

Love More And More

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[0 : 00] Well, if you could turn with me now to 1 Thessalonians, we're gonna continue reading 1 Thessalonians, we're gonna read chapter four verses 1 to 12.

1 Thessalonians four verses 1 to 12. Finally then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that as you receive from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.

If you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus, for this is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality, that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passions of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God, that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things.

As we told you beforehand and solemnly warn you, for God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore, whoever disregards this disregards not man but God who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

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, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia, but we urge you brothers to do this more and more and to aspire to live quietly and to mind your own affairs and to work with your hands as we instructed you so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

[1 : 38] May God bless this reading of his word. Well, when it came to thinking about what passage to preach tonight, the passages that kept coming to my mind was one Thessalonians four.

Don't worry, not because of the first half about sexual immorality, but really what I was thinking particularly about was verses nine and 10. Let me read those again. Paul says, 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, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia, but we urge you brothers do this more and more.

Paul's desire for the Thessalonians is very simple really. His prayer, he says, I see your love for one another, now love one another more and more.

And that's what came to mind, that's the encouragement and prayer that I want to leave you with tonight, but more importantly, this is God's word to you, regardless of who's standing up here, this is God's timeless and unchanging and infallible word.

Just as he spoke through Paul to encourage the Thessalonian church, this is God's encouragement for us as we come to his word. I see your love for one another, now love one another more and more.

[2 : 56] Those are really just our two points for this evening. First, I see your love for one another. When Paul looks out at the Thessalonians, not when he looks out at them, he's writing, but as he thinks about them, he sees their love for one another and he rejoices.

And first of all, he does that because he sees it as a sign of good health. As tough starts go, the Thessalonian church had a pretty difficult beginning. You can read more about it in Acts chapter 17, but Paul and Silas came to Thessalonica with the message of the gospel and lots of people believed.

It was really a great encouragement. That was the birth of the church, as many people believe through Paul and Silas' preaching. But the church was less than a month old when Paul and Silas were forced to leave the city because of really severe and intense opposition.

And Paul is cut off. He's longing to be with the church and reading this letter, you just get an insight into how much he loved them. In chapter two, verse seven, Paul says, we were gentle among you,

like a nursing mother taking care of her own children.

That's how Paul saw his relationship with them. That kind of parental motherly taking care of an infant. He has a deep love for them. And so when Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica, he felt like he was having a baby ripped from his arms, really, he describes himself as being torn away from you in chapter two, verse 17.

[4 : 22] And just like a parent being torn away from a child, Paul longs to know how is the church doing? How is this infant church doing in my absence? How are these young converts?

What has happened to them? And months passed with no news, Paul had traveled further south in Greece at this point and he didn't hear anything, didn't hear anything. And Paul was wanting to know what has had happened.

And it got to the point where he sent Timothy up to find out what had happened. And chapter three in Thessalonians is Paul's response when he gets Timothy's report. And basically Paul is glowing. Paul's rejoicing and Paul is relieved that the church is not just surviving, but they're thriving. That in this time that he's been gone, God has kept the church and God has been building that church. You may know that in the first few months of a baby's life, they get quite a lot of checkups from a health visitor who'll come by and they'll measure the baby's length and their head circumference and their weight and they'll plot all these things on a chart and ask the parents about various other kind of questions to determine how the baby is developing and is it all healthy?

[5 : 35] Well, you might see Timothy's like the health visitor who's come back to Paul. And he's telling him all about how the church is doing. And if Timothy's the health visitor, that means Paul is one happy parent.

He's overjoyed because the Thessalonian church, you could say is just a big, fat, happy baby. They're doing really, really well. And chapter three, verse six, Paul says, "Timothy has come to us from you "and he has brought to us the good news of your faith and love." They are, Paul is overjoyed because the Thessalonians are growing in this faith and love.

Now faith and hope and love are three things that Paul often comments on. They're three key markers of health that Paul often turns to in his letters.

