HIGHER AIM WITH DR. CURT DODD

Taught By God To Love

Living To Please God | Part 3 | 1 Thessalonians 4

INTRODUCTION

Have you ever walked into a church as a visitor and walked out without anyone saying a word to you? Dr. Dodd has, and he says it made him feel like an outsider. That experience reveals something important about the Christian life. It is not enough to know God's Word or to live a pure life. God also calls us to love the people He has placed around us, including those who are very different from us.

In *1 Thessalonians 4* and *5*, Paul's central theme is living to please God, not ourselves. In earlier messages, Dr. Dodd taught that we please God intentionally, authoritatively, sexually, and intellectually. Now he turns to a characteristic that marked the early church just as clearly as its purity: brotherly love. "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" (*1 Thessalonians 4:9*).

KEY POINTS

1. Purity And Brotherly Love Go Hand In Hand

Two characteristics defined the early church: a commitment to purity and a deep love for one another. One without the other leaves us out of balance. These believers cared so much for each other that Paul told them to "greet all God's people with a holy kiss" (*1 Thessalonians 5:26*). This was not a romantic gesture but an expression of family affection. God wants us to love our brothers and sisters in Christ, because we will spend eternity with them. That includes the ones we find difficult. God may even give them the condo right next to ours.

2. Only God's Love Can Love Like God

In English we use one word for love, whether we are talking about a spouse or Mexican food. The Greek of the New Testament had several. *Eros* described romantic, physical love. *Storge* described the love within a family. *Phileo* described brotherly love. Above them all was *agape*, the selfless love of God. The only way to love others with agape love is to know Jesus as Lord of your life. You cannot give away what you do not have. When we are in love with Christ, His love flows through us to our spouse, our family, and everyone around us.

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3. God Teaches Us To Love People Who Are Different

Paul says the Thessalonians were *theodidaktoi*, which means "taught by God." Dr. Dodd notes that this is the only place in the New Testament that speaks of God teaching His children to love one another. God often does that teaching by placing people in our lives who stretch us. We are called to "help the weak, be patient with everyone" (*1 Thessalonians 5:14*), and we do not have to agree with someone in order to love them. Jesus Himself called a diverse group of followers. He called fishermen. He called Matthew, a tax collector despised by his own people, who later wrote his Gospel to show those same people that Jesus is the Messiah. He called Simon the Zealot, a member of a movement that sought to overthrow the government. He even called Judas. God wants us to learn to love every one of them.

4. Love Reaches Beyond Our Comfort Zone

It is easy to spend time only with people who are just like us. Dr. Dodd enjoys being around people who golf, hunt, and fish, but he admits he needs friends who crochet too. Believers in other churches and denominations who follow King Jesus are on the same team, even if the color of their jersey looks a little faded. Generations need each other as well. Younger believers miss out on wisdom when they avoid older saints, and older believers need lasting friendships with those who will carry on the faith. Even our neighbors may be God's gift to us, people He uses to knock off the rough edges that do not look like Jesus.

God is still at work shaping us into the image of His Son. Sometimes the very people we find hardest to love are the ones He uses most. Your neighborhood, your workplace, and your church family may be the mission field where God wants you to show what it means to love like Jesus loves.

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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Have you ever felt like an outsider at church or in a group of believers? How can that memory shape the way you welcome others?

2. Dr. Dodd says God teaches us to love by placing people in our lives who stretch us. Who is that person for you right now, and what might God be teaching you through them?

3. Do you have friendships with believers who are different from you in age, background, or interests? What is one step you can take this week to connect with someone outside your comfort zone?