

“Pleasing God More and More” (1 Thessalonians 4)(9.6.20)

1 Thessalonians 4 (NIV84)

4 Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. ² For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

³ It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴ that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵ not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; ⁶ and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. ⁷ For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. ⁸ Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

⁹ Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. ¹⁰ And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.

¹¹ Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, ¹² so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

¹³ Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. ¹⁴ We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage each other with these words.

The word of God for the people of God.

Title: **“Pleasing God More and More”**

LET US PRAY.

INTRODUCTION:

In my son’s house, there is a doorway marked in the same manner as many homes with children. The pencil lines start low and now they reach over my head. They are dated and the height and name of the child is noted. Likewise a Christian is to grow into their faith, and to continue growing. What might that look like?

[S. B. Bossiter](#): “There may be movement in Christian life but no progress. Like the water wheel that turns round in the same place that it did ten years ago, may be the Christian life that runs the weekly round of Church services. Like the door that swings on the same hinge, but never moves from the door post, may be the Christian life excessively busy, continually in and out, but never advancing into the interior truths of God’s Word. Christian life is not a treadmill round; Christianity is not meant to teach us how to talk, but to teach us how to walk, and walking is orderly, constant progress towards a terminus, a glory. The path of the just shineth more and more unto the perfect day.”

Yes, as the saying goes, I feel Paul’s pain. He wants the Thessalonians to continue their great start. There is so much that opposes our Christian growth. One old-time preacher shared this sentiment: “A minister’s task is an endless one. Has he planted knowledge? — practice must be urged. Is the practice satisfactory? — perseverance must be pressed. Do they continue in well-doing? — they must be stimulated to further progress.”

BODY:

The central issue of this chapter is explained in the opening topic sentence. We are to live our lives in order to please God. This is the purpose all Christians have in common. Our natural tendency is to be people pleasers. If there is a conflict between pleasing God and pleasing family members, what are we to do? If there is a conflict between pleasing God and pleasing society, what are we to do? If there is a conflict between pleasing God and pleasing ourselves, what are we to do? {pause} The last one, was a trick question. My friends, if we are walking with Jesus, pleasing ourselves should be consistent with pleasing God.

Paul reminds the Thessalonians of his instructions on living a God pleasing life. We can see Paul's teaching is consistent with Hebrews 11:5–6 (NIV84): ⁵ By faith Enoch was taken from this life, so that he did not experience death; he could not be found, because God had taken him away. For before he was taken, **he was commended as one who pleased God.** ⁶ And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

The centrality of faith is consistent with this description of Enoch and we saw it in chapter three of Thessalonians, which I taught you last week. The Thessalonians faith was mentioned five times. And, in the 12th verse of chapter two, the Thessalonians are told to live lives worthy of God or walk in a manner worthy of God, depending on the translation selected. For our living with God is a walk. Remember that it is clearly indicated that the LORD walked with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden in the cool of the day. That is why human beings were created, to please God, to enjoy God, which requires being in the presence of God.

For most of human history, walking was the primary mode of getting from one place to another.

Scripture instructs us to walk by faith; walk in the Spirit; walk in wisdom; walk honorably; walk circumspectly or carefully; and more. We know that the Lord Jesus walked everywhere on his earthly journey, even on water. The only exception recorded was His prophesied entrance into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday – riding on a donkey.

And in Jesus, we have the ultimate example in pleasing God, His Father and our Father. Matthew 3:16–17 (NIV84) ¹⁶ As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. ¹⁷ And a voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.”

When we live into our baptism, with Jesus, then we please God. That is literally one of my daily prayers. When we live and walk in the power of the Holy Spirit, then we are pleasing God. The more we manifest the Lord Jesus in our lives, the wider the Father's smile beams upon us.

We have covered the first half of the first sentence; which ends, “as in fact you ARE living.” So, why does Paul bring it up? He says, I ask you; then he turns up the volume, we urge you; more volume, in the Lord Jesus; do this more, and now the volume maxes out, and more. Keep on doing what you are doing to the utmost. Why? Because this life is commanded by Jesus and made possible through our faith in Jesus. There is a place in New Zealand called Slope Point. Years ago, sheep farmers planted trees to protect their herds from the winds. This place is south of Australia and there is nothing between it and the South Pole to hinder the winds. The trees at Slope Point are bent over from the constant force of those winds.

As Christians, we too face the winds of this world. They are winds of worry. Satan and his demons are trying to blow you down. If Satan cannot topple you, he will at least try to drive you off course. He knows your weaknesses and he is so deceptive with his lies. Success can fill you with pride.

Disappointment can lead to lethargy and laziness. Defeat can lead you to despair.

All sorts of sin can trigger your brain to release dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin, and endorphins. By pursuing and reinforcing sinful pleasures, deeper and deeper neuron paths are reinforced in our brains. Instead of seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness, we succumb to the strong winds of Satan.

That is why Paul says next, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified.” As Paul develops this thought, he tells the Thessalonians AND us, that we are to be holy, honorable, and pure. Yes, sanctification is the growth process of a Christian into the likeness of Jesus, but we tend to look at one side of the sanctification coin. It is the obvious one of morality. In Sunday School and in sermons this is where the emphasis is placed. Most likely, this is because it is the more easily observed.

Even here, Paul points to sexual immorality, controlling your body, passionate lusts, and impurity. These are clearly identified with the heathen; those they do not know God. God will punish all such sins. And, if you take advantage of someone else to gratify these unhealthy sexual pursuits, it will be all the worse for you. What about leading others into these sins? Then, violators are rejecting God. So you see, it is not just the other person you sin against but the Lord himself. They were warned initially and are being warned again.

