

Gospel Standards (1 Thess 4:1-12)

We're in chapter 4 this morning. The Apostle Paul opens this section by saying, "Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more." That word 'finally' makes it seem like Paul is wrapping it up. Like those preachers who say, "I'm almost done," and then go on for another 15mins. But Paul isn't wrapping things up. He's only moving on to what needs to be said.

At first glance it might seem like Paul is starting on to a totally different topic. It could seem like he gets all practical all of a sudden. But there is a definite flow. For one, he's just prayed that the Thessalonians would increase in love for one another. And that the Lord would establish their hearts blameless in holiness. And so now he's just moving on to what holiness and brotherly love look like. The topic here is sanctification; being made holy. In chapter 3:13 we see this is the final goal for the church: holiness. Ephesians 1:4 says the same thing: "God chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world...why?...so that we should be holy and blameless before Him." God's will for your life is your sanctification.

Paul repeats the phrase a few times: "More and more." That's a good way to understand sanctification. Justification is once and for all. Sanctification is more and more. God's word to the Israelites is the same word to us today: "Speak to all the congregation of the people of Israel and say to them, You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy" (Leviticus 19:2).

Sanctification is as important as justification. Faith without repentance is a half job. Without works faith is dead. The good news leads to the good life. Gospel truth and gospel living go together. Sound doctrine is useless without a holy life.

We gotta take our cues from Scripture. How can we claim to know God if we don't seek to please Him. But won't people be scared away if we talk about holiness? Paul didn't hesitate from telling this to the new believers in Thessalonica did he. He was only there for a short time but he'd already taught them about gospel living. Notice in verse 1? **“That as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God.”** Verse 2, **“For you know what instructions we gave you.”** Verse 6, **“the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you before and solemnly warned you.”** We gotta live according to the gospel. We got to live in a way that pleases God.

In these verses Paul tells the church what that means. He does it by taking up the two most significant parts of human life: sex and work. Home life and work life. There's something in here for all of us. Something we can all do... or not do. From the privacy of our bedrooms with sex and marriage. To our daily work life. God's will for us is our sanctification. Let's look at the Christian sex and work ethic.

1. Sex Ethic (vv. 3-8)

When it comes to sexual immortality the Bible's teaching is simple: **don't do it**. Check out verse 3, **“For this is the will of God: your sanctification.”** What is that? **“Abstain from sexual immorality.”** In other words, don't do it. Why not? Because God's will is our sanctification. Holiness and sexual purity go together. You know back in Paul's day, sex outside of marriage wasn't a sin. It was a normal part of life. Sexual freedom was big in the Graeco-Roman world. And Thessalonica was famous for it. Not much has changed right? It was counter-cultural back then. It's counter-cultural now. Sex for self-pleasure was all the rage back

then. And it's all the rage today. But the Christian is called not to be a self-pleaser but a God-pleaser.

Notice we're not to abstain from sex full stop! But sexual immorality. The word used is *pornea* and it's a broad word. It covers every kind of sexual sin. Basically it's anything outside of marriage. God's will for sex is within marriage, between one man and one woman. And in that context sex is very good!

Notice in verse 4, "Each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honour." Now there's a debate around the interpretation of this verse. It comes down to the Greek word "skeus" which translates to 'vessel'. Some commentators say Paul is talking about a man taking a wife. So it would be, "each one knows how to take a wife for himself." Now that's a possibility. For example, the wife is called the 'weaker vessel' in 1 Peter 3:7. But I think interpreting 'vessel' as 'wife' is too obscure. Why wouldn't Paul use the word 'wife' if that's what he meant? I think 'vessel' as referring to the 'body' here makes most sense. Although that doesn't mean marriage is a free for all. Marriage isn't a form of legalised lust. Husband and wife are to treat one another in holiness and honour. "With my body I honour you" goes the vow. The Lord sees the intimacy in the bedroom. And he hates every form of human exploitation. Notice in verse 6, sexual immorality is over stepping the mark against our fellow human. It's called a transgression. So sexual immorality is a form of exploitation. And the Lord is the avenger in these things. God will avenge all cruelty. And that means sexploitation.

The greatest form of sexploitation in our day has to be internet pornography.

Here are some up to date stats from Covenant Eyes:

- The pornography industry is a \$97 billion business worldwide,

- Every second, \$3,075.64 is being spent on pornography,
- 28,258 Internet viewers are viewing pornography.
- 88% of scenes in porn films contain acts of physical aggression.

This is the problem of our time. The leftwing media talk about the problem of consent. But that is a bandaid fix. Pornography is the cause isn't it. The content is often wildly violent, sexist and racist. But you never hear the media or big tech companies calling to end to porn distribution!

That said, we aren't pointing the finger outwards to the world. Notice in verse 5, passion and lust are to be expected from the world. Those who don't know God won't live to please God will they. How can they? It's impossible. Holiness is only possible for those in union with Christ, who've been reconciled to God. Those who have been given the Holy Spirit. So the greatest need for our society isn't political reform but the gospel. The message that God reconciles us to himself through Christ. That our Creator has become our Redeemer. That those who are far off (don't know God) can be brought near by the blood of Christ. This is eternal life to know God and Jesus Christ His Son. That's what Australia needs in 2021: the knowledge of God revealed in the gospel. Jesus Christ who sets us free from idols to serve and know our Creator. Jesus Christ who can change us from being self-pleasers to God pleasers. It happened to the Thessalonians. It can happen today! It's the same gospel isn't it?

