

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 “Walking To Please God”

Well let's go ahead this week and take a look at our text as we get started if you will follow along with me the first 12 verses say the following.

Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; ²for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

³For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, ⁵not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord *is* the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. ⁷For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. ⁸Therefore he who rejects *this* does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.

A Brotherly and Orderly Life

⁹But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; ¹⁰and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; ¹¹that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, ¹²that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and *that* you may lack nothing.

I'm sure as you have gone through life and as you grew up that when you were a part of something and your parents came to the events that you knew that you had someone in your corner...I can remember when I was a child playing basketball on different teams that my grandad who was not able to get out of the house all the time would come to one or two of my games each year. He was actually a very good basketball player when he was in high school and every time he would come to one of my games I knew that I wanted to play even better than I usually did because he was going to be watching me and rooting me on.

If you have ever experienced that then you know that a little encouragement can go a long ways and Paul has made it very clear in this letter that he has a deep concern for the church in Thessalonica, he thinks and prays for them consistently, he loves them as a father and mother love their child.

Paul cared so much about them that he just had to know first hand how their faith was and in chapter 3 we were told that he could no longer stand not knowing about them and chose to send Timothy to them. When Timothy came he had two tasks that had been given to him. The first was to establish this church meaning it was his job to help them mature in the faith and to have a strong foundation in Jesus and then he was to come alongside and encourage them.

We have also seen that this was a church that had endured much trouble and persecution for their faith and Paul has worked to let them know that really this should be expected as believers and that he himself had endured much for the name of Jesus as well.

When we left off last week Paul was desiring that the Lord might direct he and his companions back to the church in Thessalonica, that the church would abound in the love of God more and more towards one another and that their hearts would be established in holiness at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

It is the holiness of the believer that Paul is now going to hammer home to this church in Thessalonica and today we'll be looking at a few very specific instructions that Paul had for this church that would help them immensely as they sought to live for Jesus.

Let's go ahead here and look at our text if you look at verses 1-2 which say this **Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; ²for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.**

You would think from the first words of verse 1 that Paul would be wrapping up his letter in just a few short verses and perhaps that was Paul's intention but as he wrote being inspired by the Spirit it would seem that one thing led to another.

I like how Paul addresses the believers here as brethren...This means that Paul saw them as equals and not as his servants or that he was above them or over them. Paul always seemed to value all who believe in Jesus. I do think we should remember that there is not one of us that is more important than another, that there is not one of us that has any kind of special access to God that other people do not. Yes, we have different callings but each one of us are just as valuable to the Lord as the person next to us and the Lord has great plans for each one of us.

We can also see here that Paul is urging and exhorting the believers in Jesus and the idea you get here is that Paul is pleading with them and hoping for them with all his heart that they would see some very specific things take place in their lives. The idea that we are seeing here is that Paul desires this church to move forward, to grow, to change, to enter into the blessings that God has for them.

Sometimes I think we set the bar to low when it comes to our faith in Jesus...I believe the church in general can be a bit lazy when it comes to holiness and truly living a life that is set apart for the Lord.

One of the things that has struck me in our study in the book of Exodus as Moses was receiving instruction about the tabernacle and how it should be made and all the garments for the priests and how everything was to be done is that God then provided some very skilled individuals that could complete the things that were needed. The idea I have gotten is that God is specific about how He wants to be worshipped but He also desires that the worship of Him would be done to the best of the abilities that the Israelites had. We shouldn't settle for less than the best in what we can do...and I think that's the concept I am getting as Paul is just rooting this church forward and expecting the most from them.

Notice Paul as he is speaking to them in verse 1 says that he desires that they would abound more and more as they had received how they ought to walk to please God...and so Paul is just conveying that there is a high standard that this church should be looking to attain.

We'll talk about this as the text develops but the idea here is that as you follow Jesus there should be growth and change that is taking place on a regular basis.

I cannot in good faith just brush over the text that we are looking at today and not take the opportunity to address the fact that we need to be growing in our faith in Jesus.

You know as you go through life when you have a child you expect them to behave like a child but as a child grows up you expect them to leave childish things behind and become an adult and behave like an adult and it's the same way for you and I as we follow after Jesus. You should be maturing, you should be growing, and you should be leaving behind sinful behaviors.

