

Practicing Godliness

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 - *“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;² for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.*

³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, ⁵ not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ that 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.

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; ¹⁰ and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; 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.”

Background Notes

Last week Margie and I began putting together our itinerary for next year’s Holy Land study trip. We’re planning an option to tour Greece after the Israel tour. We plan to visit Athens, Corinth, Philippi, Berea and Thessalonica - all the places that are mentioned in the epistles to the Thessalonians. We’re excited!

When Paul arrived in Athens, he sent Timothy back to see how the young believers in Thessalonica were doing. Paul was forced to leave Thessalonica suddenly because of life-threatening persecution. He had not been there long, with very little time to teach the new Christians basic biblical truths and lessons in Christian living, and he was concerned that some of the new converts might fall away from the faith and turn back to the pagan culture, especially if they were faced with persecution. But when Timothy rejoined the apostle Paul in Corinth, he brought good news. *“...Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love” (3:6).* Praise the Lord! They were standing firm in faith, even though they were suffering tribulation and affliction.

It’s always good news when you hear that believers whom you have nurtured and mentored are established and maturing in the faith. How many you have had that experience? For example, when the Lord opened the doors for me to go to

seminary I was leading a Young Life club. I was concerned about some of my Young Life teens who were new Christians. Would they stand firm in the faith? What good news it was to write back and find out that they were standing firm and growing in the Lord!

In 1 Thessalonians 4 Paul continued to teach and exhort the young believers at Thessalonica to grow in their faith and practice godliness. *“... 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”(v1).*

Doctrinal Points

1. Sanctified believers practice sexual purity.

Verse 3: *“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality.”*

What does “sanctified” mean? Sanctification comes from the same Greek word as “holy”. “Sanctified” means to be **set apart for God’s holy use**. Are you a believer who is set apart for God’s use?

What about in the area of sexual purity? Sanctified believers practice sexual purity.

“...each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God” (v4-5). What does the word “vessel” mean? Does it refer to one’s own body, as some translations render it, or does it refer to a man’s wife? It’s not easy to determine what the word “vessel” means here, even from the context.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, the Greek word that’s translated “vessel” (v4) is used for both “body” and “wife”. 1 Peter 3:7 says, *“Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.”* 2 Corinthians 4:7 reads, *“But we have this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellence of power may be of God and not of us.”* So you see the same word that’s translated as “vessel” here in 1 Thessalonians, is used elsewhere in the New Testament for both “body” and “wife.” We can’t be dogmatic as to whether Paul has in mind a man’s wife or a man’s body - but the overall teaching is clear! Sanctified believers - who are set apart for Gods holy use - will practice sexual purity.

Verses 6-8 indicate that when we do not practice sexual purity, we reject God and despise the Holy Spirit – a very serious matter! *“Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit” (v8).*

Furthermore, we bring upon ourselves the judgment of God: *“that 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” (v6).* To “defraud” or to wrong your brother in the sexual area involves more than the actual act of adultery. Wronging your brother in this area includes all the steps that lead up to it - even if the final act of adultery is not committed.

I trust that you are not engaged in stealing the affections of another person's husband or wife. You may think you're getting away with it now - but you will experience the judgment of God, and maybe sooner than you think. God has called us to **holiness** – not to uncleanness or impurity (v7).

The believers in Thessalonica were surrounded by sexual impurity in the 1st century Greco-Roman pagan culture in which they lived. Sexual impurity was even a religious activity in the pagan temples. Temptations abounded.

Sound familiar? In our post-Christian culture we, too, are surrounded by sexual impurity – or haven't you noticed? Everything from movies and TV shows to the internet and advertising are filled with sexual impurity. As believers in a pagan culture, we must practice sexual purity in our actions, in our attitudes, and in our thought-lives. It's not automatic. In our culture, practicing sexual purity requires a determined and disciplined decision! Sanctified believers practice sexual purity.

2. Sanctified believers practice brotherly love.

Verses 9-10: *“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; and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more.”*

Notice that the Thessalonian believers were practicing brotherly love: *“and indeed you do so toward all the brethren”* (v10). And back in chapter 3: *“But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love”* (v6). So they were already practicing brotherly love, but Paul exhorted them to even greater brotherly love: *“But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more”* (v10).

Why **more** brotherly love? The reason is that you can never have enough brotherly love! The more brotherly love we have, the more unity we will have. And the more unity we have, the more blessing we will experience. Do you want blessing here at your church? Then promote unity! And how do you promote unity? You practice brotherly love!

Brotherly love is not automatic. You must **determine** in your heart to practice brotherly love – and then **take action** to do it! Sanctified believers practice brotherly love.

3. Sanctified believers practice lifestyle discipline.

Verses 11-12: *“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.”*

These two verses contain three guidelines for practicing lifestyle discipline in this world.

Guideline #1: Don't seek the limelight!

Be content to lead a quiet life. Sanctified believers don't strive and lose sleep trying to get ahead in this world. You can scarcely call yourself a sanctified believer if you're trying to gain popularity - or prestige - or power in this world (or in your church)!

1 John 2:17 says that this world is passing away. How ridiculous, how foolish, how unfaithful, and how unbelieving we are, if we seek to advance ourselves in this world.

Guideline #2: Mind your own business!

Stop gossiping! Stop judging the motives of others. Stop butting into other people's lives with your criticisms or advice. Verse 11: "...mind your own business."

Guideline #3: Be self-supporting!

Work with your own hands. This verse doesn't mean that Christians can't have desk jobs. It means we are to work hard and support ourselves and our families. Christians should not be moochers or freeloaders. Do you know any "Christian parasites" – believers who are always looking for financial help from the church or other believers? Show them this verse!

Sanctified believers practice a lifestyle discipline.

Practical Application

Remember, there's always room for improvement!

A few weeks ago I received a letter from a Christian woman who said that she had already become sinless and perfect! She told me that she didn't have to worry about sin in her life anymore because she was fully sanctified. Well, I guess she hasn't yet read this chapter in the Bible.

This woman was confusing "positional truth" with "everyday living" as a Christian. Yes, our position in God's "court" is that we were declared righteous and fully sanctified the moment we trusted Christ. But until we get our sinless resurrected bodies that will be fit for Heaven, sin will continue to be a problem in our everyday lives.

Believers must practice sexual purity. Believers must practice brotherly love. Believers must practice lifestyle discipline.

Just maintaining the "status quo" in sanctification is equivalent to stagnation! Remember – we're not sinless or perfect yet. There's always room for improvement!