

The Gospel and Pleasing God

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[0 : 00] Good morning everyone, it would be great if you could keep your Bibles open there at 1 Thessalonians 4.1 Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German theologian and a Lutheran pastor who was a very public critic of Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime.

He publicly opposed particularly the Nazi euthanasia program and its genocidal persecution of Jews. He was eventually arrested and he was executed by the Nazi regime in Flossenbergl concentration camp in April 1945, three weeks before the end of World War II.

That wasn't a prophecy. Bonhoeffer particularly, if you read his writings, he was particularly appalled by the shocking capitulation of the German church to Adolf Hitler throughout the 1930s. He was appalled by it. Appalled by it. How could the church founded by Martin Luther, the great teacher of the gospel, so fundamentally lose sight of the gospel?

That was his bugbear, if you like. Bonhoeffer saw that there had been this massive distortion of the gospel of grace that Martin Luther taught.

[1 : 36] A distortion that basically says, God loves and he forgives everyone, so it really doesn't matter how you live.

God's grace, he saved you by his grace, you are his, and therefore it doesn't matter how you live. He saw that throughout the Lutheran church in his day.

God forgives. That's his job. That was the distortion of the gospel of grace that he saw. And he called it, he was the one who we've attributed to anyway, the term cheap grace.

Most likely it was his auntie who gave him that idea. But we've attributed to Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer could see that the German church had lost hold of the brilliant balance of the gospel that Luther himself so persistently expounded.

We are saved by faith alone in Jesus Christ, but not by faith which is alone. We are saved not by anything that we do, but by the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[2 : 55] Yet, if we have truly understood and believe the gospel, it will bring about transformation of life in what we do and how we live.

Bonhoeffer wrote, Only he who believes is obedient, and only he who is obedient believes.

It is anyone who truly has been captivated by God's grace, saved by God's grace, results in a life that is changed by that grace.

Costly grace changes from the inside out. It's what we looked at last week, and it's Paul's prayer for the Thessalonian church. And now it's where he starts landing it in the second bit of one Thessalonian.

So, jump in there. I've got three points today, as I normally do. So, first of all, first point is living to please God, how to please God, and the pleasure of God.

[3 : 57] So, verse 1, The word live there is, once again, literally the word to walk.

Paul, again, uses the idea of walking, that is, as a disciple of the Lord Jesus, a follower of the Lord Jesus, walking to describe the Christian life.

That is, it implies a slow, unspectacular, but steady progress hot on the heels of the Lord Jesus, following him in his pattern of life and obedience to his teaching.

Progress, as 1 Thessalonians has already pointed out to us in chapter 1, progress in turning away from a life of sin. It's a progress in repentance.

It's a progress in walking and obedience to God as we wait for Jesus to come. Waiting for Jesus to come is not to sit still, and waiting for Jesus is to make progress in repentance and obedience.

[5 : 02] And so, this walking to please God is both the process and the goal and God's plan for your life.

It's the purpose for which you've been saved. So, if you're ever wondering, you know, what is it that God's will for my life? It's right here in verse 3. It is God's will that you should be sanctified.

That's God's will for every person, that you should be sanctified. The same word is used in verse 7. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

That's God's will for you, that you might be holy. Now, the word holy in the Bible, see, when we hear the word holy, God's word, we think of ethics, moral codes, rules to obey, laws, that kind of stuff.

But the word holy in the Bible means to be separate. It means to be set apart. And that's why God easily refers to himself as the holy one.

[6 : 13] That is, he is set apart from all that he's created. He stands, he's transcendent. He stands outside of all that he has made. That is, God is in his own category.

And when God says, I am holy, he is saying that there is none like me. I am set apart. In the Old Testament book of Leviticus, we read that it is possible for an item to be holy.

Like Leviticus refers to a holy pot or a holy table. And it's set apart for exclusive use. So the question is, or the issue is, if holiness was just about obedience to a moral code, how on earth does a pot or a table pursue a moral code?

