

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12
Lamentations 3:1-33
Psalm 130

“Concerning Brotherly Love”

December 3, 2023

Lamentations 3:26 says it well:

“It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.”

What does it mean to wait quietly?

“Let him sit alone in silence when it is laid on him;
let him put his mouth in the dust – there may yet be hope;
let him give his cheek to the one who strikes,
and let him be filled with insults.

For the LORD will not cast off forever,
but though he cause grief, he will have compassion
according to the abundance of his steadfast love.”

Waiting quietly means to wait upon the LORD.

We are often very quick to speak – quick with our answers – quick with our anger...

Let him sit alone in silence.

When we are down in the depths, we need to hope in the LORD – wait upon the LORD –
and trust him to save us from all our sin and misery.

And that’s why we sing Psalm 130!

Sing TPH 130A

Read 1 Thessalonians 4

We have seen throughout this series that Paul is centered on the themes of faith hope and love.

We are to keep believing God in our work of faith.

We are to keep loving God and neighbor in our labor of love.

And all of this because of our steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ!

What is lacking in our faith is endurance.

What is lacking in our faith is simply that our faith has not *yet* persevered to the end!

That is why *hope* is so important in Paul’s letter.

Even though he doesn’t use the *word* “hope” in chapter 3,

the *concept* of hope was very much the whole point of verses 11-13:

*and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all,
as we do for you,*

*that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father,
at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.*

Notice the connection that Paul makes between *love* and *holiness*.

The Lord Jesus makes you increase and abound in love for one another and for all –
that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before God.

The first half of chapter 4 focuses on what it means to be blameless in holiness and be abounding in love.

Holiness and love always have to go together.

What happens when you try to split them apart?

Have you ever seen someone pursue holiness apart from love?

They want to make sure that everything is done exactly the way God says – but they lose sight of loving their neighbor.

That's legalism.

Have you ever seen someone try to love without holiness?

They are so concerned to make sure that people feel good about themselves – that they will encourage people to sin, before they will confront sin.

That's called license.

Holiness without love is *not* true holiness.

Love without holiness is *not* true love.

Holiness is not cold and rigid – but warm and *beautiful!*

(Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness!)

Love does not

We saw last time that the will of God is for our sanctification.

And last time we saw that Paul highlights our sexual desires in this.

For this is the will of God – your sanctification –

namely, that you abstain from sexual immorality;

and conversely, that you know how to control your own body in holiness and honor.

There is both the negative: don't do the bad thing!

And also the positive: instead, live as a person of holiness of honor!

Why does God care so much about our sexual practice?

Because he made us for himself!

The body is not for sexual immorality – but for the Lord Jesus!

And the Lord Jesus is for the body!

There is a wholeness and a beauty and a richness in knowing Christ Jesus!

Yeah, the sexual relation is supposed to be a *picture* of that!

And it's a beautiful picture!

But the Lord wants *you* for himself!

⁷ *For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.*

Any sort of sexual impurity is entirely inconsistent with this glorious, beautiful calling!

It's important to say also that this means that sexual impurity *within marriage*

is also transgression!

Remember, whether Paul means how we obtain a wife, or how we conduct ourselves sexually, the point is that we are to do so “in holiness and honor.”

The way I treat my wife sexually must always be “in holiness and honor.”

If I am selfish – if I simply seek my own pleasure –
that is not holiness and honor!

Holy sexual conduct means that I engage in marital sexual relations
not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles.

1. “You Have Been Taught By God” (v9)

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,

You often hear that there are three different words for love in Greek.

Eros – dealing with romantic or sexual love;

Philos – dealing with brotherly love;

Agape – dealing with divine love.

That’s not entirely wrong –

but we need to be careful not to overdo the distinction,
because here in verse 9, Paul says, “concerning brotherly love” (philadelphia –
meaning very literally, ‘brotherly love’!)
but how does Paul describe this?

“you yourselves have been taught by God to love [agapao] one another.”

So which one does Paul mean here?

Brotherly love?

Or agape?

And if you think about it – we saw last time that the way we approach *sexual love* needs to reflect *God’s love* for his bride.

Your love for your wife should never degenerate into anything *less* than agape –
Christ’s love for his bride.

Likewise, “brotherly love” – philadelphia – refers to loving one another.

But it is not referring to a qualitatively different sort of love.

Philadelphia refers to how we ought to love our brethren in the church.

