

# A Life Pleasing to God

## 1 Thessalonians 4:1–12

### I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Jesus' spiritual DNA
    - 1. Up, In, Out → Mark 1 as an example
  - B. This isn't just something that we made up, it's throughout the Word
- II. *[1] Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. [2] For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.*
- A. "How you ought to walk and to please God" → this is the theme of the section and it builds from Paul's prayer in the preceding verses
    - 1. *1 Thessalonians 3:11–13, [11] Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, [12] and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, [13] so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.*
    - 2. He prays that they will grow in holiness and love while they wait for the return of Jesus
    - 3. In other words, he wants them to be blameless, unashamed, overjoyed when Jesus comes back for his bride
    - 4. This is consistent w/ the rest of Paul's writing and Jesus' rhetoric
      - a) Shameful things are done at night, but you are of the day
      - b) Behave as one who walks and belongs to the light
  - B. "In the Lord Jesus" → Paul levies this charge from a place of apostolic authority, urging them in the name of the Lord, but there is something about this phrase
  - C. Change without Jesus is white knuckling at best or a string of failures and defeat
    - 1. Many of us know the shame of failure and the frustration of a lack of willpower
    - 2. Some of you excel at discipline and willpower, but you also know that even the strictest regimen is only an accident or slip-up away from defeat
    - 3. This is especially true when thinking about the areas described in this section: controlling the passions of your body and loving people as God loves them (both can seem like impossibilities)
    - 4. Trying to change without Jesus is just a self-help book and your "self" is the reason you are in this mess. Self-help doesn't work. You need Jesus.
  - D. Paul always teaches from a framework of indicative to imperative. Because you are in the Lord... Who you are → act like it
    - 1. NOT act like it to become. No. You are, therefore act.
    - 2. This is just like Jesus in Mark 1

- E. "As you received from us" → how did the Thessalonians receive from Paul?
  1. They received Jesus by faith not by getting their lives in order
  2. They received the basic truths of the gospel and how to grow
  3. They looked at Paul as an example. He was a pacesetter.
  4. He picked them up and dusted them off when they failed (like a mom)
  5. He challenged them when they grew lazy or needed a rebuke (like a dad)
- F. So Paul says, essentially, "I gave you the basic DNA. Grow in it more and more."
  1. More and more is an important phrase, and one that is bookended in v10
  2. The Christian life is "always arriving, never arrived" until glory. Anyone who tells you otherwise is dumbing down the holiness of God or falsely exalting their own competency and abilities
  3. Christian growth is like a spiral (or a fractal)
  4. The temptation, as you mature, is to become complacent w/ a level of growth that you have 'achieved' → Paul says, "more and more"
  5. The other temptation is to think that you began by faith, but now it's time to tug on those bootstraps. No. Paul says more of the same. Faith.
- G. What pleases God? Paul ID's 2 main areas (holiness & love). As we grow in these areas we become more like Christ by faith and the HS's good work in us.

*III. [3] For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; [4] that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, [5] not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; [6] that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. [7] For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. [8] Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.*

- A. What is God's will for your life? Your sanctification. What is sanctification?
  1. Purification, refining, growing in holiness, being set apart for God's kingdom purposes. The process of being made like Jesus.
  2. This is God's will for you. This is what he wants. Stop wondering.
- B. Background: Cabirus worship
  1. What we do know is that the deity was somehow connected with the sea, safe passage, and sexual exploits.
  2. The struggles described by Paul, then, are deeply embedded as acceptable within Thessalonian and Greek society
  3. This is important b/c just b/c something is tolerated or even celebrated (pride month) in your culture doesn't mean that God is neutral towards it.
  4. In many ways to stand w/ the Lord and hold fast is to stand against a tide of things that are abhorrent to Jesus and his Word (but he gives grace)
- C. So what is the will of God? Our sanctification - but specifically here Paul addresses the need to "control your own body in holiness and honor"
  1. The obvious big struggle here for the Thessalonians, as well as for the majority of the world, is purity

