

“How to Please God”

October 22, 2017

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

I. Introduction

The last three verses of chapter 3 could have been a fitting conclusion to Paul’s letter, but Paul didn’t usually finish a letter until he had given some practical applications. To Paul, Christianity was a combination of beliefs and behaviors—doctrine and actions. As he wrote in [Ephesians 2:10](#), “**For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**” The Christian life is more than accepting Jesus Christ as one’s Lord and Savior ([Rom. 10:9](#))—James wrote in [James 2:18](#), “**Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.**” Christians are works in progress as we grow to become more Christ-like. [Turn to Philippians 3:12-14](#). Christians must progress in the Christian life—we must “**press on.**”

As a faithful teacher and shepherd, Paul was careful not only to teach the truth in terms of beliefs and doctrines to his flock, but to apply that truth in his own life and to motivate his people to apply it in their lives as they matured as children of God. Paul had already commended the Thessalonians for their actions as Christians, but now he urged them to do even more. In today’s Scripture Paul gave three ways that Christians can please God beginning with: Live a Sanctified life.

II. How to Please God

A. Way #1: Live a Sanctified life Western society has been undergoing a sexual revolution. Freedom of sexual expression has in many ways become the cultural god that rules over all the other idolatrous gods of postmodern culture. People want the right, for themselves and others, to express their sexual desires at any cost, even if that means aborting the unwanted child or risking a sexually transmitted disease. But as messed up as that may seem, the Roman culture was more sexually perverse and depraved than contemporary Western culture. They had no sexual constraints at all.

As part of that culture, Thessalonica would have been filled with such sinful practices as fornication (*sex between unmarried people*), adultery (*sex involving married people*), homosexuality (including pedophilia), transvestism, and a wide variety of pornographic and erotic perversions, all done with a seared conscience and society's acceptance. There would have been religious temples that advocated ritual prostitution. Such temples taught that if a follower engaged with a temple prostitute, he would be communing supernaturally with the deity the prostitute represented. Thus people did not consider fornication and adultery illegal or immoral; the idolatrous religions actually condoned them. Immorality was a way of life.

The Christian message of sanctified or holy living was new to that culture. Many of the new converts would have lived in immorality, some no doubt had mistresses and many of the women and some of the men had likely engaged in some form of prostitution. Their entry into the kingdom of God presented them with strong challenges—old habits and the pressures from a wicked culture would seek to draw them away from their new life and back to the old. Paul gave 3 reasons why they should live a sanctified life and abstain from sensual lusts.

1. Reason 1: To please God Paul wrote “we instructed you how to live in order to please God.” In **Leviticus 11:44** God said, “I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy.” This is the first reason to live a sanctified life or holy life: **To please God**. Everybody lives to please somebody. Some people live to please themselves. In **Romans 15:1-2**, Paul wrote, “We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.” But we must be careful when it comes to pleasing others. It is possible to both please others and honor God, but it is also possible to dishonor God—**Galatians 1:10** says, “If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.” For this reason Paul wrote in **1 Thessalonians 2:4**, “We are not trying to please men but God, who tests our hearts.”

The Thessalonian Christians already knew the fundamentals of Christian living—Paul had already taught them that, but he wrote, “**Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.**” They were doing well, so far, but as they grew or matured as Christians they needed to do more.

2. Reason 2: To obey God The 2nd reason to live a sanctified life is to obey God, Paul wrote, “**It is God’s will that you should be sanctified, that you should avoid sexual immorality.**” When he was in Thessalonica, Paul gave the believers the instructions—really the commandments of God regarding being sanctified, i.e. being separated from sin and set apart to God’s holiness. Paul probably began with the 10 Commandments. God wants believers to separate from all that is evil, fleshly, and impure. **Turn to 1 Corinthians 6:15-20.** By God’s standards any sexual activity outside the relationship of a husband and wife is immoral—**Hebrews 13:4** says, “**Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.**”

3. An aside: How to be sexually moral. Because the Thessalonians, like Christians today, were continually being exposed to all kinds of sights, sounds, and philosophies that tempted their fallen flesh to immoral thoughts and actions, Paul took a break and gave 3 principles for maintaining sexual morality, i.e., “*How to be sexually moral.*”

a. The body should not control the believer. Earlier we read, “**Learn to control your body in a way that is holy and honorable.**” 1st principle: *The body should not control the believer.* Believers must maintain self-control over the desires of their flesh. Every Christian needs to know himself well, so that he understands his weaknesses and sinful inclinations so that he can control his own body. When this is done, the believer will be set apart from sin to God, i.e. he will be holy. He/She will also be honorable in that he/she will be showing respect for his/her body as a temple of the Holy Spirit and an instrument of service to Christ. The goal is positive—pursue separation and virtue with all one’s heart.

b. 2nd principle: The believer should not act like the unbeliever. Christians cannot continue to live in the same patterns of sin that godless people do. Christians must not lower themselves to a level of heathen or sinful sexual behavior determined merely by unthinking passions and uncontrolled fleshly urges. Since over exposure to temptation can lower one's resistance, [1 Corinthians 6:18](#) says, **"Flee from sexual immorality."** The believer should not—must not—act like the unbeliever.

c. 3rd Principle: The believer should not take advantage of others. Paul warned that **"no-one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him."** Whenever believers seek to satisfy their physical desires and gain sexual pleasure at the expense of another believer, they have violated this command. Because God considers sinfully taking advantage of another believer—a child of God—so serious, Jesus gave a severe warning—[turn to Matthew 18:6-7](#). In other words, such a person deserves to be killed! So Christians must pay attention to their own holiness—separation from sin, avoid all ungodly influences, and never use other people, especially fellow believers, to get sinful gratification.

