



Let's Get Ready to Rapture

First Thessalonians 4:9-12

"Deadbeat Disciples"

Paul had taught the church in Thessalonica 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).

The church at Thessalonica had no doubts that Jesus could return for them at any moment. So much so that 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" (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.

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.

We could call 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.

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.

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, 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 show affection unless you get involved... And that means meeting with other believers in a local Church Jesus has raised-up.

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.

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.

Nonbelievers 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.

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 nonbelievers.

Like it or not your life is a witness. Nonbelievers are looking at you to see what difference it makes to be a Christian. Does it make a difference at home? In your marriage?

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.

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. 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.

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

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.

Nonbelievers 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!

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.