



JANUARY 23, 2022 | PASTOR RON KWON

“Do So More and More” (1 Thessalonians 4:1-12)

¹ As for other matters, brothers and sisters, 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 and sisters, 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.

The Lord be with you, Church! It's good to be worshipping with you today as each of us is gathered in our homes and online and the few of us here in the chapel. Even though we're physically apart right now, let's take heart that the Lord is present with all of us in every place where we have gathered in His name as His Body. Today, we're continuing in the series through 1 Thessalonians that Pastor Tim has been leading us through, so if you have your bibles with you, please turn to 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12. It'll also be on the screen if you need it. [Read 1 Thes 4:1-12]

I hope you're having a better start to the week after all the snow that got dumped on GTA on Monday. This past week was a reminder that Canadian winters are meant to be full of snow and icy cold weather. People who love winter must be those hitting the outdoor ice or the hills for skiing and snowboarding. I tried snowboarding for the first time around 5 years ago on a church day trip. A couple of the college students were trying to teach me how to



get up, how to balance, how to carve and stop. These students had been boarding for years so they provided me with some solid instruction. After 5 hours of practice, I could make it all the way down that bunny hill without falling once. I was pretty pleased with that progress and if I had kept up with it, I might be snowboarding on a bigger hill today.

When we learn a skill or gain knowledge, we tend to think the goal of learning and practicing is to get better and grow. But the goal is to actually to be pleased with the result of all the learning and practice. As Christians, the focus of our lives isn't to grow in faith or in our walks with God. That's the process of sanctification in which we are being made holy. The focus of our lives through sanctification is to please God more and more.

We might be asking, "What does it mean to 'please God' and how can we know if He's pleased or not?" This is probably a question that the Thessalonian Church asks of Paul through Timothy as he brought the encouraging report of their continued faith and love. Many of the Thessalonian believers were former pagans whose lives centred around making sure the gods were pleased in everything they did, whether it was seeking an education, starting a business, having children, or even walking through a particular area. Since Paul had been blocked from coming back to them, had they displeased God in some way or another to keep them from being united again with Paul? Is that why Paul had to leave so abruptly because of the riots and persecution?

Yet, look how Paul reminds and encourages the believers that God is already pleased with them, but also not fully yet. He writes in verses 1-2, "As for other matters, brothers and sisters, 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." Believers are forgiven of their sins and given eternal life by faith alone in Christ alone. This is saving faith. This also means that believers are set apart for God and called holy already, and yet still being made holy through sanctification by the Holy Spirit. For Paul, this is more than just about the state of holiness, but growing holiness in every aspect of the believer's life, from thought to behaviour.

Here in the NIV, the word "live" comes from the Greek word *peripateō*, which is translated as "walk" in the ESV and NASB. This is more accurate to what Paul means here because he uses the Jewish metaphor of walking to speak about Godly conduct and behaviour. In 1 and 2 Kings, this is more clearly understood as the various kings of Israel and Judah are described to have walked in the way of their ancestors. Faithful God-fearings who kept God's commands are said to have walked in the way of David, the one who sought after God's own heart. The kings who committed sinned and led the people into idol worship walked the ways of Jeroboam and Ahab. One walk pleased God while the other walk displeased God.



Jesus, as a descendent of David, also walked. He walked in the way of David, walked as he preached the gospel and ministered to many, walked in obedience to the Father and death on the cross. This is the path that believers are called to walk as well, picking up our crosses daily in order to follow Christ. This can only be done with the gift of saving faith in Christ. But now our conduct can also please and displease God because the Spirit gifted to believers and who lives in the hearts of believers reveals the mind of God, the desire of God all to walk in the way of Christ. Yet because sin is still in us, we're at odds with what God wants and what we want. In other letters, Paul writes, "Do not grieve the Spirit of God" but "walk in step with the Spirit."

Paul makes this more practical in contrasting the believers holiness with the non-believers impurity. Verses 3-8 say, 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. [b] 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."

Recently, I saw a promo video on BlogTO about a new waffle shop that had opened up, which started from a street cart. The highlight of this shop is that they sell phallus waffles. It's not just phallic shaped, like an eggplant emoji, but a waffle that look likes a penis. People were lined up to try this trendy dessert and there's no filters needed because it's a waffle, not an actual penis, right? While some people may think this is progressive and satirical, it actually reveals that our culture is regressing and reverting back to ancient pagan culture. In Greco-Roman culture, it was considered good luck to display phallic art or wear phallic jewellery and it's happening again.

