

"How to Live" - 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Okay, here's the scenario. Let's say you have two or three kids that are ages 10-15 years or so and you and your spouse are going to go to dinner. It's Friday night and you are going on a date. That's good to do. And your kids are old enough not to need a babysitter and they are good kids and you trust them but you leave them with some words of advice. What do you tell them?

Maybe you tell them that their internet history will be observed. Don't eat all the chips. If you spill something, clean it up. Be nice to each other. Help each other. Don't invite anybody else over. Like I say, they are good kids and you don't have to tell them not to burn the house down or flush the cat down the commode. They know all that so you just leave them with some general words of warning and encouragement, right? You let them know that if they do well, they will be rewarded and if they don't do well, there will be problems. Sort of a "don't start none, won't be none" kind of deal. I know all this, being the child-raising expert that I am. 😊 When I leave my two kids alone (my two dogs), I tell them to be sweet and not to get in the trash. Anybody else have to tell your kids not to get in the trash? You know what I mean.

The Apostle Paul thought of the church in Thessalonica as his kids. He planted this church and cared for it and loved it dearly and so he is writing them to give them words of warning and encouragement. But he wasn't worried about them pleasing Him. He was concerned that they live their lives pleasing to God. Aren't you glad we have scripture to tell us how to please God? I have heard that people that believe in other religions spend their whole life worried about how to please their god or gods. If it doesn't rain enough then maybe they have angered the gods. If they are doing well, then obviously they did something right. But they don't necessarily know what it was. What a horrible way to live.

We have the whole canon of scripture to explain to us the characteristics of God and what He wants us to do and not do. God wants to be known and He wants you to know what He expects of you to do and not do. And part of what we know comes from Paul's letter to this young church in Thessalonica, Greece. Let's look at **1 Thessalonians 4:1-12** this morning. I'll be honest with you. Part of why I'm preaching through this book is because chapter 4 and starting with **verse 13** is some of my favorite, most encouraging scripture in all the Bible. But we will get there next week, Lord providing. That will be fun.

But **chapter 4** is filled with good wisdom and encouragement as we will see in **verses 1-12**. Let's read that now. *"As for other matters, 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. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. 3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; 6 and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. 7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. 8 Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit. 9 Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. 10 And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more, 11 and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, 12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.*

I was talking to somebody just this past week about how oftentimes people don't need me to get all biblical and give them great and wise wisdom from scripture. So many times, people just need to hear you say, "I'm so sorry for what you are going through. I love you. And I'm praying for you." And lots of times, that is enough. But there are times, especially with a mature Christian, when I will remind them of something scripture says just to encourage them. I know I'm not

telling you anything you don't already know. I am not trying to act smart. I just want to help you remember something that might give you some encouragement.

That is at least partly what Paul is doing here for this church in Thessalonica and for our church in Chico. Almost everything here is written in at least one other place in the Bible. And Paul is telling them something he told them in person. And he knows they understood it because he even says, *"we don't even need to write this to you since you already learned it from God."* But he wants to encourage them to remember this stuff because it is very important. Just like you might encourage your kids not to do anything stupid while you go out to eat.

Look at **verse 3** again. *"It is God's will that you should be sanctified."* What in the world does that mean? "Sanctified" sounds like really holy, churchy word. And it should because it means to be holy. It means to be set apart for God's work. It is also the process that true believers go through to become more like Jesus. The process of sanctification can be difficult. But it is necessary to live a full and abundant life in this world.

I've told a lot of you that the house I bought recently in Chico is actually one of the nicer crack houses in Chico. And I say that because when I bought it there was a tall privacy fence all the way around. And inside that fence was chain link fence and then inside that there was some metal pipe fencing and then inside of that there was an electric fence in places. So, obviously, the previous resident didn't want anybody coming in.

Well, I took all that fence down. Then I went to work on the yard. There had been a patio of some kind in part of it with fence around it. I got rid of all that. Then there were some old dead trees and a bunch of rocks and chunks of metal and car parts of all kinds. It was a mess. But my goal is to have a nice, grassy yard so I'm still in the process of cleaning it up. Now, when I walk across the yard, I might see a small pebble and I'll pick it up and chunk it because I don't want rocks in my yard. I want grass.

That's sort of what God sees in your life as a believer. He wants to see you look just like Jesus but He doesn't make all the changes in your life all at one time. In fact, you will never reach a place in this life where you can say, *"Welp, I did it. I'm sanctified. Mission accomplished!"* It is a life-long process and, like I said, it can be hard but it is so worth it.

Phillips Brooks was a very busy pastor in the 1800's and one day a man in his church asked him the secret to his strength and serenity even in the midst of some real difficulties. Brooks credited it to his still-growing relationship with Christ. He said, *"The more I have thought it over, the more sure it has seemed to me that these last years have had a peace and fullness which there did not used to be. It is a deeper knowledge and truer love of Christ.....I cannot tell you how personal this grows to me. He is here. He knows me and I know Him. It is the most real thing in the world. And every day makes it more real. And one wonders with delight what it will grow to as the years go on."* (Our Daily Bread, October 14, 1994.) That is sanctification.

Let's continue with our passage in **1 Thessalonians** because Paul goes on to tell them what a big chunk of that sanctification involves. See it in **verse 3**. *"That you should avoid sexual immorality."* Okay, here me out. I may sound like an old man here but I'm not sorry. Do you want to know the problem with this world? Perfume commercials. Yes, perfume commercials. I'm sitting there the other day, minding my own business, watching some old Audie Murphy western and a commercial comes on selling some kind of perfume. Now, I know it must be hard to sell perfume because almost all perfume smells nice, at least to somebody. So, you can only say "smells nice" a few times and then it just doesn't work.

