

# 1 Thessalonians Love

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[ 0 : 00 ] I get so much joy from my kids, especially when I see them working together. There's nothing like seeing Isaac playing with Micah, building a tower that they then smash together, seeing Tamara make Micah laugh.

My children have this amazing ability to bring so much pleasure to me. There is something profound when all the guidance, all the teaching, all the no, don't hit her, use gentle hands, something profound when it all comes together.

I suppose because I know how beautiful they can play and share and love each other, it makes me so frustrated when it's not ideal. When they are as good as they can sometimes be, it's amazing, but when they're not, it's tough when they don't obey and hurt each other, when all it seems to be is conflict and self-centeredness.

I wonder what God thinks when he looks at us. Do you think he finds joy in us? Do we please him? Or is he just as frustrated that we are not living as we should, angry that we can't play together nicely?

Is that all God sees? Christians believe that they are justified and forgiven by God's grace in Jesus' death and resurrection.

[ 1 : 42 ] But is that all that it is to the Christian relationship with God? Is he just a judge who forgives our crimes? We're saved by his grace and sanctified and he sanctifies us to fit his heaven and now we work hard to obey?

Is that all the relationship with God is? It seems a bit transactional. God loves us. He gives us his grace and we obey him.

Is there anything that we do to please God? Is there anything we can do to please him? Today we're continuing looking at the book of 1 Thessalonians, standing firm in faith, hope and love. And today we're looking at issues of holiness. We're looking at issues of sexual purity and loving one another. Key issues for the church and for the Christian. And in light of these issues of obedience, we're going to see whether there is anything we can do to bring joy and to please our Heavenly Father.

So as we have a look at this passage, I'm going to pray for us. Heavenly Father, we thank you that we can indeed call you Father. Father, and as we look at your word this morning, help us to know you better and to know how we can please you.

[ 3 : 04 ] Amen. So as we've seen over the last couple of weeks, Paul and Silas were in Thessalonica, likely for a couple of months before they were chased out by a mob of Jews.

And Paul has received word about how this new church was going. And he spent the first half of the letter celebrating the church and what God was doing in them and through them.

And he's explaining and defending his motivations for coming. But now Paul turns to issues within the church. Everything seems to have been going well, but Paul still needs to address a couple of issues.

And so he begins this with a section of prayer that shows us what he is going to talk about over the next couple of chapters. From verse 11 of chapter 3.

Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus clear the way for us to come to you. May the Lord make your love increase and flow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

[ 4 : 10 ] May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones. So he mentions three things in particular.

I want you to increase in love. I want you to strengthen your hearts, particularly in view of holiness. And I want you to hope, keep hoping that Jesus will return.

Faith, hope and love. It's the three themes of the letter. We saw it at the start. It's here again in the very middle of the letter. And now it's the themes for the last couple of chapters of the book. They have heard the message of adoption, of acceptance, forgiveness, all by God's radical generosity. They've heard the message of faith in Jesus, of hoping in his return and loving one another, which he reminds them of. Not only does Paul remind them of how they are to live, Paul has some amazing news for them.

Chapter 4, verse 1. As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are now living.

[ 5 : 21 ] Now we ask you 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. The church was instructed how to live, how to live in order to please God.

And not only have these people been saved by Jesus, they're being sanctified, they're taking off their old way of life, being changed, but it actually pleases God.

And it's not some impossibility, as it says, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are now living.

They were pleasing God. The lives that they were living were amazingly pleasing to God. This is not legalism or a works-based theology that makes God have to forgive us if we obey Him.

Not at all, but it's a reminder that God is a person. He thinks, He feels, we please Him and we displease Him moment by moment within His loving, forgiving hands, inside His fatherly care for all of us.

[ 6 : 37 ] Through the finished work of Jesus on the cross, the way we are living our lives, the obedience we do, we have to God, the good deeds we do, it is actually delightful to God.