It doesn't. So what does it mean when we are called to be holy? What does it mean to be holy? It means that a pot or a table in the village is set apart for God's exclusive use.

It's not used for anything else. It is used for God and the worship of God in the temple. It means it belongs to God. That's what holiness is.

[7 : 29] It belongs to God. Holiness, sanctification is belonging to God, not just simply a moral code. You see, it is in fact possible to be moral out of a sense of duty.

Or out of a sense of self-validation. Or meeting the expectations of others. Or just simply pragmatism. It's possible to be holy.

In terms of moral. It's possible to be moral. And yet not belong to God. And therefore not to be holy. Belonging to God is first and foremost a heart issue. It's not an activity. First and foremost. It is a heart issue.

First and foremost. Now there are only few people in my life. Only a few people in my life. Where I can say that their claims of love on my life are so great.

[8 : 38] That I actually belong to them. Only a few. There's first of all and most primarily my wife. I have married her and given my life to her.

And there's my children. And there are things that I do now as a person. And especially as a married man for nearly 27 years.

That I would not do. If I was not a husband or a father. It's because of those relationships.

That I do certain things that I would not normally do. For instance. I love you church family. I'm not trying to make. I love you church family. But I will.

You will never find me painting your toenails. Or your fingernails. It just won't happen. Okay. And if it wasn't for the fact.

[9 : 40] That I was my father. And specifically father of girls. It would never have ended my. Vision. To do such a thing.

At all. To belong to God. Means to. Live on his terms. This new relationship with him.

Changes the terms of your life. It means that you delight in him. You give yourself to him. You obey him. You honor him. It's not. Simply enough.

To obey rules. To be holy. You must belong to him. As we have seen. Already this morning. He is our vision.

He is our vision. For anyone to say. What is really important. Is that I am moral. But I don't need God.

[10 : 41] Means that you have morality. But you don't have holiness. Holiness means belonging to God.

And so the core of holiness. Is intensely. Relational. Intensely relational. The opposite of belonging to God.

Is to in fact. Live. For yourself. And to reject God. To reject the relationship. And so the principle of holy living. Is not to live for yourself.

But in fact. To live. For God. And all that he has called you to. Which brings me to the second point. On how to please God. In chapter four.

Paul gives instructions. On how to please God. And how this is worked out. In three. Very practical. Areas of life.

[11:40] Three. In fact. Major. Preoccupations. Of. Of all people. Really. Sex. Work. And death. Now.

In these three things. The early Christian church. Were radically different. To the people around them. Radically different.

One of the earliest Christian writings. Outside of the Bible. Contains a very interesting phrase. It says of Christians. We share our table with all.

But not our bed with all. Very profound. See the Christians existed in a culture. And the Thessalonians.

Were these people in the Roman Empire. That shared their bed with everyone. But they did not share their money. Or their resources. Or their hospitality.

[12:39] Or their lives. With everyone. Money was sacred. To them. And sex was mundane.

Money was something to be held on to. Sex was something to be given away. Not a lot's really changed. In 2000 odd years.

The Christians on the other hand. Guarded their sex life. But were free and liberal. With their hospitality. And their resources.

And it was something that was so wholesome. And so joyous. And so wise. About this early Christian life. Because the pagan culture.

Of the Roman Empire. In those early centuries. They laughed at the Christians. For this. And yet. It totally transformed the Roman Empire.

[13:40] Within three centuries. And so when Paul is urging the Thessalonian church. When he's commanding them here.

Is not to capitulate. To their culture. And lose. Their revolutionary impact. That's what he's calling them to.

Now I'm going to say something very briefly. This morning. Super briefly about sex. Really briefly. About. About work. And then I'm going to postpone death.

Hopefully for another week. If I don't. Someone else will probably pick it up. Anyway. So. Verses. Three to eight. So. In other words.

I'm going to be really brief. On the things you want me to talk about. And I'm going to spend more time. On the things you don't want me to talk about. Okay. So. So very briefly. Pleasing God.

