

1st THESSALONIANS

4:9-12

Introduction

Jesus Christ said,

John 10:10 "...I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly."

I see two things in these words of Jesus: A *promise* and a *possibility*:

1. The promise is "**that they may have life.**" His hearers were alive; but they still needed "life." The Bible states that we are all born dead in trespasses and sins – we are all *physically* alive, but *spiritually* dead. Jesus promises **spiritual life** to all who will believe in Him as their Savior from sin.
2. The possibility is that you may have spiritual life "**more abundantly.**" "Abundantly" means *excessive, exceeding, overflowing, and beyond measure*. A good paraphrase would be "**super-abounding.**"

I say this is a possibility because so many Christians do not experience or express the super-abounding part of the Christian life. I can give you an example. In verse one of First Thessalonians chapter four the apostle Paul said,

1 Thessalonians 4:1 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;

"Abound" is from the same root for *abundantly*. The subject of chapter four is living-out the super-abounding life in your daily "walk" with Jesus. The apostle Paul wrote to "urge and exhort" them to "abound more and more." If you need to be urged and exhorted to do something, then it is something that you may or may not be doing; it is a possibility. We will see very definitely in the verses that follow that there were believers in the Church at Thessalonica who were *not* super-abounding in certain areas and attitudes.

Super-abounding in your Christian life should be more than a possibility; it should be your practice. What are some of the practical areas of your life in which you should be super-abounding?

We saw in our last study that Christians are to super-abound in *abstinence*. The Thessalonian believers were surrounded by immorality and subject to their own impulses. They were struggling against both society and self. They could nevertheless super-abound in abstinence.

Two more areas of super-abounding are presented: *affection* (in verses nine and ten), and *ambition* (in verses eleven and twelve).

We'll organize our thoughts around two points: #1 Be Super-Abounding In Affection For Your Brethren, and #2 Be Super-Abounding In Ambition For Your Business.

#1 Be Super-Abounding In
Affection For Your Brethren
(v9-10)

Chapter four began with the word, "finally." "Finally" is better translated, "and now." The words indicate a change of subject. The new subject was some problems and misunderstandings in the Church. One of them was the **idleness** of some of the believers.

Paul had taught them about the imminent coming of Jesus to Rapture the Church from earth to heaven. By "imminent" we mean any-moment. (We will see the Doctrine of the Imminent Rapture in verses thirteen through eighteen of chapter four). The Church at Thessalonica had no doubts that Jesus could return for them at any moment! But some of them misunderstood the implications of His imminent coming. They decided to quit their jobs and wait around for Jesus to Rapture them. Their idleness was becoming a burden to the other believers as they meddled in their affairs and mooched off of them. By Second Thessalonians Paul would have to say, "If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat" (Second Thessalonians 3:10). In our passage he took a more gentle, general approach and exhorted the idlers to "brotherly love" and to "love one another."

"Brotherly love" is the Greek word *philadelphia*. It originally referred to the natural affection between blood relatives but came to be applied to the supernatural affection between Christians. When you become a Christian every other believer becomes your spiritual brother or sister.

"Love one another" is the word *agape*. It describes the kind of love God has for you – a willing love that never depends upon outward appearance or emotional attraction. You experience a new, supernatural affection – *philadelphia* – for your brethren; and you express it willingly – *agape*. We are calling this potent combination of loves Christian **affection**.

Your *philadelphia* and *agape* affection for your brothers and sisters means you never take advantage of them by meddling in their affairs and mooching off of them. Most of the believers would get the point but, as we've seen, some would need a stronger exhortation in the second letter.

In the midst of the correction of their idleness there is a pretty good description of what it means to super-abound in your affection for the brethren. At least three things will characterize your super-abounding affection.

First, super-abounding affection is characterized by instinct:

1 Thessalonians 4:9 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;

"Taught by God" is a unique phrase that is found only here and nowhere else in the Bible. It does not refer or look back to any past teaching. For sure, God's Word in the Old Testament teaches you to love one another; and Jesus commanded you to love one another. But this phrase signifies a present, on-going prompting in your heart by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

That is why I am calling it an *instinct*. By definition, an instinct is independent of any outward instruction; it is something inward, inbred. It is your first impulse, something involuntary.

If you are a believer then the Holy Spirit indwells you. You already have this instinct. Jesus said, "you... have life," and part of this spiritual life is the instinctive love for other believers in God's family.

Jesus also said you could have life "more abundantly," or in super-abundance. Along with your new instinct you have your old fleshly impulses. There is a struggle between your new instinct and your old impulses.

It is up to you to yield to your new instinct and super-abound in love for your brothers and sisters.

Second, super-abounding affection is characterized by involvement:

1 Thessalonians 4:10 and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia...

"Macedonia" was the Roman province of which Thessalonica was the capital. Their geographical location and the political status of their city brought them many opportunities to minister to other believers.

Instinctive brotherly love is never selective. It encompasses all believers everywhere. To find expression, though, you must get involved with your brothers and sisters.

