

God's Purpose For Our Lives

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[0 : 00] to you, to you all. So let's read from 1 Thessalonians. Chapter 4, verse 1.

Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God. And as in fact you are living, now we ask and urge you in the Lord...

Sorry. Now we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

It is God's will that you should be sanctified, that you should avoid sexual immorality, that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honourable, not in passionate lust like the heathen who do not know God, 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. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

[1 : 16] Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man, but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit. Now about brotherly love, we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.

And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.

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, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders, and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

Amen. Thanks, Nick. I'll just ask Mike to come up now. And before Mike speaks to us, I just want to pray for him.

Mike, you're very, very welcome. And we look forward to hearing what God is going to say to us through you this morning.

[2 : 29] Just before you start, we'll pray. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we just thank you for those you give to us who are able to speak to us through your word, Lord, about your word, and about what it has to say to us.

We pray that you would help us as we listen to Mike this morning, Lord, that you would teach us and that you would show us what it is you want us to learn from your word this morning.

We pray for Mike, Lord, that you would anoint him with your Holy Spirit and just help him as he speaks to us. We ask these things, Lord Jesus, in your name. Amen. Thank you. Well, it's nice to be here in my son's place.

It's normally the place that he occupies. You'll know the difference between him and me. I'm the one who still has some hair. Well, we want to look together at God's word and so we're going to be looking, as you've heard already, at 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 through verses 1 to 12.

Do you believe that you can be perfect in this life? Do you actually can arrive at a state of perfection?

[4 : 00] Well, that's a question that has been debated by Christians down through the years. John Wesley thought it was possible. George Whitefield believed it to be impossible.

I asked you this morning, have you ever met a perfect person? I think it was Spurgeon who said, my experience of perfect people has been most unfortunate.

And I think we understand exactly what he meant by that. But where do we stand on the issue? Do you believe in absolute perfection in the here and now?

Well, what do the scriptures teach? Well, I would suggest that the passage before us will put to bed once and for all, or it should do, the idea that we can be perfect in this life.

There's always room for improvement. There's always a need in each one of us to increase in our holiness of life.

[5 : 07] To please God, as Paul says in verse 1, more and more. He reminds them also of how they might love the brothers locally and in all of Macedonia.

But he urges them to love them more and more in verse 9. So are we loving more and more? Are we increasing in holiness?

Now we should want to increase in holiness in light of the Lord's return. As you know, in 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, and indeed throughout the whole book, you have this continual returning to the theme of the Lord's return.

In verse 12 of the previous chapter, as I gather you looked at last week, we find the apostle saying, May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

May he strengthen your hearts so that you may be blameless and holy in the presence of God and Father when our Lord Jesus Christ comes with all his holy ones.

[6 : 26] So we should want to increase for this reason alone that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming back to receive us to himself. Now when we speak about holiness, we're not speaking about a legalism, the kind of legalism that will lock up the budgie's swing on a Sunday.

We're not calling that kind of legalism. What we're speaking about tonight is this morning is not just morality. The Pharisees were very moral, but they were not right in their relationship with God. We want to be holy, not just because the Lord is returning. We want to please God. We want to give glory to him. We want to honor him in the way we live.

And we want to be a witness to a watching world that we are different, that there is something in us that is not out there in the world in which we live.

So let's look at this passage together. And I want you to notice, first of all, that Paul does call for holy living in verses 1 to 8.

[7 : 46] And he calls us to be holy in the world. To be holy in the world in which we live. As he called them in that day and generation, as he speaks to the Thessalonians, that they too were to live in the world as holy people.

And how does he do this? Well, first of all, he reminds them of past instructions. He refers to those instructions in verse 1. We instructed you, he says, how to live in order to please God.

In verse 2 he says, for you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. What were those instructions?

Well, certainly we know that Paul, when he visited Thessalonica, was able to give instructions. It doesn't say a great deal in the account of Paul's visit in Acts chapter 17.

Only that he was there for a few Sabbaths. But it's evident that the work of God took place. We read in Acts 17 and verse 4 that the Jews were persuaded.

[9 : 05] Large numbers of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women came to believe, came to understand that the Lord Jesus Christ had come into the world to save sinners.

