

1 Thessalonians

I. Introduction

- A. **1 Thessalonians 4:1-8** [1] Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. [2] For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. [3] For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; [4] that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, [5] not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; [6] and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. [7] For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. [8] So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.
- B. Today our focus will be **verse 1** as preparation for our study of vs 2-8.
- C. Pray

II. Finally, excel still more in godly living

- A. **Chapter 4, verse 1** begins with the word “**Finally.**” In the first three chapters, Paul begins by expressing thanks to God that these Thessalonian believers have taken their conversion and faith in God seriously, and as a result are living a commendable Christian life in spite of their difficult circumstances and the newness of their faith.
 - 1. Paul then talks about the work God has given him to do and how he, Silvanus, and Timothy have carried it out – including leaving Thessalonica to minister in other places – which meant not being in Thessalonica to encourage and support them, and to help them with their spiritual development.
 - 2. It was out of concern for the spiritual well-being of these believers that Paul and Silvanus sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to work with them for the purpose of making sure their faith was holding strong in the face of their own persecution and upon hearing about the opposition and persecution Paul and Silvanus were enduring as they continued their God-given work in other places.

- B. Paul goes on to say in **vs 1** . . . we **request** and **exhort** (*strongly urge*) you in the **Lord Jesus** (*that is, we are requesting and exhorting you under the authority of the Lord Jesus and for His sake*).
1. I know that we could easily move on to the rest of **vs 1** because there is not much more to say by way of clarification or application in what we just read.
 2. However, we too often use words without giving an adequate amount of thought to their meaning, and how their meaning ought to effect the way we live. Therefore, I am going to take Paul's use of the words "**Lord Jesus**" and talk about what the use of these two words – in this order – mean to us.
 - a. The title **Lord** means sovereign or master, and as such it speaks of the one who has the position (*or authority*) and the right to tell us what to do.
 - b. The name **Jesus** means to rescue or save – which is why we often say it means Jehovah saves.
 - c. When the title Lord is connected to Jesus, it means our Master is our Savior. In other words, the one who has the position, the authority, and right to tell us what to do is also the one who saves us from the penalty, power, and practice of sin.
 3. Beyond these two definitions, it is important to notice the order in which these two words occur – the title **Lord** precedes the name **Jesus**.
 - a. In other words, the **Master** who rules over us and to whom we owe obedience is the **Savior** who paid the price necessary to save us from the eternal consequences of our rebellion against Him and disobedience to Him.
 - b. If you understand the profound reality of this truth, then you understand what John meant when he wrote, "In this is love, not that we loved God (*the Ruler of the universe*), but that He (*the Ruler of the universe*) loved us and sent His Son (*who as Immanuel is our Savior*) to be the propitiation for our sins" (**1 John 4:10**).
 4. The point here is that Jesus, who is our master is also our savior. He is not one or the other, but both at the same time – and this is an important truth.
 - a. In fact, this truth is so important that the words "**Lord Jesus**" appear 103 times in the NT. The words "Lord Christ" appear twice. Peter uses the phrase, "Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ" four times. And in talking to the shepherds about the birth of

Christ, the angel identified Jesus as “the Savior who is Christ the Lord.”

- b. In his sermon on the day of Pentecost, Peter said, “Let all the house of Israel know for certain that God has made Him both Lord and Christ—this Jesus whom you crucified” (**Acts 2:36**). In other words, they didn’t just crucify their Savior, they crucified their Lord – the one they should have been submitting to and obeying.
 - c. In **Romans 10:9**, Paul ties our salvation to confessing with our mouth Jesus as Lord (*not confessing Jesus as Savior, but Jesus as the Savior we are to obey*).
 - d. In **Hebrews 5:8-9**, we are told that to all who obey Him, Jesus is the source of eternal salvation. Or in other words, to all who obey Him as their master, Jesus gives eternal life.
 - e. And finally, this truth is important because just as we must trust in Jesus our Savior to save us from our sins, so we must trust and obey Jesus our Lord in order to live the kind of life that is consistent with our salvation – that is, a God-pleasing, abundant life which Jesus saves us to live.
5. Do you think of Jesus as your Master and your Savior? Do you intentionally and consistently treat your Savior as your Lord? Do you thank God that Jesus is your Lord just as much as you thank God that Jesus is your Savior? Do you believe that trusting Jesus as Lord is just as important as trusting Him as Savior? As those who have put our trust in the Lord Jesus, may see that our Master is our Savior, and may we to treat our Savior as our Master.
- C. Continuing on with **vs 1**, Paul says that “as you received from us instruction as to how you **ought to walk** and **please** God...”
1. I know that the portion I just read is an incomplete thought, but I want to stop here and look at three words: ought, walk, and please.
 2. In using these three words in this order, Paul is connecting how we **ought to live** as Christians to being a way of life that **pleases** God.
 3. Paul’s use of the word **ought** is important here, for it means we **must** live as Christians are to live, and we **must** live a life that is pleasing to God. There are two truths here that I want to clarify.
 - a. **First**, to live as Christians ought to live is to live in a way that pleases God. In other words, there is only one kind of life – the life that Christians ought to live, which is the life that is pleasing to God.

