

**While I'm Waiting
(Week 7)
1 Thessalonians 4:1-12
"A Closer Walk"**

Introduction

Mankind, he has told each of you what is good and what it is the LORD requires of you: to act justly, to love faithfulness, and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8

When God gave the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, He knew that we would never be able to live up to the standard set by them in our own human weakness. In fact, very shortly after The List was given to the people, a man was executed for picking up sticks to build his fire on the Sabbath (**Numbers 15:32-36**). He had blatantly disregarded The Law, and therefore, displayed his own contempt for the Word of God just days after he had been instructed to obey! It is the sinful nature of man to disobey God. And we must always remember that it is not The Commands that save us. No. It is by Commands that we are made aware that we NEED saving.

Let me put this another way. The Law was given as a kind of "babysitter". A guardian for the children if you will. This guardian was meant to take us by the hand and lead us to the cross of Christ and say, "Children, this is what you need". We cannot, in our own strength, live according to the commands of The Law, for even our best efforts fall short.

One of the words for "sin" in the Hebrew is "Chatta" (pronounced Khat-taw'), and it is an archery term that means to miss the mark or the intended target. For you see, no matter how hard we try and "aim" for God's perfect standards, we fall miserably short. Like the archer, who simply doesn't have the skill to hit a bullseye every time, we, even in our best efforts, fall short of the glory of God (**Romans 3:23**). Therefore, God's perfect Law ought to prove to us beyond any doubt that we need saving by someone Who is far more righteous than ourselves. Thanks be to God, there is such a One. He is the skilled and mighty archer Who never misses His intended target, and His Name is Jesus!

In **Thessalonians 4**, Paul re-emphasizes the need for Christ's followers to become increasingly holy in all they do. To be blameless and set apart for God's service. But, if we couldn't even meet the requirements given in the Ten Commandments, then how on earth can we become even more holy? The Pharisees of Jesus' day thought they obeyed The Law to perfection. They were so proud of themselves, because they were convinced that they had it all together. But listen to what Jesus said about their righteousness:

For I tell you, unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of heaven. Matthew 5:20

Wow! Now, here were some folks who thought they had done it just right, and yet, Jesus said that they still missed the mark of holiness. So how on earth can **we** do any better? By walking humbly with our God, that is how. For you see, just as Salvation cannot be earned, for it is a work of The Holy Spirit, Sanctification can only be achieved by The Spirit as well. We need a helper to guide us into holiness. And fortunately, that is exactly what The Spirit does in each of us, who are in Christ Jesus.

And I will ask The Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever. John 14:16

So, in Thessalonians, when Paul is exhorting the church to walk in holiness, what he is actually telling them to do is walk according to The Spirit of God. To allow The Spirit to transform them in sanctification more and more with each passing day. He encouraged them to do this "in The LORD Jesus" and not in their own strength (**1 Thessalonians 4:1**). And then, he goes on to describe just how someone who is being led by God's Spirit will act. They will *Live for God, Love One Another, and Lead a Quiet Life*. In short, they will live in holiness, harmony, and honesty. Please allow me to explain.

Live For God (Holiness vs. 1-8)

Holiness. It means to be set apart for special use. You see, just as we spoke about last week, God will not use someone who is “dirty” to serve Him. We must be clean in order to be effective witnesses for Christ. No one will listen to you when you speak of your love for God, when you live like the devil. Simple as that. So Paul commanded the church at Thessalonica to strive for holiness in ever-increasing measure.

Additionally then, brothers and sisters, we ask and encourage you in The LORD Jesus, that as you have received instruction from us on how you should live and please God — as you are doing — do this EVEN MORE. **1 Thessalonians 4:1**
(emphasis added)

In this verse lies a simple truth that will define every follower of Jesus Christ. It is the desire to become more and more like Him. If someone tells you that they believe in Jesus, but that same person seems to have no desire to live in holiness, then don't be deceived, they do not belong to Christ. If The Spirit of God lives within you, then you will be compelled to live in a way that pleases God.

