

Standing Together in Stressful Times

1 Thessalonians 4.9-12

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times: Those words from Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities* fit our day. Stress brings out the best and the worst in humanity. Paul's practical advice to Thessalonian Christians is amazingly timely in our COVID-19 world.

Historical background: *Persecution and stress threaten unity*

- Fundamental command: 'Love one another' (9; Jn. 15.12, 17)
- A never-ending challenge: 'Excel still more!' (10)
- Mind your own business (11a; 2 Thess. 3.11)
- Work hard – Don't be a burden (11b-12; 2 Thess. 3.6-13)



1. Paul's reference to "love of the brethren" in 1 Thess. 4.9 harks back to Jesus' 'new commandment' in John 13.34-35: *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another* (see Jn. 15.17 and 17, too). Why is this command so hard for Christians to follow?
2. In v10, Paul's characteristic praise (*for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia*) 'sugar-coats' his admonition for the Christians in Thessalonica to *excel still more*. There is a practical lesson here: If we must suggest needed improvement in someone's behavior, it's good to 'sweeten' our exhortation with affirmation! Having said that, considering the persecution they were facing, Paul's instruction about sexual purity (see 4.6), and his specific urging in verses 11-12, what might have been areas where their 'love for one another' needed to improve?
3. The phrase "make it your ambition" in v11 is from the Greek word *philotimeomai*, which means something which we aspire to as a goal or earnestly endeavor after. It may seem odd to *be ambitious to be quiet and mind your own business*, since we usually think of ambition connected with energetic action. But in the context of a local church, how important is learning to 'shut up and mind your own business'? How hard is it? Have you ever experienced a time of conflict in a church because of people not 'being quiet' and 'minding their own business'?
4. In verses 11b-12, Paul advises Christians *to work with your hands...so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need*. Notice that Paul only asks them to do what he himself did (see 2.9). What is the relationship between *love of the brethren* and *working so that you are not in any need*? How would being a hard worker influence relationships with people outside the church?