

Happy and Holy in a Hostile World – Part 4

1 Thessalonians 4; Coast Community Church; Earl Miles; 12-8-2019

Writer/Readers/Setting (1:1)

- From the Apostle Paul in Corinth (south-central Greece, 50 miles west of Athens)
- To a New Church in Thessalonica (northern Greece)
- Historical Background: Church Plant and Fleeing Persecution: Acts 17-18

The Christian Life (1:2-4)

- Rest in Jesus, as your Righteousness, for pardon and perfection.
- Hope in God, as your Supreme Good, for help and happiness.
- Pursue love, in dependence on the Spirit, by trusting and obeying God's Word.

The Basics of the Christian Life (5 Chapters of 1 Thessalonians)

1. The Nature of True Conversion
2. The Nature of True Gospel Ministry
3. The Testing of Our Faith
- 4. The Temptation of Life in a Fallen World**
5. The Day of the Lord

What do we need to know to be happy and holy in a hostile world? What do we need to know (and apply) when we are under persecution?

- That God is for us, not against us (because we are truly converted).
- That those who lead us to trust Christ are reliable witnesses (true gospel ministry).
- That we will have our faith tested and this is to be expected (testing of our faith).
- That we will be tempted to find an easier, more pleasurable lifestyle and escape (temptation in a fallen world).
- That one day evil and suffering will be judged and banished and we will be rewarded for our faithfulness (the Day of the Lord).

The Temptation to Complacency

Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort (encourage) you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us *instruction* as to how you ought (it is necessary, you are bound) to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), **that you excel still more (be more rich, abound).**

² For you know what commandments (military order, instruction) we gave you by *the authority* of the Lord Jesus. (1-2)

Finally, then, brothers, we **ask and urge** you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you **do so more and more**.² For you know what **instructions** we gave you through the Lord Jesus. (ESV)

- Oughtness: to live to please God (2 Corinthians 5:9)
- Temptation: to be content with your present level of obedience/disobedience. (John 15:2)
- Measure: the commandments of Scripture (vs the commandments of men).
- Walk and please = living to please
- Request and exhort = urgent appeal

The sum is this, that they should be more especially careful to make progress in the doctrine which they had received, and this Paul places in contrast with frivolous and vain pursuits, in which we see that a good part of the world very generally busy themselves, so that profitable and holy meditation as to the due regulation of life scarcely obtains a place, even the most inferior. – Calvin

‘A certain amount of permanent dissatisfaction with one's talents is probably a healthy thing. Those who are totally satisfied with their work will never reach their potential. The great pianist, Paderewski, achieved tremendous popularity in America. Yet, said Paderewski, "There have been a few moments when I have known complete satisfaction, but only a few. I have rarely been free from the disturbing realization that my playing might have been better." The world considered Paderewski's playing near perfection, but he remained unsatisfied and kept constantly at the job of improving his talent. - *Bits & Pieces*, November, 1989, p. 16.

There is good complacency – resting in Jesus and His love for us. (versus trying to earn some kind of acceptance or perfection)

And bad complacency – being content with where we are, knowing that involves sin and a failure to love as God loves. (ie, contentment with not being like Christ as much as we could)

¹² Not that I have already obtained *it* or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³ Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet; but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. – Philippians 3:12-14

Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. – 2 Corinthians 5:9

The Temptation to Sexual Immorality

³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is, that you abstain (far from) from sexual immorality (porneia; fornication)*; ⁴ that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, ⁵ not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ *and* that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is *the* avenger (punisher; David and Bathsheba?) in all these things, just as we also told you before and

solemnly warned *you*. ⁷ For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity (uncleanness), but in sanctification. ⁸ So, he who rejects *this* is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you. (3-8)

³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to **control his own body** in holiness and honor, ⁵ not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. ⁷ For God has not called us for impurity, **but in holiness**. ⁸ Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. (ESV)

