

Women's Bible Study Winter/Spring 2008

In Christ Alone

April 29, 2009

Christ Sanctifies Us

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

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How good it is to see all your smiling faces. I have missed studying with you these past 3 months. First of all I want to congratulate you on your heartiness and strong character enduring this very long, harsh winter. You are "true Minnesotans"!!

Second, I would like to share with you what I was doing while I was enjoying the warm sunshine in Arizona. I was a small group leader in the Women's Bible Study at the Free Church there. This is a picture of our fellowship that we had at our place one week. They were a wonderful group of women just like you---so eager to study and share what the Lord was teaching them. I always enjoy tending a few flowers in AZ and these were the nicest, most prolific I have ever had, any winter. I love to grow flowers there because they are safe within a brick fence and I have no deer, rabbits, or chipmunks to contend with !!

One of the things I enjoyed most of all, was the joy and privilege of sitting at my kitchen table and watching the sun rise over the mountains each morning as I was doing my Bible Study. It was a beautiful sight to see the first beams of brilliant light peek over the top. Some mornings there were clouds along the tops of the mountains and as the sunlight streamed through, it brought to mind various prophetic scriptures on the Lord's return. I am a visual person and I think the Lord was preparing my heart with these beautiful sunrises for our study in 1 Thessalonians. In each of the 5 chapters of 1 Thessalonians, Paul makes references to the Lord's return to clarify and encourage these new believers. I would like to share with you some of the pictures I took of these sunrises. May they be an encouragement to you too, and help you visualize with anticipation that "grand and glorious day" which you will study about next week.

From the outline on the back of the prayer page, you can see I have divided our lesson ---1 Thess. 4:1-12 ---- into 3 sections---God's Will---God's Call--- and God's Desire for us.

Let's open our Bibles to 1 Thess. 4:1-2 and begin with Paul's preparatory verses.

"Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus."

Paul begins with the word "finally" which isn't really the end of his message, but a transition in exhorting or strongly encouraging the believers to strive for spiritual excellence in living in a way that was pleasing to God. They had been taught by Paul, Silas, and Timothy when they were in Thessalonica and he is complimenting them and urging them to continue in what they had been taught, and to do this "more and more". From the very beginning these believers had been given clear instructions on the kind of life that was expected from those who chose to follow Christ. Living in a way that is pleasing to God is not an option but a necessity.

These moral instructions which Paul, Silas, and Timothy gave were not made up by men, but were given by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ,---they were only the messengers. Paul had written in 2 Cor 5:20, "We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us." Paul is saying that pleasing God is the point of life, and as our Creator and Savior he has the right to tell us how to live and to expect us to obey.

GOD'S WILL----Be Sanctified----1 Thess. 4:3-6

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid immorality that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you.

Before we get into the meaning of these verses let's clarify the word "sanctify". The dictionary definition is to set apart---consecrated to God. Since this passage states that, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified", it's important that we understand what that means. How many of you underlined that sentence in your Bible as Pastor Steer suggested when he preached on this series?

I have always thought of "justification" and "sanctification" as difficult words that can be confusing. Here are the meanings as found in Systematic Theology by Wayne Grudem.; Zondervan; chap 38.

Justification---an instantaneous legal act of God in which he (1) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ's righteousness as belonging to us, and (2) declares us to be righteous in his sight.

Sanctification---is a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives."

To simplify these terms ----justification happens at the point of our salvation, when the Holy Spirit enters our lives and begins the growth process of sanctification. This is a process that continues throughout our lives and isn't completed until we die and go to be with the Lord.

Sanctification affects the whole person, the intellect, emotions, our will, our spirit, and our physical bodies. As the Holy Spirit works in our lives, and as we yield to his direction, we will grow in our knowledge of God; we will see the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self control (Gal. 5:22-23); our decision making will conform to the will of the heavenly Father (Phil. 2:13—"God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose."); our spirits and our bodies will desire more and more to be holy and set apart for God. Our sanctification blesses our whole person and gives us great joy in the Lord.

There are no "short-cuts" by which we can grow in sanctification. We are an "instant" society. We have little patience to wait for anything. We want to cook our food as quickly as possible in the microwave. We want the fastest, high speed computer system---cell phones that can keep us in touch with the Inter-net, our offices, our families and friends---digital processing that can make every picture look perfect. I often wonder when I see photos and pictures if they are the "real thing" or have they been enhanced to create perfection? In short, we want to be in control and "make things happen ---our way". Sanctification is a process that takes time and we have to give ourselves to the "old-fashioned, time-honored means of Bible reading and meditation (Psalm 1:2; Matt 4:4; John 17:17), prayer (Eph 6:18; Phil 4:6), worship (Eph 5:18-20), witnessing (Matt 28:19-20), Christian fellowship (Heb 10:24-25), and self-discipline or self-control (Gal 5:23, Titus 1:8). God's will for us is first our salvation, and then our sanctification---letting the power of the Holy Spirit transform our lives to be like Christ more and more.

