

Family Bible Series for Sept. 25: Instructions for living a life that pleases God

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Instructions for living a life that pleases God

- 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

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Over the past several weeks, we have been examining what the Bible has to say about the purpose for our lives. Last week, we discussed the fact that our divinely given purpose is to live in a right relationship to God. But is it enough simply to love God and accept his offer of salvation through Jesus? What practical significance does that have on our daily lives? Is it possible to live a life that pleases God? If so, what does such a life look like?

This week, we are going to look at some practical instructions the Apostle Paul gives for living a life that pleases God.





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1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

Paul spends most of the first part of this letter expressing thanksgiving for the news he has heard about the Thessalonian church. Paul heard about how the influence of the believers in Thessalonica has spread to encourage other believers in the area.

Now Timothy has returned to Paul with first-hand news of the depth of faith and love this church demonstrates. Paul begins chapter 4 by commending the Thessalonian believers for the way they already have been practicing the lessons he had taught them earlier. They already were doing well in living lives distinct from those of their pagan neighbors.

Paul encourages them to continue to strive for even deeper levels of commitment. He wants them to hold up their ethical and moral standards even more. They already know the teachings Paul passed on through the authority of Jesus; now they need to move forward in their sanctification.

“Sanctification” is one of those “big church words” that many people often hear without knowing exactly what it means. Sanctification is the process by which the life of a believer is set apart for God’s purposes. The sanctified life is distinct through the practice of personal holiness. Sanctification brings us into a right moral and ethical standing before God.

This does not make the believer perfect, but it simply means that the intentional focus of life is moved from satisfying one's own desires to seeking to please God. Paul insists this is God's will for each of them and urges them to continue to strive toward that goal.

Paul then addresses two specific areas where sin most often finds the easiest access; sexuality and money. Perhaps more than any other, these two areas of our lives can interfere with our striving for a sanctified life.

Apart from technological differences, the world Paul lived in was not so different than the world we live in. The drive to satisfy sexual desires was clearly evident throughout the society of the time. Pagan worship ceremonies often included various sexual acts, and pagan temples often employed prostitutes. Prostitution also was prevalent in the marketplace, as well.

Paul was writing to people who had been exposed to these things all of their lives. He knows that even for believers, this natural desire could lead to immoral behavior. He thus encourages them to learn to grow in self-control, to possess their bodies to the degree that they satisfy their appetites in such a way that clearly demonstrates their relationship to God.

In addition to calling the people to live their faith through sexual purity, Paul also tells them they should maintain a high ethical standard in business dealings with one another. No one should defraud or transgress against his or her neighbor.

As with sex, the drive to obtain more and more wealth can be very tempting and can cause us to lose sight of our responsibility toward others. We can come to see them simply as means of obtaining what we want. This often can rob the other person of his or her sense of value, and Paul tells us God certainly will not leave such actions unpunished.

Further, because it is God who calls us to holy lives, anyone who refuses to

submit those earthly desires to God is rejecting the word of God rather than a message taught by humans. Here again, Paul likely is speaking to those in the church who want just enough of the gospel to gain salvation without having it affect their daily lives. This is certainly a warning people of every generation need to hear.

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

Paul next gives the church two positive commands to accompany the two negatives he had just given. In verses 9 through 12, Paul reminds believers to continue to excel in love for one another and to conduct their lives in a quiet and honest manner. As with the earlier commands, following these commands would make them distinct from the world of non-believers surrounding them. Such behavior in itself would be a witness to non-believers.

Paul again commends them for their well-known love for all believers and encourages them to work toward an even deeper love. He also tells them they should do honest work which does not seek to attract attention and does not interfere in the life of someone else. Such behavior not only will please God, but also will be appreciated by everyone and will allow each person to meet their own needs.

Discussion questions

- What are ways we might transgress against or defraud our neighbor?
- What things can we do to move toward sanctification?
- If Paul was writing this letter to you or your church, for what things might he commend you? In what areas are you currently seeking to excel

even more?

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