



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for June 27, 2010  
Released on Wednesday, June 23, 2010**

**“Demonstrated in Action”**

**Lesson Text:** 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

**Background Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

**Devotional Reading:** Hebrews 11:1-6

**1 Thessalonians 4:1-12**

**1** Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

**2** For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.

**3** For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:

**4** That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor;

**5** Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:

**6** That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.

**7** For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.

**8** He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit.

**9** But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

**10** And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more;

**11** And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you;

**12** That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.

**TODAY'S AIM**

**Facts:** to study Paul's teaching on how to please God and deal fairly with one's fellow men.

**Principle:** to be aware that God expects believers to live lives of holiness (1 Thessalonians 3:13; 4:7).

**Application:** to challenge Christians to be sanctified by separation from sin and unto righteousness.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Authentic Christian commitment by its nature is active. Christian commitment cannot survive in a state of slumber or hibernation. It can be actively demonstrated by us in today's world in several ways. In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul described ways that we can achieve this.

He began by encouraging us to actively obey God's instructions so that we may please Him. The driving motive of our lives should be to please the Lord.

Paul further reminded us that God's will is that we be separated to holiness and moral purity. We face the same challenges from culture that believers did in Paul's day. Thankfully, we have clear instructions from Paul on the issues of moral purity. These are as essential for us today as they were for Christians then. Paul engaged his culture with precepts of morality that were opposed to the values of the time.

Authentic Christian commitment is also demonstrated in love. There are practical ways in which our love may abound toward each other day by day. These also make our commitment to Christ attractive to unbelievers.

## **LESSON BACKGROUND**

The readers of Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians lived in an environment in which religion was seldom seen as altering a person's way of life. In Greek religions the worshiper seldom was expected to obey the god in any way. The Greek gods simply were not interested in that kind of thing.

While many pagan religions of the day simply called on worshipers to observe certain rituals, others offered something more. Some invited worshipers to engage in promiscuous sexual activity as part of the cults' observance. Such practices were almost taken for granted by many citizens.

As Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians, he responded to the challenges of this pleasure seeking environment. The God whom he preached was much more than a pagan deity who accepted gifts and doled out favors. The Thessalonian Christians needed to be conscious of this difference, remembering that God had made them and saved them for a purpose. That purpose extended to every part of their lives.

## **PLEASING GOD (1 Thessalonians 4:1,2)**

### **1. In what way does Paul continue to encourage the Thessalonian believers to please God (1 Thessalonians 4:1)?**

The word "Furthermore" introduces a continuation of Paul's previous exhortation to increase and abound in love and his expression of his desire that the Thessalonians would be established unblameable in holiness (3:11-13). There was still progress to be made (v. 10). Paul had further instructions to give regarding their daily life and conduct. They needed to go on to the next stage of spiritual maturity.

Paul urged the Thessalonians by the authority of Jesus Christ to keep on doing what he had instructed them to do (4:1). Paul has already passed on this Christian traditional information to the Thessalonians by word of mouth in his preaching. Now, he gives it to them in writing. The topic is very clearly labeled, "how ye ought to walk," and means precisely, "how you must live and please God." These two verbs are in the present tense in Greek, implying that Christianity is a way of life which characterizes all our activities and not just a few of the things we do. Paul often uses *walk* as a way of talking about the whole of life, all of one's behavior moment to moment.

The Thessalonians have made an excellent start in this God-pleasing walk. But by its nature, this new kind of life always offers the prospect of growth.

Paul referred to this next level of spiritual maturity as abounding "more and more." The Thessalonian Christians needed to overflow in their love and in the other dimensions of the Christian life, which Paul explained in the verses that follow.

**2. The Christian life "always offers the prospect of growth." If you were put in charge of growth development at your church, what would you do to promote spiritual growth among the members?**

Surely there are programs already in place that promote spiritual growth. (The class that is studying this lesson is one example!) These should be encouraged. But there are other ways to promote growth besides Bible study. Someone might suggest a kind of apprentice program to train people for various ministries in the church. A regular retreat for ministry leaders is another idea. Some have found that getting involved in short-term missions promotes spiritual growth.

**MORAL PURITY (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8)**

**3. What is the meaning of the word "sanctification" (v. 3)?**

Paul was addressing pagan cultural values that the Thessalonians once had espoused but that now had to be replaced with God's high moral values.

Paul summarizes God's will for the Christian's life in a single word: sanctification. Sanctification is the state of being set apart from common usage for something distinctly sacred, belonging entirely to God. Paul stresses this point at the beginning of his discussion of sexual behavior to make a very clear point: the way a person behaves sexually is not a "private" matter but affects the person's relationship to God. In the ancient world as much as the modern world, people insisted that their sex lives were no one's business but their own. By contrast, Paul asserts that our sex lives are very much the business of God (v. 3).