Maybe you're feeling unsure at this point, because you don't really have a relationship with God as Father. Maybe you relate to God as Lord. He's a God who is very far off.

He is distant. He's a distant master who doesn't take joy in His servant. He just expects His servant to obey. Is God a judge that doesn't find happiness in the fact that the criminal has gotten away with murder when they're found innocent?

But God is our Father. Have you ever thought about how your actions, your obedience, could see the infinite God who made the universe, could actually bring Him joy?

That He sees everything at once, and He sees you, and He takes delight in you, when you choose to continue to follow Him over other things, over yourself.

[ 7 : 50 ] What would you do? How far would you go to please God, to bring God joy? This made me think of marriage. When two people get together, their best thoughts are often of trying to make the other person happy.

You can probably imagine a newlywed couple. Think of a newlywed couple. I'm not sure if we have any newlywed couples here. Is there any newlywed couples here? Anybody that wants me to use an example of them?

Doran, when you get married, brother, that would be a wonderful thing. Let's just use two people. Who can we imagine? Should we just use Stephen that?

Maybe, maybe not. Let's just imagine this young married couple. They're just like puppy dogs. They're really sweet. They're so keen and eager to make the other person happy.

They'll do anything for them. Maybe this was you when you first got married. Maybe this is still you. I'm not sure. One of the things that I do, that I continue to do to bring Alyssa joy, is to deal with the spiders in our house.

[ 9 : 00 ] I've never really been a kill spiders kind of guy. I prefer to take them outside. I used to be okay that there were spiders because spiders eat flies. And I don't like flies.

And spiders, they just kind of hang out in the corner. But Alyssa, she's not a fan of any kind of spider. And so I had to change. I changed so I could bring her joy.

Well, less fear, more joy, I suppose. I changed who I am. So I became the Spider-Man of the household. I'll take them out.

I'll gas them. I'll squash them. I'll set them on fire. Whatever it takes to get our house free of spiders. But there is a truth to this. We change who we are to bring people joy.

If Alyssa didn't like me having a beard, well, I probably wouldn't have it. My preference is to have a beard and to have my head bald. But I don't like having these locks of questionable color.

[10:04] Somewhere between blonde, brown and red. But Alyssa likes me having hair. And so I keep doing that to bring her joy. Now, we are not married to God.

But we do have a relationship with Him. The Bible actually describes the church as the bride of Jesus. Our God has shown His radical love to us.

And so He has the right to say, This pleases me. And this doesn't. I don't like this behavior. But this is wonderful.

The God who accepts and loves and delights in us, He is also capable of saying, We need to sit down and have a talk. It's time for some serious changes in your life.

And so Paul encourages and urges the church in Thessalonica to continue to please God more and more. Particularly, he urges them in faith, hope and love.

[11:05] And we're going to look at the first two of those, faith and love. And next week we'll be looking at hope. So Paul, when he was with them, he gave them instructions on sexual purity.

But because it is so important, he writes to them again. Chapter 4, verse 3. Living in this way is both God's will for our life and it pleases God when we do it.

The kind of, not a little bit of change from, you know, leaving the dirty clothes on the floor to putting them in the basket. This is massive change in the lives of the Thessalonian church.

Paul calls on them to avoid sexual immorality, not to reduce it, not to keep a small part of sexual immorality in their lives, not to keep some hidden deep in our hearts and homes where no one else sees, but to avoid sexual immorality, to abstain from it, to have control over each of our bodies in a way that honors and brings pleasure to God, to show that we are set apart, that we are holy for Him. Controlled by our desire to please God and not please ourselves, not in passionate lust like the pagans who don't know God. Instead, for people that do know God, that we would have self-control and self-mastery.

[12:50] The Gentile, the non-Jew, the members of the Thessalonian church, would have found it incredibly difficult to understand how their conversion to the Christian God meant that they had to change their behavior and abandon their pleasures.