They entered into a relationship with God through the Lord Jesus. And they were called in this light to live holy lives.

Paul must have instructed them then. But Paul also left people behind in order that they might be instructed further as to how they ought to live.

of course, Paul would have wanted to obey the biblical mandate to preach the gospel, yes, but also to make disciples, to instruct people in the way.

Elsewhere, Paul says, I am free from the blood of all men for I have not shunned to declare unto them all the counsel of God. so instruction would have been given.

[10 : 12] And Paul's visit and the visit of others and the talking with others instructed the people. They came under deep conviction.

We know that from chapter 1 and verse 4 of Thessalonians. We know that they turned to God from idols as what chapter 1 and verse 9 tells us.

And we know also that they were encouraged and comforted as they were urged to live lives worthy of God who had called them into his kingdom.

Chapter 2 and verses 12 and 13. We know also that Timothy was with them in order to strengthen and encourage them in their faith.

So in various ways, they received instruction and Paul reminds the people of the instruction that they had received regarding living holy lives pleasing unto God.

[11 : 19] And we have it. It wasn't just Paul's instruction. It wasn't Timothy and others alone. No, it was God speaking to them.

It was the Lord coming to them and speaking to them making it very clear how they ought to live. As chapter 4 and the latter part of verse 2 tells us, by the authority of the Lord Jesus were these instructions given.

And in verse 3 he says, it is God's will that you should be sanctified, that you should be holy, that you should be set apart so the reminder that they had.

And we too need to be reminded of what we have heard in the past. Remember the various things that you were taught perhaps in Sunday school, or those things that you were taught when you first became a Christian, instruction, the things that you heard last week, the instruction that you have received.

It's good to be reminded of past instructions. We should all have listening ears. We should all know without a shadow of doubt that God has spoken to us through his word.

[12 : 53] And it is through his word that we become the people that we ought to be, namely holy people. Remember the Lord Jesus?

As he prays for his disciples who are living in a real world, sanctify them, he says, by the truth. Your word is truth.

The instruction that we receive from God's own holy word, as we're reminded in Hebrews 4 and verse 12, is living and is active.

It's sharper than any double-edged sword. It penetrates even to the dividing of soul and spirit, joints and marrow. It judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

So remember the instructions that you have received in the past. don't let the devil take them away. Don't listen to those new ideas that say it doesn't matter how you live.

[14 : 02] Instructions are important as they come to us from the word of God. So Paul calls for holy living by reminding them of past instructions.

But he also does it in another way, by encouraging them to continue. To continue in the way that they were going.

Now he's treating them very gently. Paul, you cannot accuse him of not having a pastoral concern. He's like a father dealing with his children.

As we see from chapter 2 and verse 11. For you know that we doubt with each of you as a father deals with his own children encouraging, comforting, and urging you to live lives worthy of God who calls you into his kingdom and glory.

He says in chapter 2 and verse 8, we love you so much that we were delighted to share with you not only the gospel of God, but our lives as well, because you had become so dear to us.

[15 : 24] And it's because he had this intimate relationship with them, this loving relationship with them, he can speak as he does.

You were living as you should do. Now we ask you to do it more and more. He wants them to overflow in holiness.

He wants them to excel in holiness. He wants them to abound in pleasing God. There's a tender firmness here as he exhorts them to live sanctified lives.

Are you Christian here this morning? continue on. Seek to become more Christ-like. Live your life in the light of the Lord's return.

Live as pleasing God. Present yourselves daily as those living sacrifices. I encourage you if you're a Christian and feeling the way hard this morning to continue on in your Christian pathway.

[16 : 44] Continue on to be more like him who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Paul calls for holy living by reminding them of past instructions, by encouraging them to continue.

But also he does it by calling them to be different. What were the people of Thessalonica like before they heard the gospel?

What was their culture? What was their way of life? Well we know that Paul didn't have a warm welcome when he arrived in Thessalonica.

In particular the Jews made it very difficult for him. They caused a riot in the city. It was a difficult time for Paul there.

And that was from people who claimed to be God fears. How about the rest of the people of Thessalonica? Those who weren't Jews? Well certainly we know that idolatry was present. [18:00] Which must have meant that there were heathen temples. And heathen temples often involved prostitution both of male and female variety.

