

The Call to Please God

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[0 : 00] If you would like to follow passage in your Bibles, if you have the Pew Bible, it's page 1173, 1 Thessalonians 4.

! I'm actually going to read the section that Zach preached on last week and then flow into the next section verses 9-12.

That'll kind of help us to see how this all connects, I think. So, Paul writes to the Thessalonian church,

Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another.

For that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may live properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

[2 : 06] You can see some phrases that Paul uses again in the second part that he used in the first part, about the idea of, for you yourselves have been taught, and so forth, and I ask you to do this more and more, those kinds of things.

So I think all this connects. Generally speaking, we try hard to please people, and that's appropriate, at least usually. We certainly are not to be people pleasers.

The Bible's pretty clear about that, in the sense that we would sacrifice truth and righteousness to accomplish that. But when we do something, I think we do hope that people are pleased by our efforts.

Surely, we don't begin to do something with the expressed intention of irritating other people, like, I hope this really ticks them off. You know, we don't start that way.

I'm sorry to say that some people, even believers, are not immune to such immature and unspiritual reactions, but that really should never be a pattern of life for us.

[3 : 09] Even more important than living so as to please others, however, is living to please God. I mean, do we want God to be pleased with the way we live? I hope we do. The author of Hebrews reminded us that without faith, it is, what, impossible to please God.

So, if we have any desire to please God, that can only really happen if we have trusted the Savior, if we have been born again in Him. Paul told the Corinthians that God was pleased with the foolishness of preaching, which God uses as a means to make Himself known through the proclamation of the gospel.

Salvation is, remember, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, revealed through the Scripture alone, or the glory of God alone.

So, that's the faith that we have. That's the understanding of the gospel that we should believe. The author of Hebrews, remember, commended Enoch as one who pleased God.

So, I take it from that that it must be possible for us as believers to be able to please God with the way we live. Though we who belong to Jesus Christ have the capacity to please God, it's not automatic.

[4 : 25] We read in the Scripture that sometimes God is not pleased. Surely we don't want that. These are specific statements. There are specific statements in the Bible that declare that God is pleased if we do what He says.

That's what we have in this particular text. So, if you want to please God, Paul tells us in this first Thessalonian letter how we can. And what he declares to us through the written revelation, I think it's practical, it's understandable, but it's not always very well accomplished or very easily accomplished.

But if we want to please God, this is what we're called to do. So, the areas that kind of shape in this passage, at least in my understanding, first, Paul deals with what Zach did last week, how we use our bodies to please God.

And then the next two sections in the little passage that we read after that, how we treat our brothers and sisters in Christ, how we treat other believers, and then how we conduct our business. All of those are important in our understanding of how to please God. So, I'm going to sort of do a little bit of a recap on some of the things that Zach said, not because I think he missed anything, but because I think it's sometimes good for us to be reminded, and this also kind of gives us a movement ahead into the rest of the passage.

[5 : 52] So, if we are to please God in the way we use our bodies, we have to meet the goal of holiness. I want to start out with some preventative maintenance just for a minute.

I mean, we may need to hear some things again, so that's what we're going to do. Growing in Christ means learning how to walk through life in all kinds of situations with the goal of pleasing God.

Because of factors such as our own sinful tendencies, the allurements of the world, and the relentless tempting of the enemy, we need periodic checkups.

Without realizing it, I think we suffer something I've kind of called carnal creep. All right? We slowly slide towards sin without realizing how far away we've wandered.

Now, anything with the word creep in it usually isn't good. And by the way, though we may creep into carnality, we do not creep into righteousness. Okay? That's a challenge.

[6 : 56] That's intentional. That's work to do that. That's the direction we should be going. Well, Paul was encouraging the Thessalonians to accept as a priority some mid-course corrections, and we would do well to pay attention.

So, what is at stake here is doing the will of God, pleasing God, being set apart, becoming sanctified people of God.

To be set apart to God is the will of God, and when that happens, God is pleased. So, there is to be a difference, an uncommonness in our walk.