Paul tells the Thessalonians that since it is God's will that they be involved in the process of sanctification----set apart for God and dedicated to Him ---they must be holy, which is reflected in a pure life, keeping oneself from "sexual immorality and learn to control their bodies in a way that is holy and

honorable, not in passion and lust like the heathen.” The Thessalonian believers had grown up in a culture with no Christian tradition to support laws and standards for morality. John MacArthur says in his commentary on 1 Thess. that “the pagan Greco-Roman culture of that day in which Paul ministered was more sexually perverse and debauched than contemporary Western culture today.” I find that hard to believe. I wonder what Paul would think if he could come back to the 21st century and see the “tools” that Satan has at his disposal to draw people into sexual immorality. The advertising media seems to think ads must have sexual overtones in order to sell the most products. The Internet has opened a whole new audience. “Prior to the Internet, society’s access to pornography was a far more public affair. In other words, partakers had to have nerve enough to walk into an establishment and make a purchase. No longer. We can now sit in our Beaver Cleaver homes with our white picket fences and open the attic door of pornography through the Internet. It’s now a private affair. The rate of Christians being snared daily is staggering. Satan gets his pawns trapped in secret shame, living miserable lives of deception.” Praying God’s Word---Beth Moore—2003—p275. Another “tool” that he is manipulating is the cell-phone with pictures---“sexting”----a great temptation for our teenagers. The movies and TV are overrun with immorality.

Satan knows the damage sexual sin causes. It can become a stronghold and hold a person in bondage. Because a believer’s body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, if he can get a Christian involved in sexual sin, that is the closest he can come to personally assaulting Christ. He knows that sin separates us from fellowship with God and causes a burden of guilt, and leads us down the path to other sins.

How can we protect ourselves and our families from the sexual immorality that is constantly trying to influence us??

- ◆ First, we must be strong in the Lord, reading the Word.
- ◆ Teach and train our children in purity and what God requires of Christians in discipline and obedience.

- ◆ Teach them how to resist the temptations that may come through their friends to act or speak in a way that is not pleasing to God.
- ◆ Set boundaries on TV watching, movies, the Internet, etc. Our grandchildren tell us, “we’re not allowed to watch certain programs”. They know the list that is within the boundaries.

There are blocks that can be put on your computer and your TV. However, they are not always fool-proof. Last week a news program reported a class of 11 years olds were doing some work on computers that were supposed to have blocks on them, but a couple of boys clicked on to a pornographic site before the substitute teacher was able to catch it. We must continually be vigilant against the enemy----he is always watching for opportunities!

As Jann pointed out last week, Paul had only been with the Thessalonians about 3 weeks teaching them about following Christ.

In such a short time, were they remembering what they had been taught particularly in their immoral society? These new converts had to break with their pagan background and face new challenges of leaving that old life of sexual sin behind. For them it was making a completely different change in lifestyle---like an alcoholic giving up drinking. Paul was concerned that old habits and pressure from the culture would seek to draw them away from their new life back to the old. He is like a parent here giving instructions to his children. Do you remember when your mom or dad would give you instructions--- to remember what you had been taught---when dating, with friends, and when you went off to college?

Paul presents the positive moral standard ---control your own body. Learn self-control. In the process of sanctification we have two roles to play---the “passive” and the “active”. In the passive role, we yield ourselves to God---- we trust Him and depend on Him. In the active role, we take action and we strive for holiness.

Heb 12:14 “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy.”avoid sexual immorality, and learn self-control

1 Pet 5:8-9 “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

Paul goes on to point out that they need to control their sexual behavior in a way that is “holy and honorable” (vs. 4). They are followers of Christ now and should no longer act in “passionate lust like the heathen who do not know God”. Christians are to stand apart in an immoral culture such as was common in Thessalonica and in our world today. Paul writes in Romans 6:13, “Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God.....and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.”

Paul goes on in vs. 6 to remind them that sexual immorality always harms others besides those who engage in it. Pre-marital sex wrongs the future partner by robbing him or her of the virginity that ought to be brought to marriage. Unfaithfulness in marriage (adultery) always harms the spouse, bringing heartache and often divorce, dividing a family and causing strained and broken relationships, even to the extended family members.