The writer of Hebrews was a little perplexed with the believers that he wrote to if you listen to Hebrews 5:12-14 which says this ¹²**For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. ¹³ For everyone who partakes *only* of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. ¹⁴ But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, *that is*, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.**

This was a group of people that should have been further along in the faith and yet it seems they were stagnant and found themselves without progression in their lives.

Over in 1 Corinthians 3:1-3 as Paul was addressing the arguments that were coming up in the church in Corinth he said this to them **And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ. ² I fed you with milk and not with solid food; for until now you were not able to receive it, and even now you are still not able; ³ for you are still carnal. For where *there***

are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like *mere* men?

In both of these passages you can almost sense the frustration the writers had as they knew those they wrote to should have been further along and yet they simply weren't.

As Paul is here speaking to the church in Thessalonica the idea is that he is rooting them along, pushing them forward, desiring to see growth and change.

He even says that he had taught them how they should walk to please God in their lives...and so Paul is saying you know how you should do these things now walk in them and put them into practice in your life. When you think about walking I always think about a baby as they are learning to walk...And our faith in Jesus is kind of like that. The first steps we take as we begin to put our faith in Jesus are uncertain and we are a little scared but as we grow in confidence in who Christ is and we see all He has done for us we begin to walk more confidently and that's what Paul is saying...Keep moving forward, keep walking in your faith and applying what you have learned.

Paul said this over in Colossians 1:9-10 which says ⁹**For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; ¹⁰that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God;**

We might also notice that Paul was very specific about how they should walk their lives of faith out when he said that they knew the

commandments they had been given through the Lord Jesus. I am thankful that you and I don't have to wonder what pleases God and what does not. God in His Word has been very clear about what He desires from us and how we should live our lives.

In 2 John 1:6 we have this ⁶**This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. This is the commandment, that as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it.**

In Luke 11:28 Jesus said the following when He said ²⁸**But He said, "More than that, blessed *are* those who hear the word of God and keep it!"**

In John 14:15 Jesus said ¹⁵**"If you love Me, keep My commandments.** And then in the same chapter verse 21 He said ¹**He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him."**

I want us to hear these things today as we work through our text and I want to exhort and urge us as believers that we should truly be set apart for the Lord living for Him, growing in Him, leaving the old behind and working with all our hearts towards living a life that is pleasing to Him...and so I ask you today how are you doing with this in your life? Are you living out your faith whole heartedly? Are you seeking out Jesus in His Word that you might grow in Him? Or do you find yourself lukewarm as a Christian kind of limping along in the faith living a life of hypocrisy? The reality is that Jesus wants us to be on fire for Him and I have to just warn you that I believe there are consequences for those that are kind of sitting on the fence having one foot in the world and one foot in the faith. I would simply say if this is you...and I believe the

Holy Spirit will reveal that to you if it applies to your life that you would turn and seek out the Lord and ask Him to renew your heart towards Him.

So a lot that we have unpacked here in just the first two verses of our text and it may seem a little intense but it's about to continue in that vein as we move forward here if you look at verse 3 which says this **³For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality;** So Paul so far in this chapter has really urged the church to move forward, to be walking in a way that is worthy unto the Lord and then he moves over to the topic of sexual immorality and how it should be abstained from. We may look at that and wonder why he specifically speaks to that issue and we'll develop that as we move forward but first, I want to just point out to you what he says at the beginning of verse 3 when he says THIS IS THE WILL OF GOD, YOUR SANCTIFICATION.

Have you ever wondered what God's will is? Here we can make no mistake about it as Paul says you should be sanctified and I want to take just a minute to explain this and what it means.

To be sanctified means to be set apart, it means to become more like Jesus, it means that you and I should be exclusively His and we should not give ourselves to any other thing. And what Paul is conveying here is that we should be seeing our lives progressively becoming more like Him.

In the Bible there are two kinds of sanctification that we see. There is this kind that we are talking about here where there is a holiness that is developed in the life of a believer over time and this is referred to as progressive sanctification.

