

September 10, 2023

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

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. 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.

Scriptures for further study:

Isaiah 2:5

1 John 1:6

James 1:22

James 3:2

Mark 7:21-22

Romans 13:13

Colossians 3:5-9

“Paul reminded the Thessalonians that their lives as Christians were under Jesus’ control...he exhorted these people to not just believe but behave in a manner appropriate for followers of Jesus.”

-Charles Wanamaker



Agenda

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

BIG IDEA: If true orthodoxy leads to orthopraxy, let us know and make God's interests our longing as people not mastered by the moment.

Simply – Jesus moves me to make much of God’s agenda and not my own.

OUTLINE

1. Walking in faith
2. God's Agenda
3. Gospel Control

“Initial sanctification occurs instantly at the moment of salvation when we are delivered from the kingdom of darkness and brought into the Kingdom of Christ (see Colossians 1:13). Progressive sanctification continues over time until we go to be with the Lord. Initial sanctification is entirely the work of God the Holy Spirit who imparts to us the very life of Christ. Progressive sanctification is also the work of the Holy Spirit, but it involves a response on our part so that we as believers are actively involved in the process.”

- Jerry Bridges

“It’s hard to find a sin more frequently, more uniformly, and more strenuously condemned than sexual sin.”

-Kevin DeYoung

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Paul urges the Thessalonians to walk as "saints." The appeal "to walk" is one of the apostle's familiar themes: reminding them of who they are in Christ and urging them to walk accordingly. Paul's Christian living (orthopraxy) doctrine is rooted in the gospel (orthodoxy). The imperatives of the Christian life (what we should do) are rooted in the indicatives of the gospel (who we are because of Christ's work on our behalf). Paul constantly encourages believers to live a new, grace-steeped identity and be what we are in Christ. Paul urges the Thessalonians not to grow weary but to walk with God, seek to please him, abstain from sexual immorality, control one's body in holiness and honor, and walk well before non-Christians.

-adapted from the Gospel Transformation Study

Bible

Praise to Jesus. Praise Jesus! He was so captivated by His Father the desire of his heart was to do his Father's will and He did! He kept control of his life in holiness and honor because you couldn't. His agenda was His Father's so that you can find true life and real identity in Christ which can compel you to align your agenda with His.

Repentance through Jesus. Pray today for the Holy Spirit to show you how your agenda and God's agenda are out of alignment. Confess and repent to Jesus the misaligned areas of your life and the areas of unbelief which have led to sinful actions. Repent for the times you condemned someone else for the same things that you allowed or did in your own life.

Consecration for Jesus. Consecrate yourself for Jesus today to make every effort to know God's interests and to determine not to allow your life to be mastered by a moment. Consecrate yourself to allow the beauty of the Gospel to move you to make much of God's agenda and not your own.

DISCIPLESHIP DURING THE WEEK

These "Sermon discussion questions" are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. *Grasping the Big Idea.* Has the car broken down on a vacation? How did this impact your travel plans? How did it impact you?
2. *Thinking about the 1st point: Walking in Faith.* (Refer to 1 Thess. 4:1) How do you react when you are tasked with a tedious job or chore, but you don't know why you are doing it? (Read Isaiah 2:5, 1 John 1:6, James 1:22) How are a Christian's beliefs and actions interrelated?
3. *Thinking about the 2nd point: God's Agenda.* The Bible shows you what God desires and what matters to him. Pastor Bill says, *"discipleship is not about learning the rules of religion, its about delighting in the things that God delights in...its about seeking to please him, not in order to win his favor, but in light of the work of Jesus' winning his favor for us."* (Read to 1 Thess. 4:2, & 3) What is God's agenda for you? (Read 1 Thess. 4:7, Mark 7:21-22, Romans 13:13, Colossians 3:5-9) When does God's agenda for your life and your agenda for your life collide?
4. *Thinking about the 3rd point : Gospel Control.* *"Gospel control doesn't come by elimination but through overshadowing. And nothing casts a more beautiful shadow over the mountain of temptation like the radiance of God's glory and beauty in Jesus Christ!!! Look to Christ...see him there as the most enthralling thing in the universe and you will be changed."* -Pastor Bill (Read 1 Thess. 4:4) Describe a life which is controlled in holiness and honor. How do your agenda and God's agenda for you align? How can you help someone who desires to control their life in holiness and honor?

"According to Paul, ignorance of God, or the absence of a relationship with him, was understood as the prime cause of immorality among the Gentiles. The implication for the church is clear. Faith and ethics are bound together in such a way that the person who knows God will not be driven bodily passions but rather by the will of God."

-Gene Green

"Too often we try to deal with sexual temptation with mere denial. While there is an element of abstention in the pursuit of holiness, denial of a lesser pleasure for the sake of a greater pleasure is the Christian's best weapon... Holy desire for God's pleasure helps extinguish the unholy desire of sexual temptation. Sex is about worship, and successfully overcoming sexual temptation requires an eye for supreme, divine, sublime beauty."

-Steve DeWitt

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

1. This passage is focused on living a life that pleases God, especially regarding sexual purity. You will need to decide how much of this passage your children are ready to discuss. Overall, this passage is a good reminder that God's will in our life is that we would be set apart by the Holy Spirit to live according to God's commands. God's commands are how He created us to live and flourish. They are for our good. That is an important understanding for our children to learn.