He points out in the last half of the verse that “the Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you.” Paul had already covered this with them at another time and is just reminding them that disobedience will be judged by God. We need to bring in here that God is a God of hope and forgiveness and is always ready to forgive those who have participated in sexual sin when they sincerely repent. God will not punish what he has forgiven, though consequences of those sins may still follow.

God chooses us to receive the gift of salvation---forgiveness of our sins through Jesus--- and He gives us the Holy Spirit to equip, empower, and enable us to grow spiritually pleasing to Him.

GOD’S WILL IS THAT YOU BE SANCTIFIED---THROUGH CHRIST

John 17:19 “For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.”

Jesus died on the cross not only to save us, but also to consecrate us to God’s service.

Application: How has your life been “set apart for God”? What growth have you seen through this year of WBS?

GOD’S CALL---Be Holy and Demonstrate Love---- Thess. 4: 7-10

“For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit. Now, about brotherly love we do not need to write you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you brothers, to do so more and more.”

In this section Paul continues with his emphasis on a life of purity for the believer and tells them that God has called them to a life of holiness. With sanctification he has also called them to “be holy”.

1 Peter 1:15-16 But just as He who called you is Holy, so be Holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be Holy, because I Am Holy.”

Holiness is conforming to the character of God---be like Him not like the world around us. The word “holy” in various forms occurs more than 600 times in the Bible. In fact, the whole book of Leviticus is devoted to the subject. Holiness is the perfection of all God’s attributes. God hates sin and as we strive to become more like Him and desire to please Him, He wants us to cultivate that same attitude toward sin and purity.

We live in a fallen world and everything around us is continually trying to draw us into temptation to sin and unholiness to keep us from a life of purity and holiness. Therefore we have to protect ourselves with the armor of God in Eph 6: 10-18 and guard our minds, heart, and emotions.

Proverbs 4:23 Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.

Psalms 119:9 How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to your Word.

Living a life of holiness and purity sets a very high standard, but should not seem overwhelming and burdensome. God intends the Christian life to be a life of joy!

Psalms 16:11 In Thy presence is fullness of joy; in Thy right hand there are pleasures forever.”

God shares his joy with those who walk in fellowship with Him. Jesus said in John 15:10-11—“If you obey My commands, you will remain in My love----I have told you this so that My joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” Joy results from obedience. Only those who are obedient --- pursuing holiness as a way of life----will know the joy that comes from God. Rejecting this instruction to live a pure and holy life is not just rejecting what Paul has said, but it is rejecting God, himself who gives His Holy Spirit to live within each person to empower and enable them to fulfill God’s demand. The person who ignores the demand for sexual purity is disdaining the entire Godhead; the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Paul moves on in vs. 9-10 to another subject, but continuing in the instruction to “live pleasing to God”. He says in the area of “brotherly love”, he really doesn’t need to give them any further instruction because they are practicing what God himself had taught them about love for one another in the family of God. As God pours His love into their hearts they give it out----vs. 10 you have demonstrated this “love to all the brothers throughout Macedonia”. Paul commends the Thessalonians and tells them they are doing a great job!! However, “we urge you to do so more and more”--- in other words, keep up the good work of demonstrating the love of Christ to one another. Christ-like love is not something we once and for all can attain; it is an ongoing action

that we constantly strive to improve in our lives.

Commands to love---Jesus gives several commands about love in the New Testament.

John 13:34-35 A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

John 15:12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.

Matt 22:37-39 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind. Love your neighbor as yourself.

A defining mark of a believer is the demonstration of the love of God being reflected in his words and actions.

If Paul came to visit Autumn Ridge Church he would see the love of Christ expressed in a multitude of ways. The mission statement of Autumn Ridge encompasses Matt 22---“Love for God” and “Love for others” in serving. We have a variety of ministries for the purpose of “building community” in the fellowship of the church and in reaching out to those who are hurting, lost and lonely in the Rochester area.

So many of you are becoming involved and using your spiritual gifts and talents to serve with love and build up the “body of Christ”.

I think he would have words of commendation just as he did for the Thessalonians----Good job!--- Keep up the good work---“do it more and more”---Keep on reaching out to others at Autumn Ridge, in our Women’s Bible Study and in the community of Rochester sharing the love of Jesus.

GOD CALLS US TO BE HOLY AND DEMONSTRATE HIS LOVE

Application: How is God calling you to demonstrate His love and grow in holiness in your personal life as well as in your church family?

