



1 Thessalonians 4:1-12
 Living as Followers of Jesus
 “Living to Please God”

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Today we continue our journey through Paul’s first letter to the church he helped get started in the Greek port city of Thessalonica. In this letter known as 1 Thessalonians, Paul gives some encouragement and reminders to them about what it means to follow Jesus. And 2,000 years later, what he writes is still relevant to us, including in today’s passage, because the culture in which we find ourselves and the things that seek to pull us away from Jesus and his will for our lives, aren’t all that different today than they were 2,000 years ago. So, we are in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 today. We’ll start with just the **first couple verses**.

So, a lot of English translations render these verses in a way that loses the metaphorical language with which Paul writes. The metaphor is in regards to “live in a way that pleases God...You live this way already, but we urge you to do so even more.” **The Greek literally reads, “We request and exhort you...to *walk* and please God, just as you already *walk*, that you excel still more.”** The word for “walk” is *paripateo*.

Walking, literally, was the most common way of getting around in the ancient world. But it also was a metaphor for life, and how you lived your life. So, for instance, in the Old Testament we read in Genesis 5:24, that “Enoch walked with God.” The same thing is said of Noah in Genesis 6:9 “...he walked faithfully with God.” In Deuteronomy 5:33 we read this exhortation to the people of Israel, “Walk in obedience to all that the Lord your God has commanded you...” In Psalm 23, suffering and sorrow are described as a “walk through the valley of the shadow of death” and God is with us on that walk.

What we see is that to “walk with God” is to live in a way that pleases God. It’s what a disciple of Jesus does in response to God’s grace. *We want* to walk with God according to how he commands us to. And so, Paul is exhorting them, and urging them to do that. He says they already have been doing that, but he’s urging them to do so even more.

Then, there are two areas of life in which he specifically exhorts them. Let's continue reading for the first one, and then we'll tackle the second one after that. So, picking up in **verse 3, and continuing through verse 8...**

One of the major themes of the Bible is that we are to be holy. That's what this word "sanctified" is about in verse 3. The root Greek word for sanctify is "hagios" which is the word for "holy"; the Old Testament Hebrew word is "kadosh" and means "set apart". Items used in Jewish worship in the Tabernacle, or later in the temple, were considered "holy" because they were set apart for this special use. Like those instruments of worship, we are created and set apart for worship. 1 Peter 1:15-16 is a great example of the Biblical breadth of this, as it's a New Testament writing that quotes the Old Testament, **"As he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, 'Be holy, for I am holy' (1 Peter 1:15-16, quoting Leviticus 11:45).** There are many other examples in Scripture.

And as we read: the first *specific* call to holiness Paul touches on is in the area of sexual behavior. Now, Paul comes from a Jewish background. He actually was a Roman citizen, but he was a Jewish religious leader before following Jesus. And in Judaism, sexual behavior was regulated much more than in Greco-Roman culture. Adultery and coveting your neighbor's wife, for example, are strictly out of bounds going back to the 10 Commandments in the Old Testament. Now, they didn't always abide by that very well, and we read about people in the Old Testament who did not live by that standard; but that was the standard, and it was embraced by the time we get to Jesus and the New Testament. That sexual ethic carries into Christianity, because, as you probably know, Christianity grows out of the Jewish faith.

But Greco-Roman culture knew no such boundaries around sexual activity. Gary Demarest, in his commentary on 1 Thessalonians, writes, **"Historians concur that it was a society [Greco-Roman] in which there were no restraints when it came to sexual mores [ethics/values]" (Gary Demarest).** So, there's a conflict of cultures as these Thessalonians start following Jesus. And just to be clear, Jesus upholds the sexual standard as well. He spoke against sexual immorality and adultery at least 23 times. Lust is addressed in the Sermon on the Mount and it's not treated lightly. In

Matthew 19 Jesus reiterates the Genesis vision of marriage: that it's a life-long commitment between a man and a woman, and that that is the context for sexual relations. So, Paul is saying that living into this theology is to become holy, to be sanctified.

Now, sometimes, cultural values line up with Christian values, oftentimes because our faith has impacted culture, like: be kind to others, don't steal, don't lie, and root for the Seahawks (not actually that last one!). But the Biblical view of sexual relations is generally seen as antiquated. However, a big part of what it means to follow Jesus is to submit our wills to his. We pray: "Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" as Jesus teaches us to pray. And based on Jesus' teachings, in addition to the Old Testament, Paul is reiterating that being sanctified, being made holy, being set apart for God, matters. And this includes sexual relations being expressed in the right context, the context that God establishes. It's not up to us to re-write the rules of holiness, of being set apart for God.

If this rubs us the wrong way, let's remember that the gospel is redemptive and transformative. Jesus hasn't come to put us in bondage to rules and regulations, but to set us free, to live as God intends, and that includes in our sexual relations. Let's finish out today's passage, picking up in **verse 9 and going through 12...**

So, the first specific exhortation to sanctification is in the area of sexual relations. **The second area is in regards to their support, and encouragement of one another as a body of believers.** They are getting some things right: they love one another. They care for one another. Verse 9 and the first part of 10 makes that clear, and we've read other "good job" comments about them earlier in the letter. But then part way through 10 we read "Yet we urge you brothers and sisters, to do so more and more, and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you." So, as this letter progresses, and there's just one more chapter after this one, we see that there seem to be some misunderstandings on their part about the return of Jesus. The New Testament is clear that Jesus will return. Jesus tells us it will be like a "thief in the night" – in other words, we don't know when he's returning. In

general, early Christians seemed to believe that Jesus would return very soon – like within their lifetimes.