Specifically Paul says that sanctification means abstaining from *fornication*. In this context the term refers to all sexual activity outside the context of marriage. From the biblical perspective, God created human sexuality to be expressed in the context of faithful marriage between one man and one woman (Genesis 2:23,24). Sex was part of what God pronounced "very good" on the sixth day of creation (Genesis 1:28, 31), but it remains such only when it is exercised in the context for which God created it. Those who understand God's purpose in creation and want to honor God and His purpose, will understand why the Bible forbids sexual activity outside marriage.

**4. How can a husband live in a holy and honorable way with his wife (v. 4)?**

A Christian whom God blesses with a spouse is under a holy obligation to live in a sexually wholesome manner with him or her.

The word "vessel" in 1 Thessalonians 4:4 is taken by many to be a figurative reference to a man's wife (cf. 1 Pet. 3:7). Others understand it as speaking of the believer's own body. That would underscore the fact that Paul's admonition of self-control and marriage applies equally to husbands and wives (1 Cor. 7:2).

Sexual purity demands that a husband live with his wife in a holy and honorable way. This elevates marriage to the level of holiness that God requires. It provides the wife with the honor and respect due her. There are no double standards, for God's directives on self-control and the sanctity of marriage apply to the unsaved as well as to the saved (1 Cor. 7:9-13; Heb. 13:4).

**5. What does Scripture say is one thing that keeps unbelievers from knowing God (v. 5)?**

The sanctified exercise of legitimate, God-given sexual drives is in stark contrast to the illicit sexual perversions characteristic of the unbelieving world (Rom. 1:26; Eph. 4:17-20).

Here Paul draws a sharp contrast with the understanding of sexuality that many of the Thessalonian Christians would have had before they came to faith. *Lust of concupiscence* is a dramatic phrase. Both the words *lust* and *concupiscence* refer to powerful desire and urges. So the phrase taken together means something like "strong desire added to strong desire." Paul suggests that, apart from our relationship with God, we have nothing other than our desires to act on, and so we will be controlled by them. If we know God, we can submit our sexuality to His will.

This statement implies that the person who refuses to discipline his or her sexual behavior to the will of God is acting like someone who does not *know* God, a pagan. The desire for sex is perhaps the strongest urge that a human being experiences, but for those who know God, it is something that can be brought into submission to Him.

However, as Christians, we are to act as salt and light in our culture (Matthew 5:13,14), prophetically calling people to repentance and holiness. Our primary goal must always be to bring people into a saving relationship with God that will progressively change their lives from the inside out. Just as Paul was doing here.

#### **6. What did Paul mean by defrauding a brother (vs. 6,7)?**

Paul insists that our sexual behavior is of vital importance for our relationship to God. But here he also asserts that it is important for our relationship with other people.

"That no, man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter." Several words need explanation here. First, "go beyond" means quite literally "to overstep" or "break laws." In this context it obviously means to break this moral law, Secondly, if he does break this moral law, a man will, by , that very fact, defraud his brother. This word denotes "taking advantage of," "robbing," or "cheating some, one" through greed. A comment is also needed on the phrase "in any matter." It is not just any matter that is in view, but specifically this matter which has just been mentioned, that is unethical sexual activity. The sense of the passage is then that when a man does not live with his own wife as he should, but instead commits adultery with someone else's, he must know that he has violated, or "robbed" his brother by so, and that he deserves the vengeance of God. Even though the brother, who has thus been outwitted and defrauded, may never discover the wrong that was done against him, there is, nevertheless, an Avenger- God.

An avenger is one who maintains the rights of others by dealing with exploiters. Those who engage in illicit sexual behavior can only expect God's judgment. Believers will give an accounting of their deeds at the future judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10; 2 Cor. 5:10). Paul was stern about these matters. He solemnly predicted and affirmed the grave consequences of sexual immorality when he visited Thessalonica.

The second reason Paul gives why sexual immorality must be avoided is that it runs counter to God's call (v. 7 of our lesson). His call is purposeful. God has not called us to "uncleanness," meaning sexual impurity. Such uncleanness should never be found in a believer (Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5). God has called us to live holy lives. Holiness makes no allowance for immorality.

#### **7. What does it mean to despise God's instructions (v. 8)?**

Paul drew the logical consequence to his admonition on moral purity. The word "therefore" could be translated "for this very reason." The person who "despiseth" (disregards) God's instructions and warnings opposes God Himself. He can anticipate nothing but divine judgment.

God has provided believers with the help we need to obey His instructions. He has given us the Holy Spirit (Gal. 4:6). His enablement includes the strength to exercise self-control while living in an immoral and pagan environment (5:16). Practicing moral purity demonstrates Christian commitment in today's world. Purity in our physical relationships is also in keeping with the spiritual relationship between Christ and His bride, the church, who is made "holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27).