And then there is a second way sanctification is used in the scriptures and this is what is called positional sanctification. I won't lose you in the details of this but the idea with positional sanctification is that when you come to Christ and the blood of Jesus is applied to your life you are immediately and totally sanctified or set apart and seen as holy. We should remember that the Lord can see the end product long before we see it in our own lives. We are seen as pure and spotless not because of our works, but because of what Jesus has done in our lives.

So two kinds of sanctification seen in scripture but here in our text Paul is saying to this church that they should especially be set apart to the Lord when it comes to sexual immorality. Just to shine some light on this culturally the city of Thessalonica along with many of the cities in the surrounding areas were given over to idol worship.

Included in the Roman and Greek gods of the New Testament were the fertility goddesses by the name of Aphrodite, Artemis and Demeter and many of these gods were worshipped with temple prostitution. IN addition to this sexual immorality was widely accepted as normal in the Roman world. It was not uncommon for men to have multiple partners in addition to their spouse and homosexuality was widely accepted in their culture.

So common was sexual immorality that in the church at Corinth they actually celebrated and permitted a man to be in the church who was sleeping with his mother in law.

Today in our culture we face similar issues...Sexual immorality of all kinds is generally accepted. Pornography runs rampant on the internet. Homosexuality is celebrated for an entire month. Statistics

say that in America roughly 59% of people have lived with someone they are not married to.

The issue of sexual immorality is not just an issue that took place in ancient times...sadly it has been a regular occurrence throughout history...I would simply say today that part of living a life that is set apart for Jesus is that we are pure in our lives sexually.

Now I want to be clear that sex is a beautiful thing when done the way God has prescribed it, the Lord created it to be between a man and a woman who are married and committed to each other in a life long marriage. When a man and woman come together as God has designed things to be it is a good and wonderful thing indeed.

Sadly humanity has twisted sex into anything goes at any time and this simply said results in a degradation of society and a breaking of that which God has designed.

Look at verse 4 as Paul continues to speak about this when he says **⁴that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,** The idea I get from this is that there is to be self control when it comes to our bodies sexually. Self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit and we should be seeing this in our lives when it comes to being set apart to the Lord when it comes to sex.

Sexual immorality to be clear includes any sexual act that takes place outside of the way God has prescribed...For some of us sexual immorality can be a bigger temptation than others. We each have a sinful nature that must be regularly put to death. Some of us may struggle with drug addiction, others may have issues with pride,

others still may have issues with sexual immorality and possessing our bodies in sanctification and honor.

You might also notice here that humans in verse 4 are said to be vessels that we need to possess properly and the idea is that you are a container or an item that is going to be filled with something...Let me just develop this with a few scriptures if you listen to what 2 Timothy 2:20-22 says ²⁰**But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. ²¹ Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. ²² Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.**

We might ask ourselves what kind of vessel are we? Are we a vessel that is set apart for incredible use like gold and silver and godly characteristics like righteousness, faith, love and peace or are we vessels filled with dishonorable ungodly actions unprepared for use by the Master?

Over in 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 Paul said this to the church when he said ¹⁸**Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit *who is* in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? ²⁰ For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.**

A few things here in these verses...First flee sexual immorality! Get away from it, don't mess around with it, don't be like David who

pursued a relationship he should never have even considered...Instead be like Joseph when Potiphar's wife tried to grab him and sleep with him...Joseph said in Genesis 39:8-9 the following when this took place **But he refused and said to his master's wife, "Look, my master does not know what *is* with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. ⁹ *There is no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you *are* his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"***

The second thing we see in the passage from 1 Corinthians is that you and I are to be a temple for the Holy Spirit and that we no longer belong to ourselves for Christ has paid for us.

Sexually speaking to keep with the context of what we are studying today we are to be holy to the Lord without sharing ourselves with the ungodly things of this world. Our whole lives are to be separated and sanctified to the Lord. You should have self control and Paul is just letting this church know that as he exhorts them to be holy.

Look with me at verses 5-8 of our scripture for today which say the following **⁵not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord *is* the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. ⁷ For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. ⁸ Therefore he who rejects *this* does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.**

At the end of the day you and I as believers in Jesus should see our lives being lived totally different than the world around us. We should

stick out like sore thumbs...In particular when it comes to sexual immorality we should like this for the world seems to embrace any and all alternative life styles.