So, they have gotten to where they try to sell perfume by insinuating it will make you smell sexy. And if you wear this certain perfume then obviously these male models will appear and start running their hands all over you and I guess at least one of them will take you home. That's the world we live in. We are surrounded by sex. Sex sells and so everybody selling anything tries to sell it by making it look sexy. Cars are sexy now. Buy our car and have more sex. That's what they

are insinuating. Hamburgers are sexy. How stupid do you have to be to think if you eat a Big Mac or a Hunger Buster, that chick in the bikini in their commercial will want you? But evidently it sells because everybody does it.

My point is this. It is harder today than ever before to live a life that is sexually pure. It is hard to avoid sexual immorality...but we have to do it. It is part of the sanctification process which is part of living a full and abundant life that Jesus promised in **John 10:10**. So, what is sexual immorality? Well, it is anything that is not one man and one woman married to each other. It cannot be same sex couples. It cannot be living together outside of marriage. It is not one man and one child. It is not a man a woman and a squid...or anything else. God is very clear on this. Anything sexual that is not a married-together man and woman is sexual immorality.

I went online to see some statistics about pornography. You obviously have to be careful with that so I went to a website called "Covenant Eyes" and I won't bore you with a bunch of stats but just know that every second of every day, over 28,000 internet users are watching porn. And every second of every day they are spending over \$3,000 on it. It ruins marriages, careers and lives every second of every day and yet only about 55% of adults think there is anything wrong with it. In fact, most people think not recycling is worse than watching porn. That's the truth.

The attack on the family is real. It is Satan's greatest effort and his best scheme. Break up the family. Break up marriages. Break up the good and install the bad. It is his passion and it's working. Sex addiction is higher than ever before and it will destroy every good thing in your life.

Let me help you understand what is going on. Most of you know I love to go fishing. I do. The problem is, I'm not very good at it. I'll just be honest. It's painful to say but I'm not. But I'll tell you what does work most of the time. This lure right here is called a popper. It floats on top of the water and the concave mouth makes a popping sound and look in the water and bass love it. They fall for it every time (well almost). And I always think what suckers they are to fall for this. I've never seen anything natural look like this but they fall for it and when they do, it is so much fun!

Now, what I want everybody to do is get your cell phone out right now and I want everybody to take a picture of this lure. Don't get me in the picture. Just take a picture of this goofy looking lure and save the picture. Then...whenever Satan tempts you with his sexual immorality lure to look at porn or cheat on your spouse or whatever he tries to make you do, I want you to look at this picture and remember what Satan thinks every time you do that, *"What a sucker! What an idiot! He fell for it again. How hilarious."* I know to you it looks real. It looks good. It looks like it will satisfy you but it is fake, it is wrong. It's not real and it will kill you. Stay away from all kinds of sexual immorality.

I want to end by looking at how Paul ended this segment. He says in **verses 11-12**, *"make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, 12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody."*

I was behind a family in line at Walmart the other day. Being in Walmart is always an adventure, right? Anyway, this couple had a small boy sitting in their basket and the kid was being pretty chill but the parents were a mess. They were loud and obnoxious. They were worried about everything going on all around them. And everything was hectic and chaotic and I remember thinking, *"Why all the chaos?"* Just take out your wallet and pay for the stuff and go. But they were checking each bag and looking at the register, then looking at my stuff and trying to talk to the cashier. They were talking to other customers. They both looked exhausted and it was exhausting just watching them. Even the kid looked like he was done with it all.

When Paul says here to *"make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands."* The word ambition means to labor and strive for something. The word "quiet" means to be at peace. "Business" refers to a person's own private business. This would refer to his home, family and work. Believers should be productive and earn their living with their own hands. This statement was made to this church because there were some

were lazy and would not work. This mild admonishment did not get the job done and in Paul's second epistle to them he was more direct. In **2 Thessalonians 3**, Paul says, *"We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. 12 Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the food they eat."* (Jonathon Powell, Sermoncentral.com)

When you are in the process of being sanctified and becoming more and more like Jesus and getting to know Him better every day, there should be peace; peace in your heart, peace in your family, peace in your marriage, peace in your job as far as it depends on you. When you are not falling for Satan's tricks and lures and not falling into sexual immorality, there can be great peace inside of you even when the world is complete chaos. And your peace wins the respect of outsiders as Paul says because everybody wants peace. That little boy at Walmart wanted peace.

If the word "peaceful" doesn't describe you or your house, it is a huge red flag that somebody is not doing the whole "sanctification" thing right. Know what I mean? There is sin somewhere. Maybe your relationship with the Lord is being blocked by sin in your life. Now, please know that I'm not saying that if you are right with God, everything in your life will be peaceful. Like I said, as far as it concerns you, your life should be peaceful. But we live in an unpeaceful world. That's why your peace sticks out to outsiders.

How about you? Are you at peace? Do you have peace with God? I'm not asking if you are perfect. I'm asking if you are being sanctified. Are you becoming more like Jesus every day? Do you even have a relationship with God through His Son Jesus? You can. You can have peace in your life only when you have peace with God. And you can only have peace with God when you believe that Jesus died for your sins. He paid the price the Father said was due and you don't have to be good enough or clean enough. All you have to do is believe but that belief will prove itself in your life by that sanctification. Does that describe your life?

Ask God right now to forgive you of all your sin and then repent of that sin. Turn away from that lifestyle. Do it right now as the music plays.