



# 1 Thessalonians

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**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; 1 Thessalonians 4:9**

In verse 12 of the previous chapter, Paul said, "And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we *do* to you." Now in this verse, he again brings up the subject of love among the brethren. It is obviously something heavy on his mind, and something which he feels must not be left unaddressed in its fullness. His words, "But concerning brotherly love," contrast what he said in verses 6-8. There he began with, "that no one should take advantage and defraud his brother in this matter." Now, he shows what is right rather than that which is improper.

However, he elevates the thought to highlight the importance of this fraternal bond by saying, "...you have no need that I should write to you." In other words, "This is something you already are aware of, and something that exists between you already." And how is this the case? He then adds, "for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another."

The word he uses for "taught by God" is unique. It is not found in classical writers, and it is only used here in Scripture. It is thus a word coined by Paul to make his point. The word is *theodidaktos*, and it means exactly "God taught." What Paul is speaking of here obviously must be speculated on. Does this mean they already have already heard the substance of the words of Jesus in his prayer for unity among the believers (John 13:34)? Does it mean that the instructions given by Paul and his associates, being the very words of God, have been received and acted upon by them? Or does it mean that the indwelling of the Spirit has taught them this?

What is probably the case is a combining of two or three of these things. They were taught the very truth of God by Paul and his companions, the Holy Spirit prompted them in their own Spirits, and they may have had the very words of Jesus explained to them as well. In receiving

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Christ, they understood the family unit of believers in a new way. If they are adopted children of God because of the work of Jesus, then they are brothers in a real sense.

Just as children of the same father and mother are united in a unique way, loving one another even when they disagree, so those in the church are united under a Father and a mother (Galatians 4:26) in a unique way. The bond is so close that love is expected to be the natural result. Thus they are God taught because of the situation they are in.

Life application: How unfortunate it is that Christians are so quick to tear one another apart over minor differences. There are many major doctrines which we must stand on, but churches have been divided over things as stupid as whether the congregation should stand, kneel, or sit during prayer. Pet peeves produce poor parishioners. Let us put them aside and demonstrate the love we have been called to.

**...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; 1 Thessalonians 4:10**

Paul's words now serve as a compliment towards his readers. He had just noted that they were "taught by God to love one another." Now his compliment based on that is, "...and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia."

The love of the Thessalonians for other believers was evident in their missionary enterprises which Paul noted in verse 1:8. There he said that from Thessalonica, the Lord's message had sounded forth not only throughout Macedonia, but it had even extended as far as Achaia. In carrying the message, they had also carried love for the brethren. This was a point upon which he complimented them. But he then goes further by urging them on to even greater things by saying, "But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more."

The intent of Paul's words is to encourage them to seek perfection in their love of the brethren. This cannot be taken as any sort of rebuke, but rather an exhortation to continue to perfect that which they had already displayed. Peter states the same thing to his audience in 2 Peter 1 –

"But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, <sup>6</sup>to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, <sup>7</sup>to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love. <sup>8</sup>For if these things are yours and abound, *you* will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>9</sup>For he who lacks these things is shortsighted, even to blindness, and has forgotten that he was cleansed from his old sins." 2 Peter 1:5-9

Like Peter, Paul isn't focusing on the lack. Instead, he is exhorting towards perfection. This is what all Christians should strive for, knowing that it is this which is pleasing to the Lord.

Life application: No matter how long we are in this body of flesh, we will never be perfect, nor will any of our Christian qualities be perfected. Only when we are glorified at the coming of Christ will this be so. However, we can and should strive for perfection at all times. Let us do this to the glory of God, and for the mutual benefit of those we encounter in our daily lives.

**...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, 1 Thessalonians 4:11**

Paul's words here form a paradox. He says that the Thessalonians are to "also aspire to lead a quiet life." The sense given is that they are to strive to be quiet. In other words, it would be comparable to saying, "So contained should believers be, that they are actually to be willing to jump out of their skin in order to remain that way." The words thus indicate a superlative nature involved in our striving for a quiet life.

Next he says, "to mind your own business." Christians are not to be busybodies. It is explicitly stated by Paul in his second letter to this same group of people –

"For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. <sup>12</sup> Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread."

-2 Thessalonians 3:11, 12

In this, we are only to express our opinions and actions in regards to others' lives when we are asked to do so. Other than that, we are to mind our own business, leaving others to what pleases them.

Next he says, "and to work with your own hands." Paul had set the example for them. He came and ministered to them, and yet he continued to work in his profession as a tent maker. It may be that as the Thessalonians went out to tell others about the Lord, that they became indolent towards productive work. In this, they would then become a burden on others.

It could also be, as Paul will hint at in his next letter, that the believers were so caught up in the fact that Jesus might be returning soon, that they just sat around talking about the rapture and getting nothing productive done in the meantime. Unfortunately, that same sad type of conduct continues on today. Rapture seekers find all kinds of reasons to do nothing productive for themselves or for the church as they make ridiculous predictions about the coming rapture. Every time a prediction fails, another pops up to replace it.

Finally he says, “as we commanded you.” His words are not new. Rather, they have already been noted while he was present with them. Word probably came back to him that these things were being neglected. Because of this, he is once again reminding them of the need to act in these important ways. Should they fail, there would be disunity and disharmony among the believers, and discredit upon the faith in the eyes of non-believers. Obviously, these precepts remain the same, and those who do not follow them fall into exactly these same unhappy results.

