

Fact Sheet for “Brotherly Love” 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

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This morning we are going to be looking at the next two sentences in Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians.

ESV ⁰⁹ ¶ 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, ^{10a} for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia.

The word translated “brotherly love” is “philadelphia” (φιλαδέλφια, fil-ad-el-fee'-ah) and is actually feminine in form. It begins with one of the NT words for love (φιλέω, phi-le'-o) and ends with the word for brother (ἀδελφός, ad-el-fos'). This “brotherly love” is a reference to the love Christians should have for other Christians. It is a word found multiple times in the NT, such as in Romans 12:10 and Hebrews 13:1. But there is a second word for love in this verse that is slightly different. It is ἀγαπάω (ag-ap-ah'-o), the verb form of the noun ἀγάπη (a-ga'-pe). Phi-le'-o and a-ga'-pe are close in meaning, but agape is a warmer and deeper love. It is the word used in John 13:34-35.

Paul wrote in 1 Thessalonians 4:9 that they had no need to for anyone to write to them about showing “brotherly love” because they had been taught by God to love one another with the warmer and deeper agape love. And Paul praised them because they had also shown this to “all the brothers throughout Macedonia.” Don’t miss Paul’s statement that they had “been taught by God to love one another”. How did this take place? Almost certainly Paul would have taught this when he was with them, but he is referring to something that went beyond his own teaching. They had been taught by God. When we believe the message of the gospel, receive Christ as our Savior, and are born again, then the Holy Spirit indwells us. Consider what Paul wrote to the Corinthians 2:11-12. This is one of the clear ministries of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. He helps us understand what pleases God. This is not done by audible words, but in the subtle background of our thoughts and consciences. This is how the Thessalonians were taught by God to love one another. One of the skills that we should nurture as believers is learning how to listen to God’s Spirit within us. Pay attention to your conscience. Always strive to know God’s Word better.

^{10b} 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.

They were doing well at brotherly love but Paul still urges them to literally “abound more”. Then Paul adds the words of verses 11 and 12. Why? What was happening? We don’t know with absolute certainty but we have a pretty good idea. Some chose not to work for their livelihood even though they could work. Paul would write about this in 2 Thessalonians 3:10. Think back to the days immediately following Pentecost and the inauguration of the church and read Acts 2:44-45. This could not have continued indefinitely or the early Christians would have run entirely out of resources. And it also wasn’t too long before the sin nature crept in (Ananias and Sapphira, Acts 5:1-11).

Many have thought that the brotherly love that was being shown by many of the believers in Thessalonica was being taken advantage of by others. Then because of the proximity of Paul's words here with what immediately follows, the return of Christ, many have suggested that some believers simply decided to wait for Christ's return and not work. Christians can choose to listen to the Holy Spirit within them, or they can follow the sin nature that all of us have.

We have just celebrated Thanksgiving. Read a little of the history from William Bradford and the Plymouth colony at mises.org entitled "The Great Thanksgiving Hoax".

William Bradford, Plymouth's Faithful Pilgrim, by Gary D. Schmidt. Eerdmans, 1999.

(P. 137) "Bradford decided on a bold step. He had felt all along that one of the difficulties with their system of harvest was that everyone worked for 'the general' good rather than for his or her own family. Whether one worked hard or leisurely, whether one went early or late to the fields, the same amount of food was guaranteed that person. There was no private property, no incentive to work harder than anyone else, no chance to use individual talents to good effect."

Bradford chose to "set aside a certain number of acres for each household in the colony; what they grew, they would keep. 'This had very good success; for it made all hands very industrious, so as much more corne was planted then other wise would have bene by any means the Governor or any other could use, and saved him a great deal of trouble, and gave farr better contente.'"

The same sin nature reared its ugly head in the Plymouth colony, and Bradford's solution encouraged people to work for their own livelihood. But this wasn't Bradford's or the colony's only solution.

(pp. 138-139) "But by late May, Bradford saw there were some things he could not control. A drought blighted the harvest." "... the corn stalks sent out ears before the stalks were fully grown, and soon after the ears shriveled, the leaves browned, and the stalks died. 'Our Beanes also ran not up according to their wonted manner, but stood at a stay, many being parched away, as though they had been scorched before the fire.'

Bradford turned to God. By the end of July, he declared a 'Day of Humiliation' when they would 'humble themselves together before the Lord by fasting and prayer.' On that hot day, the Pilgrims walked up to the fort on top of the Mount..." "The entire day they spent praying..."

"Their prayers were answered. 'Before our departure,'... 'the weather was over-cast, the clouds gathered together on all sides, and on the next morning distilled such soft, sweet, and moderate showers of rayne, continuing some fourteen dayes, and missed with such seasonable weather, as it was hard to say whether our withered Corne, or droupling affections were most quickened or revived. Such was the bountie and goodness of our God.'"

Bradford was wise in his choice to incentivize the people to work, but he also had a firm reliance on God.

Let's look a little more at Paul's instruction. Paul urged them to both (1) abound in brotherly love and (2) to work for their own livelihood. When he writes that they were to "aspire" to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands" he uses an interesting word for "aspire" (KJV "study", NASB, NIV "make it your ambition", NLT "make it your goal"). The word translated "aspire" here literally means to love or seek after honor. This would also be a good testimony before those who are not Christians.

What encouragements can we take away from this passage this morning? There are three.

1. Always seek to abound in brotherly love.
2. Pay attention to the Holy Spirit's voice in your life.
3. Love what is honorable both in your personal work and in your giving to others this Christmas season.