

Abounding in Brotherly Love

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

Halifax: 22 October, 10:30 AM

Introduction:

A couple of weeks ago, we came to the turning point in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians that we find in many of the other epistles...

- In the first three chapters, we had an account of how God had graciously brought the gospel to them, and how they had believed and were continuing on in His grace.
 - We saw a lot about how eager Paul was to see them continue and how he prayed for them and when he could not go himself, sent Timothy to minister to them.
 - Paul's care is the care of Christ exercised through His minister.
- With chapter 4, the turning point in the epistle occurs.
 - Now Paul moves from declaring what had been done for them to declaring what the Thessalonians are expected to do.
- At the beginning of the chapter four, he authoritatively, yet tenderly, pleads with them in Christ to abound more and more in their walk with God.
 - He reminds them that it is God's will for them to be holy, or sanctified,
 - which means that their lives are conformed to God as their God, that they live in harmony with God and with what pleases Him.
 - All this they are able to do because God Himself is at work in them through Jesus Christ.

Last week, we looked at the first of several specific ways in which Paul is going to call the Thessalonian church to abound.

- And of course as the Holy Spirit has given this to us in scripture, it is for our benefit.
- We are to abound in sexual purity, each recognising that we are to totally abstain from sexual immorality and are instead to possess our own spouse in sanctification and honour.
 - We are to pursue marriage instead of sexual immorality.
 - Whoever pursues sexual immorality is not walking with God, but rejecting Him.

This week, we come to the second specific way that Paul called the Thessalonians, and so all Christians, to abound and increase in their walk with God.

- We are to abound in brotherly love.

The words about this, which the Holy Spirit has given to the church, are recorded for us in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12.

- Listen now as I read them to you—beginning in 1 Thessalonians 4:9.

1 Thess 4:9-12: But concerning brotherly love 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. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; 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 toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.

May the Lord bless us as we seek to understand how these words apply to us.

The thing that is very obvious here is that brotherly love ought to characterise us as God's people, and that we are to abound in it more and more.

- That is why I have entitled this sermon "Abounding in Brotherly Love."
- Now if brotherly love is something we are to abound in, we need to know what it is.
 - So let's begin with that...

I. What is brotherly love?

A. The word in the original is *philadelphia* (φιλαδελφία)

1. Of course that is a word you recognise because of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
 - It is referred to as the city of brotherly love.
 - It is from *phi-los* which means *loving friend* plus *ad-el-phos* which means *brother*, so when you put them together you get *brotherly love*.
2. This word is only used five times in the New Testament, but in a very significant way!
 - Up until the New Testament was written, it was used almost exclusively to speak of the love of literal brothers and sisters born to the same human father.
 - In the New Testament, it is used exclusively of the love between Christians who are members of household of faith.
 - One of the things that is highlighted in the New Testament is that those who come to Christ are brothers (brothers and sisters, but the Bible uses the term brothers to refer to both).
 - We are brothers because Christ has reconciled us to His Father, God the Father, and we have been adopted into His family.
 - Hebrews reminds us that He is not ashamed to call us brothers, not because we are worthy, but because He has sanctified us by His blood.
 - He clothes us with the righteousness that belongs to His family, and He gives us an eternal inheritance in His kingdom of glory.
 - For this reason, it ought to delight us to call each other brother and sister in the Christian church!
 - We belong to the family of God.
3. This identity as family has been a remarkable feature of the church in the New Testament from the beginning.
 - a. From the beginning it has been important for those who come to Christ out of the world to know that they belong to a new family.
 - Many who come to Christ, as was the case with many of the Thessalonians, are rejected by their families.
 - And it is very precious for them to know that they have a new family.
 - b. Of course our attachment to the church does not dissolve natural family relationships as far as we are concerned,
 - In fact it enhances them!
 - For our heavenly Father teaches us to honour our father and mother and to love our children and our siblings more than ever—and to love them as father and mother and children and brothers and sisters ought to be loved...