As believers living in the world where the culture is shifting to moral relativism without any grounding in the Truth, it's more important now that we keep in step with the Spirit's leading because our understanding and belief of sex also needs to be distinct and set apart for God. This was problematic for the former pagans because slavery meant slave owners could request and even force their slaves to commit sexual acts. What did this mean for wealthy believers who had slaves or slaves who became believers and now were in the family of God with their masters? What if they genuinely loved each other? Pederasty was also a very normal practice in the Greco-Roman culture in which older men or women would educate or train the younger boys or girls in return for sex. I know it's very uncomfortable to hear all this, but these are the passionate lusts of the pagans rooted in the understanding



of a form of love based on sexual desire called eros in Greek. Paul tells the believers they are to avoid this secular morality and secular relativistic notion of love because it's not the love of God. The love of God has no desire to take advantage of a brother or sister because the believer is content in his or her circumstance, whether as single or married, slave or free. The believer is free to learn to take control of his or her body to grow in holiness rather than impurity. The believer can trust and believe in God's ongoing sanctification because of the Holy Spirit living within. But the sexual or intimate relationship of our lives is not the only area of conduct in which holiness needs growing.

Paul now turns to the familial and public areas of the believer's life where sanctification is also still happening. Verse 9-12 say, "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 and sisters, 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."

One of the major themes of 1 Thessalonians is the second coming of Christ. Paul writes about in every single chapter of this letter and was certainly included in his preaching and teaching of the gospel and instructions for faithful living while in Thessalonica. For some of the believers, they expected Christ's return to be imminent and happen any day. It must have caused some issues among the believers as maybe some of the wealthier Christians were having to share more of their resources and food while some believers contributed nothing. This would also have lead to some believers not having anything to do as they waited around for Christ's return, so they got into the affairs of everyone else and engaging in gossip. This conduct took advantage of the believer's love for God's family and lacking virtue even among the pagan culture as Paul writes in verse 12. In the Book of Proverbs, there's constant rebuke and warnings against being idle and the sluggards and general laziness because it is unwise and unrighteous conduct.

To love the family of God, Paul is saying that the work believers do to contribute and care for the faith community is also for sanctification because God even redeems the work that we do, because with faith and the Spirit's leading, it's the sanctification of the believer's work ethic. Our conduct in our work can please God, and work and productivity and contribution are already agreeable to both believers and non-believers.

When talking about sanctification, R.C. Sproul wrote this in his book, *The Holiness of God*, "We are to grow dissatisfied with spiritual milk and hunger after spiritual meat. To be a saint means to be separated. But it means more than that. The saint also is to be involved in the



vital process of sanctification. We are to be purified daily in the growing pursuit of holiness. If we are justified, we must also be sanctified.”¹

Sanctification includes our choices and conduct that ultimately please God because they are the fruits of faith produced by the Spirit. When I caught COVID last month and had to isolate at home, I had members contacting me asking if I needed anything and checked how I was doing almost daily and even sent food to me. I know firsthand that there are members who are holy and loving in their conduct and the fruits of the Spirit are visible in their words and actions.

There may also be some who like the Thessalonians are wondering if God is pleased or displeased with the Church based on the last seven months of three pastors stepping down, brothers and sisters leaving to start a new church, and most recently a pastoral search ending in disappointment. There may also be those who are wondering if God could be pleased with us given how the pandemic has affected our spiritual walks, our worship, our community, and everyone around us into a waiting mode to see when God will end this pandemic and where will He lead us next.

Brothers and sisters, let me remind you and encourage that you have been equipped with saving faith through the gospel and the teachings of the Lord’s commands. Your sins are forgiven through Christ’s death and blood and you are able to stand in the presence of God without fear of condemnation. You are justified, but you are still being sanctified. Your conduct and character from faith in Christ are being made holy for the Lord as you learn to follow the Spirit’s leading with the focus of pleasing God. But you can’t learn to walk in step with the Spirit if you’re sitting on the snowy hillside unwilling to try and fail or stuck in the snow waiting for someone to dig you out.

If today you’re feeling like you’re stagnant in your faith or you’re waiting to see what God does next or you’re still deciding if you want to commit to this particular community of believers at CoaH, I challenge you to switch from a trial period, low-risk, wait-and-see mentality and go all in to love God and one another. Don’t wait for someone to ask you to serve or join a life group or go to this retreat. Take the initiative to be involved in the communal life and participate or serve in a ministry. Take the risk to love the family of God even if it’s not always noticed or reciprocated. Likewise, let’s turn away from the things that would cause us or the family of God to stumble in their purity. If you’re struggling with secret sexual sins, like pornography addiction or even small things like microcheating in your marriage, confess it to brothers and sisters who are mature and trustworthy and who will commit to praying for you and walking beside you as you try to walk in God’s sanctifying love. We have this promise through Paul in Philippians 1:6, “that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”

Let’s pray.