



MORE AND MORE • Ongoing Sanctification

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

After the encouraging report brought back by Timothy (3:6-10), Paul encourages the Thessalonians to continue walking and pleasing God “more and more”. His words seem to warn against complacency, which is a persistent danger for believers. The first verse is a major transition in the letter, and contains some of the reasons Paul wrote to them: a summary and reminder of their ministry in Thessalonica (“you received from us...”) and further instruction on living out their new life in Christ (“we ask and urge you...”). Paul specifically brings up three areas in which to exhort the church: sexual purity, brotherly love and diligent living. He also touches on the subject of sanctification and the Holy Spirit, a topic that this study will look deeper into.

Sexual Purity (v. 3-8)

This study does not dig deeply into the issue of sexual purity, due to the fact that, in many cases, Bible studies on a WSN project setting are coed. The issue can be dealt with more deeply on a personal level, and it is strongly suggested that you as a leader do so, perhaps in the context of discipleship. But, as a significant part of this passage, the subject is brought up and done so in the context of why sexual purity is so important.

Paul states clearly that sexual purity is God’s will (v. 3, 7). The standards he outlines here are not just his, they’re God’s (v. 8). One reason for this is because Christians are set apart from the world and the cultures around them. Promiscuity and sex were prominent in Greek culture, and Paul is calling the church to practice self-control and purity instead (v. 4-5). A lifestyle of purity and self-control are especially important for those who are in leadership positions in the church, and who seek to minister to others. Sexual immorality damages our witness because it defiles our bodies, temples of the Holy Spirit (1Cor 6:19); it short circuits our connection with God and empowerment for ministry; and it causes us to appear no different than those we seek to reach.

Brotherly Love (v. 9-10)

Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to love one another and the brothers throughout Macedonia “more and more”. It’s not clear what he specifically means, but he’s spurring them to continue and even to make efforts to go beyond what they’ve already done, to not become complacent.

Diligent Living (v. 11-12)

The topic of idleness is also addressed in 2 Thessalonians, and appears to be in some way related to an erroneous view of Jesus second coming. The fact that

What’s the Big Idea?

Christians are called to continued sanctification, living to please God in purity, holiness, love and diligence. God has given us His Holy Spirit both to convict and aid us in this sanctification.

What’s the Problem?

Until we are home with the Lord, there will always be more room for growth in our lives. Complacency, sexual immorality and laziness are all examples of sins which often require continuous attention throughout a believer’s life.



this is the next subject Paul brings up also clues us in to this possibility. Perhaps some had stopped working with the idea that Jesus' return was just around the corner. Paul speaks against this mindset by calling them to be diligent and hardworking, not "mooching" or being dependent on others.

He also calls them to a quiet life – not one of calling attention to oneself – and to mind their own affairs and to not meddle in the affairs of others. All of these instructions are given "so that you may walk properly before outsiders". Evangelism and the testimony of a godly life are in view – our words mean little if they're not backed up by our lives.

The Spirit-filled Life

In verse 8, Paul mentions the Holy Spirit, possibly for several reasons. It would be a reminder that their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, therefore the call to sexual purity is imperative. It would remind them that to reject these instructions would be to reject the conviction and guidance of the Spirit. And it could also serve to remind them of their empowerment for living out these instructions and commands.

God's will is for our sanctification (v. 3), and in this, we have a role and God has a role. In this passage and throughout Scripture are instructions for us to follow, implying activity and initiative on our part. God provides for our sanctification through the Holy Spirit. God did not simply save us by the blood of Christ and then leave us on our own for growth in our faith. The Spirit convicts us of sin, reminds us of how God wants us to live and provides the power for us to live that way. He enables us to follow God's commands. And He marks the holiness and perfection that are already given us, spiritually, in Christ (Eph 1:4,14).

This study asks students to think of other Scripture passages that speak of the Holy Spirit's work of sanctification. Some of these are Galatians 5:16-26, Ephesians 5:18, 1 Corinthians 2:12-3:3 and Romans 8. It would be good to read these in preparation for this study.

What's Our Response?

In light of this instruction, we can examine our lives in the areas of sexual purity, brotherly love, and diligent living. The encouragement to "do this more and more" shows that our sanctification is always ongoing. We should not get complacent and think we've "arrived" – there is always room for further growth. God has made provision for our sanctification through the Holy Spirit – He seals us, convicts us and empowers us. This study culminates in a call to live the Spirit-filled life and to challenge those to whom we're ministering to do the same.

What Are the Questions?

I Thessalonians 4:1-12

LAUNCH

What have been some of your biggest struggles so far on summer project? How have you responded to them?

EXPLORE

Read I Thessalonians 4:1-12.

1. What are some observations about this chapter? What themes are present? What is the main point Paul is trying to make?
2. From what we've read in the first three chapters, as well as from the comments in verses 1, 9 and 10, it seems as though the Thessalonian church was fairly healthy, and Paul is encouraging them to live to please God "more and more". Why do you think Paul is motivated to do this?
3. What does Paul explicitly say is God's will?
4. Why is sexual purity such an important emphasis here?
5. In verses 9-10, Paul encourages the church to love one another and the brothers throughout Macedonia "more and more", even after his glowing commendation of their love and example to other believers in chapter 1. What are some ways to love others "more and more"? How can we as a summer project team love each other "more and more"? How can we love the students here "more and more"?
6. Why do you think Paul gave instruction about living quietly, minding their own affairs and working with their hands (v. 11)?
7. How is our witness harmed when we don't do these things?
8. How do verses 3-8 show the complementarity of our role and God's role in our growth?
9. Why does Paul mention the Holy Spirit in verse 8?

APPLY

10. How does the Holy Spirit sanctify us? What other passages of Scripture tell us about the role of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification?
11. How is the Holy Spirit convicting you regarding the things brought up in this passage: sexual immorality, laziness, complacency, brotherly love? How does He empower you to grow and change?
12. Paul gave these exhortations to the church he was ministering to. What are some ways that we can pass on this same exhortation to the students we're ministering to?

What Are the Answers?

1. Paul is exhorting the church to “excel still more” (v.1, NASB) in their Christian walk, specifically reminding them of sexual purity, brotherly love and diligence in daily life.
2. Discipleship is lifelong, we never reach a point where we’re needless of instruction and exhortation; call against complacency
3. Sanctification, also sexual purity.
4. Need to be set apart from culture; integrity of and empowerment for our witness.
5. Allow the group to discuss. Be specific to your team and project.
6. To provide an example of lifestyle witness and possibly to correct erroneous ways of living in light of Christ’s return.
7. Inconsistency between words and actions doesn’t show we’re set apart or real life change.
8. God’s will is for us to lead pure, holy lives, and he’s placed the Spirit in our hearts to convict us of this and empower us to achieve it, while at the same time we’re given instructions like “learn to control his own body”, implying activity and initiative on our part.
9. See “What Do I Need To Know About the Passage?”
10. The Spirit convicts us of sin, reminds us of how God wants us to live and provides the power for us to live that way. Gal 5, Rom 8, 1 Cor 2-3, Eph 5:18, etc.
11. Allow the group to discuss. Relate back to question 1, and call them to Spirit-filled living.
12. Brainstorm together. Possibilities include specific teaching, sharing the Spirit-filled life, writing a letter of exhortation to them after you’ve left, etc. Be creative and specific!

Memorize

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.

1 Thessalonians 4:1