Get on with the job: 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

When it comes to loving each other as brothers and sisters, Paul says that there is no need to write to the Thessalonians about this, because it is already happening spontaneously – God himself is teaching them to love each other, and actually that love is overflowing from the fellowship in Thessalonica to the extent that all the brothers and sisters in Macedonia are included in its scope. All Paul can say is, keep getting better and better at doing this!

In practice, what does it mean to ‘love one another as brothers and sisters’? In what ways does this love find expression in Brighton Road? Have there been times when you have experienced that love? Could we do better at loving each other as brothers and sisters? If so, how, and what part could you play in effecting this change?

In 4:11, Paul tells the Thessalonians to lead a quiet life, to manage their own affairs, and to work with their hands: in short, they are to get on with the job. What is Paul talking about here? Some people suppose that the Thessalonians were so taken up with the prospect of the imminent return of the Lord that they quit working, and ended up sponging off their fellow believers (2 Thessalonians 3:6-12). Perhaps some of them inclined to be a bit lazy or to take advantage of other people’s kindness, or they found it easier to rely on the church for charity than to engage in hard, degrading manual labour. We can’t be sure, but there seems to be a clear expectation here that, as much as it lies within our capacity, we should seek to be self-sufficient and to provide for our own needs.

The Local Government Pension Scheme defines gainful employment as ‘paid employment for at least 30 hours a week for a period of at least a year.’ However, from a psychological perspective ([Gainful Employment - an overview | ScienceDirect Topics](https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/social-sciences/gainful-employment)), ‘Those who are gainfully employed are people who look forward to going to work rather than dreading it. More specifically, gainful employment consists of holding a job that: (1) provides a sense of engagement and involvement; (2) allows one to find a sense of purpose in life via providing a product or service; (3) leads to a sense of performing well and meeting goals; (4) includes companionship with and loyalty to colleagues, supervisors, and companies; (5) provides variety in job duties; (6) provides a safe working environment; (7) provides minimal income for oneself and family; and (8) leads to happiness and satisfaction.’ Work need not – should not - be a bad thing. It is part of God’s intention for us. After all, in paradise, Adam was given the job of working in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:15). Prolonged inactivity is simply not good for us. So, whether it is tied to earning an income or not, God has work for all of us to do! So, let me ask you, what are you doing for God? Are you making good, effective use of your time? To what extent does your work for God meet the eight criteria listed above? Are there responsibilities that God is calling you to take up, or to put down? Is there anything God wants you to change about how you work for him? And remember too what Paul says about quietly getting on with your own life and minding your own business - these questions are about you – not about anybody else!

It may be that part of Pauls concern for the Thessalonians was that they were suffering persecution: that may lie behind his advice to lead a quiet life, to keep a low profile and behave properly and decently towards outsiders in a way that wins their respect (4:11-12). There is no doubt that loving service towards the community is one of the ways in which the church earns the respect of its neighbours. Can you think of ways in which we are doing this? Again, are there ways in which we could do it better?

Paul is concerned that the believers should not be dependent on anyone else. He may have financial dependence in view here, but there are other ways in which we can end up being unhealthily dependent on other people. According to psychologist J. Birtchnell, ‘adult dependence is characterized by the need to stay close to others, the inclination to be primarily the recipient in interpersonal transactions and the tendency to relate to others from a position of inferiority and humility. The dependent person receives from others a borrowed identity, guidance and direction…acceptance, approval and affirmation of worth’ (‘Defining Dependency’). For most of us, there will be periods in our life when we experience this kind of vulnerability, and we would have been lost without the support of other people to get us through those times. Yet if we can end up being so dependent on others in the long term that we lose all capacity for self-determination, that is a bad thing. When we are helping others, there can sometimes be a danger that their reliance on us boosts our own self-esteem (‘I don’t know how they would manage without me!’). Helping people is always about enabling them and empowering them to do as much as they can for themselves, so that they are able to contribute something of value to others in their own interpersonal transactions. There is a wealth of psychological wisdom is Jesus’ words, ‘It is better to give than to receive’ (Acts 20:35).Who can you help with a step towards increasing confidence and independence, and how?

Forth in Thy name, O Lord, I go, The task Thy wisdom hath assigned,

My daily labour to pursue; O let me cheerfully fulfil;

Thee, only Thee, resolved to know In all my works Thy presence find,

In all I think, or speak, or do. And prove Thy good and perfect will.

Charles Wesley