, "Do not lie to one another." This is just a partial list of the "one anothers" that are found throughout the New Testament on how we should love one another.

This is why it's so important for your Christian growth and development to be a part of a local fellowship: so you can forgive one another, serve one another, love one another, pray for one another, bear other's burdens, be hospitable to others, not judge others and not lie to others. Jesus added in John 13:14, "Wash one another's feet." To be able to do the "one anothers," you need to be a part of "one another." It means to interact with one another and loving one another.

Now notice in verse 10 that this love needs to expand. "We urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more." You never arrive at being perfectly loving. I've met people who think they've arrived at being perfectly loving. "Love just flows out of my life! I'm just the ultimate, loving Christian! I've fully arrived!"

"Okay, let me watch you when you get on the freeways in California."

It's like the little boy who asked his mommy, "Mommy, why is it that only when Daddy drives, the idiots come out? It's never when you drive."

No. As loving Christians, we always have room to grow in love. We need to love each other

more and grow and grow in our love. 1 Thessalonians 3:12 says, "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another." Then in chapter 4, verse 1, it says, "...how you ought to walk and to please God." Again, you "should abound more and more." That's the growth of that love. So the first thing we need to do, in light of Jesus' coming soon, is to learn to love each other more.

Then, secondly, we need to stay calm. Verse 11 says, "...that you also aspire to lead a quiet life." In the King James version, it says, "...that ye study to be quiet." In a modern translation, the word "study" means "to make it your ambition." Paul looked at Timothy and said, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth," 2 Timothy 2:15, in the King James Bible. He's not talking about getting your books and commentaries out and studying the Bible. The word "study" there means "be eager, be devoted, be zealous, be committed to." So he's saying, "Be eager, be devoted, be zealous, be committed to being calm, being quiet." So the words "be quiet" literally mean "to rest." It is used of the silence after speech, the rest after labor, the peace after war and tranquility of mind.

I like the J.B. Phillips paraphrase, of 1 Thessalonians 4:10, which says, "Make it your ambition to have no ambition!" I like that. Another translation says, "Make it your ambition to be unambitious." So what Paul is saying here is, "Calm down! Chill out!"

So the problem was that they were in a state of restlessness and mental excitement. It was because they believed Jesus was coming at any moment. "He's coming! Why're you mowing your lawn?! Be done with lesser things, thou man of God. Let the grass grow! Why go to work? Why paint the house? Why do anything? Jesus is coming! Why worry about paying your bills? We're gonna get raptured!" The Lord may just let you stick around, so you have to pay those bills in the tribulation. Don't be stupid!

Why do Christians have to be so dumb? We don't have balance in our lives. We either get all absorbed in earthly things and forget the Lord's coming, or we completely ignore earthly things because the Lord is coming. Satan wants to get us off balance. One of the keys of the Christian life is balance. You still have to meet your husband's needs, your wife's needs, your kids' needs. You still have to go to work. You have responsibilities, even though Jesus could come back tonight. He said, "Do business til I come." So calm down, chill out and as we used to say in my hippie days, "Mellow out, dude!" So these Thessalonian Christians were out of balance.

Now I know what's going on in the world today; I've been watching the news. I know that the Bible predicts in Ezekiel 38 and 39 that Russia will invade Israel. I know that there will be a one-world government. There is all this talk about world peace and globalism; we have all these globalists in the world today. It's going to lead to the end of time with the Antichrist and a one-world government. People think that's the only hope for humanity. But wouldn't people think that there will still be evil men in the world? To think that war is something we will eliminate in this 21st century is foolish. Jesus said that in the last days there will be "wars and rumors of wars...but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom."

So the world is going to get darker, not better, but we stay calm.

I was watching a lot of the news on Ukraine this week. I was getting uptight and freaking out and yelling at the TV. My wife walked by and said, "Don't forget that Jesus is still on the throne."

"Okay. Whatever." Then I heard the Lord say to me, "Abraham, listen to your wife," Genesis 21:12. Then I realized that she was right; Jesus is still on the throne, so why am I freaking out? So I took my remote and turned the TV off. Then I said, "Lord, help me to calm down, to know that You're on the throne, that You're ruling the affairs of men."

So the Thessalonians had a spirit of restlessness, so Paul said, "Calm down! Don't be freaking out!"

I want you to note, thirdly, the thing we're supposed to do in light of the Lord's coming. I chuckle what Paul says, in verse 11: "Mind your own business." "Calm down, mind your own business and do your own work." The problem was meddlesomeness; they became busybodies. In 2 Thessalonians 3:11, it says, "For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies."