We might even take note that when individuals live in sexual immorality that it not only effects their personal relationship with Jesus but it also defrauds and takes advantage of others...Sexual immorality not only effects you personally when you engage in it but it brings down and strikes against all others involved. If you think about it when a person engages in sexual immorality it harms the person that God intended that other person to be with...the effects of sexual immorality are wide ranging.

Notice also we are told here that the Lord is the avenger of all such people that choose to live in this sin. In other words the Lord will hold those accountable that choose to walk and live in that manner of life.

And finally we can see here that Paul let's this church know that anyone that rejects these ideas is not rejecting man but they are rejecting God. These are commands from the Lord not man made ideas and thoughts that Paul was pushing on this church.

It's interesting that the LGBTQ+ community will come after those that stand against them and yet really their issue is not with those that live for Christ but with God. They are fighting against what He has said is right and wrong and not ourselves. Sometimes when the world comes against us for our belief in traditional marriage which I am going to add here is between a genetic male and a genetic female we need to keep this simple truth in mind. They don't hate us, they hate the God we live for.

Now to wrap this section up before we move on I just want to encourage you that if you happen to find yourself in sexual immorality that the best thing you can do is confess that sin, repent of it and walk away from it forever. The Lord can help you do that as you bring things to the light and allow Him to work in your heart.

Ok a few more instructions from Paul as we finish out this section of scripture if you look at verses 9-10 which say ⁹**But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; ¹⁰and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more;**

Previously Paul spoke of the need to grow in God's love and now he turns to brotherly love or what is called phileo love and this is simply a love that could be said to be like a friendship or a deep care for a person...and Paul here says that God has already taught them how to love this way but notice again that he says you should increase in this more and more.

Over in Philippians 3:12-14 Paul said this of his personal walk with Jesus when he said ¹²**Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ¹³Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.**

You and I both know we are not yet perfect as we go through life and we won't be perfect until the day that we move from this old broken

tent which is our earthly body and into our heavenly one that is free from the pollution of this world but we should be looking to live a life that is fully set apart unto the Lord and that's really what Paul is looking for in this church.

Especially I would say that your love should be growing for your brothers and sisters, for those that you share a common love of the Lord Jesus with.

Look at verses 11-12 which give a few last instructions for this church. They say ¹¹**that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you,** ¹²**that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and *that* you may lack nothing.**

Well today we live in an age where communication from one person to another is far easier than it ever has been before...and yet the principles of God's Word remain the same you should be looking to live a quiet life...and I think the command next to it goes along with it in that you should look to mind your own business.

We seem to have a knack for knowing the latest gossip that is taking place amongst the body of Christ and yet we know that such things should not be taking place. It's interesting how gossip will spread and if you have ever been around it you know that the story that is given from one person to the next can vary greatly and when its finished what is being said is far from what actually took place.

I want to encourage you today to be very careful when it comes to meddling in the business of others and allowing gossip to fester in the body of Christ. It can and will lead to division and it must be stopped

when it shows itself. If gossip or the business of others is being spread you can simply stop it by not participating in it.

And then Paul says that instead of that each person should be working with their own hands...meaning each should be providing for their own needs...and this must have been a problem in the church in

Thessalonica for in 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12 Paul said this ¹⁰**For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.** ¹¹**For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies.** ¹²**Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.**

Finally Paul says that as they live their lives they should do so with outsiders in mind and you and I should be the same way should we not? We are to live with the heart of making disciples, we should live with a heart that says I am a reflection of the Savior.

Today I would simply ask you in closing two things. First, have you accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior? And second if you do claim to follow Jesus does your life clearly reflect that?

If not I would ask why not? And if you do need to repent of some hidden sin in your life or something you know does not please the Lord I would strongly encourage you to do so as we worship the Lord and if you need to talk about something guys I am available and ladies you can speak with my wife.

Let's pray.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Verses 1-2

Hebrews 5:12-14

1 Corinthians 3:1-3

Colossians 1:9-10

2 John 1:6

Luke 11:28

John 14:15

John 14:21

Verse 4

2 Timothy 2:20-22

1 Corinthians 6:18-20

Genesis 39:8-9

Verses 9-10

Philippians 3:12-14

Verses 11-12

2 Thessalonians 3:10-12