There are two kinds of people in this world. Those who live according to The Spirit and are, by His power, striving for holiness, and then there is everyone else. To be a follower of Christ is to live to please Christ. **You cannot stay where you are and go with God.** Those who live to gratify their own fleshly desires are not part of God's kingdom. This is not some wild speculation, this is Scriptural fact.

The church at Thessalonica was striving to live in such a way that they would be pleasing to God. And Paul admonished them to do so even more. To live in such a way that they were becoming more like Christ with each passing day. This is the process of Sanctification, and it can only be achieved by prayer and the study of God's Word, as we yield ourselves daily to be led by The Spirit, and not the flesh. And one of the “proofs” of this kind of living is in abstinence from sexual immorality.

For this is God's will, your sanctification: that you keep away from sexual immorality, that each of you knows how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not with lustful passions, like the Gentiles, who don't know God. **1 Thessalonians 4:3-5**

The word that Paul uses here translated “sexual immorality” in the CSB is “*porneia*”, and it is from this word that we derive our English word “*pornography*”. The Scriptures are abundantly clear. Anything sexual that is outside the bounds of a husband and wife is strictly forbidden by God. God created this activity to be strictly between married couples in order for them to have a bond with one another that no one else could share. It is long overdue for the church of Jesus Christ to return to holiness in this regard. It would be improper for the church to turn a blind eye to sexual sin within the body of Christ. Many these days would urge the people of Christ to “get with the times”, as it were, and to stop being so old fashioned. But let me remind you that God NEVER changes with the times.

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from The Father of lights, Who does not change like shifting shadows. **James 1:17**

Paul goes on to say that everyone, who belongs to Christ, must be able to control his/her own bodies (“*vessels*” in the original text). In fact, to be a “vessel” filled with The Spirit is to have “self-control” (**Galatians 5:23**). So the Christian is left with no excuse for sexual sin. God has, in fact, by His Spirit living within us, given us the ability to keep ourselves from sinning in this manner. In Thessalonica, pagan gods were actually “worshipped” by engaging in sexual immorality with temple prostitutes. Sexual immorality was a way of life in Thessalonica. The vast majority of the society which surrounded the fledgling church not only condoned such activity, but strongly encouraged it. For the church of Thessalonica to take a stand against such behavior would have caused its membership to seem deranged and out of touch to the inhabitants of the city, but they were commanded to stand firm

nonetheless. And so are we. Marital intimacy is in fact a gift from God Himself. But as the Creator and Giver of such a gift, He has every right to determine how it will be used. And not only does He have the right to instruct us in these matters, He also will bring judgment upon those who willfully disobey.

This means one must not transgress against and take advantage of a brother or sister in this manner, because The LORD is an avenger of all these offenses, as we also previously told and warned you. For God has not called us to impurity but to live in holiness. Consequently, anyone who rejects this does not reject man, but God, Who gives you His Holy Spirit. **1 Thessalonians 4:6-8**

For you see, not only do we hurt ourselves when we are sexually immoral, but we also involve others in our sin. We lead others astray. And God has promised to avenge those souls that we lead into temptation. For our sins not only have an impact on our lives, but the lives of others, as well. The child of God desires to live FOR God and longs to bring honor and glory to Him in all things. One cannot honor God by engaging in sexual sin. We can only live for God, by living in holiness.

Love One Another (Harmony vs. 9-10)

About brotherly love: You don't need me to write you because you yourselves are taught by God to love one another. In fact, you are doing this toward all the brothers and sisters in the entire region of Macedonia. But we encourage you, brothers and sisters, to do this even more.... **1 Thessalonians 4:9-10**

Since we have spoken of our need for increasing love within the church from last weeks lesson from **Chapter 3**, I will not belabor the point. Suffice to say that there will never be a time when the Church has too much love in it. We need to love God, and the more that we love Him, the more that we will love one another!

