
Words of Truth

I Thessalonians 4:9-10

By: Brian A. Yeager

“But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more” (I Thessalonians 4:9-10). The Greek word “φιλadelphία” (Strong’s # 5360) that is translated “brotherly love” appears in four other passages in the New Testament (Romans 12:10, Hebrews 13:1, I Peter 1:22, and II Peter 1:7). It is not that these saints needed to be taught this afresh. They were a loving group of saints (I Thessalonians 3:6). Rather, it is as this chapter began, that they needed to abound more and more in what they already had been taught.

When first century Christians were taught about brotherly love it was often a lesson they had already been taught. For example, consider this: *“Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you: because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes”* (I John 2:7-11).

Think about where New Testament teaching of brotherly love started: *“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another... This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends... These things I command you, that ye love one another”* (John 13:34-35; 15:12-13; 15:17).

The lesson here had not only been obviously taught to the saints in Thessalonica before this epistle was written, but also earlier in this epistle. Notice: *“And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you”* (I Thessalonians 3:12). When we come to the second letter to the saints in Thessalonica this was written: *“We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth”* (II Thessalonians 1:3). So, their love towards each other did grow as instructed.

When we think about brotherly love we cannot just think about such as it relates to our local brethren (I Peter 2:17). If any person is obedient to our Lord and thus is our brother or sister in Christ (Mark 3:31-35), we are taught of God to love he or she. Think about what happened in the following text: *“And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the Spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul”* (Acts 11:27-30). Then tie to those Scriptures how we see brotherly love through deeds towards one another: *“For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another. Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous. Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you. We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death. Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth”* (I John 3:11-18).

So, the way these brethren are going to abound in love is not through some sort of emotional, internal thought process. Growth in brotherly love is about abounding in something that can be seen. That goes back to what Jesus taught and what was taught shown in the previous paragraph. It is the appeal that Paul used when he asked Philemon to accept his runaway slave Onesimus back into his household as a then converted brother in Christ (Philemon 1:1-22).

Love is the motivator in our service to one another. Paul wrote this to the churches of Galatia: *“For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself”* (Galatians 5:13-14).

So, how significant is the subject matter of brotherly love? Here it is in a nutshell: *“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God... If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also. Whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God: and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments”* (I John 4:7; 4:20-5:2).