

Prayer

How can we praise You enough, Lord God?
We are amazed at Your love and Your forgiveness of all our sins;
We are overwhelmed by the gracious help of Your Spirit at all times;
We are astounded by the vision of Glory given us within Your Word;
We are blown away by our sure inheritance of the Kingdom of God!
We worship You, Lord God! Father, Son and Holy Spirit: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Houses

Give thanks to God for the preciousness of home, and all that it means. Give thanks for the memories you have of your home and other places where you have lived.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks to God for His mercies whilst travelling
- Pray for people who are in despair or suicidal
- Pray for the International Monetary Fund and its responsibilities

Meditation

Be present with us, Lord:

When we are faced with difficult situations;
When others turn against us and reject us;
When the things we have planned collapse;
When we do not know which way to turn;
When time passes and a deadline is not met;
When relationships get worse, with angry words.

For You alone can enable us

To turn the impossible into what is possible;
To help us stand back from hurting others;
To build us up again, with lessons learned;
To let You take the strain and learn to trust You;
To enable us to be patient in all situations;
To guard our words and repair relationships.

The Spirit can do all this in us!

Bible Study - 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

⁹ Now concerning the love of the fellow believers, there is no need for anyone to write to you, for you have been taught by God yourselves, to love one another. ¹⁰ You do indeed love all the believers throughout Macedonia, but we urge you, fellow believers, to do so more and more. ¹¹ Make it your ambition to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, just as we instructed you, ¹² so that you may conduct yourselves properly toward outsiders and have no dependency on anyone.

Review

On the surface, the sentiments expressed within this part of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians are straightforward. He commends the 'brotherly' affection they have already shown and have become noted for within the region of Macedonia (4:9), and encourages the church to pursue this 'more and more (4:10). However, if we thought that this 'brotherly affection was intended to be gregarious in nature, then we are mistaken, for Paul follows these comments immediately with advice to 'live quietly, mind your own affairs ...', and 'have no dependency on anyone!' Quite literally, the expression 'mind your own business' comes from here, from verse 11!

It is of course possible to take any part of this passage and spiritualise it somewhat. For example, the first part of it is another Scripture that uses the famous phrase 'love one another', one of the few phrases that comes from the lips of Jesus (John 13:34, 15:12,17), and crops up repeatedly in the writings of Paul, and also Peter and John. As one of Jesus' commands, it was surely bound to influence the life of the early church; and so, Paul encourages the Thessalonians to do this 'more and more'. By writing in this way, Paul challenges all who read his letter to do the same, including us. The Thessalonians were asked to do this and they were no slackers, so how much more should we feel the call to 'love one another' with greater zeal. It is a pertinent call to all God's people today, amongst whom there is sometimes the most awful division, scandal and acrimony. These things need to be overcome with good purpose and intent on all sides, for no other reasons than the fact that Jesus asked this of us.

However, there is something lying even deeper within this Scripture, and this is worthy of our attention. However, we will only discover it if we look carefully at the circumstances Paul is describing. Thessalonica was a proud and independent city, founded by no less than Alexander the Great and now a centre for the Roman governance of the province of Macedonia, in preference to its neighbouring and competing city of Philippi. There is some indication that in the first century, small Christian communities sprung up in smaller towns, and became dependent upon the richer Christians in the cities and the financial and other resources they could provide, including safety at times of persecution.

With all this in mind, Paul's first few comments in this passage clearly encourage the Thessalonians to continue their good work in respect of hospitality within Macedonia. It has been suggested that the Christian community of Berea (see Acts 17:10,13, to where Paul fled after escaping Thessalonica) was one church community that had received generosity from the church at Thessalonica. However, Paul was ever mindful of the human tendency to fall into sinful ways, and in the second half of this text, he gave them some advice that we do not necessarily spot. By urging the Thessalonians to 'mind their own affairs', and 'work with their hands', he was asking them to do something that did not come naturally. Most of the Thessalonians were influential people, as befits a city of class. They were used to being generous, and probably enjoyed the reputation that came with this; but Paul told them not to parade their wealth and influence. They were not materially dependent upon other Christians, except that they could easily have become dependent in other ways. Potentially, theirs was a ungodly dependency on status and approval from others, and everything Paul said was designed to draw them away from this. They were to learn the lessons of being meek and self sufficient; advice Paul may well have given to all churches.

This is all very interesting, because Paul was not merely founding individual churches, but seeking to establish principles by which they churches could relate to each other, and together make up the 'body of Christ'. This could only be done on the basis of equality, and whilst churches were not equal in worldly social status, they had to be equal in the sight of God, and it was important that they related to each other without any sense of dependency

on another. To suggest otherwise would allow the world's agenda to break in to what God was doing in His church. This was only a small part of Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, but it is important and it can be found in other letters. Tomorrow, we will see Paul shift what he has to say to talk to the Thessalonians about one last very important matter.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. To what extent is 'love one another' demonstrated in the life of the church today, whether in your church or in others?
2. To what extent is it right for Christians to 'mind their own business' and seek to be non dependent?
3. How can the church behave properly towards outsiders today?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The Bible is full of surprises, and I was not expecting this passage of 1 Thessalonians before we came to it for today's reading. Now, I have read 1 Thessalonians many times before, but I have to confess that I do not recall reading this section, or trying to understand what Paul was saying here. It is one of those places in scripture where we possibly read through a text and just assume that there is some connection that we have not quickly seen; and we move on. It is certainly a message to me to be more careful!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Is it possible that you have been presumptive in your generosity, perhaps in giving a gift, and assuming that you will be rewarded for so doing? Read through this passage again and assess where you stand within what it says about the Thessalonians.*
- *Pray for the church today and its many divisions and sometime difficult attitudes towards the beliefs and practices of other churches. Pray for humility, and an acceptance of each Christian fellowship on an equal basis.*

Final Prayer

Lord God, there is so much that we should prayerfully bring to You concerning our lives and all we do. Take us, we pray, and infuse Your Spirit into every part of our being. Sort out the wrong and bring to light the right, so that we may live and work according to Your Wisdom; and make our lives an offering of prayer to You; AMEN