GOD’S DESIRE---Be Pleasing to God Daily ---1 Thess. 4:11-12

“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.”

Paul is calling the Thessalonians to work hard at living wholesome, responsible lives, not only to please God, but to achieve a good reputation for the church and sharing with unbelievers. He says they are to be “ambitious” about living a “quiet” life. Ambitious means to be zealous and strive eagerly, while quiet denotes rest and tranquility. It is easy to get caught up in spiritual excitement or emotional issues so we have to make every effort to aim toward balance and calm.

Then he adds the phrase to “mind your own business and to work with your hands.” Apparently some of the Thessalonians were taking undue interest in other people’s affairs---in other words, “busybodies”. They were more interested in passing on tidbits of information about “who was doing what”, instead of being focused on their own job or being of help if there was a need.

Paul also admonishes them to work with their hands. This was not a divine command, but to keep them responsible in their daily living. The Greeks in general thought manual labor degrading and fit only for slaves. Christians took seriously the need for earning their own living and elevated the status of working with your hands. Since God gave Adam the work of tending the Garden of Eden in Genesis, manual work has been a part of all of our lives. Work is a reflection of our Christian life and our ethics. Our employers, our fellow workers, and others can tell a lot about us from observing our work ethic and how we respond in various situations. How does your service or work witness to your faith?

Col 3:23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord , not for men.”

In your work or service do you do as little as possible to get by? Are you habitually late? Are you often negative and critical? Or do you have a positive attitude---give your best ---going the extra mile in serving?

Paul was concerned about them winning the respect of the outsiders or unbelievers in their community. We need to lead exemplary lives because the unbeliever does not separate our faith from our behavior. They often judge Christianity by our actions. You have heard the phrase “You are the only Bible some will ever read.”

So it is important to remember that we are ambassadors for Christ and we never know when we are being observed. We want to always bring honor to the name of the Lord. When believers display good work attitudes and habits and live in a loving and tranquil manner that respects others’ rights and

do not gossip, it gives a powerful testimony to unbelievers and makes the gospel credible.

He also wanted to be sure that they were not dependent on anyone and were financially independent. In 2 Thess. 3:11 some of the new believers were so caught up in the imminent return of Christ they were neglecting their work and relying on others to support them.

Paul has admonished the Thessalonians in this passage to make every effort to live a quiet life that is pleasing to God. How do we translate that to our own lives here in Rochester, MN? As you have reflected on this passage this week and worked on the questions, what do you think pleases God the most? I'm sure you all have a variety of ideas from your walk with the Lord. Did the Holy Spirit reveal anything specific or "new" that you plan to incorporate into your daily life? I'd like to share with you some ways God has shown me will be pleasing to Him in my life.

Seven Ways to Please God Daily.

1. Right relationship---Confess your sins daily –keep short accounts with God---He can't bless a life of sin. Make God the number one priority in your life.

1 John 1:9 If we confess our sin, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Deut 6:5-7 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and all your strength. These commands I give today are to be upon your hearts.

2. Read the Word ---read some portion of God's love letter to you every day, it is your greatest treasure to know the heart of God.

Psalm 1:1-2 Blessed is the man....whose delight is in the law of the Lord and who meditates on it day and night.

Psalm 145:13 The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made.

I'm so encouraged to hear how many of you have accepted the Challenge Pastor Steer gave to read the Bible through this year. I wrote this motto in my Bible to remind me.

---"Read the Word, line by line---Every day in 2009"

3. Pray diligently---Prayer is our “knee-mail” to God. His line is always open waiting to hear from us about anything.
Phil 4:6-7 Don't worry about anything, instead pray about everything, tell God your needs and don't forget to thank Him for His answers, and His peace will guard your heart and mind in Christ Jesus.
1 Thess 5:17 Pray continually.

4. Obey the Holy Spirit's leading---Learn to listen and hear the voice of the Spirit and act on what He shows you.

Isaiah 50:4-5 The Sovereign Lord...wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught. The Sovereign Lord has opened my ears.

Psalms 119:34 Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart.

5. Serve the Lord with your spiritual gifts and a servant heart---encouraging one another in the fellowship.

1 Peter 4:10 Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace.

Hebrews 10:24-25 Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together...let us encourage one another.

6. Remember to be thankful---to keep your spirit in tune with God, His Sovereignty, and provision.

1 Thess. 5:18 Give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

James 1:17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father.

As an old song says, “Count your blessings, name them one by one; Count your many blessings, see what God hath done.”