- Commandments: the revelation of God's will.
- God's will: that we be sanctified (more pleasing to God).
- A Primary Issue: sexual purity.
- His Own Vessel: body or wife or other?
- Problem: just following your desires wherever they lead you.
- Defrauding a Brother: committing adultery?
- The Lord is the Avenger: for unbelievers? For believers? For all men? (Hebrews 13:4)
- The Spirit: Convicter and Enabler of Holiness
- 'Porneia' = originally associated with harlots and prostitution; broad enough to include any sexual activity outside of marriage
- 'vessel' = can be a 'container' or 'utensil' or figuratively, the 'body' (container of the soul or Spirit) [see 1 Samuel 21:4-5] or 'reproductive organ' or a 'woman'
- 'possess' = to acquire, get, procure for oneself [see Ruth 4:10]
- 'will of God' = presentation of our lives to God and for God (Romans 12:1-2)
- And if we present our lives to God one of the major ways in which our lives will change is in the area of sexual activity (Romans 1:18ff).
- Sexual sin (and homosexuality in particular) is not worse than other sins but it is a 'red flag' in regard to who or what we are worshiping and whether or not our lives are being lived as 'present to God'
- Idolatry in the OT is pictured as 'harlotry' and is associated with sexual immorality (see the pagan religions like Aphrodite)
- There is a way to live that shows that you know God and a way to live that shows that you don't!
- To reject God's Word is to reject God. And to reject God's Word about sexual matters is to reject God!
- My purpose in life should shape my practice.

When he says that 'this is the will of God,' he means that we have been called by God with this design: 'For this end you are Christians – this the gospel aims at – that you may sanctify yourselves to God.' The meaning of the term 'sanctification' ... that renouncing the world and clearing ourselves from the pollutions of the flesh, we offer ourselves to God as if in sacrifice, for nothing can with propriety be offered to Him, but what is pure and holy. – Calvin

As, however, he addresses husbands and wives indiscriminately, there can be no doubt that he employs the term 'vessel' to mean 'body.' – Calvin

He sets us apart to Himself as His peculiar possession. – Calvin

'Fornication' by which we are to understand all uncleanness whatsoever. – Matthew Henry

The body is here called the vessel of the soul, which dwells therein and it must be kept pure from defiling lusts. – Henry

The sin of uncleanness, especially adultery, is a great piece of injustice that God will be the avenger of. – Henry

The contempt therefore of God's law and gospel is the contempt of God himself. – Henry

'British statesman Edmund Burke argued, "men are qualified for civil liberty in exact proportion to their disposition to put moral chains on their own appetites. Society cannot exist unless a controlling power upon will and appetite be placed somewhere, and the less of it there is within, the more there is without. It is ordained in the eternal constitution of things that men of intemperate minds cannot be free. Their passions forge their fetters." - *Imprimis*, Vol. 20, No. 9.

But as he was discussing righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix became frightened and said, "Go away for the present, and when I find time I will summon you." – Acts 24:25

Stop depriving one another, except by agreement for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer, and come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control. – 1 Corinthians 7:5

But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn *with passion*. – 1 Corinthians 7:9

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,

²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. – Galatians 5:22-23

The Temptation to Irresponsible Living

⁹ Now as to the love of the brethren (phildelphias), you have no need for *anyone* to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; ¹⁰ for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more (be more rich, abound), ¹¹ and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life (to be still, be silent; 'study to be quiet') and attend to your own business (to perform one's own) and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, ¹² so **that you will behave properly (walk properly, decently, becomingly) toward outsiders (those without, outside) and not be in any need (to have a need for no one).** (9-12)

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, ¹⁰ 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**, ¹¹ and to **aspire to live quietly**, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we **instructed** you, ¹² so that you may **walk properly** before outsiders and **be dependent on no one**. (ESV)

- Love: the divine lesson
- No Complacency: Love more!
- Love: live quietly (peaceable; ‘having been seated’; tranquility arising from within; 1 Timothy 2:2; 1 Peter 3:4)
- Love: attend to your own business
- Love: work with your hands
- Love: behave properly toward outsiders
- Love: not be in any need

He enjoins that each one strive to conquer himself. – Calvin

There can be no doubt that he includes every useful employment of human life. – Calvin

Whoever does that which is good is taught of God to do it. All who are savingly taught of God are taught this lesson, to love one another. – Henry

They must be exhorted to pray for more and labour for more. There are none on this side of heaven who love in perfection. – Henry

It is the most desirable thing to have a calm and quiet behavior. Satan is very busy to disquiet us; and we have that in our own hearts that disposes us to be disquiet; therefore let us study to be quiet. – Henry

Those who are busy-bodies, meddling with other men’s matters, generally have but little quiet in their own minds and cause great disturbances among their neighbors; at least they seldom mind the exhortation to be diligent in their own calling. – Henry

‘A scene that occurred on a New York city street: Kitty Genovese was slowly and brutally stabbed to death. At least thirty-eight of her neighbors witnessed the attack and heard her screams. In the course of the 90-minute episode, her attacker was actually frightened away, then he returned to finish her off. Yet not once during that period did any neighbor assist her, or even telephone the police. The implications of this tragic event shocked America, and it stimulated two young psychologists, Darly and Latane, to study the conditions under which people are or are not willing to help others in an emergency. In essence, they concluded that responsibility is diffused. The more people present in an emergency situation, the less likely it is that any one of them will offer help. This is popularly called the "bystander effect." (In the actual experiment, when one bystander was present, 85 percent offered help. When two were present, 62 percent offered help. When five were present, then it decreased to 31 percent.) - Lawrence S.