It should be a walk of holiness, a walk of purity. One way that we should look different than the walk of the world is, and by the way, I think sometimes we think Christians should be weird.

No, they shouldn't. Okay? We're not weird. Okay? We're not, we're different. All right? That's not, there's two different things there. All right? I've met some Christians that were probably that way, weird.

[8 : 02] But we're to be different, and the world should pick up on that. And I think that as we understand what Paul is saying here, we'll get that. The word sanctification is kind of a big word, but it doesn't need to be a foreign word to us.

It carries the idea of being uncommon, different, special, set apart for a purpose. We belong to God because he purchased us. You remember what Paul said to the Corinthians, you are not your own. What? You are what? Bought with a price. Therefore, glorify God in your bodies. So how we live is to be different from the way other people live.

How does that look? Well, he tells us negatively, some things have no place in the life of believers. And as Zach addressed this faithfully and firmly last week, we are to abstain from immorality.

This is a negative aspect of Paul's counsel. We learned last week that sexual immorality is a general term describing various forms of behavior that the Bible calls perversion.

[9 : 10] We should not be surprised when we see that in the world, though it is in the world and always before us, it ought not to have any place in our lives.

To abstain from immorality suggests that we do not participate in the things that would lead in that direction. Somewhere along the way, instead of concentrating on pleasing God, we might begin thinking about pleasing ourselves.

And when that happens, we begin to see things in the world that appear to answer the desire for our own pleasure, which falsely promises to satisfy our appetites.

With approval of flesh and the encouragement of the enemy, we start down that slippery slope of perversion. So Paul says it's time to pump the brakes and do a rapid 180.

Years ago, I remember coming across a commentary by Warren Wiersbe, and he said something like this as he was describing this problem of a worldly attitude and a worldly walk by a believer.

[10 : 22] He said, Anything in the Christian's life that causes him to lose the enjoyment of the Father's love or his desire to do the Father's will must be avoided.

I like that. Because there are some things that sometimes we do and say that, frankly, we know cause us to lose the enjoyment of the Father's love.

And sometimes they cause us to leave the desire to do the Father's will. Well, you know that immorality has destroyed countless marriages and families and careers and churches and reputations.

And for those who have managed to dabble in such things without actually being exposed, their lives are at best weak and ineffective, failing at the very core of Christian responsibility, which is to please God.

Thankfully, there is a God who gets our attention, changes our hearts, and turns us around. That's great. But if we get involved in those things, we're going to be in trouble.

[11 : 32] And we're going to bring chaos in our lives and the lives of others. Positively, again, we are to maintain control. The believer should be marked by holiness and honor to provide what we need to live such lives.

We're given the Holy Spirit. We are to be controlled by the Spirit. You probably are aware in Galatians chapter 5, Paul talks about the fruit of the Spirit. The last one he mentions is self-control. How do those two work together? Well, on the one hand, we are to be controlled by the Spirit. On the other hand, we are equipped by the Holy Spirit to exercise control over ourselves.

So it's the Holy Spirit who gives us the desire and the energy to be self-controlled to the point that we avoid, even flee from those things that you read about in the first eight verses.

Always, the nature and work of the Holy Spirit is holiness. When we're under his control, we are moving in the direction of holiness. One author I came across some time ago said this, to go on living in impurity is a direct insult to the divine giver and a sin against the Holy Spirit who is the power unto holiness.

[12 : 47] He supplies not only the desire, but also the ability to live a life of purity. His indwelling puts an end to the pagan plea that man has no power to resist impure desires.

For believers to go on living in immorality is to repudiate the gracious provision of God for holiness and invites his sure judgment as the avenger of sin.

The way to escape is to fly to the giver and accept and cherish his gift. So, question, do we possess a passionate love set on pleasing God, or is there a passionate lust fixed on satisfying our carnal desires?

Verse 6 always puzzled me a little bit. In the text, again, you heard from last week, that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this manner.

I used to scratch my head and think, what are you talking about brother here? I thought this was talking about this individual. Well, it is true that maybe immorality occurred and broke up a family or something like that.

