

Gospel Living

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[0 : 00] All right, very cool. So, if you have a Bible, go ahead and turn to 1 Thessalonians 3, verses 11. We're going to kick off there. And I want to start our time with posing this question to you, is what kind of living pleases God?

The Thessalonian believers, they're wondering that. And we today, probably many of us as believers, we care about that. And we wonder, what kind of life does God call us to live? What kind of life would please him? And Paul gives us a helpful answer in the text we're going to read today. And I would say everything that he says here is relevant and authoritative over our lives as followers of Jesus.

A little aside is we're going to hit on two big topics of what living, the kind of living that pleases God looks like. But I want to say it's not the summation of everything, but it's important two pieces that we need to consider as we seek to honor our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, and our Heavenly Father.

So, without further ado, let's jump into the passage. Now, may our God and Father himself, our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all as we do for you.

[1 : 13] So that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Finally then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.

For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality, that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God, that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.

For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore, whoever disregards this disregards not man, but God who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you. For you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia.

But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more and to aspire to live quietly and to mind your own affairs and to work with your hands as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

[2 : 48] This is God's word. So I want to draw our attention to the very beginning of this passage because it is actually a prayer. Paul opens with a prayer over the Thessalonian church.

And he prays for two things. And he wants to let them know that, you know what, when I pray for you, this is the kind of way that I pray for you. And he prays, God, increase their love for one another. Yes, they have love for one another.

In fact, in a way that Paul commends in that first chapter, he is like blown away by it. And he says, may that increase all the more. And then the second thing he prays over them is, Lord, establish them in holiness.

Why does Paul care so much about those two things that he's gonna stop mid-instruction over them and pray over them right then? Because living holy pleases God because it reveals his nature.

That's what Paul is trying to get across to them. And Paul says, man, Lord, may you establish them in holiness. It is that important. What does that mean to live holy?

[3 : 54] Well, we're gonna get into some of those standards. And one of those is stewarding our sexuality. And we're gonna get to that soon enough. But first, we need to lay some important groundwork here. God cares about how you and I live.

He really does. In the Old Testament, he gave commands and laws to light the path upon which his people should walk. And when you think about all those laws and ordinances that he gave to Israel, they're summed up in two great commandments.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself. That is the spirit of the law summed up in those two great commandments. It's what drives holy living.

It's what holiness is always connected to. And then Jesus, he came and he showed us what holy living looks like when it is done in perfect obedience to those two great commandments in the summation of the law.

He was the prototype of the new man in whom God's spirit came to dwell, whose commandments are written upon the heart, and who lives to glorify God. That's what he does. And in short, Jesus showed us what a life is lived, what that looks like glorifying God, walking according to the spirit, and shining the light of the gospel.

[5 : 04] My favorite book, Next to the Bible, I think I have to say that as a pastor, you know. My favorite book, Next to the Bible, is by this guy named Paul Miller, and he wrote this book, Love Walked Among Us.

If you spend any time with me, you've probably heard me talk about that. But what it is, this guy, Paul Miller, this pastor, he spent 10 years just over and over just looking at the life of Jesus, studying the gospels so closely, and he wrote this book out of those 10 years of study, and it shows us how Jesus came to earth and walked around and showed us what it means to love one another like Paul is getting at here.

To live a loving life like Jesus sounds great, but guess what, guys? It is a lot more demanding and counterculture than you think. Love in our day has been cheapened.

Our modern ethic that we are told today about love is to love yourself, right? And there is just enough truth in that to be deceptive. But here's the thing, there's a big difference between loving yourself and living for yourself.

And that's the problem with the modern ethic for today about love is it conflates those two things. If loving yourself simply means knowing that you are a child of God with his imprint upon you, that you are made with dignity and honor because of that, and thus don't deserve to be mistreated and abused and maligned and oppressed and enslaved and dehumanized, and that you have a divine calling and mandate upon your life and a purpose for your life that is supremely above all other things to glorify God as you become more and more like him in character and in lifestyle, then the Bible is on board with that understanding, right?

