

I Thessalonians

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1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Vss. 1-8

- As much as Paul was thrilled to hear of how the Thessalonian church had thrived in his absence, even under intense persecution, he said in 3:10 that he longed to see them so he could “complete what is lacking in their faith.” Remember that Paul’s time with them was interrupted so he was not able to complete their training. Had he been saying this to the Ephesians he might have said that he needed to finish equipping them for battle.
- At the heart of the issue was the question of what it truly means to BE Christian, to live the Christian life day to day. In vs. 1 he commends them for how well they have done but urges them to excel even more. Paul then begins to address the question of what it means to BE Christian where they live, right there in Thessalonica. First, abstain from sexual immorality. The Thessalonians were living in the middle of a culture where anything goes. This was especially true of the men! The wealthier, more powerful women could perhaps act with the freedom of the men, but in general if a married man had sex with the prostitutes at a different temple every night of the week no would bat an eye. This is what John means in 1 John 3:10 when he says “By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious...”, for both John and Paul are saying that the life of the Christian and the life of the pagan should be obviously different. We are to live our lives “in sanctification and honor”, that is, being the process of maturing as a disciple and honoring God in all we do and say and not live in the throes of “lustful passion, like the Gentiles, who do not know God.”
- In vs. 6 Paul goes back to the last commandment of Jesus, that we are to love one another as He loves us. Like John, Paul here is putting great emphasis on the value of love for one’s brother. We are not to live like the pagans, so we are not to transgress or defraud one another as the pagans do. If we love our brother we do not seek to hurt them, steal from them, or cheat them.
- Vs. 7: “For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.” Mike Warnke, a Christian evangelist on the 1970’s and ‘80’s, made the comment that “Christianity isn’t just about not doing the DON’T’S, its about doing the DO’S! And if you spent all your time doing the DO’S, then you would have time to do the DONT’S! And you wouldn’t so you don’t!” Paul says in Ephesians 2:10: “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.” Jesus said in the Sermon of the Mount that we are to “be perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect” (Matt. 5:48). This is what sanctification is: doing the

good works for which we were saved, for which we were created in Christ Jesus, by in so doing we become more like our Father in Heaven a little more day by day.

- When in vs. 8 Paul says, “so he who rejects *THIS* is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you”, he’s really saying three things. First, by *THIS* he means The Way, the lifestyle of Jesus Christ by which the Christian disciple is called to live. Second, this Way is not Paul idea, not some man-made philosophy of life. This is God’s plan for His people. He says in vs. 2 that the commands he gave were by the authority of the Lord Jesus. The declaration that Paul is just the messenger of the Truth, sent by Christ and with His authority, is a thread that runs through the letter, as is responding to some criticism suggesting that what Paul spoke was just his own philosophy. So to reject The Way, is to reject the God who gave it. Third, God gives the Holy Spirit to us to empower us to live the life He has called us to live. On our own we can do nothing, but we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. By itself the Christian life makes no sense and seems impossible to live, but with the power of the Holy Spirit The Way makes perfect sense and becomes easier and easier to live the closer we are drawn the Christ.

Vss. 9-12

- Paul begins with a praise here but ends with a warning. He praises them on how they are so effectively following Christ’s command to love one another. And not only are they showing Christ’s love to their own church but to all the Christians throughout Macedonia. Even still, Paul wants them to press on and love on an even deeper level.
- His admonition to keep working with their hands may seem odd to us, but Paul lived in an eschatological state of emergency, believing every morning that today may well be the day of Christ’s return. He may have oversold that to the Thessalonians or it may be the lesson that was interrupted when he had to quickly leave town. It seems they were on the verge of quitting their jobs to wait for the immanent return of Christ. No No, Paul is saying. Make it your ambition to live a quiet life and keep at your work. Let Christ return and find you working while the sun is still shining, just as Paul commanded them to do. That way they will have the means to be charitable to outsiders and show outsiders the life of Christ in their day to day work AND not be in any need. Paul never asked for charity. He provided his own living as a tent maker and he expected the people of his churches to be equally diligent, thereby setting the best example possible for all the pagan world to see!