### **BROTHERLY LOVE (1 Thessalonians 4:9-12)**

#### **8. How are we taught to exhibit brotherly love (vs. 9,10)?**

The love that the Christians have for each other is *brotherly love*. Prior to the New Testament, this term was used almost always for the love one naturally has for family members. But Paul applies the term broadly: all Christians should love each other as brothers and sisters because in Christ we have become members of the same family.

The basis for this wide, deep love is the wide, deep love of God. Paul said that he did not need to write to the Thessalonians about brotherly love, for they had been taught by God to love each other (v. 9). God teaches us by the indwelling Holy Spirit's outpouring of God's love into our hearts (Rom. 5:5). Love for other Christians is inbred through our relationship with the Spirit of God.

God's sending His Son to die for sinners, is the supreme demonstration of love. If we believe that message, we are compelled by it to change our outlook and bring as many into the circle of our love as God brought into His circle through Jesus.

Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to overflow more and more in their love for other Christians (v. 10 of today's lesson). They had made contact with other churches in the province of Macedonia and entered into a mutual love relationship with them. Paul commended the churches of Macedonia for their love and their willingness to support other believers in desperate need (2 Cor. 8:1-5). Still, the potential existed for them to increase in their affection for each other.

#### **9. Paul said the Thessalonian church's love for others was known throughout Macedonia. How can a church today become known for its love?**

If we set out to be known for our love, we will probably fail. We need to make loving others a priority whether anyone notices or not. But if we achieve our goal, we'll probably get a reputation for it as well. Do we help our members when they are in need? Do we invest in people for their own sake and not just for what they can do for us? Are we quick to overlook a slight or insult, and quick to praise another for a job well done? These are the marks of love; let's do them "more and more."

#### **10. What twofold result comes from exhibiting brotherly love (vs. 11,12)?**

"And that ye study." This word does not refer to study in the sense of opening books or reading; it means "to desire," or "to determine." A possibly clearer translation would be, "aspire to live quietly and take care of your own affairs while you work with your hands as we instructed you."

There is dignity to work, for work is a blessing from God (cf. Gen. 2:15). A believer should be if at all possible self-supporting and independent and therefore not a burden to other believers. Paul set an example by working with his own hands (1 Thess. 2:9). There is no place for idleness when one could be working. A person actively engaged in his own daily occupation will not have time to be a busy-body.

The fulfillment of these goals produces a twofold result. First, there is a positive testimony before unbelievers. To do these things is to walk honestly, that is, to behave in a becoming or decent manner. It wins the respect of those on the outside, referring to the unsaved (Col. 4:5; 1 Tim. 3:7); for they observe that Christians are not taking advantage of each other.

Second, Christians who work with their hands will not be dependent upon others. This admonition was probably directed at those who were living irresponsibly on the charity of those who were more industrious.

Paul reminds these people to renew their commitment to work and so to take care of their own needs. Love compels Christians to be generous with each other, but it also compels that they never take advantage of such generosity when they have the means and opportunity to support themselves (2 Thessalonians 3:6-12).

### **PRACTICAL POINTS**

- 1.** It is never enough to know the truth; we must practice it and grow in it (1 Thessalonians 4:1,2).
- 2.** Holiness is God's will for us, and He provides the power to grow in it (vs. 3-5).
- 3.** Recalling God's character and calling will help us maintain purity of life (vs. 6,7).
- 4.** To take biblical commands lightly is to despise the God who gave them (v. 8).
- 5.** There is always opportunity for our love to increase in extent and intensity (vs. 9,10).
- 6.** Diligence in our daily work and duties is a powerful witness to the world (vs. 11,12).

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **Our Divine Purpose**

As Paul reminds the Thessalonians about Christian behavior, we see that no part of their lives has been excluded. Whether it is the very private matter of sexuality or the very public matter of community life and work, new life in Christ transforms it. Whether it is those closest to us or those farthest away, the love of Christ compels love for all. God has made His will and purpose clear in all these matters. Those who are captivated by God's grace and love will want to do nothing so much as to please Him by fulfilling His will and purpose in all areas of their lives.

When we become Christians, what part of our lives is left just to us? None! And that is a very good thing for us. By pleasing God, fulfilling His purpose in every area, we discover the purpose for which we were made: to be His entirely.

### **PRAYER**

Father in Heaven, we surrender our lives to You again. Forgive us for holding back parts of ourselves as if they belonged to us. Make every part of us Your sacred, holy territory. In Jesus' name, amen!

### **THOUGHT TO REMEMBER**

"It was character that got us out of bed, commitment that moved us into action, and discipline that enabled us to follow through."—Zig Ziglar

### **LESSON SUMMARIZED BY**

Willie Ferrell

Jesus Is All Ministries

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