

## Love and its Counterfeits 1 Thess 4:9-12

What does a life that pleases God look like? Paul starts ch4 by telling us what it doesn't look like: it isn't controlled by lust or sexual immorality. So it's no surprise that when he tells us what it is marked by, he begins with *love*.

### **Love: The Mark of the Family**

What is the characteristic that should mark the Christian family? Paul tells us it is brotherly love. This is what makes a good church: the deep bond of family. We know we are Christians when we love our fellow family members.

But Paul says he doesn't need to tell them this because God has already taught them. He has taught them through the Old Testament scriptures. He's taught them by his Holy Spirit – that God is love. But he has also taught by his example: the Christ loved us so much he died for us. When we know that love flooding our hearts, we will love one another.

Paul commends the Thessalonians for their love of Christians across the region. The love of God's family goes beyond loving people who are just like us. It transcends culture, race and, denomination. It recognises that if you belong to Jesus, you're my brother or my sister.

Paul urges them to love like this more and more. When it comes to loving others, we can never say we've arrived.

### **Two Counterfeits of Love**

Paul highlights two fakes of brotherly love. They spring from the same cause. Convinced that Christ was coming back soon people in Thessalonica had quit their jobs, so they had time on their hands and weren't earning any money.

The first counterfeit of love is that of *the gossip and the busybody*. Some had become *too* interested in others' lives. Being a gossip or a busybody gives the appearance of love and concern, but actually it is all about 'me' and my need to feel important. But when you know God's love for you in Jesus, you don't need to gossip to feel like you matter.

The second counterfeit of love is *laziness and cultivating a wrong dependence*. However, people who live like this will prefer to cultivate friendships with the well-off, rather than those who have nothing to give them. So it undermines the love that has nothing to do with what we earn.

But there's another reason Paul sees things differently.

### **Why Getting Love Right Matters**

In v12 Paul gives two reasons why minding your own affairs and providing for yourself financially matter. Firstly, being a busybody kills Christian witness. But secondly, if we are wrongly dependent on others, we have nothing to give to those who genuinely need financial support. But when we know that Jesus loved us so much to give himself for us, we won't turn our back on the world or the world of work, or keep our money for ourselves. Instead we'll work, and give, so that others might know that love for themselves.