

1st Thessalonians

"How to Please Your Father"

(1st Thessalonians 4:1-12)

Some Context: The Christian life can be compared to a walk. From our perspective, the Christian walk starts with a step of faith and continues. When walking one is always making progress toward the intended destination. And of course, as Christians, our destination is to be with the Lord. The New Testament routinely pictures our walk in Christ and Paul has already charged the Thessalonians to walk in a manner worthy of God (1st Thess 2:12). He has just indicated that because they were relatively new in the faith, there were some things in which they needed to mature (1st Thess 3:10). Paul will now shift to a more detailed discussion of how the Christian should walk through life. In the first portion of chapter 4 of 1st Thessalonians, Paul described three ways in which the Christian ought to walk: (1) Walk in Holiness (4:1-8), (2) Walk in Harmony (4:9-10), and (3) Walk in Honesty (4:11-12).

The Text: 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. ²For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. ³For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶that 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. ⁷For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. ⁸Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. ⁹Now 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, ¹⁰for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, ¹¹and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, ¹²so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one. (ESV)

The Purposes of writing 1st Thessalonians: We have already seen that Paul had at least four purposes for writing 1st Thessalonians:

1. Paul commended the Thessalonians for their exemplary living under persecution.
2. Paul defended his conduct in Thessalonica against criticism that had developed in his absence.
3. Paul explained his absence from them.
4. Paul explained why he sent Timothy to them.

Now we will see two additional purposes emerge. In this section Paul gave instructions on sexual purity and he admonished them on the proper manifestations of brotherly love.

Walk in Holiness - Sexual Purity (4:1-8): The Roman culture of the day was immoral. Sexual abnormalities were the norm. Much of the necessary work was accomplished using slaves, consequently there was an abundance of leisure time which led to over-indulgence in the fulfillment of the lusts of the flesh. Paul gave four reasons why the believer needed to shun Roman life. First of all, we must **seek to please God**. Paul had commended the Thessalonians for being imitators of him (1st Thess 1:6). How did Paul live? – “Not to please man, but God” (1st Thess 2:4). Pleasing God should be a major motivation in the Christian life. Remember, it is possible to obey God and yet not please him (think of Jonah). Secondly, we need to **obey God**. When Paul was with them, he had given them instruction. Now he was reminding them, specifically about sexual purity. Biblical teaching is that God created sex to serve his purposes which are for continuation of the race and for the enjoyment of the marriage relationship. Biblical teaching also indicates that the marriage relationship is between one man and one woman for the life of each. God’s word tells us that the marriage relationship as he has defined it must be honored (Hebrews 13:4). God’s purpose in establishing this boundary is not for the purpose of robbing joy from his people but for protecting them from losing their joy. Throughout the Bible, God warns against sexual sin, and this must be heeded. Furthermore, we are **to glorify God**. Christians are supposed to be different from the world. We are the “Ecclesia,” the “called out” ones. We have been called out of the ways of the world. Self-control is the final fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:25). Walking in this distinction and exercising self-control will enable us to glorify God. Finally, we must shun the Roman life **to escape the judgment of God**. Paul taught that no one is to wrong his brother in any way associated with sexual sin. God must deal with sin of his people when they sin (Think of King David). While loss of salvation is not on the table, loss of reward both now and the hereafter certainly are. God will never allow his people to sin successfully.

Walk in Harmony – Brotherly Love (4:9-10): Though sexual immorality is a thing to be avoided, brotherly love is a thing to be cultivated and enhanced. Both a holy life and brotherly love naturally characterize the believer. Paul acknowledges that the Thessalonians do not need to be taught to love one another because God has taught them himself. His encouragement is for them to be aware of this and to demonstrate this more and more.

Walk in Honesty – Earn Your Own Living (4:11-12): “Aspire” means to wholeheartedly pursue. There are three things that Paul tells his readers to wholeheartedly pursue: (1) live quietly, (2) mind your own business and (3) work with your hands. Paul may have heard from Timothy that some in the church believed that Jesus would return soon and had given up working for a living in an attempt to prepare for this. Paul later addressed this in his second letter so perhaps they were getting bogged down in this area. Paul indicated that there are two reasons to earn their own living: (1) that they would win the respect of others (walk properly) and (2) that they may be independent. We are NOT to seek the world’s approval but at the same time we are NOT to discredit the one that we represent before the world.

Calvary Bible Church and the Thessalonian Letters: The Constitution of CBC refers to 1st Thess 4:1-8 in support of its Statement of Doctrinal Beliefs as recorded in Article III.P. Regarding “Human Sexuality” the statement reads: “*We believe that God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and a woman. We believe that any form of homosexuality, lesbianism, bisexuality, bestiality, incest, fornication, adultery and pornography are sinful perversions of God's gift of sex.*” As you can see, we believe what Paul believed. Paul’s authoritative words on the subject came “by the Lord Jesus Christ.” He logically demonstrated that sexual purity was part of the will of God for a sanctified life, that this purity protects the holiness and honor of the involved parties, and that purity or virginity was contrary to the philosophy of the world. He argued that abuse of sexual purity defrauded the other person, that it would bring the judgment of God, and that such a sin was ultimately against God who placed his Spirit within the believer’s body. If we were to think any other way about this, we would be working against the God that we want to serve.

Next Week: “The Comfort of His Coming (1st Thessalonians 4:13-18)”