[13 : 59] I could see how that would hurt another brother. But it might be simpler than that. I think Zach hit on this last week. It goes something like this. We never sin in a vacuum.

Our sin has a ripple effect on the body of Christ. When a brother or sister in Christ falls morally, the church is marked as hypocritical.

The world looks at that, eh, they're all alike. Ministry is made more difficult. The enemy is given more ammunition. The credibility of Christ takes a hit.

But also, the potential ministry of the person who sinned is marred or sometimes destroyed. And God will discipline that individual and possibly discipline the church depending on how they respond to the sin further impacting the work of Christ.

It's a big deal not to walk in holiness. If we think we can play around with impurity while maintaining our walk with Christ, we really are deceiving ourselves.

[15 : 04] And if we blow this off as no big deal, we are reminded that to disregard the warning is not disregarding mere man, but it's disregarding God.

God has given us this Holy Spirit to go toward impurity puts us at odds with the purpose of God to sanctify us and to conform us to the image of Christ.

If we want to please God, it really does matter how we use our bodies. Check out Zach's sermon from last week. You'll be blessed and taught.

Now let's move into what he says in verses 9 and 10 and 11 and 12. Verse 9 and 10, he says, not only do we need to be careful how we live our lives in terms of our bodies, but also he's saying how we treat our brothers and sisters is important.

If the first is the goal of holiness, the goal here is love. So again he says in verse 9, Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia.

[16:21] But we urge you brothers to do this more and more. So abstaining from the selfish, sinful actions produced by a fallen world, believers are called to focus attention and efforts toward loving one another by the purest of motives and the best of conduct.

Such a response is a strong outward testimony to the change in us due to the Spirit's working of regeneration and transformation. So if we're to please God, it does matter how we treat other people.

And sometimes, we don't treat them all that nicely. This brotherly love is the supernatural love. We're basically selfish people. We love for other people.

I'm sorry, love for other people does not come naturally. We want others to show love to us, but we're not so quick sometimes to love them.

There's a selflessness that all of us have that we're thinking about how do they view me, what are they thinking about me, do they like me, you know, and it's like, just kind of forget that, please.

[17:30] It's about them, not really about us. Yes, but it's a tough one. But the Father, actually, it's interesting, the Trinity here has taught us how to love one another.

When Paul says in the text, you have been taught by God to love one another, I'm scratching my head a little bit, okay, what does he mean by that? And this sort of came to mind. The Father taught us to love each other when he gave us his Son to die for us.

That's really what John was saying in 1 John 4, 19. The Son taught us to love each other when he said in John chapter 13, verse 34, a new commandment I give you that you love one another.

The Holy Spirit taught us to love each other. Romans chapter 5, verse 5, Paul says, God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

So, God has been teaching us all along, the whole Trinity has been teaching us all along to love one another. If we fail or refuse to love one another, we're not pleasing God and frankly, we're not without excuse.

[18:47] We have been given both the example and the power to love one another. This is a supernatural love. I've watched over the years a lot of Christians take each other apart.

It's not pretty and it's hard in churches. It's anything but love. One of the greatest demonstrations of the power of God and the reality of salvation in Christ is selfless love of one person to another.

I think that's one of the reasons why we were told in the Bible to see how they love one another was a big deal in the early church. When Paul told the Ephesians men, husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that was in the context of one of the most amazing descriptions of the love of God toward sinners that you will ever read.

Christ is the example. The commandment has been given without qualification in that text. God has been given to us. And such a seeming impossible love has been made possible by the presence and the power of the Holy Spirit.

He's poured out his love upon us. It's a supernatural love. But it's also a developing love. The acknowledgement here is made by Paul that the Thessalonians were doing a good job with this.

[20:12] But their generosity and their acts of mercy, their selfless service throughout Macedonia had not gone unnoticed by Paul, nor had it gone noticed to those who'd received it.

However, in everything we do in our walk with Christ, there's always room for improvement. We don't graduate from that until we go to heaven. We just keep on more and more.

However, I guess I could say it this way. It's impossible to overdo loving one another.

