

“Divide and conquer” has been a principle of war for centuries. If you can divide the opposition you will win the war. Alexander the great’s father, Philip II of Macedon, applied this principle. So did Julius Caesar who conquered much of Europe. Napoleon also used it to conquered many countries.

Children seem to now this principle untaught. They go to Mum and say, “Can I have some lollies?” When she answers, “No. It’s dinnertime” they go to Dad and ask, “Can I have some lollies?” Who replies, “Sure. Here you are.” Parents need to be united or the children win.

The Greeks developed the strategy of a phalanx, soldiers in close formation with shields and weapons. Their unity together made it very hard for enemy to defeat them.

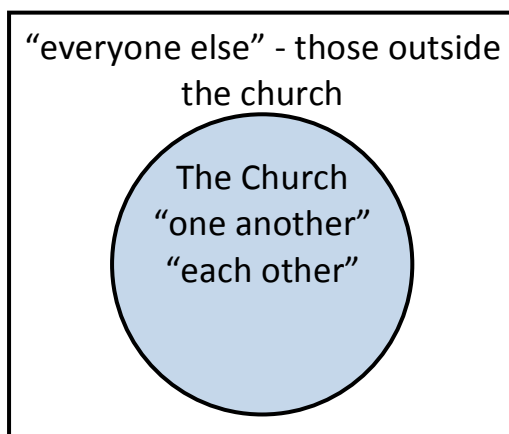
Unity is vital for soldiers, political parties, unions, and parents. It is also vital for the church. We need to take this to heart. We have been looking at 1 Thessalonians. The church there was under attack facing persecution as a new church. How could they stand firm and remain faithful under this pressure?

The church today is under attack from our society, from Satan and in some places facing strong persecution. To remain faithful we need to be united together and to invest in one another.

Soldiers need a unity of fighting closely together. Politicians need to have a unity of supporting party policy. Our unity needs to be a unity of love.

Called to unity in love

In 1 Thessalonians 3:12 we read, “*May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.*” It’s important to see the special relationship we have with each other in the church. Fifteen times in this letter Paul calls believers “brothers and sisters.” Our love for each other is to be a brotherly love - a “philadelphia”. We are called to be family together.



⁹ Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. ¹⁰ ... Yet we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more. (4:9-10)

We need to have our idea of what it means to be church shaped by God’s word not shaped by what it means to belong to a club. How do we love each other? Paul says, “Now we ask you, brothers and

Invest in one another

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. ¹³ Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work.” (5:12-13)

There are those who are called to lead a church. They have a special role to care for God’s people and we need to respect their leadership and love them. But it is easy to think it is all up to them. To think they are the ones called to lead, teach and care. But Paul goes straight on, *“And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.” (5:14)*

See here he is talking to the whole congregation, to us. All “brothers and sisters” are called to do these things: Warn the idle - people not pulling their weight.

Encourage the disheartened - those who are discouraged or facing doubts.

Help the weak - those who struggle to resist temptations.

We are all called to notice the needs of others around us and to support to them, encourage, warn, and help them. Do you see that? It is something we are all called to do. It is the way we are to love each other.

We are to do these things very patiently. We are not to give up on people if they don’t seem to respond. We need to keep on loving them.

Paul’s example of love

If you are cooking a special dinner you might follow a recipe and cook it but you want to know what the finished product should look. How should it be plated up? These days the presentation is all important. What you can do is to look on the web at pictures that show you. You can see what it should look like when it is all done.

With these instructions to love each other we want to know what would it look like if we really did what Paul said. There are no pictures of love on the web!! But in chapter 2 Paul gives us his own example. He talks about the investment he made in the people of Thessalonica.

Now of course Paul is an apostle. He has a very special position. He wrote large parts of the New Testament and he was used to plant new churches in many countries. We aren’t called to the same ministry as he had but his example of love shows us what our love should look like.

In 3:12 he says, *“May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.” (3:12)* Their love for each other should be modelled on Paul’s love for them and so Paul is a model of love for us also.

Paul had to leave Thessalonica after only a short time there because of fierce opposition but in chapter 2 he explains that it was not a lack of love.