It was a seaport. It was a place of trade. So there would have been various vices there. In other words we're talking about a heathen city where people would have lived immoral lives. What was said about the Corinthians could have also been said about the Thessalonians. In 1 Corinthians chapter 6 and verse 9 Paul reminds the Corinthians of what they used to be like.

He says you were sexually immoral. Idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, homosexual offenders, thieves, greedy, drunkards, slanderers, swindlers.

That is what you were he says. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified. And it could equally have been said of the people of Thessalonica.

[19:12] You see Paul wasn't writing into a vacuum. He knows what people were like. He knows the temptations that were all around them.

And he knows that these Christians, these comparatively new Christians, the world would be trying to squeeze them into its mould.

So he says to them, avoid sexual immorality. Learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honourable.

Not in passionate lusts, no one should wrong his brother. And I think he's warning there against the danger of adultery.

Bring your body into submission. Have you been watching the Olympic Games? I was watching him yesterday.

[20:14] And I was watching, listening to the interviews. And sorry, I know there's an Australian present this morning, an Australian people, I'm sorry about this, but they were interviewing the men of the four, the cockless fours, I think is what they're called, you know.

And they managed to beat Australia, sorry about that, but you know it happens sometimes. And they beat them. And then they were being interviewed. And one of them said this, he says, it's four years of daily training.

Four years of hard work in order to win one race. Bring our bodies into subjection.

The hard work, if you like, of sanctification. We work because God is at work within us. Sometimes when an athlete is training, he has to go through the pain barrier.

He has to discipline himself in order that he may obtain maximum fitness. And we have to train ourselves through the word of God, through fellowship.

[21:37] And there will be those outward circumstances. that come upon us. So providence sent from God in order that we might live holy lives. Set yourselves apart for holy use.

Even as an athlete sets himself apart in order to win an earthly crown. You know what used to happen in the Old Testament?

There were those various instruments that were used in the temple. They were set apart for holy use. They couldn't be used for anything else because they were dedicated to God.

We're to be holy vessels unto the Lord. We're not allowed, we must not allow secular influences in upon our lives.

We must be different. That is what Paul called the Thessalonians to and that is what he calls us to today. You see, what's our world like?

[22:55] What's our culture like today? Well, there's so many similarities aren't there between the modern world and the world of Thessalonica.

We live in a world of sexual immorality and it's right there present with us. It's in our front room on some of our television programs.

It's there on our internets and it's the lifestyle of so many around and about us. Adultery is perfectly legitimate in the eyes of so many.

To live together outside of marriage is perfectly acceptable. It's alright to bring children up with no regard for Christian morals.

And because it's all around us, we're not shocked by it anymore. So Paul's words are relevant. And never think that we cannot fall into sin.

[24 : 06] Many of us have lived long enough to see even strong or seemingly strong Christians fall. And as 1 Corinthians 10 and verse 12 says, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall.

Be different and ready to be different whether you find yourself in school, in university, in an apprenticeship, in a job situation, whether you find yourself in a home with an unbelieving partner. Seek to live to the glory of God. Be different. The other day I was with my wife in a pet shop in Middleton and on the door of the pet shop there was a parrot and I said to the lady in the pet shop, I said, aren't you afraid of it going out into the road?

She said, no, it's afraid of the traffic, it will never go far. Lovely little parrot, nice grey parrot and I thought, when I went out I put my finger up and he very gently came on to my finger.

Looked beautiful, lovely. And I tried to let him go and he wasn't having it. He caught hold of one finger, I tried to take him off and he caught hold of that.

[25 : 41] And have you ever been bitten by a parrot? It's not very nice, it's very very painful as a matter of fact. And it ended up with me having to go for a tetanus injection into the bargain.

You know, I invited him. It looks so nice. And sin sometimes looks nice. It isn't always horrible. It doesn't always look horrible. But it bites. It destroys. Be different. And Paul calls for difference. Don't be like the heathen. Don't be like those around and about you. Be Christ-like. So, he encourages them.

He reminds them of past instructions. He encourages them to continue. He calls them to be different. But he also reminds them that they live their lives before the Lord.