7. Practice His Presence---moment by moment throughout your day, be consciously aware of Jesus' Presence, and love. His name means ---“God with us”.

Matt 28:20 Jesus said, “Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

Psalms 46:10 Be still and know that I am God.

As we have said previously, the sanctifying process in our lives continues as we learn and grow until we go home to be with the Lord. As we let the Holy Spirit teach us, He is always ready to help us see new ways we can live lives of obedience that please God. I would like to share with you a personal experience of one of these 7 principles that the Lord has been teaching me.

I believe it all started last fall when we studied the life of Joseph. In the lectures I researched and wrote I was impressed with the phrase “the Lord was with him,” used several times in references to Joseph and Jacob. My curiosity caused me to look up many Biblical characters and other references where God says over and over, “I will be with you” from Genesis to Revelation. This concept was not new to me, but somehow the familiarity over time had dulled the meaning for me. Deep in my heart there was a longing for a real consciousness of God’s Presence in my daily life which I didn’t really recognize until I came across a devotional book in the Christos Bookcenter, **JESUS CALLING** by Sarah Young, a missionary who began listening to Jesus in her quiet time and writing down what he had to say. It’s written in first person so it’s as if Jesus were speaking right to you. They are very short readings interspersed with Scriptures of hope, comfort, love, encouragement, and reassurance, and many of them speak of “I am with you”.

Quote from January 28---“I am with you always. These were the last words I spoke before ascending into heaven. I continue to proclaim this promise to all who will listen. People respond to My continual Presence in various ways. Most Christians accept this teaching as truth, but ignore it in their daily living. When My Presence is the focal point in your consciousness, all the pieces of your life fall into place. The fact that “I am with you” makes every moment of your life meaningful.”

I have found this book to be such a blessing to me and a help to keep my mind focused on God and His Sovereignty, not on my problems and not on the troubling circumstances in our world that can bring fear, worries and anxiety. I use this devotional as a beginning to my prayer time each day.

God uses many different ways to draw and reveal Himself to us, to deepen and enrich our walk with Him. What is He showing you today?

GOD DESIRES WE LIVE OUR DAILY LIVES PLEASING HIM--- FOR HIS GLORY

***WBS is a ministry of Autumn Ridge Church-Rochester, MN 55902 www.autumnridgechurch.org
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Study Intensive Questions

1. What does “sanctification” mean? How does it affect our whole person? In your Christian life can you see a pattern of definite growth in sanctification? Have you seen any particular growth in this past year through WBS?
2. Paul points out in vs 3 “to avoid sexual immorality and learn to control their own body”. Why is this just as important today as it was then? What damage does sexual immorality cause (from this passage and others)? How can we protect ourselves and our families from sexual immorality?
3. The Holy Spirit gives us self-control as part of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5:22-23) How does this help us set boundaries for our behavior---internally and externally? (Col 3:5-9; 1 Co 6:18-20; 1 Tim 4:7-8; Rom 6:11-14; 1 Pet 5:8)
4. God calls us to live a “holy” life in vs 7. What does a “holy” life look like? Give some characteristics and references.
5. Paul commends the Thessalonians for their love of fellow believers and urges them “to do so more and more”. Why is this important to demonstrate the love of Christ? What command does Jesus give about love in John 13 & 15? How does the Mission Statement of Autumn Ridge (Matt 22:37-39) fit into this passage? (Loving God; Serving People)
6. In what ways does our attitude toward our work or service give witness to our faith? Why should we care about the respect of non-Christians (vs 11)? What determines if we are “a busybody” or genuinely concerned about the troubles and struggles of others? (James 2:14-16)
7. This passage is entitled “Living to Please God” in the NIV study Bible. What do you think pleases God from this passage and others? How are you “living to please God” in your daily life?

Discussion Questions

1. What does “sanctification” mean to you? In your Christian life can you see a pattern of definite growth in sanctification? Have you seen any particular growth in this past year through WBS?
2. Why is sexual purity as important today as it was in Paul’s day? How can we protect ourselves and our families from sexual immorality? What is the role of the Holy Spirit in helping us?
3. Paul commends the Thessalonians for their love of fellow believers and urges them “to do so more and more”. Why is demonstrating Christ’s love so important? How does the Mission Statement of Autumn Ridge (Matt 22:37-38) fit into this passage?
4. What determines if we are a “busybody” or genuinely concerned about the troubles and struggles of others?
5. This passage is entitled “Living to Please God” in the NIV study Bible. How are you “living to please God” in your daily life? Did the lecture give you any new insights?

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