- but on their part, if they reject Christ, it causes division in various degrees of severity—from coolness to outright dis-ownership.
 - And on our part, we cannot, as believers, do anything they may wish us to do if it is contrary to the commandments of our Lord—and in that way, Jesus says that we must hate them to be His disciple, but apart from that, we ought to honour them more than we did before our conversion.
- c. But the thing that makes this new family so very remarkable is that it unites in brotherly love those who would not otherwise be united!
- It takes Jews and Romans and Greeks and Arabs and Ethiopians and Persians and barbarians and unites them together as brothers and sisters...
 - And it also takes masters and servants, rich and poor, educated and non-educated, the refined and the unsophisticated, and it brings them all together in brotherly love.
- B. But in what does this brotherly love consist? We can learn the answer to this question by looking at the New Testament.
1. Perhaps this brotherly love can best be summarised as truly caring for each other.
 - Except where families have been poisoned by sin, brothers very often stick up from each other—feeling that an insult to their brother is an insult to them.
 - And if a brother or sister or some family member is suffering, we suffer with them and do what we can to relieve them with our service or our money.
 - Yes, what makes the family relationship stand out above others is a true personal concern for each other,
 - a willingness to truly make their needs my needs and their victories my victories.
 2. Turn over to Romans 12 where brotherly love is spelled out in some detail.
 - Let's start with Romans 12:10.
 - a. Verse 10 begins: **Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love.**
 - Being kindly affectionate speaks of a true fellow feeling, where you sincerely want your brother to get on well—you care about him.
 - Harsh words are not a part of such a relationship, but tender words of encouragement and hope—of support and appreciation—of expressions of willingness to help.
 - b. Verse 10 continues: **in honor giving preference to one another;**
 - To *honour* others is to treat them as deserving of respect—as important to you—as those who should be put first—
 - You put their interests ahead of your own, treating them as more important than you are.
 - It is a spirit that is the very opposite of envy and jealousy, of striving to be on top, of using others or trampling upon them.
 - You treat them like treasure instead of like dirt.
 - c. Verse 11 adds: **not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;**
 - This shows that great energy is spent for them—think of the zeal of Jesus who left the glories of heaven to die on the cross...

- You take up their cause for them with zeal...
 - You labour and toil to meet their needs—you are not slack about them, but passionate, like a mother bird gathering food for her nestlings and defending them from predators.
- d. Verse 12 speaks of: **rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;**
- This speaks of not giving up on them—of the kind of love that keeps reaching out even when there is opposition and things seem to be at an end.
 - It can be easy to put on a show of care for others until hard times come—but true brotherly love will stick with your brothers through hard times as well as prosperous times.
 - Prayer will continue to flow—real prayer that cries out for God to bless them—and will not let Him go until He does.
- e. Verse 13 concludes: **distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.**
- And yes, a real brother will help out his brother in need—
 - He will take you in if you need a place to live, feed you if you are hungry, give you clothing if you are naked.
 - And it doesn't matter if you can pay him back.
 - That is how the church of the Thessalonians were treating each other.
 - That is how we are to treat each other in the church.
3. Hebrews 13 also gives a full and rich description of brotherly love...
- a. It begins in verse 1 by telling us **to let brotherly love continue...**
- It is something that can easily grow cold over time.
- b. It tells us not to forget to look after strangers in verse 2,
- And in verse 3 to remember the prisoners as if we are chained with them since we are also in the body—
 - That gets at the idea of treating them as our own flesh—if they are in prison, we should be as concerned about it as we would be if we were in prison.
- c. Interestingly, in verse 4, it speaks of honouring our spouse in marriage by abstaining from fornication—that is part of brotherly love too.
- Brotherly love in the church does not skip over those who are closest to you—it does not miss loving your own marriage partner!
 - There is a kind of love that likes to show off that ignores the biological family because its goal is to be seen and admired.
 - The word for that kind of brotherly love is hypocrisy.
- d. Then the passage goes on to speak against covetousness—we should be glad when our brothers have things—because we all have the Lord...
- You don't envy those that you love.
 - And verse 7 tells us to remember those who rule over us—receiving instruction from them and imitating their example—
 - they are our big brothers and we are to admire them...

