



### **Pleasing God with a Life of Ever-Increasing Love**

*Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more. (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10)*

Have you ever heard someone get a compliment and secretly wondered inside if anyone would say the same thing about you? What an amazing testimony to the Thessalonian congregation putting their faith in Christ into practice that Paul should say, "We don't even need to write to you about brotherly love because you've been taught it by God and live it so obviously." You hear that and you can't help but wonder, "Would Paul, inspired by the Spirit, come to the same conclusion about our congregation, about us at Ascension?" Are we, like the Thessalonians, known throughout the neighborhood or the city or the region as the people that show heaven-sent love to each other? ...I'll let you chew on that and answer that for yourself.

To be sure it's not a matter of guilt by comparison. Have you ever done ANYTHING motivated by guilt and been at all fulfilled or satisfied with the end result? Nor does God want guilt to be our driver or our master. That's why he has gathered up our failures to love others as we love ourselves, our pious-sounding words, and our pathetic excuses, and put them all on Jesus and counted him loveless on the cross in our place. All so that we could live and experience what real, unconditional, you-first love is and looks like. By his selfless life and death Jesus has freed us from our guilt so that we can live and love like him, who lived among us full of grace and truth. Such is what it means when Paul says that the Thessalonians were taught to love by God himself.

But what does Jesus' love look like? Several thoughts come to mind. 1.) He actively searched for opportunities to show compassion. He never shied away from anyone in need. Instead he engaged them, one on one, without passing the buck or handing off the responsibility to someone else. 2.) He invested and committed the love of our Savior always took the time. There's an old saying that goes, "The last part of a person to be converted is their pocketbook," but the longer I'm in ministry and the more I reflect on it for myself, the more I conclude that the "possession" we least want to let go of and give to the Lord and to each other is our time. 3.) Jesus saw his love for us through to the very end, in fact the hallmark of his love is that it *doesn't end*. Since Christ's love is so deep that we could lose ourselves trying to expound it all, we'll let these three points suffice for now.

At any rate, no matter how we may size ourselves up against the metric of the Thessalonians' love for each other, our love has an infinite distance to go to measure up to Christ. Thus, Paul encourages us to love more and more. With more of our hearts, more of our words, more of our actions, more of our money, and more of our time. Because as this devotional series reminds us, time is of the essence. Our time here is finite, and Jesus is coming soon.

*Prayer: Lord Jesus, teach me to love others entirely even as you have loved me. Especially help me be more aware and personally invested in the needs of my brothers and sisters in faith. Make me ready to serve them with the time, the energy, and the gifts that you have so graciously given me. In your name I pray. Amen.*