[14:34] And sex. Verses. That's verses. Three to eight. Now throughout history. This is. I'm like again. Helicopter view here. Throughout history. There's been two basic approaches to sex.

The first. Is the deification of sex. Sex is the way to wisdom. Sex is the way to. To. Personal satisfaction. Joy. Personal.

Self validation. And realization. And the other side. See sex. As degraded. And debased. It's a thing you don't talk about. And yet. When you read.

The Bible. And in fact. If you had the ability. To. To read. The actual Hebrew language. In the Old Testament. And the Greek language.

In the New Testament. The Bible. Is entirely. Barefaced. What I mean by that is. Hair on the back of your neck. Type of rejoicing.

[15:28] In erotic. Marriage. Love. Like it rejoices in it. In a way that. Pleasant society. Does not want to talk about it.

And yet. At the same time. It calls us to flee. Sexual immorality. Like it's the plague. The Bible never speaks about sex in whispers.

Nor does it live it up. To the point where it becomes the core of your identity. And self-fulfillment.

Now there are three important principles. To understand about the Christian biblical view of understanding sex.

The goodness of sex. The context of sex. And the purpose of sex. I'm going to be real super quick with this. The goodness of sex is implied here. These verses don't say. God's will for you is to be holy.

And so don't do it. Stay away from sex. That's not what it says here. It says. Abstain from immorality.

[16:35] Not abstain from sex. Sex. Properly used. Is good. And it will function for your holiness. Used incorrectly.

And it will undermine. Your holiness. It has an incredible power for good. If used as God instructs. As he's the one who designed it. Or it is incredible power for destruction. If not. It would be incalculable.

The lives that have been destroyed. Through sexual immorality. Throughout history. Sex is good. And the wonderful power of sex.

Has to happen. Within the context of sex. Back to. Verses three and four. You should avoid sexual immorality. But each of you should learn. To control your own body.

[17:33] Now the word sexual immorality there. The statement there. It actually translates. The Greek word. Pornea. Which means. Which we get our word pornography from.

And so. You could read this and say. Well actually. That Paul's just saying. Just don't read Playboy magazine. Or something. You know. Don't stay away from that. But that's not what it's meaning here. In.

In Greek language. Pornea. It means much broader. Than just simply. Pornography. It means. In fact. The misuse of sex. Period.

The misuse of sex. Period. That's pornea. It means. There's all. Sexual violation. Outside. The bible's. Context. For sex.

The context for it. Is in verse four. And you. Would not. Necessarily. Pick it up. If you just had the NIV translation. As I do. The statement.

[18:31] Your own body. Literally means. To live with your own wife. Or. Get a wife. Depending on how you.

Translate it. Literally. The idea. Of marriage. Biblical marriage. Is that the two become one. And which is why. It's translated here.

Your own body. That is. You are one with your wife. In other words. Live with your own wife. Paul is saying. That you can have sex. In marriage.

Or you can misuse sex. That's the implication. And it's the whole Bible's. Implication of this. The biblical. The biblical context.

For sex. Is very simple. Sex is for. A monogamous. Heterosexual. Marriage. It's not for. Outside of marriage.

[19:24] In any form. Whatsoever. It is for the person. That you are. Married. To. And. I'm not going to unpack that.

Any further than that. This is the design. Of God. Who created. In the first place. But let me just give you. One good reason. Why.

The biblical. Ethic. Of sex. Totally transformed. The Roman Empire. In three centuries. Because the freedom. Of sexual expression.

Throughout history. Whatever culture. You were in. The freedom. Of sexual expression. Has always. Always. Always. Without question.

Been bad for women. Always. Women. Women. Are the ones. Who have been. Exploited the most. Abused the most.

[20:20] Hurt the most. Carrying the burden. The most. First. And that is. Certainly the case. As Paul writes. To this church. In Thessalonica.

Certainly the case. They are living in. Thessalonica. Is in the Roman Empire. First century. And for the average man.

Living in Thessalonica. A wealthy. Progressive. City. Was the average man. Had a wife.

