

# 1 Thessalonians – Lesson 9

## A Life Pleasing to God

### Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

1. Review 1 Thessalonians 3:6-13. Why was Timothy's report so *comforting* to Paul? What was the *hope* of Paul in his prayer for the Thessalonian believers?

**Timothy's report to Paul indicated that the Thessalonian believers were continuing to trust in Christ by faith, were growing in their love for one another (as an outgrowth of their faith), were still thinking fondly of him and his team, and were looking forward to seeing the team again. This removed from Paul the "worry" that the Thessalonians may have succumbed to opposition and abandoned the faith; Paul could now "live" because the report indicated that all was well with the faith of the believers in the church he had planted. So, his hope was, as he prayed for them to continue in that faith, that he would be directed back to them to complete their discipleship in the faith.**

2. (a) According to 4:1-2, to *what* does Paul turn his attention in the life of the Thessalonian believers?

**Paul, building on this prayer at the end of chap. 3, turns his attention to the *life* of the Thessalonians as they trust in Christ. The rehearsal of his time at Thessalonica and his comfort in hearing Timothy's report *morphs* into some practical advice and encouragement of how the Thessalonian believers were to live out this faith in all of life. Specially, that they would "*please God*" (see 2b below), and that they would do this "*more and more*."**

- (b) Why would Paul insist, at *this point* in the letter, that believers must seek a life "*pleasing to God*?" How is this related to the issue of opposition in 3:2-4?

**Once Paul is convinced that they are *still* following Christ, the next logical step is to teach them what this faith means *practically* in life: a life pleasing to God. Paul insisted in chaps. 1-3 that a key element of his preaching in the city was to faith in Christ *that manifested itself in every aspect of life*. For Paul, faith is not some "mental assent" that punches your ticket to heaven, but a *radical trust* in Christ that permeates all of your existence; it radically changes your thinking, speaking, emoting, choosing, worldview, etc. Paul would have preached this as a part of his call to faith: to trust in Christ implies that you are willing to give him your entire life in submission to his will, and this will radically change the rest of your days. It is *inevitable* that true Christians will be *molded* in this faith; they will be changed intellectually, volitionally, and morally. Just as it is true that Christians will be opposed by the world for choosing to follow Christ, so it is *also* true that Christians will be made more and more into the image of their Savior under the power of the Spirit. A "Christian" who is not growing in faith is not a true follower of Christ.**

3. (a) Define the term "*sanctification*." What other words in Scripture are *related* to this one?

**Sanctification is the process by which the Spirit of God transforms the *outer* nature of a born-again believer into the nature that is now present in his regenerated heart. Sanctification involves making the desires of the new heart "present" in all of the life of the believer, over against the desires of the flesh and the continuing tendencies towards sin still present. Sanctification comes from the same root word as holiness or separateness; it is to *literally* be set apart from that which is inconsistent with the new nature of the person. It is a work of the Spirit, in cooperation with the new heart and will of the regenerated person, to root out sin and replace it with holiness in all of life, to mold the believer into the nature of Christ himself. In other words, sanctification is to "bring out" the reality of *justification* (i.e., being declared fully righteous *in the sight of God* by faith in Christ) into every aspect of the *practical nature* of a person.**

(b) Explain how sanctification is an *integral part* of the “*will of God*” in the life of the believer.

**It is to holiness that God has purposed to save a people from a world of sinful rebellion. The intention of salvation is not merely to bring them to “heaven,” but to transform them into the nature that he had originally envisioned in creating humanity in the *Imago Dei*. God’s original purpose was to form a creature, bearing his own divine image (as creatures), and then to share an eternal, perfect relationship with them, whereby they (as creatures) would glorify him and enjoy his infinite nature forever. Thus, sanctification (as the process of molding the elect into the image of Christ) is at the heart of the reason why God has saved anyone; it is to fulfill his very purposes in creating humanity by drawing a sinful people out of the world, regenerate them into creatures who love him, mold them via the Spirit in this life to a level of sanctification, and then glorify them in his presence as perfect in his sight. The initial declaration of *justification* is continued in sanctification as the very intention of God in saving a people; it is completed in *glorification* and lasts through eternity.**

4. (a) From 4:3-5, on what *specific* element of sanctification does Paul focus? Why would this be particularly important, given the *nature* of the city of Thessalonica (note especially 4:5)?

**Paul turns his attention specifically to sexual immorality, to each person knowing how to “control his own body” (see 4b below). This discussion would be particularly important given how the city of Thessalonica, like so many cities in the Roman Empire in the First Century, would be filled with pagan religions that focused on sexuality as part of their regular practices. In fact, Paul calls this a “*lust like the Gentiles*”; the systems of temple prostitution and perverted sexual practices that marked the pagan religions of the times. Paul knew that these temptations would still remain around the Thessalonian believers, and so he turns to confront the issue as his *first bit* of practical advice on what it means to be sanctified.**

- (b) What is “sexual *immorality*” (compare 4:5 to Matt. 19:9; 1 Cor. 5:1, 6:18; 7:2; Gal. 5:19; Col. 3:5)? List some of the ways that this sin can be committed.