- e. And the passage goes on to warn us against divisiveness—embracing false doctrine such as food laws that would divide us and turn us against each other,
 - or adding to God’s worship which pulls us away from the simple worship Christ gave us that unites us...everyone comes with their own songs and their own way of doing things.
 - f. And then in verse 16, it says: **But do not forget to do good and to share, for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.**
 - That too is a part of the brotherly love we are not to forget to exercise.
4. So I trust that you are getting an idea of what brotherly love looks like.
- It means that you take a true interest in others.
 - You want to stay in fellowship with them.
 - If they go astray, you will care enough to pursue them.
 - If they are discouraged, you will seek to lift them up.
 - If they sin, you will admonish or rebuke them and call them back.
 - If they are broken, you will do all you can to mend them.
 - To go back to where we started, you will be kindly affectionate toward them.
 - They will truly matter to you like we mattered to Jesus our elder brother.

II. But where does this brotherly love come from?

- **In 1 Thess 4:9, we are told that we are *taught by God to love one another!***
- A. Paul says that he does not even need to teach them because all are taught it as Christians by God Himself.
1. It is true, isn’t it?
 - When you first came to Christ, no one had to tell you to love other Christians, did they?
 - Do you know anyone who ever came to Christ and did not know that they were supposed to love other Christians?
 - It is something we are given from the very beginning.
 2. Paul sees the Thessalonians exercising this love in wonderful ways!
 - We saw in chapter 1 how they had an excellent reputation—and part of that was that their labour or toil in love...
 - They had that fervency in their love that made them go all out for others.
 - And in our text, in verse 10, Paul says that their love extended to all the brethren who are in Macedonia.
 - They not only cared for the congregations that were in Thessalonica, but they cared for churches all across their province—
 - If someone was a brother in Christ, they treated them as they would treat Christ.
 - That is how Christian love ought to be!
 - If someone in our church is in need, we should especially care for them, but we should also care for those who are in other churches.
 - They are our brothers.
 - The Thessalonians were doing this.

3. All this is evidence for Paul that they have been taught of God.
 - a. They did not have love like this for others before they came to Christ!
 - It is something that was put in them by the grace of God.
 - He gets the glory for it.
 - b. So it is for you—think of all the people in the church that you know and love that you would never have had anything to do with if it were not for Christ.
 - It is the Lord that has given you love for them.
 - c. I would not have even known how to love a wife without Christ.
 - Knowing what I know about myself before I came to the Lord, I am pretty certain that I would have ended up in a divorce.
 - It is by the grace of God that I am able to love a wife.
- B. How does God teach us to love one another?
- The answer to that question has two parts...
1. First, He teaches us through the example of Jesus.
 - a. Think about it.
 - Anyone that comes to Jesus for salvation—anyone who obtains true saving faith,
 - knows that Jesus poured out His life to atone for their sins.
 - I am sad to say that there are lot of people in the visible church who do know that—they have come to Jesus only to heal them of their hurts,
 - or perhaps only in rituals...or for moral guidance...
 - but they do not know Him as the one who saves them from the wrath of God against their sin.
 - b. But when you are truly converted, you realise the great love of Jesus as the One who gave Himself for you,
 - And that has a powerful effect on you.
 - You can't come into the church without a sense that if He has loved these people enough to bear the pains of hell for them,
 - you ought to love these people too—as He does.
 - You realise that it would be completely inappropriate for you do anything else but love them.
 - Nobody has to tell you that.
 - As it says in 1 John 4:10-11: **In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.**
 - c. This is a family that is founded on incredible love...
 - And now that you are a part of it, you are to be filled with the love.
- But Christ's example is only part of what God does to teach you to love your brothers in the church.
- I told you that there are two parts to it.
 - Without this part, your love would fail.