And their function. Was. Hopefully. To have status. Was to bring money. Into the family. Was to manage. The affairs.

Of the household. And to raise. The legitimate children. The average man. Apart from the wife. Also had their mistress. And their mistress.

[21:17] Was their sexual partner. Whose main function. Was to be. The man's. Intellectual equal. And a companion. For recreation.

So. The. Husband would get. An invite. There's a. You know. Claudius. Is having a 60th. Birthday party. Down at the harbour.

At this restaurant. Kind of thing. And he would take. His mistress with him. Because that's a.

Recreation event. On top of that. They also had.

Their concubines. And the concubine. Their place. The normal concubine. For. For a man. In the Roman Empire. Was. A servant.

In the household. And so. For the master. Of the household. The man. Their job. So the servant. Would live with them. In the house. Their job.

[22 : 11] Was to do the dishes. Sweep the floors. And have sex. That was their job. So. He's got his wife. He's got his mistress. He's got his concubine. And if that wasn't enough. There was a roaring trade.

For prostitutes. Get the picture. And Paul. Comes along. And says. And he says. Specifically. The word is. Brothers. We're done with that. We're done with that. Brothers. One of the things. That makes this.

Biblical sexual ethic. Work. Is that it so. Empowers women. And it gives children. Also. The stability. Of a. Long term. Stable. Relationship. This brings me. The third. Thing about. Sex. These verses highlight. And that's the purpose of it. Each of you.

[23 : 06] Should learn to control. Your own body. In a way. That is holy. And honourable. Not in. Passionate lust. In other words. Take a wife.

Or have your wife. In honour. Not in. Passionate lust. It's. It's. In actual fact. It's still possible. To be. Married. But still not pursue. The good purpose. Of sex. So don't. Work on the assumption. Well I'm married. And therefore. I've fulfilled. I'm holy. I've fulfilled this purpose.

It's actually. Still possible. To be married. And not pursue. The good purpose of it. It's possible. In fact. To abuse. To take advantage. Of your spouse. In marriage. It's not true.

And I've heard Christians. Say this. And it's appalling. You know. You're burning with passion. You're burning with lust. Get married. And then you'll be fine. That is such. It's appalling. It's not true.

[24 : 02] That once you get married. Anything goes. The word lust here. Means an over desire. It means idolatry. I talked about this word last week.

The word honour. Means reverence. Or trembling awe. Even in marriage. Sex. It's possible for it to be. An idolatrous lust. Or.

It can be a way. Of honouring. Revering. And therefore. The language of building up. Your spouse. Sex can either.

Objectify. Dominate. Dehumanise. Your spouse. Or. It can. Build them up.

Humanise them. Respect them. Revere them. And the difference. Is whether we view sex as a way to give.

[25 : 03] Or it's a way to receive. Love. It's how I feel loved. And validated. Or.

It's a way to validate. And love. There we go. That's enough on sex. There's.

Way much more to unpack. I know. And maybe one day. We'll get into it. But I need to spend some time on work. Because this is the other obsession of our life. I want to again.

Be really brief on this one. Because I'm going to. Touch on it a bit later. In the series. The first thing to note here. In verses. Nine to twelve.

Is that there is no break. In the original language. Between verse ten. And verse eleven. It's all one sentence.

[26 : 01] Verse nine and ten. Are not a different subject. To verses eleven. And twelve. The first two. The first two verses.

Are about love. And the last two. Are about work. In other words.

What it's saying. Is that the biblical work ethic. Which flows. In a similar way. In terms of the biblical sex ethic. It's not about.

Receiving. It's actually about giving. The biblical work ethic. That the Christian. Is called to. It's called to walk in. Is about loving others.

With work. And so how do you. Love others. More and more. As Paul is called us to do. Get to work.

[26 : 59] Serve. Get to work. That is. The call here is for the Christian. Not to be drained on the community. Whether it be a church community. Or whether it be.

Community at large. Society at large. Not to be a drain. You are an investor. In community. Whether society. Or the church. I've done a whole sermon series.

