

Study 6: Brotherly Love

Introduction

Philia is one of the four Greek words for love which include *philia*, *storge*, *agape*, and *eros*. It is often translated to mean brotherly love. It often connotes a deep friendship demonstrating trust and mutual affection. Before starting this study, take a moment and reflect on this term. Have you ever experienced brotherly love? What does it look like and what results from it?

A genuine brotherly love creates a synergy between people that is greater than the sum of the parts. In the passages we explore today in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-18 we see that Paul is calling us to experience and demonstrate brotherly love to others. Paul is essentially calling the Thessalonians to create the glue that holds the church together and strengthens it through brotherly love and the promise of the coming resurrection. We should be encouraged in this lesson to deepen our relationship with God and fellow believers. We might also be inspired to demonstrate brotherly love to others who either do not know God or are struggling in their faith.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

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, ¹⁰ 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, 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.

Discussion

1. Verses 9 and 10 suggests the Thessalonians have “brotherly love” for one another. Brotherly love refers to a deep affection seen in close friendships. It is the kind of love that exists because of our spiritual relationship forged through our common relationship with Christ and being children of God through our faith. **If we exhibit “brotherly love” how should we treat other Christians?**
 - We should show warmth and concern for other Christians
 - We might be closer to our Christian brethren than we are with family because of the spiritual bond that is formed and the connection to the Lord that is shared among Christians
 - This does not necessarily mean we always agree with other Christians; but what it does mean is that the common cause forged by the Gospel should surpass and trump nearly any disagreement we have with another Christian; in the face of the Gospel and the truth of God’s Word, all other issues become relatively small
 - In many ways this is a rephrasing of one of the two most important commandments from God, to love our neighbor as ourself; it is what should distinguish us from those in the world around us
 - It also acknowledges that we all need brotherly love to bring forgiveness to broken relationships and a broken world; Just like we need God’s love to

ultimately forgive us for our sins, our fellow believers need our love and forgiveness for the things they have done that have hurt us

2. In verse 9, Paul mentions you have no need for anyone to write to you regarding “brotherly love” because you have been taught by God to love one another. **What do you think this means?**

-This is a difficult question and there might be many different answers the group provides for this

-Although there might not be a “right” answer, good answers would focus on one of the following three areas:

-God provided his holy Word and the New Testament says a great deal on this topic; so there is plenty of teaching on the need to love one another

-God sent His Son, Jesus to be an example for us (1 John 4:9-11, 19)

-The continuing ministry of the Holy Spirit dwells within us and constantly teaches us to love one another (Gal. 5:22, 2 Cor. 5:14)

3. It helps to have subtle reminders and encouragement to love others like we see in verses 9 and 10. **What are some of the common issues we encounter throughout our day that make it difficult to love? What are some practical ways that we can move past these obstacles to be more loving, even in the face of difficulty?**

-Some possible answers to the first question include:

-Fears

-Insecurities

-Self protection mechanisms to avoid being hurt

-Lack of maturity

-Stubbornness or anger

-Self righteousness or pride

-A failure to deal with or recognize our own sinfulness

-Some possible answers to the second question include:

-Engaging in scripture

-Meditating on God’s Word or praying

-Having others hold us accountable

-Talking with others about our problems and finding ways to work through them

4. Paul implores the Thessalonians to take three actions in verse 11. **What are those actions? What do these actions have to do with exhibiting brotherly love?**

-Three exhortations:

-To lead a quiet or restful life

-A Christian who is at peace with himself and God will be at peace with his brethren

- It demonstrates a practical application of love to others
- People who do not demonstrate a love for others or more problematically criticize or hurt others are often restless and nervous; they fail to find significance and solace in the Lord
- To tend to your own business
 - Getting our own affairs in order is a first step to providing truly Biblical love and assistance to others
 - Taking care of our own affairs in a biblical way frees us up from becoming an annoyance to others that can impede love
 - Need to find balance though between nosiness and isolationism because we need to be continually engaged in relationship
- To work with your own hands
 - God wants us to be self-supporting and productive in society rather than dependent on it
 - God is warning us against idleness or laziness
 - People who refuse to work can become unruly and undisciplined and therefore put a burden on those around them
 - We must help those in need, but not enable people if they refuse to work

5. In verse 12, Paul offers two motivations for the instructions given in verse 11. **What are those motivations and why are they important?**

- To be an example to the outside, unbelieving world
 - We should recognize that as Christians the unbelieving world is always watching and learning from our example
 - If we don't demonstrate love in our hearts, how can we draw them into closer relationship with Christ?
 - Authenticity is important to demonstrate our actions are consistent with the Gospel
- To provide for our own needs
 - Performing good work provides for our own needs and those of our family's
 - Work keeps us from being a burden on others
 - It enables us to give to those who are in need
 - It enables us to be productive in society
 - It enables us to avoid idleness, which could lead to temptation and meddling in others affairs

Read 1 Thessalonians 4: 13-14

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

Discussion

The Thessalonians, like most other pagan communities of the day, did not believe in life after death. They believed that without the body, there was nothing. So when Paul came and preached about the resurrection, he was mocked and misunderstood by many because to them the notion of rising after death was ridiculous and inconceivable. We live in a similar world today where many perceive the resurrection as impossible. Yet, Revelation offers hope in that through true repentance and turning towards Jesus Christ, there is life after death. Paul is bringing that hope to the people of Thessalonica in verses 13-14. Through these verses Paul is seeking to cut through the preconceived notions of the pagan world and demonstrate that Jesus has the power bring eternal life.