That seems to be the understanding of the Thessalonian Christians, and they've taken it so far as to stop working, and simply wait for Jesus to return. Paul is correcting them on that here: “work with your hands, just as we told you” he writes. There are two outcomes of this. First, they will be a strong witness to people outside the church. Their diligent work, and living out of their faith in their work and in their church will be a witness to others. We are called to live out our faith actively, each and every day – at home, in the workplace, in our hobbies and other endeavors.

Second of all, they will not be “dependent on anybody.” More literally it reads, “and not be in any need.” **In other words: through their work, people's needs in the church will be met.** In the church, we probably cannot realistically do this today to the degree they could then. There are needs we really can't, and shouldn't try to meet, that they could. Take medicine, for example. If I have an appendix that needs removing, like I did three years ago, I'm not asking any of you to operate on me 😂. There are needs that can be met by people with the right training and resources. 2,000 years ago, they just didn't have certain knowledge or capabilities, and could more easily meet needs that did arise.

But there are some needs we can help with. A lot of them – not all of them – but a lot of them take a particular resource that we all have access to, to one degree or another: money. (Actually, a second resource is time.) And so, I'm going to wrap up this sermon talking about *another* topic that again doesn't have a culturally popular perspective. We're hitting on two of the topics that you won't talk about at Thanksgiving with your relatives! It's a “two for one Sunday,” ...and you're welcome. 😊 So: **One way we make sure we all “lack nothing” – physically and spiritually – to the degree that we are able to meet needs, is through generous financial support of the church.** Paul is more than hinting at that here as well, because if people are going to “lack nothing” or “not be in need” that certainly meant some kind of sharing material and financial resources.

And that still is part of what it means to be actively involved in the life of a church, and part of following Jesus. **Part of the redemption and freedom we experience in following Jesus is being freed from idols that seek to control and enslave us and this includes money.** Throughout Scripture, expectations are given about our financial stewardship. Jesus talks frequently about being wise with our money, avoiding greed, giving to others, the dangers of money, and more. And still one of the most difficult facets of life and faith is to relinquish our finances to him.

But imagine if we did that as God asks? Imagine if everyone in our church gave a full tithe, which is 10% of our income. The Old Testament introduces the concept and Jesus reinforces it. The ministry needs we could meet in our church and in the broader community would grow almost exponentially. Statistically, financial giving levels by Christians in America is about 3% instead of 10%. Let's presume we're at that same level in our church (I have no idea what our giving levels actually are). Our church budget in 2024 is a little under \$600,000. I can't imagine what we'd do if we had triple that amount for 2025. And it may not be wise for anyone who is giving 3% to go to 10% in one year. But what about increasing your giving by 10% or 20%? The first couple verses we read this morning, Paul exhorts them to live for Jesus more and more. What if we applied that to our financial stewardship? So, instead of say, \$5,000 a year, it's \$5,500 or maybe \$6,000? And then maybe a similar increase the next year? For sure, some people who are on fixed incomes, maybe are unable to do that. But then there are others who could increase even more than that. If we did give "more and more" the fact is, our ministries would be even more impactful than they are and meeting more and more of people's needs, a little like what we see in **this video... If you're reading online, you can watch it at:**
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tWXkX9axcWs>

What a great example of taking care of others and meeting their needs, so no one lacks anything. That food cost money. And you see, your money is holy, too. Like sex, the world would like to tell you otherwise. But God tells us that it's holy. **Money is part of your life and like the rest of you: God wants it set apart for him, sanctified for him.** If our budget for next year *were* able to increase by 10% or more, I don't know exactly what we'd do

with that, but I would ask our elders to consider things that help us lead people – ourselves, and others – toward Jesus where we live, work, and play. Maybe expand our church staff, or discipleship resources, or leadership training, or our local and global missions to better meet people’s needs outside the church and introduce them to Jesus.

So, most of you recently got, or you will get very soon, a letter from me about financial stewardship for 2025. Copies are also at the Info Center in the lobby, and at our website. And like this sermon, the letter is probably not as inspiring as I’d like it to be; but I hope you’ll read it and prayerfully consider what God would have you designate as holy, as set apart for him in support of the ministries here at Rose Hill...and so that facet of your walk with Jesus would be sanctified. **Consider asking yourself: “How am I “walking with God” in my finances, and how can it be sanctified “more and more” for His kingdom work?”** Ultimately, our inspiration is not a letter or a sermon, but Jesus, the one who gave everything he had for you and me, so we can experience everything he has to offer now and in eternity. He’s the one for whom you and I are sanctified, made holy, set apart to serve with our bodies and our relationships with others, and our finances, and – really – the rest of life as well. And when we live that set apart life, we demonstrate our walk with God, living in a way that pleases him. Let’s pray...Amen.