In the past. On work. But this is. This is just a summary of it. Dorothy Sayers. Was an English. Crime. Novelist. And playwright. She wrote a brilliant essay.

Called. Why work. It was. It was actually during. World War II. 1942. Was when she first presented. This essay. And it says.

That society as a whole. And individuals in particular. Are dying. They are dying. Because they do not have. A revolutionary. Doctrine.

[27 : 57] Biblical doctrine. Of what work. Actually is. The modern. Version of work. Is it's what you do. For a living. My work is what I do.

For a living. We do. This thing. This vocation. This role. That I have. Is what I do. To make money. So that. Then I can do. What I really want. It's a means.

To an end. Sayers. Quoted. A surgeon. Friend of hers. In the essay. A surgeon. Friend of hers. Which this surgeon. Put it so succinctly.

Nobody. Works today. For the sake. Of the thing. They do. The result. Of the work. Is a byproduct. Of the real aim. The real aim. In work.

Is money. Or status. Doctors. Practice medicine. Primarily. For personal status. And to make a living. Not to relieve suffering. The patient.

[28 : 53] Is something. That happens. Along the way. The biblical. Doctrine of work. Is the gracious.

Expression. Of creative. Energy. In the service. Of others. For the good. Of others. What Sayers. Was saying.

Is unless. We understand. The biblical. Doctrine. Of work. Work. Will always. Be a burden. You'll never. Find rest. In your work.

Modern. Expressive. Individualism. Leads. To a restlessness. Both. In. Sex.

And. In. Work. Because. It's about me. It's about. My identity. It's about. My status. It's about. My validation. It's about. My advancement. The bible's.

[29 : 49] View of work. Is a work. That arises. From the place. Of rest. It rises. From a place. Of status.

Of contentment. And freedom. And so you are able. To give yourself. Which brings me. To the final point. What you'll see.

In both. Sex. And. In work. It's about. The love. Of others. So why. We want to do that. The final point.

The pleasure. Of God. Living. To please. God. As Paul calls us to. In verse one. Is not the same. Is. As living. To appease God.

They're very different. Living. To a please. God. Is to love. In the hope. That I will be loved. Back. It's giving. In order.

[30 : 45] To receive. Living. Living. To please. God. Is living. For the sheer. Pleasure. Of God. One of the greatest.

Struggles. In the Christian life. And I mean. The greatest struggles. In the Christian life. Is a failure. To understand.

The very. Basic. Pattern. Of Christian. Discipleship. It is so basic. It is so basic. That it starts. Way back. When God gives. The Israelites. The Ten Commandments. Where did the Ten Commandments. Begin.

I won't ask you. To put your hand up. And do that. Because I don't want to embarrass it. Where do they begin? You normally say. Well. Commandment number one is. No.

[31 : 40] Doesn't begin. There's a prologue. Before the first commandment. I am the Lord your God. Who brought you out of. Egypt. That's where it begins.

The Ten Commandments. Begin. With the pleasure of God. To rescue his people. And one of the greatest. Struggles in the Christian life. Is to understand. This. This.

This basic pattern. You see. By the time Paul gets. To calling us. To please God. He's already given us. The foundation of it. He's already given us. The motivation for it. The structure of.

All of Paul's letters. And all biblical ethics. Is the indicative. Followed by the imperative. If we do not understand.

The indicative. The statement. Of fact. The act of God. The cross of Christ. The gospel.

[32 : 41] If you do not start there. It is in fact. Impossible. For us. To fulfill. Let alone. Joyfully obey. The imperative.

The commands of God. It's impossible. If you don't embrace. The indicative. You cannot do the imperative. In his book.

The nature of true virtue. Jonathan Edwards. Wrote that. Unless a person. Has experienced. The grace of God. Unless we know. We are not saved. By our own good work. And that God embraces

us.

Because of Jesus work. Then everything we do. On the moral scale of life. Every ethic we pursue. Will be driven. Entirely. By self-interest.