The English term sexual immorality is the word *porneia* in the Greek, a term meaning sexual sin of any kind outside of the God-prescribed context for sex within marriage. From this word we get the English *pornography*: the abject representation of sex in various physical manners. Sexual immorality, therefore, would include physical intimacy outside of marriage (i.e., not with one’s spouse), adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, pedophilia, incest, and the use of pornographic imagery visualizing sex between others, irrespective of their marital status. It is a general term used in the N.T. to define sexual relations that are “outside” of boundaries that God has established for it within a monogamous, heterosexual, life-long, covenantal union of marriage established within his own creation mandate in Genesis 1:28f and Genesis 2:21-24.

- (c) What is it that Christians are to do in regards to *sexuality*, according to 4:4?

**Christians are to “control their own bodies” when it comes to sexual impulse. Although the fallen nature of humanity has perverted the natural desires of the flesh for the purposes of procreation into harmful lusts fulfilled in various unnatural ways, Christians are to seek to control those “appetites” by bringing them under submission and control.**

5. Explain why Paul considers the issue of sexual morality so *important*, according to 4:8. How does the sexual immorality of a believer “*wrong his brother*” (see 4:6)?

**Recognizing the God-ordained purpose of sexuality (and the two genders), Christians are to reflect a differing worldview regarding sex, and are to seek to *redeem* its reality in their lives.** Like all other matters of the *physical nature*, Christians are to bring every appetite under control to the glory of God; sex, too, is to be treated as a great gift of the grace of God, and believers are to push towards bringing any *unnatural* (i.e., not God-defined) desires under their control, as a part of the sanctification of their bodies. In other words, the regenerated man understands sexuality within the framework of the purposes of a holy God *for all things*, and he desires to bring his own sexuality into the same place. Thus, the believers understands that to partake in immoral sexual activity “*wrongs his brother*” because it 1) causes his brother’s wife to stumble in her sexuality; 2) causes his brother to be tempted to use sexuality wrongly; or 3) brings reputations upon the church as a whole, an organism designed to bring glory to God through an upright view of all things, but besmirched by some who pervert its teachings.

6. (a) From 4:9-10, what does Paul *commend* and *encourage* the Thessalonians to do “*more and more*?”

**Paul not only exhorts the Thessalonians to pursue sexual purity, he also commands them to love one another more and more. Their reputation has advanced throughout all of Macedonia regarding their care and concern for one another, and for other Christians in the region, and Paul encourages them to continue that as an expression of their faith in Christ.**

- (b) What *additional* instructions does Paul give the believers in 4:11? Why do you think Paul *expands* on this concern in his *second* letter (see 2 Thess. 3:10-12)?

**Paul is also concerned that the Thessalonians “*live quietly*”, “*mind [their] own affairs*”, and “*work with [their] hands*. ” These are instructions for the Thessalonian believers to be *productive in life*: to go about their daily business without drawing *undue* attention to themselves, and to earn a living. They are not to be so “*self-involved*” with their new faith in Christ that they fail to live like a good citizen, earn a living, take care of their families, and do the *ordinary* things required to live well in this world. Based on the fact that Paul *expands* on this in his second letter, it would appear that Timothy had reported back to Paul that some in the church had decided, in light of the *imminent* return of Christ (which the church was anticipating), that they could quit their jobs and spend their entire life just waiting for the *Parousia*. Paul certainly hopes for the return of Christ, as well, but he knows that the Christian cannot simply quit being a part of the world in anticipation of that day; it may be many years into the future, and the Christian will still need to earn a living and take care of his family. So, Paul instructs the church to “*get to work*,” for the day of Christ’s return may be delayed, and it would be inappropriate to just “*live off others*” until that supposed day arrives.**

- (c) Why is Paul concerned that the Thessalonians “*walk properly before outsiders*” (4:12)?

**The reputation of the church is based on the individual reputation of those who make her up, and that reputation is a *reflection* of the nature of Christ himself. For individual believers to *besmirch* the reputation of the church by their actions before the world would diminish the value of the gospel to outsiders, and give them a reason to *reject* it. Paul wants Christians to be disciplined and consistent, to live in a way that offers the reprobate man *no reason* to insist that Christians are hypocritical or have a “*holier-than-thou*” attitude when it comes to the various realities of living in the world (i.e., sexuality, employment, family matters, etc.)**