I love what Paul tells the Thessalonians about brotherly love: **"...you don't need me to write you, because you yourselves are taught by God to love one another"**. The word that He uses for "taught by God" sounds very much like one of those words that Paul is famous for creating by the combining of two words. The word is "theodidaktos". This is the only place this word is found in all of Scripture, and it literally means "God-taught". You see, no-one needs to teach a Believer how to love, for Christ Himself puts His love within us. If you do not love, you do not know God.

The one who does not love, does not know God, because God IS love. **1 John 4:8**
(emphasis added)

So, if you are truly in Christ, if you are staying closely connected to Him (**John 15**), then you are being "God-taught" how to love one another. It is not something that comes from your own human effort. It is The Spirit teaching you how to love more and more, as He brings you to sanctification. This supernatural love is the proof that we belong to Jesus.

By this everyone will know you are My disciples, if you love one another. John 13:35

So as His disciples, we must be ever increasing in love. Or as Paul would say, **"do this all the more"**.

Lead Quiet Lives (Honesty vs. 11-12)

...to seek to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your hands, as we commanded you, so that you may behave properly in the presence of outsiders and not be dependent on anyone. **1 Thessalonians 4:11-12**

The Believer, who strives to walk closely with Christ and is led by His Spirit also relies upon Him to provide for their physical needs. Jesus commands us:

...But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you. **Matthew 6:33**

We live in a world that says, "If you don't get what you want, demand it". This is why we have so many protests and riots in America these days. Everyone wants what they want, and they want it **right now!** And when they do not get what they want, they become angry and often violent. Rather than living for God and longing for His will and provision, they are self-serving and impatient.

What is the source of wars and fights among you? Don't they come from your passions that wage war within you? You desire and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and wage war. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and don't receive because you ask with wrong motives, so that you may spend it on your pleasures. You adulterous people! Don't you know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? **James 4:1-4(a)**

Being close to God and walking according to the Spirit will bring a calming sense of peace to the Believer. We will lead a "quiet life", because we are content to be under His control. If God doesn't provide it for us, then we do not need it. We learn in Christ to be content with what we have (**Philippians 4:11-13**; **Hebrews 13:5**).

This doesn't mean that we are not required to earn our own living. We are commanded to work for our wages. The child of God cannot be content with being lazy. Paul told the Thessalonians to work with their hands and not be dependent upon others for their living. We live in a society that is filled with people who think that others should work so that they don't have to. This is why our nation's debt has become so enormous that it can never be repaid. People believe that it is the government's responsibility to pay their way, as it were. However, this can only be done by shifting that burden onto others and forcing them to pay. If we truly love our neighbors as ourselves, then we will not long to take advantage of them in this manner. We have an obligation to provide for our own financial well being, as we rely on God to enable us to work.

Does this mean that we are not to assist those in need? Of course not. We are commanded to help, so long as, the needs are legitimate and not as a result of laziness. In his second letter to the church at Thessalonica, Paul would write:

If anyone isn't willing to work, he should not eat. **2 Thessalonians 3:10**

God is not impressed with those who are unwilling to work hard to earn their living. And to be led by His Spirit is to be willing to earn our daily bread. We are to not expect others to provide for us, when we are more than able to do it for ourselves. Paul tells us that we should behave properly (**vs. 12**). The word actually means to live honestly and with integrity. To take advantage of another's generosity for our own personal gain is to be dishonest. God has called us to lead quiet lives, working hard to provide for our families, and to be content. One of my favorite verses in Scripture is found in **Psalms 37**, where David writes:

I have been young and now I am old, yet I have not seen the righteous abandoned or his children begging for bread. **Psalms 37:25**

So walk closely with The LORD, seek first His righteousness, and He will provide for your physical needs. But don't be surprised, when that provision requires you to get a job! Walking with God will lead us to Holiness, Harmony, and Honesty in our dealings, and that includes honest labor. Lead a quiet life. Live to please God in all that you do. Be a living example of the difference that Christ has made... in YOU.

And let all those who walk with God say... TRUTH!!!