And the Thessalonians are off the charts in their love for one another. I mean, just that verse that we read in chapter four, he says, "Concerning brotherly love, "you have no need for anyone to write to you." And that's not just because they're really loving, which they are, but because he recognizes they've been, as he says, you've been taught by God.

You didn't need me there the whole time holding your hand. God has taught you to love one another. And that is so obvious in the way that you have grown and grown and grown in love.

[6 : 53] Thessalonians were clearly marked out by love. While I'm sure that love wasn't exclusively directed at other Christians, Paul particularly draws attention to their brotherly love.

You'll notice that love for other Christians in the church and other Christians in Macedonia, which is that province of Northern Greece that they are part of.

And the Thessalonians were so loving that in that passage that Grant read for us earlier, in verse seven, we're told they became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Akhaya. We aren't given many details of what that love looked like.

But in verse three of chapter one, Paul calls it a labor of love. They were working hard to love one another. This clearly wasn't just a surface level friendliness, a bit of chit chat when they see each other.

This went deeper than just asking, how are you? They were invested in one another's lives. This was hard work. This was costly. This was an ongoing self-sacrificial love, laying down their lives to serve one another, seeking to build one another up, to encourage each other, giving their tears and their time and their talents to love and to serve these other believers.

[8 : 08] And Paul sees this labor of brotherly love as a sign that the church is doing well, that the church is healthy. And so I just wanna pause and ask, do we look at love in the same way as Paul?

Do we see that love for other Christians as a vital sign of a healthy church? I mean, what do we think makes a healthy church? If you were to list it, would we say, I don't know, faithful preaching, the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's supper, that we'd see that there's evangelism, discipleship.

I'm sure there's other things we could add. But would we think of love? Would we look, do we look for love? When we visit a church, when we look at our own church, and we think of health, do we

look for love and for people loving one another?

Because Paul does. Love is not just an optional extra. He doesn't go say, oh, you're great. Are you trusting in Jesus as your Lord and Savior? And that he died on the cross, that your sins are forgiven, that you're adopted into his family?

That's brilliant. Now, it doesn't really matter that you can't bear to be with any other Christians. We know they're weird anyway. But as long as you're trusting in Jesus, that's fine. That's not what Paul says.

[9 : 18] He's overjoyed to hear about their faith, yes, but also their love, their crucial pillars of a healthy Christian church, of a healthy Christian life. Paul looks for love.

God's people should be marked out by love. And if they're not, that there is a problem. If there isn't a deep gospel driven, intentional, and active love that is being displayed in a church, then we have to ask, is a church really healthy?

Do we look for love? Not only that, though. Do we give thanks when we see it? Because Paul does. And he sees it and he tells the Thessalonians and he sees it to encourage them. To encourage them that they are healthy, that they're growing in health.

If love is a vital sign of a healthy church, then it really is something that we should give thanks for. We should give thanks to God, because ultimately it comes from him, as we'll come on to.

But we also should give thanks to one another and with one another. Often, we're the last to see ways in which we have grown as Christians. Often we need people to point that out.

[10 : 29] We need people to encourage us, to say and see areas in which we've grown, to speak of areas in which God's grace has transformed us, and we need to be telling one another that, and sharing that, and rejoicing together.

It may not be a very Scottish thing to do, but let's tell one another when we see growth and encourage one another in that. Brother Elias, love is a sign of a healthy church, so let's give thanks together for that when we see it.

And so I wanna take this opportunity to also encourage you. You have welcomed us in love. And it's been a privilege to be prayed for and cared for by all of you.

But more than that, you've also grown in love. And it's over the time, my time here, just two and a half years, I've seen as this church has grown corporately as into more and more of a healthy church in the way that you love one another.

You've grown in welcoming one another, in selflessly serving one another, in reaching out in love to people who aren't just your peers or in a friendship group, or who are like you, but reaching across those boundaries to care and serve for one another.

