

1Thessalonians 12-04-27a

This is Friday, the 27th of April, 2012. We're in the Book of First Thessalonians, Chapter 4. And we will resume this evening in the vicinity of verse 10 and 11, although we hope to move quickly into the section beginning at verse 13. We'll take a moment, as we usually do, to go before the Lord in prayer and ask his blessing on our fellowship and on our study.

Father, we're grateful for another opportunity to get together, to have fellowship, and enjoy the blessing of association with believers who share appreciation and enthusiasm for your Word and the truth that guides us and gives voice to your Holy Spirit, gives us the ability to see the Lord Jesus Christ in the fullness of his glory as he embodies and reflects your glory. We thank you for the instructions and the admonitions and the clear guidance that is provided to us in passages such as the one we look at this evening, and we ask your blessing on us as we try to understand and make application from these verses, the truths that they bring to us in this portion of your Word tonight. We pray that in all things the Lord Jesus will be glorified.

We ask it in his name. Amen. The message that Paul has been communicating to the church in Thessalonica, which he had ministered to in person and, as you recall, had to leave in something of a hurry, is one of encouragement.

Timothy has returned after a space of time where he left Paul, went back to Thessalonica, communicated Paul's care and concern, received some fresh information and experience in that place, and has returned to Paul. With that report, with that communication, Paul writes this letter, and he is encouraged and he is encouraging to these people. This would be, I think, a very great compliment if someone of the stature of the Apostle Paul says, you have no need that I write to you about love for one another because from everything I've heard, you took our teaching to heart and you've been really abounding in it.

So it would throw into maybe a little bit more sharp relief anything that he does say by way of, here's where you can improve. And this is right where we are in the letter, right here in this part of chapter four. He says, and you remember at the beginning, Brethren, we urge and exhort, we parakaleo you that you should abound more and more, *peri suo*, overflow in these things.

And he talks about, and we've looked at in detail, this idea of knowing how to obtain or acquire your own vessel. And great dead seas of ink have been spilled. Does vessel mean body? Does vessel mean wife? I think you can certainly find those meanings if you want to.

I think they could actually even be included in some way in the application. But I think personally, primarily, because of this verb and because of this noun, both of them somewhat unusual in such a context, he is expanding the view beyond that specific application. Pornia is not just sexual immorality.

A vessel is not just a wife or a body. And the sense of obtaining doesn't mean to possess. And so

this skewing we talked about in the last couple of weeks tends to limit the application of the passage.

We say, well, I don't have a problem with that. I'm not in any danger of committing this kind of physical immorality, sinning against a marriage or a future mate or whatever it might be. Don't have a problem with promiscuity.

Don't have a problem with this. So we just give it kind of a light touch and wait to find something that's more pertinent. But if this is as I personally think it is, talking about our capacity, and this is not just any old capacity.

You can have capacity for life. You can have capacity for happiness. You can have capacity for self-fulfillment.

You can have capacity for growth and a lot of things. But in this context, what is the vessel? What is this capacity that's being spoken of? It is in the area of brotherly love, Christian love. Love within the church.

Love within the fellowship of believers. And as we seek to please God, our faith and our hope can be measured. They are expressed and they are evident and manifest in the way we treat each other.

This is the litmus test. This is the gauge. This is the meter.

You can say what you want and you can think what you want about what the level of hope and confident expectation of the fulfillment of God's prophecies and promises and so on about the heavenly future. You can say and think what you want about that. You can say and think what you want about faith.

How much we know, how much we believe it, how firmly we claim it, how much we gain by way of righteousness through faith and all that, we can tell ourselves all kinds of stories about that, right? We say, well, I know doctrine. I've been listening to Bible class for years. I believe it.

I don't argue with any of it. I'm all for it. I put it in my prayers.

I'm claiming it and so on. But here's the thing. Paul says, if you want to know where you stand, how are you doing with love? Love is the window.

This is what I like about these John Deere tractor mowers. There's one up in Arkansas that we use and you see this kind of thing elsewhere. But unlike a car with a gas gauge that can break, the gas gauge in the VW van, I had to take that whole thing apart.

Had to drop the engine, take out the gas tank, take the gauge out, replace it. The float was busted and all that. It's all hidden.

It's down in the mechanism somewhere and you have to trust the needle. You have to trust that the float's not defective and so on. The great thing about a John Deere tractor and others like it is under the seat where you sit is the gas tank, which seems a little scary, but it's not.

But when you look at the tractor from the rear, there is a window that shows you exactly how much gas is in the tank. It's a little clear window right in the gas tank. All you've got to do is look.