6. Paul's suggestion that he does not want believers in Thessalonica to be uninformed acknowledges his understanding of the pagan culture many of these believers grew up in. Paul wants to be clear to them that there is life after death through Christ, which is a difficult concept for the Thessalonians to understand and grasp. Paul suggests to them not to grieve like unbelievers do. An important point here is that Paul is not saying don't grieve. He is simply saying that grief is different for believers than it is for others. **What hope do we have as Christians when a fellow believer passes from this life?**

Therefore, how is grief different among Christian believers?

- We have the hope that a believer will be with Christ in heaven at the second coming of Christ
- We have the hope that when a believer dies, that is not the end of the story; instead their soul is simply asleep and will rise again
- Grief for a Christian recognizes this hope in what will come to pass in the future
- Like others, we are sad to see this person leave this life, but we can celebrate in the hope that they will be proceeding to a better place and they will be with Jesus
- This in turn gives us hope for others who are with us today as well as for our own lives

7. Verse 14 states that because we know that Christ died and rose again, we have confidence that he will return with those believers who have already passed. We live in a fallen and sin-ridden world and there were many examples of that on display throughout 2020. **Given the promise over verse 14, how should we live our life to others, particularly non-believers?**

- We can love all the more abundantly and spread the Gospel to others we love deeply so that they can realize this promise too
- Hope in death becomes a powerful witness that we recognize that death is not the end and that there is more to the story; others who view this approach can find hope in their own and their loved ones death
- No fear in death

- We have confidence that a glorious future lies ahead of us, regardless of the difficulties and suffering in this life
- We can live our life as ambassadors of Christ and the Good News
- Think of it as aliens on assignment
- Through our positive and hope filled example, we can be an inspiration to others and fill them with the Good News that only comes through the Holy Spirit

Read 1 Thessalonians 4: 15-18

¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, ^[a] that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

Discussion

8. Read Matthew 24:30-31 and contrast Jesus' account of revelation and the rapture with Paul's account in 1 Thessalonians. **What are the similarities and differences between the two descriptions? Given Paul's purpose as a New Testament prophet how can we explain any observed differences?**
 - Similarities
 - Both discuss the sound of a trumpet
 - Both discuss a gathering of the elect to be with Christ
 - Differences
 - In Matthew the Son of Man is coming on clouds, but in Thessalonians believers ascend to the clouds to be with the Son
 - In the gospels angels gather the elect, but in Thessalonians Christ Himself gathers the elect
 - Matthew does not explicitly mention a resurrection, whereas this is predominant in Thessalonians
 - The order of ascent is not mentioned in Matthew, but it is discussed in Thessalonians
 - The two passages are very similar, but there are some differences
 - Part of Paul's mission was to encourage, instruct, and console believers who are following the teachings of Jesus Christ and these differences do just that
 - It is difficult to interpret the mystery of the revelation and exactly how it will occur; like most prophetic utterances about the future, these verses are sufficiently similar and consistent
9. Paul's emphasis on uniting those who have already died with the believers still alive on Earth is also a reassuring message to the Thessalonians. **How do these reassurances**

distinguish Christian believers from nonbelievers and how do they reinforce the call to show brotherly love toward one another?

- We have a reassurance here in verses 15-17 that believers who have already past and currently living believers will be united with Christ at the rapture
- The focus here on coming together is reassuring to Christians that they will be united with Christ with not only their family and friends still living, but those who have already past
- But more importantly, these passages emphasize the Christian family and how we are all united through Christ
- This largely distinguishes us from nonbelievers in that we are members incorporate of the body of Christ, his temple and eventually we will be united with him
- So even if we are estranged from our earthly family, we have a family through our faith that will welcome us with open arms when Christ returns and this provides us with hope
- It also reemphasizes the brotherly love we have for one another who are all part of this loving family through Christ

10. In verse 18 Paul suggests that we should encourage one another with these words. **As believers, what are some ways we can encourage others (who are struggling) with the promise and hope of Christian brotherly love and the resurrection in these verses?**

- Christianity is inherently a communal religion; it is not intended to be practiced in isolation
- The promise and hope of the resurrection is that we will be united with Christ and those who have passed before us and we will be with them for eternity
- This promise should give us hope and anticipation in Christ's second coming
- But while we are here, we are called to engage in brotherly love with one another and to encourage one another
- The Gospel surpasses our social circles, our political ideology, our country, our origin, our culture, and our gender; the Gospel brings together disparate people who on the surface might not share much in common; but through Christ we are deeply connected with brotherly love through Christ and we are called to share that love with each other and others
- This should encourage us that no matter how tough things get in our lives or in our environment, we have the promise of God and we have each other, united through Christ

Closing/application

In this passage we have explored Christian brotherly love and the promise of Christ's return and the resurrection. We are encouraged with the guarantees that the believer will not face judgment of separation from God, the believer will be resurrected at the return of Christ, and

that if Christ comes during a believer's lifetime the believer will be raptured to be with Christ. With these guarantees Paul's sincere hope is that believers will trust in God and deepen their faith through him while spreading God's love and Gospel to others, while also encouraging others to deepen their faith as well. His hope for nonbelievers or those who doubt is to find Christ as their personal Savior and that these nonbelievers will learn to put their trust in God. In order to accomplish this, believers need to come along side the nonbeliever and show Christ's enduring love to them. So we should be encouraged to engage with the rest of the world armed with these hope we have in Christ, being ambassadors for Christ.