2. What did Paul write in verse 1 of our passage about our Christian life? *(He said that Christians should continue to apply Jesus' teachings to their lives. He said should live that way "more and more".)*

3. What did verse 3 say is God's will for our lives? *(Verse 3 says that God's will is our sanctification. Make sure your children know that this means that we grow in our holiness. This means living more and more like Jesus. This means that we will more than likely live differently than some of our neighbors or students at our school.)*

4. If your children are ready for discussion about God's plan for sexuality, then ask them what God is teaching us about that in verses 4-5. *(Paul mentions being able to control our bodies and not living like people who do not know God. You can talk about how sin distorts God's good gifts to us for us to act in such a way that God did not intend. Sexuality is meant to be in a lifetime, marriage relationship between a man and a woman.)*

Scriptures for further study:

Acts 4:36-37

John 15:18-21

John 16: 33

1 John 3:8

Colossians 3:13-15

FOR STUDENTS

1. Do you ever feel like obedience to God is a dry duty? How does this passage encourage you?
2. How does this passage help us not to be “approval junkies”?
3. What is one area in which you are finding it hard to obey God? How will this passage help you to pray for your own heart?
4. Are you seeking God’s will for a specific situation at the moment (or do you know anyone who is)? How does verse 3a help you?
5. What does the culture around you say about sexual conduct? What is the biggest temptation for you personally to conform with the culture?
6. Why is it so important to pursue holiness? What’s the implication if we disregard holiness?

*Selected questions borrowed and adapted from 1 & 2 Thessalonians for You by Ligon J. Duncan.

FOR NON-BELIEVERS OR NEW BELIEVERS

1. Paul makes clear that these instructions are given in the authority of Jesus (v.2), according to the will of God (v.3), by the calling of a holy God (v.7). Therefore, to disobey these instructions is to disobey or reject God Himself (v.8), and to treat God as of no account.

Question: How does this affect the seriousness with which you look at your sin?

2. In verse 2, Paul writes that this is “how you **MUST** live” as believers. In other words, this is not a matter of personal choice but of imperative necessity.

Question: How does being instructed as to how we must live smack up against our culture’s belief that it is the individual’s right to make our own decisions, and follow our own desires?

3. In the first century Thessalonian context, there was sexual laxity, and sexual sin or fornication was just a normal part of life. Sex was even featured in the worship of many ancient deities.

Question: How does this compare with the sexual practices in our current cultural context? Is sexual immorality any less prevalent today? Do you think God is any less concerned today with how we as Christians live during these sexually confused times?

4. In verse 3, Paul is saying in no uncertain terms that we must have nothing at all to do with sexual immorality. Elsewhere, Paul taught that there should not be even a hint of sexual immorality in our lives (Ephesians 5:3) and that we should flee from sexual immorality (1 Corinthians 6:18).

Question: Have you adopted this same kind of strong and resolute posture of sin avoidance in your own life? Or are you compromising, downplaying, dabbling in, or justifying things that you should totally eradicate from your life?

5. In these verses, Paul is addressing the process of sanctification in the Christian life. He is not talking about how to be saved, but rather how we as Christians must live (literally “walk”) now that we are saved. More and more our lives will be characterized as overflowing, pleasing to God, and holy.

- **Recognize** that this process will often be slow, so don’t get too discouraged.
- **Commit** yourself and pray for a steady progress not just in the area of sexual purity, but in every area.
- **Remember** God has given you (and given you personally) this power through his Holy Spirit (verse 8).

A Surprising Gratitude: The Emergence of Faith, Love and Hope in Thessalonica



Sunflowers, Vincent Van Gough, 1888

About the artist and painting: In 1888, the Dutch painter Vincent Van Gogh moved to southern France with a dream. He wanted to establish an art community where painters could live, work, and inspire one another. One of his mentors, a man he deeply respected, Paul Gauguin, agreed to come and live in this community. As a symbol of his thankfulness and happiness, Van Gogh painted a series of sunflower paintings and hung them in his room. The sunflower meant to reflect his surprising joy towards achieving a dream.

The apostle Paul was probably not an artist but he did produce a letter expressing his surprising joy, his thankfulness, and happiness. This letter was his “sunflower” to the church Thessalonica. It’s Paul’s verbal painting of Gospel Gratitude. What are things you a most grateful for in your life? Has the Gospel taken root in your heart? If so, what fruits of gratitude are being produced and overflowing in your life as a result of Jesus?

In his opening words from Paul to the Thessalonians, he writes:

2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, constantly mentioning you in our prayers,
3 remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. The same faith, hope, and love that made a difference in the lives of believers then can make a difference in your life now. **“I’m excited for what God has in store for us First Presbyterian Church, as the Spirit washes us in these words of Gospel gratitude. May Christ be our hope for the world to come, our faith for today, and our love for a lifetime”** Pastor Bill Pardue

The purpose of 1 Thessalonians:

“A Surprising Gratitude: The Emergence of Faith, Love and Hope in Thessalonica”

"The purpose of 1 Thessalonians is for Paul to convey to the Thessalonians how encouraged he is by the good report about them and to deal with other aspects of the news brought by Timothy." - Cara, 1 and 2 Thess. 22-23

Paul writes to express his GRATITUDE for the firm faith of the church and their expression and commitment to brotherly love. At the same time, he desires to see the church grow in holiness and provides information and encouragement concerning the hope we have in the certain and imminent return of Jesus Christ.

"The concern Paul had for this congregation was so overwhelming he decided to send Timothy back to the city to 'strengthen and encourage' the believers in their faith and to 'find out about' their faith...1 Thessalonians was written after Timothy arrived in Corinth to report his findings to Paul...He brought good news of the faith, love, and steadfastness of the congregation despite hardships. - Green, PNTC, 52.