I read in a commentary somewhere, and I forgot to note where it came from. I hate it when that happens. I got this great quote, and I don't know who to give it to, but there is an endless source of divine energy available for Christian living.

Paul was not satisfied until he and those he worked with had it all. Some might say, but you have no idea what I must put up with. You would not believe the selfless, arrogant, self-righteous, and they go, you know, eh, it happens.

[21:25] But if God gave the command to love one another, and he gave us the capacity to love one another, it seems to me that there's only one thing missing, our obedience to love one another.

No excuses, no buts, just do it. And we can, really. We have the Spirit of God. And in fact, in Peter's letter, he says this, just, I'm going to read this slow, kind of let it sink in.

Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart.

Since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God. When God saved us, remember, he poured his love into us so that now we have the capacity to pour out that love to one another.

It's there. So when we say, I don't know, I can't love that person, maybe we need to re-examine that. Yeah, you can. So the goals so far in pleasing God have been holiness, verses 1 through 8, and love, verses 9 and 10.

[22 : 48] The final one that Paul deals with here is respect. And he sets the context here that it's important not only how we use our bodies and how we treat one another, our brothers and sisters in Christ, but how we conduct our business.

So here the goal is respect. Here are the verses. I'm going to pick up on verse 10 running into verse 11. We urge you, brothers, do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, to work with your hands as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

ambition. So ambition of a quiet life he addresses first. Now that may seem a little bit paradoxical. It's kind of interesting how Paul says it.

Strive eagerly and zealously to be quiet. Kind of weird, you know. But he said something similar to Timothy when he said that you may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. So, regardless of your personality, there is a responsibility to live a quiet life. That's an ambition.

[24 : 07] Let's see if we can figure out what that means. The word quiet probably carries the idea of peace of mind. It's a striving to have a balanced, tranquil perspective in life.

It's not all hyper, crazy, or look at me, or always stirring the pot. It's not that. It's living in quiet confidence of God's providence, trusting him through all kinds of circumstances, all kinds of situations, both pleasant and difficult.

That says something about those around us. It gains their respect. It speaks volumes about our great God. And such a life pleases God.

Closely connected to this ambition of a quiet life is an ambition of a private life. We need to live lives that give attention to our own business and not be pressing in on everyone else's business.

It's long been a problem among believers to be over-interested in other people's affairs while failing to attend to our own. Paul would later have to tell the Thessalonians in his second letter in chapter 3 this, For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busy bodies.

[25 : 39] Now such persons are we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

Pastor Mike will get to the idea of something that was happening in Thessalonica, but apparently people were waiting for Jesus to come.

And they're excited about Jesus to come. Is that a good thing? Sure. But they were so excited and so anticipating that return that they quit working.

And then when they quit working, they run short on things. And then when they run short on things, they start depending on somebody else to take care of them while they're righteously waiting.

And Paul says, no, don't do that. You have a responsibility to have a quiet life and a private life, and we'll get to it in a minute, productive life.

[26 : 40] That's the call. Well, so, he said, I mean, again, this was a problem in the first century.

Paul attested to Timothy, besides that, you learn to be idlers going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies saying what they should not.

That's a problem. So, if you would please God, then if we would please God, we need to take care how we conduct our business. Paul continues to make the case that if we would be respected, we should also make it our ambition to be that of a productive life.

Now, we ought not to be afraid to work with our hands. The Greeks believed that free men should never stoop to the level of manual labor. There was a slave for that. So, you don't need to do that.

That's what they would say. But the attitude is inconsistent with true Christianity. There's no inconsistency between holy living and honest work.

[27 : 48] By so living to please God in what we do, we will gain the respect of a watching world, and we will gain a dignified independence. It's kind of weird.

Looking back over my life, I'm not sure anybody was enamored by sermons I preached, but a couple times, and this, by the way, was done with the wrong attitude, but we were in a church for a while that there really wasn't, there wasn't paid people to help clean and so forth.

And so people would clean on a scheduled basis, you know, and I would go in really early on a Sunday morning and work on the message and so forth, and then I'd kind of get my heart ready for the day.