Life application: If you are a busybody, an idle person, or a rapture-speculator, Paul’s words should speak out to you today. We need to keep our noses out of other folk’s business, we need to be diligent in work, and we need to let the Lord decide on when He will return. He will come at exactly the right moment. To not act in the manner Paul instructs only stains the name of Christ in the eyes of others, and it brings unnecessary division to the body.

**...that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and *that* you may lack nothing.**  
1 Thessalonians 4:12

Paul continues with his exhortation to “increase more and more” from verse 10. He now tells them to “walk properly.” To walk signifies the conduct of one’s life, as it does consistently in Scripture. In this case, the word means “having good form,” and it is the opposite of walking in a disorderly fashion, as is noted in 2 Thessalonians 3:6. He then adds on to this the words, “toward those who are outside.”

There are a multitude of reasons which can be inferred as to why we should so walk. We want to be right examples for others, we would not want to be seen as inviting sin and unholiness, we would not want to be seen as subversive to the society in which we live, and etc. In walking properly, we would avoid such things, bring honor to the Lord, and have no reason for accusation against the title of “Christian.” However, if we are walking properly and we suffer, then Peter tells us the benefit of that –

“But even if you should suffer for righteousness’ sake, *you are* blessed.”

-1 Peter 3:14

Finally in this verse, Paul says, “and *that* you may lack nothing.” This can be taken in the neuter, as in this translation, or it can be taken in the masculine, and thus read, “may lack of no man.” In other words, not sitting around idle waiting for the rapture to happen. In such a case, they would be dependent on others. This is certainly the intent of the passage.

Paul will soon speak of the coming rapture, and he will continue to define events which will occur around that event in his next letter. In both, he indicates that this is what some were

doing. They were sitting around, waiting on the coming of the Lord, and were not productive in their regular, or their Christian, lives. This attitude is certainly contrary to “walking properly.”

Unfortunately, there is an entire section of believers out there today who still fit this sad pattern. They are unproductive because they are speculating on what is known but to God. Equally unfortunate, they turn their lack of productivity around and claim that it is they who are doing the Lord’s business by being “watchmen” for the Lord’s coming. Reject this type of behavior and walk properly in this life you have been given.

Life application: We are here to live out our lives to the full, not sit around watching 10 rapture date-setting videos a day. That is a waste of the life the Lord has given us. Let us not fall into that sad routine.

**But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. 1 Thessalonians 4:13**

This verse begins the third major section of the chapter. He gave his “Finally then” in verse 1. Then he introduced what is “the will of God” in verse 3. Next he added, “But concerning brotherly love” in verse 9. Now, there is another “But” which is one of great hope for those who have lost loved ones before the coming of the Lord. As the letter was written 2000 years ago, that is a lot of lost loved ones, and it is also a lot of hope in the hearts of God’s people.

“But I do not want you to be ignorant” (some translations say “we” here), speaks of a matter which, if mistaught, or misunderstood, would leave believers with sadness, confusion, and possibly even bitterness towards the faith. It is possible that there were already erroneous ideas being bandied about which were causing heartache and pain over “those who have fallen asleep.”

What can be inferred here is that even at this early time after the establishment of the church in Thessalonica, some of the congregation had passed away. Without Paul being there, it may be that someone went up to the one grieving and said, “I’m so sorry for your loss. It is too bad that this happened before the Lord’s coming. Now they will never know what glory they have missed.” In this, there is the erroneous assumption that death meant the end of that person’s hopes for a return to the Paradise lost so long ago. Paul will now correct this, showing that death is a defeated enemy, and nothing can block a believer’s access to the glory which is promised. No, not even death itself.

In this, he again first calls them “brethren.” The words here are exclusively for believers. They are first and foremost to living believers, and they are (as will be seen in the next verse)



pertaining to believers who have died. These verses cannot be applied to anyone outside of a personal faith in Christ Jesus. In the term, “fallen asleep,” there is already a clue as to where Paul is going with this. A person who is asleep is expected to awaken at some point. A person who is dead is not. Paul uses this most friendly and comforting term, and he then applies it to believers who have, in fact, died. It is reminiscent of his words to the Corinthians concerning the defeated foe -

“O Death, where *is* your sting?  
O Hades, where *is* your victory?” 1 Corinthians 15:55

As the people he refers to now are merely “asleep,” there should not be the sense of grieving that there would be over someone who had died. To bolster this, he then says, “lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.” The word “others” is speaking of anyone who is not in Christ. When a person not in Christ dies, there truly is “no hope.” And even if a person in Christ dies, an unbelieving friend or family member still senses only loss. Because they don’t believe in a resurrection, they have no hope for the one who will actually someday be resurrected. To the one suffering the loss, there is only the anguished thought of eternal separation.

But in Paul’s words there is hope. If he is making a contrast of those who have no hope, then that means there must, in fact, be hope! He will continue with his thought about this marvelous hope through to the end of the chapter.

Life application: Death is a sad time, even for Christians, because we will miss the fellowship and happiness that we share together now. But there is also a sense of joy in knowing that our beloved friend or family member is with the Lord. There is great comfort in Jesus Christ. Let us rest in Him in our times of sadness, drawing from the well of comfort He has given us – the pages of Scripture.