And it's this God-centredness that drives our ethics. It comes out of the character of God. He is a holy God. And we want to please him. Notice in verse 8, **“whoever disregards this teaching disregards God who gives us his Holy Spirit.”** Sin is against God first and foremost. Remember what David said when he committed adultery against Bathsheba? And repented in Psalm

51, “Against you and you only I have sinned and done what was evil in your sight.” So when it comes to sexual immorality the God’s word to us is “don’t do it!”

2. Work Ethic (vv. 9-12)

But on the other hand when it comes to work, the teaching is... “do it.” We’re not to get down and dirty when it comes to sexual immorality. But we are when it comes to work. Paul moves from chastity to charity: Philadelphia. Not cream cheese but brotherly love. Notice in verse 9, “Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, because you’ve been taught by God to love one another.” God-taught. Here is the fulfilment of the New Covenant promise God makes in Jeremiah 31: “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts...no longer will each one need to say to his brother, ‘Know the Lord’ for they shall know me.” The believer has a divine intuition. We inwardly know God’s law. What’s that? To Love God, and love our neighbour as ourselves.

What does it mean to love your neighbour? It’s not a warm fuzzy feeling inside of us. It’s very practical. Check out verse 11, “aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands as we instructed you. So that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.” The background to this is that some of the Thessalonians had abandoned their jobs because of the second coming. ‘It’s all going to be burnt up so what’s the point of working? So let’s just spend our days praying and sharing the gospel until Jesus comes back.’ But this view of work is...well unethical. It ain’t biblical.

Paul isn’t talking about unemployment here but idleness. When you can’t find work or have been made redundant that’s very sad. That word ‘redundant’ is a horrible word isn’t it. No human being is redundant. Every human being is of infinite value.

Not because of their usefulness but because we are made in the image of God. So if you're struggling with unemployment you could ask for some help from others at church, maybe we can help find work, or support you until you do. Here Paul is talking about idleness. That's work being available but not taking it.

Let me say a few things about work according to these verses and some other Scriptures. You might say, 'what does a pastor know about work?' *Pastors are six days invisible and one day incomprehensible*. But I'm going to attempt it anyway. Here is something of a Christian work ethic from these verses.

1. God's will for our lives is to work. Work is good. It was around before the curse. God planted a garden and then he put man in there to keep it; to work the ground. Work might feel like a curse. And that's because of it has been greatly effected: "**cursed is the ground because of sin, in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you.**" Because of sin in the world work has been effected. It can feel like a curse. But work is still good. It's God's will for our lives.

2. We work for Philadelphia. Not cream cheese but brotherly love. WE don't work for our own good but the good of others. A big part of loving our neighbour is done by working. Rather than needing support, we can help support others. Mooching off other people isn't loving. Plus it keeps us busy. Paul says mind your own business. The devil makes work of idle hands. David fell into sin when he was meant to be out on the battle field. Lack of business on our end might lead us to meddle in other people's business. So we work for brotherly love.

3. Ambition and work. Paul says an oxymoron that we are to be ambitious not to be ambitious. Many folk work to get ahead. To climb the ladder. To be somebody. To make it. But as Christians

we are to be content with the work God has given us. And work hard to live quietly.

4. Next **the Bible teaches that all types of work are good.** The sacred and secular divide doesn't exist. One type of work isn't more holy than another. It was William Tyndale who said, **“washing dishes and preaching the word of God, there's no difference when it comes pleasing God.”** Jesus was a carpenter. He wasn't ashamed to work with his hands. Neither was Paul, who was tent maker. IN our day we don't really have the sacred and secular, but the paid and unpaid divide. Despite what our society says, unpaid work is still work. In fact the most important work is unpaid. Mother's and housekeeping. Feminism has delegitimised the most important job in the world, raising human beings! Gardening is work. University work is work. School work is work. You might say, “what should I be doing?” Ask yourself, ‘what do I like doing? What am I good at? What do others think I'm good at? And then go for it and pray God would open a door.

5. **Working as Witnessing.** A massive part of our witness as believers comes through our work. I remember when I was converted and it quickly spread through my whole work place. And I got all these opportunities to share with people. Not only through words but also how my work ethic had changed. I was now working to please God. And even the smallest of tasks that no one else saw became important.

So finally (this really is the end), you now know God's will for your life: your sanctification. Remember your justification: once and for all. But your sanctification is more and more. Becoming more and more like our Lord Jesus. The good news leads to the good life. In every situation private and public let's be asking, 'How can I do the right thing to please my heavenly Father?' How can we

please God in the privacy of our bedrooms and out in the work place?

Let's pray that God would help us live holy lives.

Song Ctown - Undivided.

Swansea - Rock of Ages

Benediction: **Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; He will surely do it.**