[26 : 46] verse 1, we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus. Verse 2, the instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

Verse 3, it is God's will that you should be sanctified. failure to live their lives as they should could bring the judgment of God upon them.

See what he says in verse 6 and 7, the Lord will punish men for all such sins as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man, but God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

It's always good to remind ourselves that we live our lives before the triune God. the Son has saved us through his precious blood.

[28 : 07] His perfect righteousness has been given, put to our account. The Father has loved us in Christ and we're now reconciled to the Father.

Every Christian knows the work of the Holy Spirit within their lives. And let us remind ourselves this morning that he is the Holy Spirit.

It is the Holy Spirit who lives in us. It is by the Holy Spirit that we have been born again into the very family of God.

Our very bodies have become the temple of the Holy Spirit. We're living in the presence of the living God. And as we remind ourselves of this relationship we have with Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

So we are to live holy lives. And the evidence that we have this relationship will be that we will live holy lives.

[29 : 22] Let us not pretend that we are Christians if we're living lives of sin and wretchedness.

The evidence that we've been born again is that God lives in us and we want to be holy.

holy. But let me say this to you this morning. If you've failed, and we all fail at times, let us remind ourselves that there is one to whom we can confess our sins.

Doesn't one John remind us that if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

So Paul calls for holy living in the world. But secondly, Paul calls for holy loving in verses 9 and 10. Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other, and in fact you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia.

[30 : 40] Yet we urge you brothers to do so more and more. Why was there no need to write?

Well there was no need to write because the divine teacher had entered their lives. They have been given the Holy Spirit, and the fruit of the Spirit is what?

Well amongst other things is love. One of the characteristics of Christianity, one could argue the principal characteristic of Christianity is love.

What they knew, we know. We don't need to be taught to love one another, do we? Or do we need to be taught?

are we putting into practice the love that we ought to have, not just for the local believer, which is the hardest form of love.

[31 : 51] I love everybody in Africa. I don't have any problem. You see, I'm not rubbing shoulders. But to love each other in a local sense.

the Thessalonians were demonstrating their love by their actions, are we? Now we know this.

Do we do it? And are we doing it more and more? You see, there's always need for improvement.

There's need for improvement in the home.

There's need for improvement in the church. There's need for improvement before a watching world. And we may not always find it easy to love one another.

Sometimes it's extremely difficult. Now you may have heard this before, but turn to 1 Corinthians chapter 13 and verse 4.

[32 : 54] Here is, if you like, the test card. Now, I don't know if there's anybody else as old as I am here this morning. I think there may be one or two. But they used to have on the television many years ago when there wasn't 24-hour television, what they called a test card.

And it used to appear. Even Ian remembers it. Ian, you're getting old. And, you know, it was there. And you could adjust your set according to the test card.

Now, here's the test card for each one of us. Go for it to verse 4 of 1 Corinthians chapter 13. And instead of using the word love, put your own name there.

Michael Grant is patient. Don't say anything, Rosemary. Michael Grant is kind. Michael Grant does not envy.

Michael Grant does not boast. Michael Grant is not proud. Michael Grant is not rude. Michael Grant is not self-seeking. Michael Grant is not easily angered.

[34 : 08] Michael Grant keeps no record of wrong. Michael Grant does not delight in evil. Michael Grant rejoices in the truth.

Michael Grant always protects. Michael Grant always trusts. Michael Grant always hopes. Michael Grant always perseveres. Michael Grant never fails.

How often do I come short of that? Of course you can't go on to verse 13 but now these three remain faith, hope and Michael Grant and the greatest of these.

But you can't go that far. But you know it's a good test case to look at that and examine our own lives and say well we have to love more and more.

We're not there yet are we? And if you think you are well come and see me afterwards or let me speak to your wife or your family.

[35 : 15] So Paul calls for holy loving in the church. And the final thing he says to us is this as he calls for holy ambition.

make it your ambition verse 11 to lead a quiet life. To mind your own business and to work with your hands just as we told you.

So that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anyone. You can't accuse the apostle of not being practical.

He's continually in his letters reminding his readers how they should live in an evil world. So it's not surprising that he ends this section with three very practical points.