2. The temptation here would be to scold the world for their lack of sexual ethic, but what's the problem with that? We aren't concerned w/ the world. Salvation doesn't come by cleaning yourself up, but by faith.
3. Remember, Paul wants to present a pure bride to Jesus. Jesus wants his bride to be pure. He chooses that imagery in his writings for a reason
4. Elsewhere he says sexual immorality shouldn't even be named among God's people. What is sexual immorality? Looking with desire at someone who isn't yours to desire and anything else beyond that.
5. So... quite a bit. NO place for it in the body of Christ. Jesus needs to purge it from your being by his good, Holy Spirit's work of conviction
- D. Paul explains that our bodies and even our desires do not exist to be used without discretion. Actually, they have a purpose and the purpose is honorable.
  1. What is the purpose? To control your body in holiness and honor in order to love God and love people well (more on that in the next section)
- E. The purposes, then, are entirely selfless whereas this kind of impurity is selfish
  1. Sexual immorality is rooted in immediate, selfish desires. There is nothing honorable, godly, or others focused about it.
- F. This is why Paul says that you "wrong your [fellow human]" in this way
  1. To sin sexually is to harm yourself and to harm others - it is a selfish act
- G. And Paul makes it clear - God has an opinion, and it is a strong one.
  1. He says that God is an avenger against those who exploit their fellow human in this area
  2. I don't know about you, but that sounds terrifying to me.
  3. *Hebrews 10:31, It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*
- H. To disregard a call to purity is to flippantly disregard God, your savior, the one who gives his HS. These are Paul's words.
- I. The point: Grow in holiness. Use your body to honor God and one another. What does honoring one another look like? Love!

IV. *[9] Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, [10] for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, [11] and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, [12] so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.*

- A. God teaches us how to love. What does this mean? God's love is the metric by which true love is evaluated
  1. The world's love is selfish, but God's love is selfless
  2. The world's love is used as leverage, withholding becomes a weapon. God demonstrates love to his enemies by dying them to redeem them
  3. The world's love is fractured by sin, but God's love overcomes the fracture to make a way for reconciliation
- B. It is this profound love that God demonstrated to his children on the cross and the type of love we are called to have for one another.
- C. Remember, growth is a process not a destination. We are arriving, never arrived.

- D. The Thessalonians already love one another, but Paul says that they can grow!
  - 1. Can't we appreciate this challenge? Surely we love more today than we did 15 years ago (hopefully). Let's grow in it! Let's love more. Let's outdo one another in love.
  - 2. Christian community is about fulfilling all those "one another" passages and therefore fulfilling the law of Christ, the law of love
- E. So Paul talks about that Christ-oriented love towards one another (IN), but then he defines outward love towards the world. How does a Christ-follower engage the world? He says to walk properly, which is to walk in wisdom
  - 1. Live quietly
    - a) Don't be a meddler. Don't stir the pot for the sake of stirring the pot. Don't be a busybody. Don't throw fuel to the fires of division and dissension with whispers and gossip. Live quietly. Put your hand to the plow, and walk out your salvation.
  - 2. Work hard
    - a) Don't exploit one another's loving generosity by being a slouch. Instead, work hard. Earn your keep. Fitting exhortation for a time in history when many are tempted to not work and simply collect from the government
    - b) Working hard is a way that we can love our neighbor (by giving rather than receiving) and honor God in the community (b/c we work unto him rather than to ourselves)
  - 3. When we live and work like this, we are respected by outsiders and we love those within our Christ-family

## V. CONCLUSION

- A. **Summary:** Following Jesus is a process of being perpetually changed from glory to glory (maturity, sanctification). God expects us to grow more and more as we age spiritually.
  - 1. **UP:** He wants us to grow in Christlikeness (holiness)
  - 2. **IN:** He wants us to grow in brotherly love
  - 3. **OUT:** He wants us to grow wisdom as we walk among the world
- B. **GOD** desires our sanctification and his Holy Spirit is continually pressing us towards that goal
- C. **WE** are called to submit to the call to growth and aggressively pursue it rather than lazily drifting into complacency.
- D. *Philippians 4:8–9,[8] Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, **THINK** about these things. [9] What you have learned and received and heard and seen in me - **PRACTICE** these things, and the God of peace will be with you.*

## Table Talk

- 1. As believers, God grows us UP, IN, and OUT:

- a. We grow UP in our relationship with God as he makes us more like Christ.
  - b. We grow IN as we connect with our Christian family in community.
  - c. We grow OUT as we walk in wisdom with the world around us, being and sharing Good News with those desperate for it.
2. In which of those three areas are you currently the strongest? Where are you the most in need of growth?
3. Growth in these areas is like a spiral. You never arrive until glory, you are always arriving. What is your plan to grow in these areas by the Spirit (not by the flesh)?
4. Who will you share this with so that you can have loving accountability in your growth?