

## Abound More And More

“But concerning love of the brethren ye have no need that one write unto you: for yourselves are taught of God to love one another for indeed ye do it toward all the brethren that are in Macedonia. But we exhort you brethren, that ye abound more and more; and that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, even as we charged you; that ye may walk becomingly toward them that are without, and may have need of nothing” (1 Thess. 4:9-12).

The words “abound,” “abounded,” “abounding,” or “aboundeth” appear about 27 times in the New Testament and most of the time (25) they are found in Paul’s letters. Paul’s letters urge that we abound in hope (Rom. 15:13); thanksgiving (Col. 2:7); liberality in giving (2 Cor. 8:2); in faith (2 Cor. 8:7); in every good work (2 Cor. 9:8); in the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 15:58); and, in love (1 Thess. 4:16; Phil. 1:9).

The Thessalonian brethren (Paul said) needed none to remind them to love their brethren. God taught them both by words and deeds to love each other and they themselves demonstrated they had learned that lesson by their showing love toward all the brethren in Macedonia. The second journey of Paul carried him through Macedonia after he had received the Macedonian call (Acts 16:10-16), and when he left the region he left behind three flourishing churches: Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea. Paul’s language here (“indeed ye do it toward all the brethren in Macedonia”) tells us that the Thessalonians did not isolate themselves from other brethren and churches in the region — they were acquainted with other brethren in other congregations and demonstrated their love toward them. In our present day I rather think that — unlike the Thessalonians who needed no instructions to manifest love toward other brethren — American churches, in many regions need to be reminded to show love toward other brethren. So many things interfere with our concern and care for others. We need to rekindle love and care and thus in that love, abound more and more.

Paul gave some needed advice about other matters in this section from the letter: he urged the brethren that they “study to be quiet.” Vines, in his Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, tells us this word “rest” means silence. Since the next phrase in 1 Thessalonians 4:13 is that the Thessalonians were to do their own business, the apostle is instructing the brethren they are not to be meddlers in other men’s matters (1 Pet. 4:15). Solomon has a quaint statement regarding those who try to take care of other people’s affairs: “He that passeth by, and vexeth himself with strife belonging not to him, is like one that taketh a dog by the ears” (Pro. 26:17). So often one who attempts to help those with marital problems finds himself with both parties upset with him. Paul’s advice to Thessalonians was “mind your own business.”

Paul had words for slackers as well. He commanded them “to work with their own hands.” Contrary to the opinion of so many, “the world does NOT owe him a living.” Adam was commanded that “in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread” (Gen. 3:19). So often, those who are busy tending the affairs of others haven’t time to provide for themselves. In Paul’s second letter to these brethren, his words are even more pointed:

“For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, if any will not work, neither let him eat” (2 Thess. 3:10). Many, in today's world, are appalled at Paul's words and would very likely charge him with being void of the milk of human kindness.

We are “to walk becomingly toward them that are without.” The word “without” has a variety of different implications and context is essential to determine the particular meaning in any given text. It is found here in 1 Thess. 4 to identify those who are not Christians (compare its meaning in 1 Cor. 5:12-13, 9:21, Col. 4:15, and 1 Tim. 3:7). Paul's appeal that Thessalonian brethren walk becomingly toward those that are “without” is a subtle reminder that the very ones who should be the focus of our attention in evangelism may be “turned off” if our behavior is not consistent with our message. Just as the Pharisees of old rightly deserved the Lord's condemnation because “they say and do not,” so may many of us receive His similar reproof. Let our lives be a true reflection of the wonderful doctrine of Christ!

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