

**WALKING OUT HIS WORD EACH DAY
THE 1 THESSALONIANS SERIES**

**COMMENTARY
ON MESSAGE #7**

February 18th, 2018

As you read this section of the commentary I hope you will not think me guilty of false advertising. The key passage of scripture we will begin with is not in I Thessalonians, it is in Romans. Well at least it was written by the same author! In Romans 12:1-2 Paul wrote this:

*“Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy,
to offer yourselves as living sacrifices,
holy and pleasing to God –
this is your spiritual act of worship.
Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,
but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.
Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is –
His good, pleasing and perfect will.”*

In the sermon that corresponds to this section of the commentary we focused on **sanctification**.

Q1: Do you remember what the root word or meaning of sanctification is? (If you need help, look at Exodus 3:5. What did God say about the ground?)

If you want extra insight into Paul’s mind, read Romans. Certainly all of Paul’s letters (I, II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, I, II Thessalonians, I, II Timothy, Titus and Philemon) reveal something of Paul’s heart and mind. But Romans is his most in-depth discussion of salvation and the Christian life. He actually spends the first 11 chapters teaching doctrine and only gets to practical application starting in chapter 12. Romans 12:1-2 is a powerful summary of what sanctification looks like in thought and deed. In the sermon notes we summarized Paul’s teaching on sanctification like this:

The Christian’s main purpose in life is to become as much like Jesus as possible before that glorious moment when you step into eternity and see Him as He is.

Q2: According to Romans 12:1, what should be the primary motive for pursuing sanctification?

When you think about it, there is a very basic motive that should prompt us to pursue holiness
→→ gratitude for God’s mercy. It is God’s mercy that makes it possible for us to have a future and it is

God's mercy that allows us to view the return of Christ not as something to be dreaded but as something to be longed for. The mercy that Paul is speaking of in 12:1 calls us to look back to the first 11 chapters of Romans. Only after a glorious and lengthy explanation of the salvation found in the gospel of Jesus Christ does Paul say, "THEREFORE ... in view of GOD'S MERCY ..."

Q3: In Romans 12:2 what are we supposed to stop doing?

The word *world* in verse 2 is very important. In this particular case it is not a reference to the physical planet we inhabit. Perhaps over the years you have heard it taught that the word *world* is a translation of the Greek word *cosmos*. In I John 2:15-17 (please read these verses) John tells Christians "do not love the cosmos." Used this way, *cosmos* refers to the system that energizes sinful humanity in its state of rebellion against God. It is a mentality, a mindset, that is arrogant, self-seeking, fleshly, humanistic and "live for the moment" in its outlook. Now, even though the word *cosmos* would be perfect for Paul to use in Romans 12:2 when he says "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this **world**", he actually uses a different Greek word, "aion". This word literally translates as *age*, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this age."

NOTE: In his work *Synonyms of the New Testament*, Dr. G.C. Trench says *aion* describes "that floating mass of thoughts, opinions, maxims, speculations, hopes, impulses, aims, aspirations at any time current in the world which it may be impossible to seize and accurately define, but which constitute a most real and effective power, being the moral, or immoral atmosphere which at every moment of our lives we inhale, again inevitably to exhale." (cited by Dr. John MacArthur in his commentary on Romans).

The word *conform* speaks of the process used in pressure molding. It means to apply pressure to something in order to make it take on the shape of the mold.

Q4: Now that you have seen these definitions, how would you describe what Paul is warning against in Romans 12:2?

When we think about not being conformed to the pattern of this world, that obviously includes outright sin. But don't overlook the more subtle meaning of *aion* (age). Not everything about this age (or about the *cosmos* in I John 2:15-17) is sinful in and of itself. One of the traps we step into has to do with taking things that are good, or at least neutral, and making too much of them. We can do this with a job, a hobby or even with another person. I am commanded to love my wife, and I absolutely do love her. But what if I love her more than I love God? What if I depend on her to be my ultimate source of joy, purpose and contentment? If I do that I have taken a good thing (love for my wife) and distorted it into an idol. This is something that will interfere with the process of sanctification in my life.

Q5: Is there anything in your life, though not wrong in and of itself, that you have made too important at the cost of an intimate walk with the Lord?

This is a good time to be reminded of a major emphasis in I Thessalonians, the future return of Jesus Christ that could happen at any time.

Q6: How many verses can you find in I Thessalonians that speak of Christ's return?

*May He strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and **holy** in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all His holy ones.*

I Thessalonians 3:13

Few things hinder the process of sanctification more than getting caught up in momentary things. As already mentioned, the world (aion/cosmos) is characterized by a "live for the moment" value system. It numbs us to a sense of eternal things. It elevates instant gratification. Thoughts of the holiness of God and the supremacy He deserves in our lives are pushed to the side or drowned out by things that are temporary. Do you know what the best cure is for not being conformed to the pattern of this temporary world? It is focusing on the return of Christ and living in a state of expectation and readiness (and all of this is possible because of God's mercy, Romans 12:1).

Now, let's shift gears a bit and correct a common and dangerous misconception about sanctification. Remember, the root meaning of sanctification or being sanctified is the word holy. Christians are called saints and this is simply another form of the word holy. It is very easy to think that holiness is about keeping the rules. We are given a list of the things that we are not to do, and we also have a list of the things we are supposed to do. The thought is, "Well, if I do what the list says and keep the rules then that means I am sanctified."

We are not against rules! The Bible has plenty of them and Paul cites some of them in I Thessalonians 4:1-8. What must be opposed, however, is reductionism. This is the mistake of reducing sanctification and the pursuit of holiness to nothing more than keeping rules. Sanctification is about loving Jesus, being like Him, and longing to please Him and see Him.

*How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!
And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know Him.
Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known.
But we know that when He appears we shall be like Him for we shall see Him as He is.
Everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as HE is pure.*

I John 3:1-3

Sanctification is about getting a head start on Heaven. What awaits us is glorious! The One Who awaits us is glorious! Let us strive to become more like Him even now.