He wrote. The enjoyment of God. Is the only happiness. With which our souls. Can be satisfied. You see.

[33 : 38] If we know. That God has embraced us. That he's approved of us. That he's accepted us. Because of. Jesus. And his work. Jesus work.

Then we can. Enjoy him. In such a way. That all of our work. All of our labor. All of our lives. All of our walking. All of our obedience.

Is for the sheer joy. Of pleasing God. We cannot please God. Without the pleasure of God.

And the gospel of Jesus Christ. Is the good news. Of God's pleasure. Towards sinful humanity.

When the angel visited Mary.

And said. Your life's about to turn upside down. You're going to have a baby. But not just any baby.

The angel said. The Holy Spirit will come on you.

[34 : 41] And the power of the most holy. Will overshadow you. So the holy one. The set apart one. The one in transcendent one.

To be born. Will be called the son of God. Jesus Christ. The holy one. The son of God. The holy transcendent God.

Will enter his creation. And in Matthew 3.17. At the baptism of Jesus. The voice was heard from heaven. This is my son.

My beloved son. With whom I am well pleased. Very pleased. Infinitely pleased. My son. God the father is expressing.

His pleasure in the son. And the spirit the same. As he descended in that moment. It's therefore no surprise. That Jesus says.

[35 : 42] In John 8.29. That he lived to please. His father. I do nothing on my own.

But speak just what the father has taught me. The one who sent me. Is with me. He has not left me alone. For I always do what pleases him.

I do nothing on my own. Completely obedient. To the will of the father. The only holy one. Who lived the perfect life.

He's. You see this is the Jesus. Who knew. The pleasure of the father. For all of eternity. And so live to walk. In obedience. And he did. As he tells us.

In. John 17. He did. Completed the work. That the father had sent him to do. To reveal God to the world. And to bring sinful humanity back.

[36 : 40] Into intimate relationship with their God. His pleasure in the father. Led him. Obediently. To crucifixion.

On a Roman cross for us. This is the Jesus. Who was humiliated. Stripped naked. Nailed to a cross.

In front of all of his family. And his friends. Stripped naked. So that we might be brought. Intimately back. Into relationship with God.

And the real cry. On the cross of dereliction. For the first time in his life. He ever experienced. My God. My God. Why have you forsaken me? The one.

Who had never been abandoned. By his. Never felt alone. Why have you forsaken me? For the first time. In all. Of. Eternity.

[37 : 35] He experienced. The displeasure of God. The father. Whose pleasure. He always enjoyed. The one. Who was always with him.

The one. Who. Who he lived. To please. Turned. The. Turned. His face. Away. From him. Abandoned him.

So. That the intimate. Relationship. Of the presence. And the pleasure. And the approval. Of God. That he'd. Experienced. For all of eternity. Might be. Ours.

Might be. Ours. He. Obeyed. The will. Of his father. To. Experience. The rejection.

Of his father. So that we might. Experience. The pleasure. And acceptance. Of God. And live. To obediently.

[38 : 32] Please God. And the. Only thing. The only thing. That we contribute. To us.

Experiencing. The pleasure. Of God. Is the. Sin. That drove. Jesus. There in the. First place. Drove. Jesus. The holy.

Son of God. To the cross. And experience. The infinite. Displeasure. Of God. That's the only thing.
We contribute. And to the degree.

That we see. Jesus. On that cross. Receiving. The displeasure. Of God. For our. Approval. The
more.

We will seek. To love him. By walking. To please him. In all of life. And Paul. Is urging us here.
Really.

[39 : 29] Fundamentally. To be. Who you. Are. Who you. Already. Are. In Jesus. Christ. Holy.

And blameless. You are God's. Special. Possession. You are his. Much. Loved. Children. So. In
Jesus. When he looks. At you.

He doesn't see. Your faults. And he. Failures. My son. My daughter. In whom. I am well pleased. So
live it.

Bonhoeffer wrote. Only he who believes. Is obedient. And only he. Who is obedient. Believes.