Make it your ambition he says make it your goal. Make it your goal to lead a quiet life.

[36 : 24] And that doesn't mean getting rid of the children. children. And it doesn't mean hiding yourself away in a hermitage or a monastery. But it does mean living a life that is calm.

I like the authorised version which translates it study it says to be quiet. It's the opposite of being contentious.

It's the opposite of being full of strife. it's the opposite of running around like a headless chicken. Of having a hasty temper. Study to be quiet.

Live a life that is calm in your home, in your church, in your workplace. Make it your holy ambition to have that meekness of spirit that characterised the Lord Jesus.

Of whom we read in 1 Peter 2 in verse 23 that when they hurled their insults at him he did not retaliate.

[37 : 37] When he suffered he made no threats. And he did this, he was like this, when the storm clouds were gathering, when Calvary beckoned.

There was this quiet calm and confidence that God would vindicate him. Do we have this holy ambition?

Make it your goal, your holy ambition to mind your own business. Was this exhortation needed in Thessalonica?

It seems that it was. And it seems that they didn't take it to heart. For in the second letter, chapter 3 and verse 11, we read, we hear that some among you are idle.

They're not busy, they are busy bodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread that they eat.

[38 : 47] Now it's right, surely, for all of us to have a concern for others, a concern to help others, but that's different to interfering so that we become busy bodies, to become another person's conscience in the church.

Make it your ambition to mind your own business. Very personal, isn't it? Remember Peter?

Peter who had denied his lords with oaths and curses. And Jesus speaks to him after his resurrection. And Peter realizes that he's failed the Lord, but the Lord recommissions him.

Feed my lambs, feed my sheep. But Peter needed to learn other lessons. And you remember on that occasion, Peter says to Jesus in John chapter 21 and verse 21, as he looks at John, who had lent against the breast of Jesus at the last supper, Lord, he says, what about this man?

And the Lord turns to Peter and says, well, if he's alive and remain, when I come, what is that to you? You follow me.

[40 : 20] And that should be the concern of each one of us here this morning. We can point the finger, we can look at others and say, they are failing. What about you?

You follow me, said the Lord Jesus. Mind your own business, make it your business to walk with the Lord as you should.

And the final very practical lesson is to work with your hands, not to be idle. It seems that some had given up work in anticipation of the Lord's return.

time. But that was wrong. The Christian should be active. The Christian should be ready to work.

Oh, we live in days here in Ireland, don't we, of mass unemployment. I hear that they're more on the live register, as they call it, than there ever has been, or certainly in recent years.

[41 : 30] unemployment is rife, but that doesn't mean that we need to be idle. There are things that we can do that will still be pleasing to the Lord.

There are things that we can do that will glorify His holy name. Speak to your leaders in the church, and there will be things that need doing to reach out into a world, to be an influence to those around and about us.

We can still be active. Why should we be this way? Well, verse 12 tells us that outsiders are looking on.

They're seeing what is happening. And we want with our daily life to win the respect of outsiders. And it goes back that we're different.

people look upon us and say, yes, that person, that man, that woman, that young person, is living their lives differently.

[42 : 43] And they will want to glorify our Father who is in heaven. May this be the experience of each one of us.

That as we live our lives to the glory of God in the world. And that we live those pure lives. That we have this loving relationship with each other.

That we're making it our holy ambition to be the kind of people that we ought to be. That others will notice and come to know the Savior that we know.

And that the Savior that has transformed our lives to be made more like unto his life. And may his be the glory forever and ever.

Amen. Let's pray together. Father, we do live in a world that is sinful. And we know the sin that is within our own lives.

[43 : 49] And we know that there are times that we try, as it were, to pull ourselves up with our own shoelaces. And we fail, and we fail miserably. So we pray that you will empower us by your Spirit.

That we might live the kind of lives that we ought to live. In the society in which we find ourselves. In our homes. In our personal walk with you.

Lord, we thank you that you have begun a work in us. And we thank you that that work will be continued as we rely upon you and you alone.

Father, help us day by day to live the kind of lives that will bring glory to your name and will influence a community in which we find ourselves.
And all this we ask that your name might be glorified. Amen. Amen.