- b. **Second**, the word **ought** implies obligation. Therefore, living the Christian life as we **ought** to live it is not an option, it is an obligation or requirement.
 - c. In talking to His disciples, Jesus uses the word ought in the same way Paul uses it here. In **Luke 17:10**, Jesus said, “So you too (*disciples / servants*), when you do all the things which are commanded you (*by your master*), say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we **ought** (*or were obligated*) to have done.’”
4. Therefore, as those who are trusting in the Lord Jesus for eternal salvation, we are obligated to live as Christians ought to live. And in doing so, we fulfill our obligation to live a life that is pleasing to God.
- D. How do we or can we know how Christians ought to live? Just as Paul taught and instructed the Thessalonian believers in the way they ought to live and please God, so the Bible, along with the convicting, enlightening, and revealing work of the Holy Spirit and the ministry of God’s pastors and teachers teach and instruct us how we ought to live.
- 1. Therefore, I want to point out a few scriptures that speak about the kind of Christian life that pleases God.
 - a. In **Romans 8:6-8**, we are told that living a self-serving, self-pleasing, self-ruled life is a form of hostility toward God, and therefore **displeasing to God**. Therefore, we can conclude that a God-serving, selfless, God ruled life is **pleasing to God**.
 - b. We read in **Colossians 1:9-10**, that gaining a proper knowledge of [God’s] will enables us to live in a manner worthy of the Lord which in turn **pleases Him** in all respects.
 - c. **Colossians 3:20** says, “Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is **well-pleasing to the Lord**.”
 - d. We read in **Hebrews 13:15-16**, “Through [Jesus] then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. [16] And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. (*Notice, praise, worship, thanksgiving are good, but because they are not a dependable proof of a godly life, God is pleased when we do what is good and sharing with those in need.*)
 - e. And finally, in **1 John 3:21-22**, we see that obeying God and doing the things that please Him has its rewards – it moves God to give us what we ask for in prayer.

2. Do you love God so much that you want to please Him by how you live day in and day out?
 - a. Is living a life pleasing to God on your mind when you get up in the morning? Do you think about what is pleasing to God when you make difficult choices, deal with challenging situations, and face the enticements of the devil's temptations, worldly attractions, and fleshly pleasures?
 - b. Do you strive to do what is pleasing to God in the use of your finances, how you do your job, and how you use your free time?
- E. If you love God this much, or if you want to love God this much and are therefore working at living like a Christian ought to live so as to please God, then the final words of **vs 1** are for you. But to keep them in context, I will read all of **vs 1**.
1. Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), **that you excel still more**.
 2. Now remember, Paul is writing to new believers who have a ways to go in growing toward Christian maturity and godly living. However, it is probable that we can apply these words "**excel still more**" to ourselves – even though some of us have been Christians for a number of years.
 3. Now it is important to note that Paul was not criticizing these believers, nor was he inferring they were doing something wrong. In fact, he prefaced his exhortation for them to excel still more with the confirmation that they were already living a Christian life that was pleasing God. However, he didn't want them to settle there. He wanted them to continue growing, **to excel still more**. And that is what I want for you.
 4. Why? Because in spite of the distance we have come in our spiritual growth, it is probable we have further to go.
 - a. The reality is, we are multi-faceted individuals with numerous thoughts about many things, an array of values, multiple beliefs, fears, desires, interests, and commitments, plus some mixed motives and double-standards. In addition, we are involved in various kinds of relationships.
 - b. In all of these areas and relationships, we need to put off the old nature, die to self-rule and selfishness, put on Christ-likeness, and learn to love as we ought.

- c. And given that no one has demonstrated the ability to change their whole life all at once, we can rightly agree that growth is a progressive process that takes place over a prolonged period of time.
 - d. Therefore, to become godly in **ALL** our behavior, not just some of it, we must continue to pursue God and godliness for a prolonged period of time – or in Paul’s words, we must **excel still more**.
 - e. Without question, current achievements regarding spiritual growth and godly living are commendable and good. No one is criticizing or condemning them. But remaining where we are the rest of our lives is neither commendable nor good. We are to move toward being conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ in every area of our lives.
 - f. Therefore, in spite of how much we understand about God and His word, in spite of how far we have come in spiritual growth and Christian maturity, in spite of how godly we are living and how pleasing we are to God – we are being exhorted to excel still more.
- F. How do we excel still more? What does God’s word teach us about this?
1. One thing God teaches us to do in relation to excelling still more, is to pray. There are several prayers in the Bible that you can use as models for your praying. For example –
 - a. David’s prayer in **Psalm 139:23-24** is just such a model, “**Search me**, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; [24] and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and **lead me** in the everlasting way.”
 - b. And you can daily ask God to conform you, more and more, to the likeness of Jesus Christ (**Romans 8:29**).
 2. Paul provides a method that can be used over and over again. We find this in **2 Corinthians 7:1**, “Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us **cleanse ourselves** from **ALL** defilement of flesh and spirit, **perfecting holiness** in the fear of God.”
 3. Peter reminds us of the necessity to be on guard against the return of old sinful ways – which sometimes is encouraged by false teachers or ungodly counselors. **2 Peter 3:17-18**, “You therefore, beloved . . . be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness,

[18] but grow (*keep on growing*) in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

4. We can learn much about what it takes to excel still more from **Titus 2:11-13**, “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, [12] instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, [13] looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus.”
5. From **Hebrews 5:11-6:2** we see the importance of moving beyond understanding and being able to talk theology to living a godly life – here and now.
6. And finally, excelling still more requires right thinking. Paul speaks about this in **1 Corinthians 14:20**, where he exhorts us to be mature in our thinking. In **Philippians 4:8**, Paul provides a list of things that are spiritually healthy and enhancing to think about. And in **Titus**, Paul exhorts his readers to be sensible in how they live their Christian life. For us today, this means being sensible, or using sound, godly judgement and common sense in discerning right and wrong, and in how we live day by day. The point is, right thinking about God, God’s word, practical godliness, relationships, how our behavior affects others, how to speak the truth in love, and other such things is essential to spiritual growth, godly living, and excelling still more in each of these areas.

III. Conclusion

- A. Finally then, those of you have been attending Redford Church, I request and exhort you under the authority of the Lord Jesus and for His sake, that as you received from me instruction as to how you ought to live the Christian life and please God (just as you actually are doing), that you excel still more.