2. Second, He teaches us by actually putting love in our hearts when we come to Jesus, love that we don't just feel, but that we practice.
 - When He establishes His covenant with us, He has to radically change us so that we can be His people.
 - He says as much in Hebrews 8:10: **For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My laws in their mind and write them on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.**
 - And of course the principle part of God's law is love—so when God says He puts His law in our heart,
 - it is the same as to say that He puts love in our heart—as He describes it in Deuteronomy 30:6, He circumcises our hearts to love Him.
 - And this work is done by the Holy Spirit.
 - John goes on to speak about that in 1 John 4:12-13 when he says: **No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us. By this we know that we abide in Him, and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.**
 - Do you see that?
 - We know that God abides in us or lives in us because we love each other—He has given us the Holy Spirit.
 - As it says in Galatians 3:22, **the fruit of the Spirit is love!**
 - It is something that the Spirit produces when He dwells in us.
 - It is part of the new birth—the Spirit changes us so that we now love our brothers.

TRANS> So God gets all the glory for the brotherly love that is found in the church!

- When it is absent, it probably means more than anything that there are a lot of people in the church who are not yet truly born again.
 - If the Spirit of God were in them, they would love their brothers in the Lord.
 - 1 John 4:8 could not be clearer: **He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.**
- But what a wonderful thing it is when God does work in us both to will and to do what pleases Him—and when we know that He *is* at work in us...
 - That lays a firm foundation of hope for the next thing we find the rest of our text.

III. That this love is to grow in us as God's people!

- A. At the end of verse 10, Paul says that we are to increase more and more in this brotherly love that God has put into our hearts.
 - His words are, **But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more;**
1. Paul is sticking to what he said about our overall walk when he introduced this second part of his epistle in chapter 4 verse 1:
 - **Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God;**

- a. I spoke to you about the encouragement in this.
 - It would be very depressing to be told that whatever growth you have now is it—that you will never progress beyond where you are today.
 - Of course you would be very grateful to be born again and to have new life from God.
 - But it would be very discouraging if there was no progress to be made.
 - b. But indeed there is much progress to be made!
 - The Thessalonians had done much by God’s grace, but there was much more—more and more progress!
 - The goal is to love like Jesus loved us.
 - That is what we are aiming for my brothers and sisters!
 - It is a very high calling.
 - Do you remember how I described this progress to you before?
 - The love you have now is, perhaps, like a water gun.
 - The love of the Thessalonians was like a garden hose.
 - The love of Paul was like a fire hose.
 - But he is calling for love that is like a tidal wave!
2. There are so many ways to improve your brotherly love.
- a. That your motives would be purified—
 - all of the self-seeking and the desire to show off would be put down.
 - That you would really be able to live for God and for others.
 - b. That the pettiness would be ended...
 - The feeling that you are put upon; the complaining about your trials.
 - c. And speaking of trials, that you would learn to love when you are going through hard times...
 - that you would more and more die to self so that you would be like Jesus who loved His disciples to end—even through the deepest sufferings!
 - d. And that your love would expand—with a capacity to love more and more people.
 - I find that I can only carry so much and I am overloaded...very weak...
 - e. And that you would be able to love a greater variety of people...
 - We tend to find some people easier to love than others—we know how to love them—and we love them more.
 - Growth would see us loving people that rub us, or people that we have trouble understanding.
 - f. And then just the intensity of your love—that you would be able to love them with a stronger, deeper love...
 - With a love that is willing to do more for them than you are now—to pour out more of yourself...to make a greater sacrifice...
 - g. And finally that you would learn to love with wisdom...
 - that your perception of what people need, and of how to really benefit them—not always to please them, but to have wisdom to know what you ought to do and say to them.

3. So yes, there is a lot of room for growth!
 - If we were saved on the basis of our own works, we would all be in trouble.
 - But we are not—we are saved on the basis of Christ’s righteousness.
 - And besides that, we have seen that God is the author of this brotherly love.
 - There is progress to be made, but we are not under condemnation.
 - There is progress to be made, but we are not without resources to grow.
 - So let’s get on, as Paul says, increasing more and more!
 - Don’t become stagnant.
 - Hebrews 13:1: Let brotherly love continue!

TRANS> And now as we move on with verses 11-12, we see that...

B. Paul calls for some specific improvements in the Thessalonians’ love.

- It is good for us to look at these specifics for ourselves, as well as the general goals that are presented here.
 - Let’s begin with the specific improvement that Paul calls for in their brotherly love.

1. He tells them to aspire to lead a quiet life.

a. There is some playfulness here in the words because he is essentially saying that they should strive to not strive—aspire to not aspire.