There's how much gas you've got. It's real easy. No mechanicals, no steel gas tank that you can't see through.

It's opaque plastic, but it's got this little clear space and you can see the gas right there. You know instantly by looking. This, hear me now, this is what love is to the Christian life.

How we are doing in brotherly love, how we are doing in Philadelphia, how we are doing in the application of agape toward one another is the truth teller. You can't get around it. Faith and hope will not out themselves in love unless they are genuine.

We can try to fake love. We can smile. We can glad hand.

We can be obsequious toward one another. We can do all kinds of things, but we know in our heart and over time other people will know what is actually in our heart. You cannot fake genuine Christian love.

If we're trying to fake it pretty soon, impatience and frustration and bitterness and grudge bearing and implacability and judging and maligning and other things will out. We cannot keep up a pretense on this very long. And this is why it's in the arena of the fellowship that this is in evidence because fellowship is frequent.

It's repeated. It's a commonplace. And you know how this is.

Somebody can go out on a date and put their best foot forward. They paint over all the flaws and they hold in check all of the weaknesses. And you can look like you're just the greatest thing that ever walked in shoes to the person you're with as long as the exposure is limited and there's no real stress or test.

But over time, pretty soon, the truth begins to show through because nobody can keep up a pretense for very long. So this is why I think Paul says, look at your love. This is where you need to be increasing and abounding and overflowing, not overreaching your neighbor, not harming your brother.

This is the measure. Your faith and your hope are not worth much if it doesn't result in and manifest in love because that's a reflection. That's the window in the gas tank showing what the level of these things truly is, not what we would like to think it is, what it actually is because this is faith and hope in practice.

Love is basically our faith and hope in practice. And we can only do love of the genuine kind, love that is sacrificial, beneficial, long-suffering, gentle, good, patient, forgiving, all of those 1 Corinthians 13 attributes. We can only do that in the presence and power of faith and hope.

Why can I relax and let things slide that would ordinarily great and cause me mental latitude sins and cause me to react and get defensive or respond in some sort of caustic way? How can we do that? Our faith becomes more and more real. Our hope becomes more and more real, enables us to put things in perspective and in context. And we say, you know what? This isn't worth what my flesh wants me to do.

This isn't worth the price of acting in an unregenerate and unspirit-filled way. It's just not worth it. Look at what's on the line.

Look at what's coming in the future. What do I have that I did not receive? What if God looked at me and treated me the way I deserve? So this is what he's getting at. And he says, you've got to learn.

You've got to come to know how to acquire this capacity, this vessel in honor and sanctification. Not bumping somebody else and knocking over his vessel and preventing him from having a receptacle for the blessing and glory of God. We each have to stand there with our bowl, our vase, our catcher for the grace and the mercy and the blessing of God.

And we can't be like women at a white sale, elbowing each other out of the way. You know, I got to get mine, I got to get mine. And harming others.

And so there is a one another component in this. Well, this is what he's talking about. So as we come forward in the passage tonight, that no one should overreach and defraud, harm, cause a negative result to his brother in this matter.

Because the Lord is the avenger of all such. If you are honestly trying to please God and expand your capacity for love and to reflect the glory of God and so on, and some other believer impinges and does despot to us, God takes that personally. This is like a father seeing his child being mistreated and he will avenge.

And this is a caution against responding in kind. If we are wronged, we should endure it patiently and let our father handle it. It's just like little kids.

You know, little brother punches little sister. Little sister shouldn't go scratch his eyes out. She ought to wait till the parents rebuke, correct and instruct the brother.

You don't want to become equally guilty. You don't want to descend to that level. You just wait.

Let the righteous judge in heaven assert his prerogatives and deal with whatever retribution or vengeance or discipline or judgment is required. Remember, if we try to judge one another, the

judgment that we use is going to come right back on our heads. The judgment we're with you judge another is the judgment with which you will be judged.

We have to stop the chain. We have to stop the reciprocal reactive sin cluster. If we are wronged, we've got to stop, commit it to God, he will avenge.

He will take care of it. And we've got to trust him for that. Assume he knows more than we do.

He can be more fair. He can prevent it from becoming a nest and a pit and a cesspool of sin. The avenger of all such, as we forewarned you and testified, it was a testimony and a warning.

This is emphatic in Paul's mind. You've got to trust God in this area. Do not take justice into your hands.

Do not try to even the scales. Do not try to teach a lesson. Let God handle it.

God did not call us to uncleanness, but to holiness. Look at the Lord Jesus, who when he was reviled, did not revile in return. When he was troubled, did not trouble in return.