A lot of believers, who have spiritual life, do not super-abound because they remain independent rather than becoming involved. I know lots of Christians who have blown-off Church. They think they are fine on their own. Well, it is just impossible to super-abound in affection unless you get involved... And that means meeting with other believers in a local Church Jesus has raised-up.

Third, super-abounding affection is characterized by increase:

1 Thessalonians 4:10 ... that you increase more and more;

There is always room for increase in your affection. The abundant life Jesus promised is an overflowing that never exhausts its source.

There is a progression in these three thoughts:

1. First, you learn to recognize your new instincts.
2. Second, you regularly meet with believers and are presented with real-life situations and opportunities to instinctively show affection as you get involved.
3. Third, you go on increasing your sphere of affection as you take on more and more opportunities to minister.

It is all made possible by the indwelling of God the Holy Spirit. "Abundantly" also means you have an abundant *supply*, an inexhaustible *resource*. You may find yourself physically exhausted; that's OK! But you can never really be spiritually exhausted in the sense that the supply of God's Spirit is always sufficient.

The idleness of some of the Christians was a strain within the Church. It was also something else: It was hurting the witness of the Church to the watching world of unbelievers.

#2 Be Super-Abounding In Ambition For Your Business (v11-12)

Unbelievers have a knack for finding-out and emphasizing what is wrong with Christians. In Thessalonica they saw a few deadbeats mooching off of others and concluded that Christianity was flaky. They didn't want to quit their jobs and sit around all day waiting for Jesus to come back; nor did they want to "join" the Church and have to support those who did.

Paul took up this aspect of the problem in verses ten and eleven. His overall counsel is in verse eleven where he said, "aspire to lead a quiet life." There is a play on words that was lost in the English translation. The phrase reads, "make it your ambition to have no ambition."

Remember the situation in Thessalonica: Unbelievers saw a few of the believers as having no ambition; they had quit their jobs and were simply waiting around, doing nothing. They needed to be ambitious; but in a different way than unbelievers – in a spiritual way that was super-abounding.

What does this super-abounding spiritual ambition look like?

First, you make it your ambition to mind your own business:

1 Thessalonians 4:11 that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to **mind your own business**...

We use this phrase in a mostly negative way... But it is a very positive biblical exhortation. You're to be mindful of your own affairs, especially with regard to how they will be viewed by unbelievers.

Like it or not your life is a witness. Unbelievers are looking at you to see what difference it makes to be a Christian. Does it make a difference at home? In your marriage? In raising your kids? Does it make a difference at work? In your work ethic? Does it make a difference in your free time? All of these and more are on display.

You can super-abound in spiritual ambition in all of these areas!
For example: Before I was a Christian I had a certain ambition with regard to my work and career. When the Lord came into my life, my ambition changed. I began to understand that I was placed at my job in order to be a witness to unbelievers of the love of God and the salvation He offered all of them by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Second, you make it your ambition to maintain your own business:

1 Thessalonians 4:11 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,

Paul had "commanded" them to "work with their own hands." They could not accuse Paul of being confusing – of confusing them with all his talk of the Rapture. They knew better than to become idlers.

"Work with your own hands" is a strong phrase, one that encourages hard work and industriousness. I told you about how my ambition changed at work once I was saved. I began to actually work harder; I became a better employee, an honest employee. By the grace of God I was super-abounding in ambition as I maintained my daily business.

The same kind of super-abounding should characterize your home life and all the other areas and aspects of maintaining your life.

Simply put, Christianity ought to make a difference and it ought to make *you* different.

Whether or not you super-abound does not affect the truth of Christianity. Jesus came to offer all men everywhere for all time "life" - spiritual life, eternal life. Your failures cannot cancel-out the truth of His promise.

At the same time, people want to abound; to live life as it was meant to be lived; to resolve their problems at home and at work. If you super-abound it will fill-out Jesus' promise as unbelievers watch you fulfilling the possibilities of spiritual life through a power that is unknown to them.

This section is summed-up in verse twelve:

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

"You may lack nothing" means you are providing for yourself through honest, hard work. Christianity energizes you to do more, not less. Working hard, minding and maintaining your own business, is an important part of "walk[ing] properly toward those who are outside."

"Properly" is translated *honestly* in the KJV. It's from a word that means *becomingly* or *decorously*. You've heard of the word *decorum*; it means "suitable to the occasion or to your character." A Christian should have decorum, walking in all areas of life in a way that is suitable to your character and to the occasion.

Unbelievers are outside looking in. They are watching you in **all** your business, and by "business" I mean at work, at home, and at play. They are window-shopping, wondering if Jesus Christ can deliver on His promise. He can!

Conclusion

There's a quote I like that puts the life of the Christian into perspective: "*It is no bad thing to celebrate a simple life.*"

The simple, "quiet" life of the Christian **is** cause for celebration.
Living out the principles of biblical Christianity day-by-day in the
power of the indwelling Holy Spirit is life as it was meant to be lived.