

In the last lesson, you looked at the immorality of the world and within the church. This week you are going to look at the right kind of love, agape love. Love that we are to show to others. The love that can only come from God. Is this kind of love a feeling or an action - an act of the will? Is it something that can come and go? Is it natural or is it learned? Can it excel? Does it fail?

These are the questions that you are going to answer this week.

Remember to start every lesson in prayer, and approach this study with a heart that desires to be molded into the likeness of God's heart. Pray that His desires become your desires.

DAY ONE

In I Thessalonians 4:9, Paul states that they were taught by God to love one another. Isn't that an interesting statement? How did God teach them to love? What were they taught? If they could be taught, does that mean that you can be taught as well?

Back in chapter one, Paul commended the people for their labor of love. Now in 4:10 he says that they were practicing love toward the brethren who were in Macedonia. How were they doing that? He went on to urge them to excel still more. Keep on loving - labor even harder that you have been.

There was a song we used to sing when I was growing up. It said, "We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord, and we pray that our unity will one day be restored, and they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love. Yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love." When people look at Christians today, when they look at you and I, will they know we are Christians by our love?

We need to have answers to these questions. We need to hold our lives up to God's standard and see if we measure up. The church today, the body of Christ, is sadly lacking in this aspect of our lives. Why? I think the answer is back in chapter one. It is a labor of love. It is hard work. It is time consuming. It means not having "me" time because I am focused on the needs of others. It means dying to self. If we are truly honest with ourselves, we will admit that we don't want to labor; we do enough hard work; we don't have time; we just need some time to ourselves to kick back and relax. What would Paul think about that attitude? More importantly, what does God think?

Excel still more! Labor harder! Love the brethren!

1. Thoughtfully read through I John 3:10-5:3 and Romans 5:5-11. As you read think through all the questions that were asked in the introduction of this lesson. Read through these passages and record what they teach about love and how you can practically apply these teachings to your life.

2. Read through I Corinthians 13. This little chapter is tucked into Paul's teaching about spiritual gifts. No matter what spiritual gifts you may have if you are not exercising those gifts in an atmosphere of proper, active love toward the brethren, they are useless. As you go through the description of active, agape love, record and personalize each one of these and describe how you should be living that out in your life. For example, "I should show my love by being patient with . . . by . . . (practical suggestions/applications).

3. Read Matthew 5:17-20 and Romans 13:8-10. Both of these passages have to do with a believer's relationship with the Law and how that pertains to loving one another. Write a thorough explanation of what is being taught, particularly in the Romans passage, and how you can apply these principles to your life. Take time to look at what you have learned from the passages you have studied so far.

DAY TWO

1. Take time to prayerfully review what you learned from Day 1. If need be, go back and reread the passages if you are unclear on any of them.
2. Read through the book of I Thessalonians. As you read through, record the practical ways that the Thessalonians loved the brethren. Make sure to include chapter and verse with each point.
3. Now it is time for prayerful application of all that you have learned concerning love. Can someone look at your life and see your labor of love? How would they see that being lived out in your life everyday? Is there something keeping you from loving the brethren (or certain brethren) as you are called to do? How can you start loving the brethren? How can you excel still more? Take these before the Lord in prayer and ask Him for the wisdom and courage to live these principles out in your life.

DAY THREE

Paul moves directly from loving one another as we ought to a teaching on the importance of work in a believer's life. It makes sense when you think about it. Paul commended them on their works of faith, their labor of love, and steadfastness of hope. This is our daily life and part of that daily life is attending to our business and working with our hands.

Is our attitude toward work, and how we approach work important to God? Is it necessary to live this part of our life out in obedience to His Word? I certainly hope you answered that question with a resounding, "Yes!" If God's Word talks about it, we better understand what He says and how we are to live that out!

1. Start by reading I Thessalonians 4:9-12. How do the ideas of loving and working tie together? Is one related to the other?
2. After you have wrestled with the question on your own, you can check your commentaries and see if they add any additional insight to verses 9-12. Please don't go any further than that.
3. Look up the following verses and record what you learn about work and a Christian's life. Create an outline when you are done studying the passages.
 - a. Genesis 3:17-19
 - b. Exodus 20:9

c. Ecclesiastes 5:12

d. Acts 20:33-35

e. Ephesians 4:28

f. I Thessalonians 4:11-12

g. II Thessalonians 3:7-15

MY OUTLINE ON WORK

4. The verses that you looked up teach believers to have a proper attitude toward work. But what about those who have people who labor under you. Does the Bible address what your attitude toward them should be. Read the following passages and record what you learn from each.
 - a. Leviticus 19:13

 - b. Deuteronomy 24:14-15

 - c. Jeremiah 22:13

 - d. Malachi 3:5

5. What about those who labor in the work of sharing the gospel. These are people who have devoted their lives to bringing the truths of God's Word to those who need to hear. Some don't have time or energy to spend in working a full-time "secular" job in addition to spending adequate time in preparing and presenting the Gospel. In the Old Testament, the Levites spent their lives serving in the work of the temple. The people thereby cared for the Levites by the gifts and offerings that were brought to the temple. What does God's Word tell you about how you are to care for those who teach you the ways of God through His Word? Record what you learn from each of these verses and how you need to apply them to your life.
 - a. I Corinthians 9:1-23

 - b. Galatians 6:6-10

DAY FOUR AND DAY FIVE

1. If you haven't looked at your commentaries yet, you can take the time to do that; HOWEVER, don't go beyond I Thessalonians 4:1-12. We have yet to dig into those wonderful verses at the end of chapter 4.
2. Complete a thorough observation - chapter study - on I Thessalonians 5. Don't skim over this. You are coming to the end of the book, make sure you finish strong!
3. If you have anytime left, take the time to review this lesson, and pray about how you are going to begin applying what you have learned to your life.