I want to look at 4 things Paul says bout his love that are examples for us:

1. His love was costly love
2. His love was pure
3. His love was unselfish
4. His love was for their spiritual welfare

1. His love was costly love

He says, *"We had previously suffered and been treated outrageously in Philippi, but with the help of our God we dared to tell you his gospel in the face of strong opposition."* (2:2) Paul had just come from Philippi where he and Silas had been beaten and put in prison. They had suffered there and then they came to Thessalonica where they faced more bitter opposition. But because of their love they continued to preach to the people until they had to flee for their lives.

Not only did Paul spend time preaching he also worked to support himself. He didn't want to be a burden to them so he worked night and day as a tent maker. *"Surely you remember, brothers and sisters, our toil and hardship; we worked night and day in order not to be a burden to anyone while we preached the gospel of God to you."* (2:9)

Real love will often be costly. It will take time. We can't say I'll help if it's convenient. We need to be there when people need us. It can be emotionally draining. One man in our last congregation had severe depression. It was very draining visiting him in the psychiatric ward or listening to him when I visited him at home. There is a cost to love.

2. His love was pure

He says, *"For the appeal we make does not spring from error or impure motives, nor are we trying to trick you"* (2:3) and later, *"You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed."* (2:10) His message was pure, his methods were pure and his motives were pure.

Our character, our honesty, the genuineness of our love, and our relationship with God speak as loudly as our words.

3. His love was unselfish

Mosquitos love me. I'm the most popular guy at a barbecue! They all want to be with me. But the mosquitos aren't trying to give me anything. They just want to suck my blood! Their love for me is just for what they can get from me.

Sometimes our love can be like that. We are more interested in what we can get than give. We take on a ministry or spend time with people for what we can get out of it. Paul didn't do that. *"You know we never used flattery, nor did we put on a mask to cover up greed—God is our witness. ⁶ We were not looking for praise from people, not from you or anyone else."* (2:5-6)

Paul wasn't looking for personal gain. He wasn't looking for praise or money or power. He was doing everything for their sake. He was committed to their welfare to teach the gospel, to encourage and help them.

He uses two illustrations to show this:

Firstly the image of a mother: *"Just as a nursing mother cares for her children, ⁸ so we cared for you. Because we loved you so much, we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God but our lives as well."* (2:7-8)

Invest in one another

1 Thessalonians 2:1-12

Nursing mothers give up so much of their lives for their baby. They have to get up at night, feed, change, bath, and be there all the time. It is a great illustration of investing in another person's life.

Then Paul uses the image of a father: *"We dealt with each of you as a father deals with his own children, ¹²encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory."* (2:11-12)

Again, see the care he had for each of them as individuals, *"each of you"*. He noticed their need and said the appropriate word for each need: *"encouraging, comforting and urging."*

His love was not like a mosquito! It was giving not self-centred.

4. His love was for their spiritual welfare

It comes across throughout the letter that his love is focussed on their spiritual needs. He makes every effort to preach the gospel to them (2:2). He *"urges them to live lives worthy of God."* (2:12) Now he is writing this letter to teach them, encourage them and to correct them where they are off track.

Do you see that at the centre of his love is this concern for them spiritually? He wants them to know God, grow more like him and remain faithful to God through all difficulties, to stand firm in their faith and finally to be together with Jesus in heaven.

Paul does have a special position. None of us will be like him but we are all called to love each other. Our love needs to be: 1. Costly, 2. Pure, 3. Unselfish, and 4. Concerned for people's spiritual welfare.

How will it happen?

We need to invest in each other. We need to get to know each other, spend time together. Morning tea, social events, and other gatherings are not just for enjoyment (though they can be very enjoyable). Above all they are so we can develop deeper relationships and invest in one another. They are opportunities for us to serve one another in love.

Home groups are the best way of getting to know each other so we can encourage, pray for and care for each other. If you are not in a group talk to Marty or Emily or me.

Unless we build relationships none of this will happen. Rick Warren says in his book The Purpose Driven Life, "Busyness is a great enemy of relationships. We become preoccupied with making a living, doing our work, paying bills, and accomplishing goals as if these are the point of life. They are not. The point of life is learning to love - God and people. Life minus love equals zero." (p.125)

"Divide and conquer." If we are not united we will fall. If we are going to stand firm in the face of hard times in life and the opposition of society around us we need to invest in each other. We need to be united, to build good relationships with each other and serve to each other in love by encouraging and supporting each other.