The church is supposed to be a family – and to love one another as a family.

As brothers and sisters.

Peter says it very much the same way in 1 Peter 1:22

²² Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love [*philadelphia*],
love one another [*agapao*] earnestly from a pure heart, ²³ since you have been born again, not of

perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God;

Peter and Paul both think of this in the same way.

How do we come to love?

Peter says love one another

since we have been born again through the living and abiding word of God.

Paul says that you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another.

In both cases our love for one another – our brotherly love –
is rooted and grounded in God’s love for us –
and is communicated to us through God’s own teaching –
through the living and abiding word of God.

This goes back to what we saw a few weeks ago about the Word of God.

How does God himself teach us?

Paul makes clear that the Thessalonians

do not need anyone to write to them concerning brotherly love.

You already know this stuff!

You know it – because you have been taught by God.

(In the previous verse, Paul had reminded us that God “gives his Holy Spirit to you.”)

It’s not just that you have read this in your bibles.

It’s not just that you’ve heard lots of sermons about this.

It’s that *God himself* has taught you.

And yes, he *uses* your bible reading.

And yes, he *uses* the preaching of the Word.

But in the incarnation – the *Word* became flesh and dwelt among us.

And in the coming of the Holy Spirit –

the living and abiding word of God now dwells *with us*.

The Holy Spirit *is* the presence of the exalted Christ with his people!

But you know how to love!

Now – we need to be clear –

that this is not a universal principle!

There is a sense in which everyone knows how to love.

Since we are all made after the image of God,

we all know – in a sense – how to love.

But if you look around you, it doesn’t take long to realize

that humanity is not very good at *actually* loving each other!

But Paul says that the Thessalonians *are* good at it (look at verse 10):

2. What You Are Doing – Do More and More (v10)

¹⁰ *for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia.*

As Timothy has traveled back from Macedonia,
Timothy has heard the stories about the Thessalonians,
and their love for the brethren in every town!

What does this love look like?

Paul doesn't give us a lot of details –
but certainly he would agree with John's description in 1 John 3:16 –
“By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us,
and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.
But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need,
yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him?
Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth.”

What does it mean to lay down your life for someone?

Think of how Paul says this to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5.
Here he is talking about enrolling widows on a list –
but he is describing what a woman is supposed to do before she becomes a widow!
“having a reputation for good works:
if she has brought up children,
has shown hospitality,
has washed the feet of the saints,
has cared for the afflicted,
and has devoted herself to every good work.” (1 Timothy 5:9-10)

What does love look like?

Deny yourself, take up your cross, and come follow me!

Bringing up children is hard work!

Giving birth to a child is hard labor.

But bringing up a child is even *more* work!

Showing hospitality – the word for hospitality is “love of strangers.”

What we call hospitality today is the next one – “washing the feet of the saints” –
namely, inviting your church friends over and caring for them.

But hospitality – in the biblical sense of the term – is loving strangers.

Welcoming strangers into your home and caring for them!

Caring for the afflicted – looking out for those in need,
and doing what it takes to provide for them.

If you want to know what Paul means by brotherly love,
he's talking about real, life-on-life care for those around you.

It can be a challenge, sometimes, to do this well.

It's especially hard because we don't live all that near each other.

Four years ago, we moved downtown,

so that we could be in walking distance from two other families in the church.

For the last four years we have had morning prayer once a week with those two families.
It makes a difference.

I suppose I should mention that we have a neighbor who is getting ready to move –
so if anyone wants the beige house next to us – let me know!
And next summer, there will be another house that will be moved
onto the parking lot across the street from us!

But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more,

We heard the same language already in verse 1, where Paul summarized his doctrine of sanctification.

“We ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus,
that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God,
just as you are doing,
that you do so more and more.”

Notice that Paul speaks of our sanctification as including both an *already* –
and a *not yet*.

You are doing this – but we urge you to do it *more and more*.

Our Shorter Catechism says it this way:

“Sanctification is the work of God’s free grace,
whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God,
and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.”

Notice how we say it: “*we are renewed in the whole man* after the image of God.”

We are already sanctified in Christ.

We already love – because God has loved us.
But we all need to grow in our love and in our holiness.

Paul thinks the Christian life as a life lived at the intersection of the cross and resurrection of Christ.

We share in the sufferings of Christ – we share in his trials and tribulation.

But we also share in his resurrection glory –
not just “someday”!

But already – by faith – we see *him* sitting at the right hand of God.