So many people are on social media. I'm with them, and they're not even looking at me; they're on their phones. What do they spend all their time doing? Looking at what everybody else is doing. Mind your own business. What has God called you to do? "Oh, I don't know, but look what they're doing." Focus on God's will for you, God's plan for you, God's purpose for you. Focus on what God has called you to be, the track He wants you to run and what He wants you to do and accomplish with your life in investing your time.

It's good to be concerned with the needs of others, but don't neglect your own, personal affairs. So mind your own business, even though the Lord is coming soon.

A great example of this is in John 21:22, when Jesus told Peter what was going to happen to Peter—that he would be bound, be taken where he didn't want to go and basically saying that Peter would be crucified. When Peter heard that, he turned to John, the beloved apostle, and asked Jesus, "What about him, Lord?" Jesus had just given Peter what God's will was for him, but it didn't register with Peter. Peter asked, "Well, what's going to happen to John?"

Then Jesus said to Peter, "What is that to you? You follow Me....If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you?" That wasn't Peter's business. So Jesus was actually politely telling Peter, "Mind your own business. Don't worry about John. Focus on My will for your life. Be content." It is that desire to know other's business that sometimes gets us in trouble.

The fourth, and last, thing we are exhorted to do in light of the Lord's coming is to get to work. So he said they should love each other more, keep their cool, mind their own business and get to work. Verse 11 says, "Work with your own hands, as we commanded you." They weren't working. "Why work? Jesus is coming at any time! We don't need to go to work."

So you call your boss and say, “Hey, I heard a sermon on the end times today at church. So I quit.” A few weeks later you ask, “Can I have my job back, please? Jesus hasn’t come yet.” Don’t be stupid. Be busy. Be occupied.

The Greeks despised manual labor; they regarded it as degrading. It was only to be done by slaves. So it was easy for these people in the Greco-Roman culture to say, “Oh, Jesus is coming. That’s awesome! We don’t have to work or do anything.” And when the Lord didn’t come, they said, “Uh, can we come over to your house for dinner tonight?”

“Why do you need to come over?”

“Because we don’t work anymore, so we don’t have any money. Can we stay at your house? Can you help us out?”

Paul says, “No, no, no! That’s a bad witness to the world. You don’t provide for yourselves, and you’re unable to give to others.” This is so important.

In Colossians 3:23-24, Paul says, “Whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.” So whatever your job, it’s a service to God, and you need to do it faithfully. So Paul says basically, “Get to work.”

In John 13, Jesus knelt down and washed the feet of His disciples. He said, in verses 13-14, “You call Me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet.”

The conclusion of our text is in verse 12, where Paul gives us two reasons why we should do these four things. Why should we love each other more? Why should we keep calm? Why should we mind our own business? Why should we get to work? The first reason is to be a good witness to unbelievers. Verse 12 says, “...that you may walk properly...”—or “honestly”—“...toward those who are outside.” “Those who are outside” refers to unbelievers, the unsaved world. “Properly” means to behave “decently.” In 1 Corinthians 14:40, Paul says, “Let all things be done decently and in order” in the church. It’s the same Greek word. So live a decent life, because the world is watching.

The outside world never comes into the church to hear a sermon, but they watch the believers in the outside world every day. If our lives in the world aren’t consistent with our message, they won’t hear the message of the Gospel. Let them see how Christ has changed your life: make you a better worker, more conscientious on the job and better at home.

The second reason why we should love each other, keep calm, mind our own business and get to work is in verse 12. It’s that you’ll not be in any need. It says, “...that you may lack nothing.” The NIV renders this, “...that you’ll not be dependent on anybody.” So Paul says that if you lack nothing, you can provide for your own needs, be self-dependent, and you can help others.

One of the motives that we should have as Christians for working hard is not only to provide for ourselves, our families and our children but to give to others, to be benevolent. So the money you make isn't just for you to hoard; it's for you to be a blessing to others in need.

So these two things are the reason we do this. It's so we have a good testimony before the watching world and that we have lack of nothing.

You might summarize verses 1-8 by saying we are to walk in holiness; verses 9-10, we are to walk in harmony; and verses 11-12, we are to walk in honesty and integrity. All this should be for one desire, verse 1: "to please God."

Do you want your life to please God? I do; I want my life to please God. I know there are some times when I don't please God. I know there are some times when I don't please people. But all that really matters is that I please God. And sometimes in pleasing God, you will disappoint people.

So find out what God's will is for your life, calm down, be quiet and get to work.