

WEEK 2

FAITHFUL: LIVING A LIFE PLEASING TO GOD

May the Lord cause you to increase and enrich your love for each other and for everyone in the same way as we also love you. May the love cause your hearts to be strengthened, to be blameless in holiness before our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his people. Amen.

1 Thessalonians 3:12-13 (CEB)

So then, brothers and sisters, we ask and encourage you in the Lord Jesus to keep living the way you already are and even do better in how you live and please God—just as you learned from us. You know the instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. God's will is that your lives are dedicated to him. This means that you stay away from sexual immorality

1 Thessalonians 4:1-3a (CEB)

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-6 (NIV)



CHILDREN OF THE LIGHT

THURSDAY

“Stay away from sexual immorality”

READ: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-4

“God’s will is that your lives are dedicated to him” - what a lovely, spiritual sentiment. This means that you stay away from sexual immorality - hold on, Paul. You’re going to spoil this lovely moment by talking about, er, sex? Yes, he was. If we needed any reminding that human nature hasn’t changed much in the last 2,000 years, the subject-matter of this chapter should provide it.

N.T Wright writes that a “world of unbridled self-gratification was what the Thessalonians found on their doorsteps, the world to which until recently they had themselves belonged.” (Wright, N.T. Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians (The New Testament for Everyone). Westminster John Knox Press, p. 118. Kindle Edition.)

For people raised in the Greco-Roman culture, learning “how to control your own body in a pure and respectable way” was a new idea, not something they just assumed had any connection with serving God. In what ways is our culture different from that? In what ways is it similar?

Unlike many medieval (and some modern) Christians, Paul did not write this to say God forbade all sexual expression (cf. 1 Corinthians 7:1-9). In what ways is it as harmful to treat all sexual activity as wrong as it is to treat no sexual activity as wrong?

PRAYER: Lord Jesus, you created us with, well, hormones. Yet you made us able to direct those potent feelings and urges in ways that serve love, not self-gratification. Whatever my stage or station in life, help me find that pathway. Amen.

SATURDAY

“God has already taught you to love”

READ: 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

The apostle’s words about “loving your brothers and sisters” followed his teaching about sexual ethics, but moved to a different but equally practical focus on “love’s” meaning. Verse 10 was the key to Paul’s message. “The point of this little paragraph is that money can express love, and, indeed, that if the love is genuine it will find an outlet in financial generosity. This is not always clear, because in a literal translation verse 9 simply speaks of ‘love of the family’ and of ‘love’. Those who think of love as a set of feelings and emotions, at some distance from practical behaviour, will naturally see this simply in terms of a kindly and winsome spirit in personal relationships...the rest of the paragraph makes it clear, as do similar passages elsewhere in the New Testament, that this ‘love’ is expected to issue in practical support within the Christian community, and also, as far as this may be possible, in the world outside.” (Wright, N.T. Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians (The New Testament for Everyone). Westminster John Knox Press, p. 121. Kindle Edition.)

In short, financial generosity is very much one way God has taught us to love.

Paul saw believers as a family, not just an “organization.” This ‘brotherly love’ presupposes the close ties within the spiritual family of God...At conversion, believers become lifelong pupils as the Spirit bears inner witness to the love within the Christian family (cf. Ro 5:5; Gal 5:22). No external stimulus is necessary; mutual love among Christians is an inbred quality...further progress remained a goal for them (3:12). Paul particularizes v.1...: “we urge you, brothers, to do so even more.”

More love is always possible for Christians because the ultimate example of Christ himself (Jn 13:34; 15:12) is infinite and can only be approached, never fully reached.

In what ways are you included in God’s “family;”? How can you extend that to other family members you may not yet know?

PRAYER: Loving God, thank you for inviting me into your vast yet love-filled family. And thank you for calling me to actively invite and include others in this eternally enduring family connection. Amen.