You can see that human nature has not changed. In the dominant Greco-Roman context of Paul’s day, there were no constraints on sexual activity. I could give you a long litany of today’s scandalous sexual activity, but there isn’t enough time. Let it suffice to say our society is saturated with sexual content that tragically even affects children.

What’s the big deal? Ephesians 5:12 (NIV84) For it is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. 1 Corinthians 6:15–20 (NIV84)

¹⁵ Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! ¹⁶ Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” ¹⁷ But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit.

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. ¹⁹ Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

And that is why Paul, here in his reminder to the Thessalonians, closes this portion by saying this instruction is from God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

Newsflash: God is not against sex. Our Creator gave it to us as a gift. He told Adam and Eve to be fruitful and multiply. BUT, this gift is reserved for the context of marriage of a man and a woman. They become one flesh and in so doing, they are united together to form a family with children. The sex is to give them physical pleasure but also comfort and security in a loving relationship where your spouse puts you first. This marriage relationship’s exclusivity and uniqueness are meant to build up each other, the family, and the place of God in those relationships.

Let’s talk about the other side of the sanctified coin and it is closely related to the holiness aspect. With moral purity on one side, the other side means to be set apart. It means to stand out from the mass of humanity. We are to look different from the culture that surrounds us. We think differently. We believe differently. We love differently. We are motivated differently. We have different hopes. We are citizens of heaven. We have an eternal perspective. In short, we live and walk with God. And, we are anticipating the Lord Jesus’ return.

Certainly our being sanctified will be exhibited by an external holiness. Not easily evident, but what makes it possible, is an internal holiness. In Ephesians 5:25–27 (NIV84), Paul instructs, ²⁵ Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶ to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷ and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless.

You see my friends, we are cleansed from the inside out. As Paul said in 1 Thessalonians 2:13, “The word of God is at work in you who believe.” By our faith in the sacrificial work of Jesus, being in communion with him individually and as a church, and the work of the powerful word of God, we are able to live out our calling as children of our heavenly Father.

In one of my daily prayers, I pray that the Holy Spirit's voice would be the guiding light in my life. In the daily prayer guide on our Emmaus Faithlife Group, there is always a section on confession. During that time, I pray for the Holy Spirit to wash through me and cleanse me of anything unworthy. During the confessional time of our Holy Communion liturgy I make a similar plea for the Holy Spirit to flow through me. Think of it as a spiritual shower.

Paul proceeds to speak about Philadelphia love – brotherly love. We do not need to write to you about this, YET he is writing about it. They have been taught Philadelphia love by God directly. Jesus says in John 6:45 (NIV84), "It is written in the Prophets: 'They will all be taught by God.' Everyone who listens to the Father and learns from him comes to me."

The Thessalonians have already demonstrated their love to other believers throughout Macedonia. They have sent financial support and prayed. "Yet we urge you, to do so more and more." We are to continue to make progress, step by step, layer upon layer. This is part of our growth. We are blessed and God works in our hearts through this very intentional brotherly love.

Is it easy? Sometimes yes and sometimes no. Do they deserve it? This is not for us to say. When we truly see ourselves as we really are, we understand that it was only by the grace of God that we have been saved. Often said, but seldom actually appreciated, "But, for the grace of God, there go I." We are to be people of grace. We have benefited from God's grace and we MUST demonstrate that grace to others. This takes effort. This takes love.

Paul joins the word ambition to something seemingly without ambition, a quiet life. Usually ambition is connected to a driving force to succeed. It typically requires hard work and determination. Do we associate this definition with the quiet life? NO, but clearly we should. Minding our own business seems more like practical advice instead of biblical guidance. Apparently, too many of us need the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit to mind our own business. Yes, keep your nose out of your neighbor's affairs. It also seems strange that Paul admonishes the Thessalonians to work with their hands. Most all of the Jesus followers in the early church believed His return was imminent. They were afraid that Christians who had already died were going to miss out somehow. Paul explained that wasn't the case at all. Some believers reasoned, well if Jesus is coming back, why should I waste my time working? They were healthy and able to work but chose not to work. They became a burden on the other brothers and sisters. This is not consistent with Philadelphia love or Christian example.

CONCLUSION:

Yes, Jesus' Second Coming gives a framework to our Christian worldview. It gives us hope in the future. We are reminded not only of the New Heaven and New Earth to come, God's kingdom fully realized; but also, the Day of the Lord, judgment, and the wrath of God. Looking forward to Jesus' return also speaks to our hearts longing for communion with our God and the universal Church; the gathering of all the saints of Christ.

A few years ago, for a special Christmas program, I rewrote Sam Cooke's song, "Change Gonna Come." It is a great song that was very popular during the Civil Rights movement. My lyrics reflect our hope in Jesus' return.

"The Lord Is Gonna Come"

By Don McMahon

1. God was born in a manger in Bethlehem town;
The day's gonna come, when He returns wearing his crown
He's been long, a long time coming
But the Lord is gonna come, oh yes he will

2. It's been so hard living, and I'm NOT 'fraid to die
'Cause I DO know what's up, beyond the sky

He's been a long, a long time coming
But the Lord's gonna come, oh yes he will, Oh yes will.

3. Jesus told us to be ready for his return
For a new heaven and a new earth we yearn

He's been a long, a long time coming
But the Lord, the Lord is gonna come, oh yes he will

4. Then I go to my brother
And say, "Brother, help me please."
And he winds up, joining me
Praying on my knees

Ohhh, There been times that I thought
I couldn't last for long
But now I know, I'm able to, carry on

He's been long, a long time coming
But the Lord's gonna come, the Lord's gonna come,

Therefore encourage each other with these words.
My friends, live to please God, more and more!
Amen and amen. Let us pray.