You see, the other religions in the area, with the exception of Judaism, all of the other religions, promoted sexual immorality. The cults of the gods, Dionysus, Aphrodite, Osiris, and Isis, they all encouraged sexual license.

Female slaves could be used to satisfy desires. Prostitutes were at the service of any person. Sexual immorality on view here is anything outside of marriage, and it was easy to access for people in Thessalonica.

And so if you moved from one religion to another religion, you would continue in those practices. But moving to Christianity meant radical change. And Paul gives four motivations to seek sexual purity on top of seeking to please God.

From verse 6, have a look with me. And that in this matter, no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before.

[14:17] For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being, but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

So firstly, sexual purity is desired so that no one wrongs a brother or a sister. Sexual sin was not just a sinful liaison between two people or alone.

It actually damaged relationship between people and relationships with God. It damages existing relationships between husbands and wives.

It steals what should be kept for marriage from the marriage bed. Sexual immorality corrupts the eye and the heart of the viewer, leading to damage in later relationships.

And so Paul says, don't wrong someone else by sinning sexually. Secondly, Paul says that the Lord will punish those who commit such sins.

[15:22] Now, this warning wasn't new for the church because sexual sin doesn't just damage the community, it damages the relationship with God. And God says that he will punish those who sin.

The third thing, God called us to be pure. He called us to himself to be pure, to live a holy life. He didn't call us to himself to be corrupted.

The question of sexual immorality is not a question of what little things can I do, how far can I go, what is permissible, or what can I get away with.

It is purity. How pure can I be? And fourthly, it's not Paul being rejected. Paul motivates them by saying, this is the word of God.

If you reject what I say here, you are rejecting God himself. These are not man-made words. These are not words of a culture. They are not words of a particular time.

[16:25] It is God who calls us to be pure. God's will is that we are to be pure and holy and blameless before him.

And when we are, it pleases God. Living pure lives is actually a delight to God. Have you ever made an omelette before?

Anybody made an omelette? Did anybody have an omelette for breakfast? No? Okay. I've occasionally made an omelette. Imagine you're going to make an omelette for the person you love most in the world.

Let's say I'm making it for James Cason just because he's right in front of me. And so I'm making an omelette for James. And I've got the bacon already chopped. I've got the cheese, the chives, the mushrooms.

James, anything else you need in there? Egg. Okay. We'll get to the egg. We'll get there. Anything else? Anything else? Tomato? Peppers?

[17:26] Capsicum? Okay. Salt and pepper. Okay. And of eggs. Eggs. Okay. So I've got the eggs. I've got six. Don't worry. I don't really have eggs. This is all hypothetical. And the recipe calls for six eggs.

And so I go to my fridge and I've only got six eggs left. This is really good. This is good. This is just going to feed James. James is a very hungry, growing boy, isn't he, mum? And so, you know, six eggs is just going to be good for him.

And this omelette is going to bring so much joy to James. And so I crack the first egg and the second egg and the third egg and the fourth egg and the fifth egg.

And I crack the sixth egg. Remember, I need six eggs or he's going to be hungry and he's not going to be satisfied. And it stinks. It's rotten. Now, we don't get too many rotten eggs these days.

I can't remember the last time I got a rotten egg was, but I got it today. But this recipe calls for six eggs. So what do I do? Do I put it in anyway?

[18:25] Let's put it in anyway. Because I really want to please James. I need six eggs. How much do you think that little bit of rotten egg is going to influence the whole?

And so I cook it up. I present it to James. And before he can even get his fork into it, the smell hits him. It's just awful. He goes green.

What is this disgusting mess you've put before me? He shouts. Impure. And he tosses it on the floor. He's an angry guy.

He's not. He's not. He's lovely. We wouldn't present something like that to someone we love to consume, would we? And yet we bring bodies and minds that are far more rotten than an omelette. And yet we offer them in marriage. We say, God, this is enough for you. We've been loved by God so much, and yet we respond by giving him the good parts mixed with bad, and we think it's enough.

