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# IN THE WAITING

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## Living it Out

N.T Wright says, "If we needed any reminding that human nature hasn't changed much in the last 2,000 years, the subject-matter of this chapter should provide it. When Paul wants to talk about the practical things facing the young church, the first three that come to mind are: sex, money and death. You can't get much more basic than that".

The way Paul teaches about these things is clear and foundational, and all depends once again on three things:

- the commands of the Lord
- the presence of God, and
- the power of the Spirit.

### A Life that Pleases God - 1 Thessalonians 4-12 NIV

God longs for us to become the sort of followers who will truly reflect His image. When He sees this happen, He is delighted. God wants us to be holy as He is holy. Holiness is the shining reflection that appears in us when we learn in practice what it means to be in God's image.

We are made holy by the forgiveness of our sins through Jesus' death and resurrection. God's Spirit now dwells in us, so we need to live in a way fitting that the Holy One is in residence (1 Corinthians 3.17; 6.19).

### Body – Sexual Purity - 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

Sexuality is a good gift of the wise creator, but like all good gifts is given for a purpose. The issue is we live in a world (just like the Thessalonians), where a driving force in the expression of sexuality is selfishness and self-gratification.

A sexual life that exemplifies holiness and reflects the character of God looks like this.

1. No sexual immorality (fornication). This includes all kinds of sexual practice out side marriage itself, and in Paul's world could refer particularly, though not exclusively, to the sacred prostitution at pagan temples.
2. Show self-control – don't be full of lust.
3. No cheating on each other – be faithful to your spouse.
4. Remember that these instructions are not only from God Himself but will be backed up by the judgment of the Lord. God takes this stuff seriously!

Easy to say, hard to do (Matthew 5:28). But the key to it all is the knowledge of God (1 Thessalonians 4:5): the God in whose image humans were made (Genesis 1.27), and who longs to see that image reflected in the holiness that the Spirit is now at work to produce (1 Thessalonians 4:8; Romans 7:24-25; 8:1-2). When we seek to please ourselves, instead of God, we're rejecting the transforming work of the Spirit in us.

Are you living out your sexuality in a way that is pleasing God? Well, if not, the amazing news is, that: not only can run to God for forgiveness, not only can you ask for help from someone you trust, but you can also ask God for help in the power of His Spirit. Whatever you do, don't just ignore it, don't just leave it to the side, because it's simply far too serious for that.

## **Heart – Love for One Another - 1 Thessalonians 4:9-10**

The steadfast and selfless love of the Thessalonians, that had been expressed in real and practical ways, had become famous in a very short amount of time. It's obvious that their clear understanding of God's sacrificial love, had caused them to respond in pouring out their lives to their brothers and sisters.

Paul is saying loving one another is a major part in growing in holiness, and the way that you love one another, is a measure of God at work in you. It reflects us fulfilling part of Jesus' commands to love our neighbour and loving one another as He has loved us.

## Hands – Quiet Work – 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

The point of the context of this paragraph is that money can express love, and that if the love is genuine, it will find an outlet in financial generosity.

This family love is expected to be lived out in practical support within the Christian community, and as far as this may be possible, in the world outside. God's own expression of His love resulted in His total self-giving in the person and death of His son. Christian expression of the same love must have the same self-giving quality, and money is an inescapable part of that.

However you spend your days, go about it without a big song and dance, but with the primary focus, of serving the Lord, as to point people back to God. Thinking of others, but not judging others.

**THERE'S TWO REASONS PAUL WANTS THIS TO BE KNOWN.**

1. This is a witness to people in the community. Financial behaviour, like sexual behaviour, is one telling indicator of the health and integrity of a movement.
2. Within the fellowship, those in need should be provided for. This was why the place of widows, so quickly became important in the early church (Acts 6.1; 1 Timothy 5.3-16).

These are not side issues, away from the real theological heart of the Christian gospel. If God has created a new family in Christ, and if that family is based on and characterized by nothing less than self-giving love, these things are vital.

Sometimes we can think that our daily lives don't do much for God, but Paul is saying don't underestimate where God has you. Seeking to please God every day, by living according to God's standards, is a powerful and distinctive witness to the world, not only that Jesus is the Lord of our lives, but that Jesus is the Lord of all.

Paul wants the Thessalonians to grow, not because he's never satisfied, but because the standard is Jesus. We are also encouraged to grow and to do it:

- With an incredible freedom: not to earn God's love but in response to God's love.
- We do that with an incredible power: with the indwelling presence of Holy Spirit in us.
- We do that with an incredible future: knowing that this work will be made complete when Jesus returns.

AND IT BEGINS WITH ONE SIMPLE QUESTION: HOW CAN I SEEK TO PLEASE THE LORD TODAY?

## **Discussion Questions**

1. What is so counter-cultural about living to please God instead of ourselves or other people?
2. Why was Paul so concerned about the Thessalonians' avoiding sexual immorality? Are there any similarities between their highly sexualised culture and ours?
3. What would it look like for us to be famous for the way in which we love one another?
4. Work and sex are topics (along with money) that we tend to keep out of friendships (unless it's whingeing about work!). How can we be more accountable to one another in these areas of our lives? What are the particular temptations that we're likely to face? How do we live a holy life in these arenas?
5. What is one aspect of your life (especially considering the topics covered this week) that you can orientate more to please God?
6. How can you rely more on the Holy Spirit to bring you into a holy life?