4. Reason 3: Paul then gave the 3rd reason to live a sanctified life: **To escape the judgment of God.** It is true that the Christian is under no condemnation for sin—every Christian has been forgiven, but it is also true that he is not free from the harvest of sorrow that comes when he sows to the flesh—[turn to Galatians 6:7-8](#). A holy or sanctified walk involves a right relationship with God the Father (*who called us*), God the Son (*who died for us*), and God the Holy Spirit (*who lives within us*). To despise God's commandments is to invite the judgment of God and also to grieve the Spirit of God.

B. Way #2: The 1st way to please God is to live a sanctified life; Paul then gave a 2nd way to please God: **Love the brothers.** An off-shoot of living a sanctified life is love. The more Christ-like we become, i.e. the more sanctified we become; the more we will love one another. [Romans 5:5](#) says, **"God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."** Since every Christian has the Holy Spirit ([Romans 8:9](#)), every Christian is filled with God's love and as we walk with God, the love inside us will come pouring out. Instead of sinning against a brother, a Christian

will love him with brotherly love. This love is phileo love—the love of deep affection, such as in friendship or even marriage. Christians belong to the same family, and have the same Father, they should love one another. Paul said that there will be brotherly love and there will also be agape love.

Paul wrote that he wasn't telling the Thessalonians to acquire something they didn't have; rather he was encouraging them to get more of what they already enjoyed. *You can never have too much Christian love.* Paul had prayed that their love might “increase and overflow” (1 Thess. 3:12) and we will see in 2 Thessalonians that God answered that prayer.

C. Way #3: The 3rd way to please God is: “**Win the respect of outsiders.**” The emphasis is on the believer's witness to those who are outside the Christian fellowship—to unbelievers. Christians not only have the obligation to love one another but also to be good testimonies to the people of the world. Paul's great concern was that the Thessalonian believers earn their own wages and not become freeloaders depending on the support of unbelievers.

When Paul wrote, “**Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life,**” he was emphasizing the inner peace that enables a Christian to be satisfied through faith in Christ. Believers are to lead peaceful lives, free of conflict and hostility towards others. Saints aren't to be running around creating problems as they earn their daily bread. This is a witness to the transforming power of the gospel.

The purpose underlying Paul's exhortation on work and his other instructions: to love, to live quietly, and to mind their own business—was evangelistic, so that the Thessalonians would “**win the respect of outsiders.**” For Paul, the key to evangelism was the integrity Christians demonstrated to a sinful, confused, and upset world. Believers, who sacrificially love other people, exhibit tranquil, peaceful lives, conscientiously focusing on keeping their own lives in order, and faithfully carrying out their daily responsibilities in the workplace—all the while proclaiming the Gospel—are the most effective witnesses to their unsaved neighbors and loved ones.

III. Conclusion

Paul devoted a great deal of space to the theme of sexual purity because it was a critical problem in the church of that day. *It is a critical problem in the church today, too.* For many, marriage vows are no longer considered sacred, and divorce (even among believers) is no longer governed by the Word of God. Contrary to Scripture, there are “gay churches” where homosexuals and lesbians “love one another” and claim to be Christians. Premarital sex and “Christian pornography” are accepted parts of the religious culture in many places, BUT God has said, “**You should be sanctified.**”

In today’s Scripture Paul emphasized some characteristics of the Christian life. The obedient Christian will have a sanctified life by abstaining from sexual sin; a harmonious life by loving the brothers; and a respected life by working with his hands and not meddling in the affairs of others. When unsaved people see Christ magnified in this kind of life, they will either oppose it with envy or desire to have it for themselves. Either way, God is glorified. Peter put it this way in **1 Peter 2:12, “Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”**

What we see in this part of Paul’s letter parallels what Jesus identified as the most important commandment—**turn to Matthew 22:34-40.** What about your life—is the love of God seen in your life? Does phileo and agape love ooze out of you? Jesus said in **John 14:15, “If you love me, you will obey what I command.”** With the help of the Holy Spirit, do you strain to live a holy life, a sanctified life, a life separated from sin? Do you seek to please God or someone else? Who do you really obey?

Do you truly “**Love your neighbor as yourself?**” How about your fellow Christian—is your love for them increasing and overflowing? How about the unsaved that know you, that deal with you—do they respect you as a person and as a Christian? Are you concerned about their eternal destiny? Is your life a positive example to Christians and non-Christians alike?