Wrightsmen, Social Psychology in the Seventies (Monterey, Calif.: Brooks/Coal Publishing

Company, 1972), pp. 33-34. quoted in Courage - You Can Stand Strong in the Face of Fear, Jon Johnston, 1990, SP Publications, p. 37.

We might be surprised at what moves us toward irresponsibility and lack of love!

¹⁰ For even when we were with you, we used to give you this order: if anyone is not willing to work, then he is not to eat, either. ¹¹ For we hear that some among you are leading an undisciplined life, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. ¹² Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to work in quiet fashion and eat their own bread. – 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12

¹¹ For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, ¹² instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, ¹³ looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, ¹⁴ who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. – Titus 2:11-14

The Temptation to Fear Death

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so **that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope.** ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout (a shouted command), with the voice of *the* archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain (left behind) will be caught up (seize) together (at the same time) with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words. (13-18)

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, **brothers**, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a **cry of command**, with the voice of an archangel, and with **the sound of the trumpet of God**. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore **encourage** one another with these words. (ESV)

- Death: sleep for the believer (temporary bodily rest)
- Grieving: a right way and a wrong way
- Return of Christ: with the dead saints
- Return of Christ: meeting in the air to return to the earth.
- Comfort in Death: death is not final
- ‘caught up’ = snatch or seize; take suddenly and vehemently; grasp something eagerly; see Acts 8:39; 2 Corinthians 12:2, 4

- Ignorance of the truth feeds wrong emotions and response

He does not, however, forbid us altogether to mourn, but requires moderation in our mourning ... the knowledge of a resurrection is the means of moderating grief. – Calvin

To those who have been once gathered to Christ he promises eternal life with him, by which statements the reveries of Origen and of the Chiliasts are abundantly refuted. ... to assign to Christ a thousand years, so that he would afterwards cease to reign, were too horrible to be made mention of. – Calvin

His design is to dissuade them from excessive grief. All grief for the death of friends is far from being unlawful; we may weep for our own loss, though it may be their gain. Yet we must not be immoderate in our sorrows. – Henry

They sleep in Jesus. They have retired out of this troublesome world, to rest from all their labors and sorrows ... They are not lost, nor are they losers, but great gainers by death and their removal out of this world is into a better. ... They shall be raised up from the dead and awakened out of their sleep. – Henry

The principle happiness of heaven is this, to be with the Lord, to see him, live with him, and enjoy him, forever. This should comfort the saints upon the death of their friends. We and they with all the saints shall meet our Lord and be with him forever, no more to be separated either from him or from one another forever. – Henry

‘Mark Twain, became morose and weary of life. Shortly before his death, he wrote, "A myriad of men are born; they labor and sweat and struggle;...they squabble and scold and fight; they scramble for little mean advantages over each other; age creeps upon them; infirmities follow; ...those they love are taken from them, and the joy of life is turned to aching grief. It (the release) comes at last--the only unpoisoned gift earth ever had for them--and they vanish from a world where they were of no consequence,...a world which will lament them a day and forget them forever." - Mark Twain

‘On his deathbed, Charles Simeon smiled brightly and asked the people gathered in his room, "What do you think especially gives me comfort at this time?" When they all remained silent, he exclaimed, "The creation! I ask myself, 'Did Jehovah create the world or did I?' He did! Now if He made the world and all the rolling spheres of the universe, He certainly can take care of me. Into Jesus' hands I can safely commit my spirit!"

‘Hudson Taylor, founder of China Inland Mission, in the closing months of his life said to a friend, "I am so weak. I can't read my Bible. I can't even pray. I can only lie still in God's arms like a little child and trust."

Our Daily Bread, January 1, 1994.

How we think about and approach death is a matter of knowledge and faith.

⁶ Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord— ⁷ for we walk by faith, not by sight— ⁸ we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. – 2
Corinthians 5:6-8

²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² But if *I am* to live *on* in the flesh, this *will mean* fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. ²³ But I am hard-pressed from both *directions*, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for *that* is very much better; ²⁴ yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that your proud confidence in me may abound in Christ Jesus through my coming to you again. – Philippians 1:21-26