When he was abused and mistreated all the way up to and through the crucifixion, he did not open his mouth. And this is our model and it's important. So we have a warning and a testimony.

He who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us his Holy Spirit. How do we have the supernatural power to endure this kind of injustice when our flesh is activated and wants to respond, wants to do an equal amount of harm and injury and sin back? It's the presence of God's Holy Spirit. We don't have it in our own strength.

That's why he has given us his Holy Spirit to enable us for this kind of task. And guess what? When we do it, God is glorified because it is his instruction, his grace, his word, his spirit that rises above and raises us up above this sort of thing. But, verse nine, concerning Philadelphia, you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God.

Now this is important. And if you are keeping track and if you want to put it in your Bible, that word Philadelphia in this context is particularly important. It's particularly important, especially in terms of what's coming up.

Concerning Philadelphia, philos adelphos, love of the brethren. You have no need that I should write to you for you yourselves are taught by God. This looks like it would be a verb and a prepositional phrase in Greek, but it's not, it's one word.

This is, and it's a hapax. We love to find a hapax legomena, a single use of a word, only place you find it in the scripture. And this is it.

And it's an interesting word. Have you ever, let me ask you this question and don't be bashful if you haven't because hardly anybody has. Have you ever seen the word autodidact? Have you

ever seen somebody called an autodidact? Autodidact.

You know what, do you remember what it is, Matt? Well, I didn't either. I had to look it up, but it's somebody who can quickly pick things up. They can teach themselves everything.

It basically means teach yourself. You know, automatic or autonomic or whatever. It means it does it itself.

Auto, you do it for yourself. So autodidact means you teach yourself. You're just real quick on the uptake.

You see a thing. You don't have to have somebody train you. You don't have to spend a lot of time.

You just, you pick it up, you teach yourself. But my piano playing is largely autodidactic, which is why it is of the quality that it is. It's self-taught.

You pick up an instrument or a skill, or maybe you teach yourself something out of a book. Autodidact. Well, this word here is sort of like that in the sense that it is a verbal adjective and it is a single word.

You are taught by God is just a single word. And it's theodidaskaloi. When it says you are taught by God, it is theodidactoi actually.

If I remember right, I've lost it off my page here, but it's theodidactoi. And it's a play. Paul sort of made up this word.

It doesn't show up in any Greek literature until after this time. He sort of manufactured it, but they did have autodidactos or autodidaskalos, if you will, in Greek. But this is theodidactoi.

And what he's saying is, instead of you just sort of pick this up and now you've acquired this skill, he says you are, and the best way to translate this is you are God-taught. You are God-taught. I have no need to write to you about Philadelphia because you are God-taught to love one another.

And interestingly, he says about Philadelphia, I don't need to write you because you are God-taught to agape one another. So this sort of blurs the nice distinction people like to try to make between Philadelphia as sort of a friendship love or a brotherly love and agape meaning an active love. Paul says, I don't have to write you at Philadelphia because you are God-taught to agape each other.

And indeed you do so toward all the brethren. And this is why I had you emphasize Philadelphia because you do so toward all the adelphoi in Macedonia, you philos or agape, all the brethren. Now here's where it gets interesting.

We urge you adelphoi that you increase more and more. And this is where I am going to part ways with the New King James translation and with virtually most of the commentaries that I checked. I think looking at the flow of thought here, that there's been kind of a, and I could go into all the details, but I'm not going to.

There's a reason why people have taken the tack they've taken in trying to understand what this is saying. And they've been looking at second Thessalonians. They've gotten the idea based on the earlier context that where it says, don't overreach your brother, that this was a business context.

And there's a bunch of stuff that goes into this, but let me just say that a lot of the commentary which drives the translation has been front loaded with assumptions. And if you just come to the text as kind of a ignorant guy, like I do, without a lot of that baggage in play and just read the letter and let the context of the letter speak its own mind, see what you think about this. I think this verse division at 11 is very unfortunate.

Just for the moment, pretend like there's not a new verse at 11 and verse 10 keeps going. And in Greek, you don't have that you also. See that in verse 11, that you also, all that is, is chi, K-A-I, which can mean and in a construction like this, it can mean even, or it can mean also.

So a very good, and in my opinion, excellent Greek translation of what is being said here. Now think about what Paul says. He started and he said, you all try not to overreach each other and so on.

Pay attention, don't knock over each other's vessels. You're all standing there trying to learn how to acquire this vessel that God can use and so on. And he says, but concerning brotherly love, I really don't need to write to you because you are God taught in that area.

To love one another and you do so. You love the brethren and the brethren even in Macedonia. Philadelphia, God has taught you how to do this.