- The words used here are often used with reference to quietness about public life.
 - So it seems that Paul is encouraging them not to be agitators in the community, pursuing a political agenda, but to mind their own business, working with their hands.

➤ For the last hundred years or so, it has been popular to assert that some of the Thessalonians were not working because they supposed Christ was coming back soon and there was no need to work.

- But while there were some who were confused about the return of Christ, Paul does not make the connection between mistaken views on the return of Christ and idleness.
 - That is a supposition that is read into the text.

b. Something that is increasingly being recognised is the prominence of the patron/client relationship in some of these Greco-Roman cities.

- It was a very common element in Roman and Greek society that a wealthy person would be a patron who supported a number of clients.
 - They did not necessarily use terminology for it—sometimes calling each other friends, but it was essentially a patron/client relationship.
 - The clients would show up every morning to greet their patron, and he would give them pretty much a day’s wage in various gifts.
 - They benefitted the patron by making him appear more honourable and important, and they would support him in political causes,
 - and show up with him when he went places to display his greatness—sort of like Absalom when he got fifty men to run before him—it gave him honour and respect.

- And besides providing for the clients, the patron would also help them with litigation, arranging marriages, funerals, contracts, and other matters.
 - As this element of Greco-Roman civilization becomes more recognised, there is good reason to suppose that Paul is advising the Thessalonian believers to provide for themselves by working with their hands instead of living in these patron/client relationships.
 - In telling them to work with their hands, he doesn't necessarily mean they have to use their hands per se...it is just a way of saying that they need to engage in honest work to pay the bills.
 - c. One of the problems, very likely, was that some of the believers were looking to prominent members in the church (and maybe even to prominent citizens outside the church) to look after them as clients.
 - This may very likely be at the root of some of the problems in the Corinthian church where they were clamouring about their favourite teachers, engaging in law suits, having feasts put on by those in the patron class that excluded the poor...
 - You see, patrons would try to gather the most prominent clients they could find because it made them look better...
 - And that meant the poorest were excluded...
 - And of course clients would posture themselves to gain the favour of the most important patrons they could find.
 - Paul is telling them to knock it off and start providing for themselves.
2. The general goals are clear—
- a. That by providing for themselves, they would be walking properly before the world as Christian examples.
 - You see that in v. 12: **that you may walk properly toward those who are outside.**
 - Instead of clamouring for position and status, both as patrons or as clients, they would be living a quiet life of godliness in the community.
 - They would be living in brotherly love such as the world does not know.
 - Giving to the poorest of the community who were not able to help themselves, not to make them clients, but in brotherly kindness.
 - And those labouring with their hands would be able to use their gifts to serve and love the wealthy members without jockeying for position and pitting one against another.
 - Those outside looking at the church would see a community where true brotherly love was the motive instead of personal honour and gain.
 - That is what Paul means by walking properly toward those that are outside.
 - b. The second goal (also in v. 12) is that by working, they would lack nothing!
 - The wealthy, not having to maintain clients, would be free to give to churches in need—with no strings attached...

- and to give to widows and others—with no strings attached...
- And those working with their hands who had been busybodies would now be able to provide for themselves—to have the liberty that goes with that,
 - and even to be able to contribute to the work of the ministry and to the relief of the poor themselves.
 - They would be able to manage their own affairs.
- c. Paul wants the church to be living beautifully before the world to the glory of God. That is the main principle.
 - We should want that too.
 - Christian love is beautiful and we must not let anything interfere with it.
 - Each of us who is able, should provide for ourselves so that we will lack nothing and can get on with loving our brothers and serving them.
 - No one should be living off of unemployment or welfare who is able to provide for themselves.
 - Nor should we take work that will jeopardise the good name of the church—for example, working at a disreputable establishment.

Conclusion: The conclusion of the whole matter is that we are to abound in brotherly love, following the beautiful example of Saviour that we might be a beautiful church for His glory and honour in our city.

- We are His bride and we should behave accordingly:
 - **1 Peter 3:3-4: Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel—4 rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God.**
 - **1 Timothy 2:9-10: In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works.**