Already – by faith – we have been *raised* with him and are seated *with him* in the heavenlies.

That is our present identity.

I have been crucified with Christ (there is the suffering with him),
and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me –
and the life I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God,
who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal 2:20).

This is our present reality *in Christ*.

Our understanding of this – and our experience of this – is still pretty fragmentary!

It's the “already” and the “not yet.”

We are already sanctified in Christ Jesus.

But we are not yet what we shall be!

So wherever you are in the Christian life –
the question for you is *what is the next step?*

What does it mean *for me* to follow Jesus *more and more?*

Maybe right now you've got a bunch of little children –
and it's just overwhelming to even imagine what showing love for strangers would be!

Okay!

Start praying about that.

Maybe it's not time yet for doing much – but start asking God to show you what it *will mean*
“more and more” down the road.

But if you are younger – and you don't have a crazy schedule yet –
start thinking about what it means for *you* to love one another diligently.

The temptation for you is to be so focused on your career
that you don't think about what it means to follow Jesus.
If you let that happen – then your career will become your Lord.

I remember a young man who had to make a major career decision.

His dream job was offered to him.

It would require him to go on the road pretty much half the time –
but it was exactly what he wanted to do –
and the pay was incredible.

The alternative was to take a sideways track into a dead end job with half the pay.

But he could be home every night.

He took the sideways track – and he has never regretted it.

I love hearing him talk about the opportunities he has with his children – and in his church.

Because...

3. What Does Brotherly Love Look Like? (v11)

¹¹ *and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you,*

In verse 11, Paul lays out three things.

a. Aspire to Live Quietly

This is drawn from Lamentations 3:26 – “quietly wait for the salvation of the LORD.”

The picture here is tranquility – stillness before God and man.

Brotherly love is not preoccupied with getting your own way.

And particularly in Thessalonica,
Paul is concerned that the church not kick up a fuss before the watching world.

That's why he adds:

b. Mind Your Own Affairs

You won't be surprised to hear that the "you" is plural.

Paul is not an individualist.

He wants you all to mind y'all's affairs.

In other words, the Christian community needs to be its own patronage network.

Take care of each other – love each other – follow Jesus together!

All of that is included in "mind your own affairs"!

c. Work with Your Hands

And work with your hands.

In other words – "earn your own living."

Brotherly love demands that each member of the community be useful to the others.

We'll hear in 2 Thessalonians that some were expecting Christ to return so soon
that they figured they could stop working and spend all their time in prayer!

But Paul says that such an approach misses the point of what we are doing as Christians.

Notice the two reasons given in verse 12:

4. What Is Brotherly Love For? (v12)

¹² *so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.*

What is brotherly love for?

So that you may walk properly before outsiders.

We rightly think of this in terms of Christian witness – making disciples of the nations.

But we may need some help to figure out how it is connected to the second part –
"and be dependent on no one."

Again, we need to remember what the ancient Roman world looked like.

If you are going to survive in the Roman world,

you need to have a patron –

you need someone with sufficient clout to protect you.

Early Christians were drawn either from the synagogue (if they were Jewish),

or from some pagan patronage network –

that would most likely have required them to participate in pagan sacrifices.

If you are going to "walk properly" – honestly, decently – before outsiders,

then you need to "take care of business" among yourselves.

In our day, if you say "and be dependent on no one" –

it sounds like you are saying “I am an Island! I can take care of myself!”

But guess what?

The you is *plural*.

So that *y'all* may walk properly before outsiders and that *y'all* be dependent on no one.

In other words, that the Christian community be able to take care of your own needs.

It's still possible to do this sort of thing!

Back in 2008, when the economy blew up,

we had several tradespeople in the congregation.

There were no construction jobs – so we had a congregational unemployment rate of around 15%.

Our deacons sent out a note to the congregation

saying that there were several skilled tradespeople available –

and that if people could provide the materials,

the deacons would pay the labor cost in order to provide work for these men.

Over the next year, it is safe to say that this congregation (as well as other friends)
provided pretty nearly \$100,000 to those families.

And as far as I know, only one or two people asked for help from the deacons.

Work with your hands – and (as a community) be dependent on no one.

Paul is actually very clear that you – as a community – should be interdependent!

And – as an interdependent community – we should be good at drawing others into this!

That's why Paul highlights the importance of how we walk before outsiders.

They need to see us loving one another – caring for one another.