And a few times, I'd go in and realize that the volunteer person on the list didn't come in and clean the church. Sermon laid aside, time to clean the church.

And a couple of times, I hadn't finished yet when somebody came in and I was vacuuming or cleaning the bathroom or something. It probably made more impact on them spiritually than the sermon I preached that day.

[29 : 01] And they said, what is wrong with this guy? Oh, well, I guess it's good that he's doing that. And I, again, I was like irritated that people didn't do it, but I think what happened was that they said, oh, this guy, he's doing the right thing here.

He's, that's good to see that. And it does make a difference when we demonstrate that we're not afraid to work and that we pitch in and help. Paul is saying that to a certain extent.

We need not be dependent on other people for our basic needs. And all this kind of works around that idea of love. If we love each other, we're not going to be messing around with immorality.

If we love each other, we're going to be doing our own, doing the right thing by taking care of our own needs, by living a quiet life, by not stirring up things. All that's around the idea of love that he centers on, love your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul wrote to the Ephesians about slaves, about bond servants. He said, bond servants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ.

[30 : 15] Not by way of eye service, as people pleasers, but as bond servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man.

So when we're serving other people, when we're doing honest work, those kinds of things, it's not just doing that, it's as to Christ, as to the Lord. That's the kind of service that we're supposed to do. Such ambition, men pleases the Lord and it gets the attention of a watching world. You've probably heard this little poem. You are writing a gospel, a chapter each day, by the deeds that you do and the words that you say.

Men read what you write, distorted or true. So, what is the gospel according to you? Oh, that we would set our desires on pleasing God.

Pleasing God is not a checklist activity that can be completed and considered accomplished. It's an ongoing responsibility that every believer carries.

[31 : 29] And it's inclusive, involving our personal lives, involving our relationships with other people, and particularly in the body of Christ, as well as our interaction with our community.

So, we are to walk in purity and respond in love and gain respect from those with whom we live and work. And when that's true, Paul says, God is pleased.

And when we fail at those things, we fail to please God. And when we act in impure ways, we are not loving one another. We are self-absorbed. And when we fail to respect others by not living a quiet, productive life, we're not loving one another.

We're depending on others to do for us what we should be doing for ourselves and others.

Sometimes when the Scriptures take us in a direction where we're called to look at ourselves and make some corrections, we stumble.

We might want to make those corrections, but we either believe that we are so far off the path of righteousness that we can never find our way back, or we believe we're just too weak to make the return journey.

[32 : 41] In either case, we are thinking that if we have failed to please God at that point in our lives, we will never be able to please Him. That's not true. There's a way back.

There's hope, and there's help in the Lord. We confess our failures. We trust Him to cleanse us, and He will. And then we start walking in holiness and love and respect.

He promises to walk with us. He promises to provide us with protection and grace, with power and provision. And in the process, God will be pleased, and we will gain respect from a watching world,

and the best part of it is God will be glorified in all of that.

So, God will someday, for all believers, sanctify us completely. He will someday present us blameless before Him with exceeding joy.

And how do I know that? Because He who calls me is faithful. What does that mean? It means He will surely do it.

[33 : 53] And that's the promise that Paul recorded at the end of this letter in chapter 5, verses 23 and 24 that you'll hear about before too many weeks. And that's God's promise to us as well.

Let's pray. Father, thank You for Your kind grace as You're working in our lives. We're flawed people, but thank You that You are a faithful God and a forgiving God and a merciful God. and so our hope is in You, our trust is in You. Thank You that even if we're really struggling and some of these things have us pinned down, thank You that by Your Spirit, through Your Word, with Your grace, You're able to turn us around and make us productive and pleasing to You all for Your glory.

May You make that happen in us today. If we're doing reasonably well, may we, with Paul's words, keep on doing it, keep on more and more loving one another, maintaining a purity as we live our lives in this world, and serving, working, to be respected by the community and again, pleasing to You.

Thank You for this congregation. Thank You for Your kindness that You've poured out upon us.

Thank You for Your mercies. May we be a light to a watching world for the glory of Christ.

[35 : 42] In His name we pray. Amen.