[11 : 42] I see you bearing with one another more, being slower to take offense, being quicker to forgive. And that's a delight to see. It's a delight to see that growth in love.

I'm not saying those things just because they're not saying that they weren't there before, but because they're growing more and more. And so it's wonderful to see that. And so we give thanks. We also, and Paul gives thanks to God because ultimately that growth is a sign of God's work. It's a sign of a healthy church, but it's also a sign of God's work.

That's just our second sub point. Because you might be wondering, what's the big deal about brotherly love? Now, why is it a mark of a church that people love one another? Don't lots of people love each other.

It's not only Christians who love each other, is it? And there's wonderfully, there's an element of truth there. It's true that one John 4 verse 8 says that God is love.

[12 : 40] He is the origin, he is the originator of love, and God has created us in his image to be image bearers who can love. And just because the fall has broken us as image bearers, that doesn't mean that we don't see love all around us.

Some of the most loving people in my life, and my life aren't those who are Christians, and I long for them to be Christians, and you probably know the same. There's lots of people who don't know Christ, who still are loving people.

But what, so we've been, but all of our love is, while we are created to love like God, to reflect his image in that, we have all that love has been marred.

That love has been broken, it's been tainted by sin. The God's image in us didn't disappear in the fall, but it was broken in some ways. It was, it didn't disappear, but it was fractured.

We don't reflect God's love as we should. And if we look at our own hearts, our motives are often wrong. Our love always falls short of where it should be. And if that's true, not just of our love for God, but our love for one another.

[13 : 50] If we're then poor examples of love, isn't it wonderful that God in his love doesn't give up on us? We might not be worthy of his love, and yet the Bible tells us that he loves us.

In just those verses that we began in one John verse 10, in this is love, not that we have loved God, but that he has loved us.

And he sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins. God loves us not because we are lovely in and of ourselves, not because we are worthy, not because we can love him back on our own, but because he is a loving God, because love is central to his character.

But neither is that a theoretical love. John says, God loves by sending his son to be the propitiation for our sins. That might be a hard word to say, but it's a word that describes what happens on the cross.

It describes God's love on the cross. As he sent Jesus Christ to be the substitute, and as God in his love poured out his wrath that we deserve for our sin on Jesus, so that he took the punishment for our sin, so that his wrath was averted from us if we're trusting in him.

[15 : 06] That's love on display. Is God not treating us as we deserve? And is Jesus taking the punishment we deserve on the cross so that we might be saved?

God's love is active in sending Christ to die. As Paul says in Romans 3 verse 8, God demonstrates his own love for us in this. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Now some of you don't know God's saving love, and so this is my last opportunity really to urge you to take hold of that love, to lay hold of Christ, whether you're listening online or here in person, to throw yourself on him, ask him for mercy, ask him to forgive your sins.

He is a loving God, and if you do that, he won't turn away, he won't push you away. And when Jesus told the parable of the prodigal son, we often focus on the son, we also need to focus on the father.

What happens when the son comes back or the father doesn't just stand aside or turn his back to the son? He runs, he throws his arms around him. That is the character of our loving God.

[16 : 11] He longs for sinners to come back to him, and he won't turn any away. Will you turn to him if you haven't already? When we trust in God, in Christ, God not only saves us in love, but transforms us in order to love.

Just to illustrate that, sin makes us like a broken mirror, we might say. And in the Roman times, mirrors are made of bronze. It just helps with my illustration.

But if that mirror became all dented and rusty, it wouldn't reflect very well. But when we trust in Jesus, when God forgives us and unites us to Christ, it's like he transforms that, so it reflects better. He scrapes away the rust, he hammers out the dents, he polishes us until we gleam to reflect the character of his son so that we reflect his love.

Now that restoration process is lifelong. It doesn't all happen at once. Everyone here is imperfect in their love, even if we're trusting in Christ.