But, and this is where I would put verse 11, right before the word but. And you could also say now. And I think now would be a better, but is okay, now is better.

Now we urge you brethren, that you increase more and more also to do these three things. And we have three infinitives. So what they've done here when they translated this is they have this, we urge you to increase more and more looks backward.

You've been taught by God to love the brethren and we urge you to do so more and more. That's how they've translated it. I don't think this more and more is looking backward.

He says, look, Philadelphia, you not only love each other in your local community, you love all the brethren in Macedonia. You're doing great. God has taught you this.

I can tell that God has gotten this across in your souls. You're doing great. Now, or but, what I would like to urge you to do more and more is these next three things, these next three infinitives.

This urge you to do more and more is looking ahead in the sentence. You see what I'm getting at here? And here's what he's saying is, he says, you know, the first thing you have to master after you get your relationship with God straight, you know, there's that old thing, God, myself and others. We first have to be reconciled to God, get straightened out with our relationship with him, then our relationship with the brethren and then our relationship with those who are outside.

It's like a target. God is at the center, then the fellowship of believers, then those who are outside. Well, Paul has just been talking about this relationship with fellow believers.

He says, you need to touch it up here in a few places. Don't be overreaching each other. You know, concentrate on building up that capacity.

But I really don't need to write to you about this because the evidence is everywhere that you are God taught. You do this all through Macedonia. What I would like you to do more and more, and he already encouraged them more and more at the beginning of chapter four.

He said that perisuo, that you overflow more and more in terms of brotherly love. He's not repeating that here. Now what you can do more and more is overflow beyond your love of the brethren and do these three things.

This is what comes up in your verse 11. It says, that you also aspire to lead a quiet life. And it's really kind of funny in Greek because you have that you also aspire to lead a quiet life.

How many words is that? One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight. It's like nine words in English. There's only three words in Greek.

Chi, philo, temestai, heskazain. That's all you have there. Chi, which I've already said, and they've translated it that you also, but this could be that you abound more and more even.

And then we have philo, temestai. Now, you remember up earlier, what did I say? Concerning Philadelphia, right? He says, I don't have to write to you about that. You're doing great.

So what I want you to do more and more is philo, temestai. Now, right in the middle of that is teme. This is the basis of the name Timothy.

You remember what it means? Teme is honor or value or worth, worthwhileness. So look at this word. See if you can figure out what it means.

Philo, teme. The estai is just the infinitive form here. Philo, temestai.

It's a middle voice, and it means that you love the honor of, that you love the worth of, and then you have this leading a quiet life, which we'll look at next. But he says, you're already loving the

brethren. Now, what would be great is if you would abound more and more in loving the honor of.

This word originally, in earlier Greek, meant to be ambitious, to aspire to something. And it kind of makes sense, doesn't it? If you aspire to be an astronaut, you love the value and the honor and the worth of being an astronaut. If you aspire to being a great cello player, you love the value and the intrinsic worth of the cello.

You recognize the intrinsic qualities of a thing, and you love that, and that's what you're shooting for. You have an ambition in that direction. That's what philo, temestai means.

And philo, temestai is a middle voice, meaning you're gonna do this in your own interest. It's between an active and a passive. And so you have, and aspire is not a bad translation, but it literally means that you love the value and worth and honor in whatever the next word is.

And the next word is, heisoukzadzo. Heisoukzadzo is the vocabulary form, H-E-S-U-C-H-A-Z-O or D-Z-O, heisoukzadzo. Heisoukzadzo, and this is a really interesting word.

It's so interesting that I can't cover it before the break, but I will tell you now, it does not mean to lead a quiet life. There's no word for lead, there's no word for life. It does have a relationship to quiet or quietness, but it doesn't mean to lead, it's never used anywhere, any place, by anybody, in any context in the New Testament or prior to talk about leading a quiet life.

It isn't what it means at all. But this has been imported because obviously when you're interpreting and translating, you have to try to figure out what it's saying. And people have made some assumptions and said, well, you should aspire to lead a quiet life.

This isn't what it says. So we'll pause here and take our break. And when we come back, we're going to figure out what heisoukzadzo means and why it is that we should recognize the value of it.

And if Paul says, you have gotten through grade school and middle school, you've learned to love one another, you've learned to stand there with your capacity without bumping other people and spilling their stuff, and you're God taught to do this, and you've manifested it not only in your own group, but also throughout the region, here's where you can move next. This is your advance. This is what you can do more and more.

As you keep on doing that more and more, also work on this. Here's a new area. What is it? Well, we'll have to come back and see.