[19:30] Brothers and sisters, God calls you. God chooses, and he's called us not to live a life mixed with good and bad. God loves you.

Not the good eggs with the rotten eggs, but to one of purity and holiness, to be a delight to him. Now let me encourage you, even though we have all sinned in many ways, we have all sinned sexually, there is no time better to change our lives, to live a life pleasing to God.

God, if you are struggling in this area, come and talk to me after church. We can have a good chat over a coffee. Come and, if you're a woman and don't want to talk to me, come and speak to Deb. Speak with your community group leader. It is good and right for God to command us to obey him with our lives, to live lives of purity, and when we do, they are a delight to God.

And so, in very similar language to Paul's encouragement to sexual purity, he encourages them to continue to live lives of love. So, have a look with me at verse 9, as we start to have a look at Paul's call to love.

[20:51] Verse 9. Now, about your love for one another, 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 of God's family

throughout Macedonia.

Yet, we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more. And to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life. You should mind your own business and 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. So, Paul encourages the Thessalonian church to love, to love one another.

Not just the people around them, as they've been doing, but their love has actually gone out into the whole of Macedonia. And he urges them to do so more and more.

Here, Paul speaks about those who should mind their own business and work with their hands. Because it appears that there are those who had become lazy. They'd become lazy for one reason or another.

[ 21 : 59 ] And so they'd become a burden on their brothers and sisters. Now remember, this was a time before there was social systems like ours. And so, they didn't have a government who would hand out assistance.

There wasn't a dull system in those days. What you had was family. You had your brothers and sisters in the church. The burden would have been on the family to provide for someone who wasn't working.

The burden would have been on the new church family. And so, Christians should either work or be seeking work. Now, Christians, you're all usually a nice bunch.

You're a good bunch of people. But Paul encourages everyone to keep working with their hands. Because it would be very easy to become a burden from someone in the church to other people. It's similar to Paul's comments on sexual purity. Brotherly love, loving others, is good for the community. It wins the respect of outsiders. And instead of being dependent on other people, working means that they could love one another.

[ 23 : 11 ] They could love those in their church and they could love those outside of the church throughout Macedonia as they had been. It creates a view that says, I want to please God and so I'm not going to be selfish.

I'm going to please God with my body pursuing sexual purity and I'm not going to be a burden on those around me. Instead, I want to work and provide for those people around me because God has provided for me.

These are really important words for a young church in Thessalonica. He wants this church to continue on for many years, to continue to share the gospel of God, to continue to grow and spread, to continue to share the good news of Jesus.

Now these are messages that are important for a young church to hear, to be sexually pure and to love, not being a burden. Because unfortunately, I've heard too many horror stories of churches falling apart because of sexual immorality.

you may have heard of similar stories where the devil has dangled temptation in front of the leader's eyes, hoping to destabilize a church.

[ 24 : 29 ] Imagine this church in Thessalonica. They are influencing the country and the region around them. How easy would it be for temptation at the top, those who are leading the church, so that they sin sexually and the church falls apart?

How easy would that be to happen? When people's eyes slip from seeking God to seeking their own pleasure, it destroys churches, it destroys people's lives.

And loving brothers and sisters more and more, it will combat against all kinds of sins and personal agendas in the church. staying pure, staying blameless, loving more and more, it effectively future-proofs a church against attacks from outside and inside.

And so we should be praying, we should be praying that this church here would continue to love more and more. We should be praying for one another, we should be praying for our leaders, you should be praying for me, that we would please God with our lives, that we would avoid sexual immorality.

We should be praying so that our families continue strong in the Lord, so that our daily lives would win the respect of outsiders and ring out into the area around us.

[ 26 : 01 ] God has saved us, he has forgiven us, he has loved us, and he delights in us. Obeying God actually pleases him.

We can please the God of the universe. How can we not change and seek to live lives to bring delight and joy to the God who loves us and made us?