[17 : 15] But one thing is certain is that God does restore us to love like him. That is the trajectory that we're going to know. That's our trajectory if we're trusting in Christ.

God is making us more and more loving like Christ. And so when Paul hears about the transformed love of the Thessalonians, he knows there can be only one explanation, God is at work, God has been at work.

Thessalonians were genuine believers. The love is a sign, their love is a sign that God is at work. He's like one of the, it's like the road sign. That says men at work where you see that sign.

Well, seeing love in a Christian's life is like a sign that says God has been at work. Brothers and sisters, I've only been here for two and a half years, but it's been a privilege to see God at work. Be encouraged, God is at work in you. If you're feeling discouraged in your Christian life, if you're feeling like you're stagnant, you might not be as growing as much as you want to be and maybe as much as you should be.

[18 : 24] But God has been and is at work in your lives. I can see that God working to grow you in love like him, grow him in love for him, grow you in love for his people.

And that growth in love has been unified. As surely as each individual is united to Christ. So when God grows us in love, he knits us together in love for one another.

He knits us together so we more and more as a body of Christ display what true love looks like in our relationships for each other. And so to God be the glory for great things he has done and that is evident in this room.

But Paul said it doesn't end there. And so neither will we. He says, I see your love now loved one another more and more. So our second point, love more and more.

Our growth as Christians, including growth in love isn't just something that we passively sit by through life. Regeneration is God's work. But God also commands us to partner with him in that restoring work.

[19 : 32] Paul can speak of a labor of love because it's something we need to work at. We might think of love like a muscle. We need to use that muscle. We need to work out that muscle for it to grow.

But it's God who gives the growth. It's God who provides the energy for that muscle to work. And when we see God's work and our work hand in hand, really in that phrase when Paul says, you've been taught by God to love one another.

God is at work hand in hand. We're hand in hand with God as we seek to grow and love for one another. Well, how does God do that? How do we grow hand in hand in love?

There's lots of things we could say from the Bible. I just wanna pick out two things in the lives of the Thessalonians. First, very simply, he gives us people to love.

God puts people in front of us who need our love in order to grow us in love. People who need your love, people who need my love.

[20 : 30] For the Thessalonians, that was the people in their church, but also the Christians throughout Macedonia. We read in 2 Corinthians 8 that a lot of the believers in Macedonia lived in severe poverty and suffered severe persecution.

And in verse 10, we're told the Thessalonians rose to the occasion. They labored in love for the Macedonians so that Paul could, Paul heard from, as Timothy went and visited Thessalonica, well, he heard from all the villages he passed through how those churches in Thessalonica were loving everyone else.

It was infectious. It was, their love was spread abroad. The people that God put in front of them, they loved. Have you ever paused to think, who has God placed in my life for me to love?

Not who do I want to love, but who needs my love? Paul isn't primarily, Paul is primarily talking about other Christians here, but not saying that we shouldn't love those outside the church, but that we have a particular responsibility to our Christian brothers and sisters.

That's why it's called brotherly love. It's brotherly, not just in nature. We love like family, but it's brotherly in origin. It comes because we are family in Christ.

[21 : 45] That is who we are. Our first identity is before, our identity as family in Christ comes before our identity as blood family in that way. Our identity, we are brothers and sisters in Christ if we're trusting in Jesus.

And so we have a responsibility to love one another. And so back to the question. Will you ask yourself, who has God placed in my life, placed in front of me that I can love?

Now in this world where there's so many connections and so much in our lives, it can be easy to be a bit overwhelmed and think, well, there's so much need. I can't meet at all. But God does give us spheres of responsibility, even just thinking in your own family, in the church, in the car away itself. Who has God placed in my life who I can love? Both believers and unbelievers. Who needs some encouragement? Who needs some company? Who needs a meal? Who needs someone to listen to them?

Who needs someone to laugh with them? Who needs someone to weep with them? Who needs someone to pray with them? Who needs practical help in some way?

[22 : 54] Who has God placed in our lives that we can love? Because God puts people in our lives to help us to grow in love so that we rise to the occasion, strengthen by Him to grow in love.

God grows us in love by giving us people to love. Second, God grows us in love through hard self-sacrifice. One of the, if we're gonna look through one Thessalonians, we can't miss Paul's overflowing, abundant, deep and rich love he has for the Thessalonians.

Paul didn't, Paul wasn't with the Thessalonians for long, but it seems like his example that in that one month he was there really stuck. Let me just read to you a bit of Paul's description of his own ministry from chapter two, verse eight.

He says, after saying that he's like a nursing mother taking care of her own children, he says, so being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you, not only the gospel of God, but also our very own selves because you had become very dear to us.

For you remember, brothers, our labor and our toil, we worked tonight and day that we might not be any burden to you while we proclaim to you the gospel of God. Twice in one Thessalonians, Paul says you became imitators of us.

[24 : 13] So it's Paul's life, it's through Paul's life that the Thessalonians learned what true self-sacrificial Christ-like love was. They were taught by God, they learned from God what it was like, but one of the ways God taught them was by giving them Paul, by giving them a man who emulated and reflected Christ's love in his self-sacrificial ministry.

He was willing to give them his very self. He sought to not be a burden, he labored night and day and toil. This was a love that was active and deep and Paul worked hard to love them.

He went out of his way. And I'm not saying anything new in terms of what this love looks like. Paul in Philippians chapter two famously describes, famously urges the Philippians to love one another by giving them the supreme example of Jesus Christ, who laid down his life, who humbled himself even to death on a cross.

And Paul says to the Philippians, have the same love. Have the same love. If you want to grow in love, then gaze on Christ.

Cause he is the supreme example of love that we are given. If you wanna grow in love, gaze on Christ. And because in Christ we see what it means, what love looks like in action.

[25 : 42] It looks like giving yourself, like giving and giving and giving. For Christ to look like going to the cross for us even when we don't deserve it. Christ loved us.

It was while we were still sinners. Christ died for us. When we go out to love other people, we don't love them because they've loved us first. That's true with those who are unbelievers.

That's true with those who are believers. Sometimes the people we can find most difficult to love can be those in the church. But Christ loved us while we were quite loveless. So as we look at Christ, may that transform our love to love like him in laying aside all of our differences, all of our preferences, laying aside anything that might get in the way our desires, anything, anything that would get in the way of us loving one another and laying down our lives in that way.

And not only that, don't only look at Christ, look at Paul, Paul gives himself as an example of love. He is absolutely overflowing in love for this church. I just love that language.

Being affectionately desirous to you, we are ready to share with you, not only the gospel of God, but our very own selves. You'd become so dear to us. How many, can we say that about one another? That we're willing to give our very own selves because the others have become so dear to us.

[27 : 09] Will we walk in the footsteps of Christ? Will we walk in the footsteps of the apostle Paul to commit to sharing our very selves, to love each other? Paul says to the Thessalonians, I see your love.

Now we urge you brothers to do this more and more. Jesus sets for us a standard of love that really we'll only ever meet when we're with Christ in glory.

It looks intimidating because it is the perfect example of love. But God in his grace and by his power is growing us through his spirit within us to make us love more and more like Christ.

He has promised that the good work he began, he will carry out to completion. In love, Christ laid down his life for you. In love, he is reshaping you to more and more reflect his love in your life.

And when Christ comes again, or when you die to be with him, you will perfectly reflect that glorious love. So take heart. You have grown in love, you are growing in love.

[28 : 13] And Christ will grow that love in you. And my prayer is over the next two and a half years, this will be, the next two and a half years will be a story of your explosive growth and love for one another.

And like Paul hears of the Thessalonians, that people will hear of Kalauea and that infectious and explosive love, they have for one another. And that would be a display of what God does, would be a display of his glory and his love in you by his power and for his glory.

Oh man, let's pray.