[6 : 49] Of understanding what it means to love yourself. And I would say all Christian faith and doctrine would also say yes and amen to that. But if loving yourself means putting your needs first, living a self-referenced life, being self-righteous and lazy and idle, and not thinking about the needs of others, and indulging in your body's urges and passions without any boundary or guiding ethic, that's not loving yourself according to what the Bible says.

That's living for yourself. It's what the Apostle John called in his letter, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life. Jesus came to show us, actually, no, no, no, that's not the way. He modeled this new way of humanity that he came to redeem and to make holy. And that word holy, it's an important one for you and me to understand rightly.

So let's stop and let's define this term. What is holy? What is holiness? holiness. Well, in a literal sense, it means to be set apart for a greater purpose. In another sense, it means to be consecrated. In terms of, now when we think about holiness as it relates to God and what the Bible explains about that, it means this otherness, this transcendence, this way of being in manners of quality and value and substance, it means to be perfect in both terms of righteousness and justice and truth and all those things, you're doing those things in purity.

[8 : 17] And to really understand holiness, we have to know the person and the character of God as he has revealed himself in Scripture. Why? Because God says to his people three times in Leviticus, you shall be holy because I am holy.

He delivers Israel out of Egypt. He saves them, right? And he brings them to Mount Sinai and covenants with them and he says, I'm gonna be your God. You are gonna be my people. And what that means is because I am holy, you shall be holy.

Leviticus 11.45, one of the instances, puts it this way. I am the Lord who brought you up out of the land of Egypt to be your God. You shall therefore be holy for I am holy. He doesn't say try to be, he says be.

Holiness is being what God has saved us to be. Now, the Bible teaches us two seemingly contradictory things about holiness, but they are both true at the same time.

Salvation in Jesus means God has made you holy, okay, and he is making you more holy. Both of those are true at the same time.

[9 : 29] That's what the Bible teaches. Not making that up. It's a timeless truth. The historic church has taught that. It's orthodoxy. How do we know God has made us holy?

For Paul and Jesus' apostles, their understanding of personal holiness was rooted in temple knowledge, that temple motif from the Old Testament. In the old temple, God dwelt in the most holy place.

It was called the holy of holies. The most holy place that could ever exist on earth and that no man can enter except one guy, the great high priest, one time a year on the day of atonement. And before he could go in there, there was a long ceremony of washing and consecration and smattering clothes with blood and all of those purification ceremonies, all that stuff.

Now in Christ, what Paul says here and what the apostles declare is that God's presence that once dwelt only in that most holy place now dwells in this new temple which is his redeemed people. The moment you put your faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior, you went from unholy to holy. Stop and consider that transformation. Stop and consider what it means, that idea of what it means to be a new creation and that's the only thing that can really make sense to define that manner of transformation.

[10 : 54] We're not just a better version of ourselves, we are a whole new thing. We are a whole new creation because of what God has done. When God saves you, he makes a temple out of you.

Consider the design and the particularness of how God said to Israel to build his temple. It wasn't, hey, go try to figure out and do your best. He's like, you're gonna build it this way, you're gonna do this, you're gonna design it this way, you're gonna etch this stuff in every little part and every little place.

It's gonna be made of this material. You're not allowed to do this. You can do this. I mean, God designed this with his wisdom in mind and it was meant to be magnificent and beautiful and draw attention to how glorious God is.

Now think of what that means for you. God comes and he makes you a new creation, not a new creation made with your own hands, but with his hands. So he comes and you look the same as a person, but something magnificent happens at salvation where God comes and in his perfect, grand, beautiful design, he creates this new temple out of you etched to bring glory to himself and you are made holy in which his presence dwells.

Are you holy? Yes. Yes. Is that the final word on holiness for you? No. And all of us are probably like, oh man, this was getting really easy. Okay, let's learn some more.

[12 : 12] See, when we think of like the temple motif, we like, we go to the Solomon's temple, stones, structures, all that kind of stuff. It's made, it's rigid, it's done, right? But that isn't, that's true, but it's probably not totally helpful in understanding how God's holiness works.

We're both holy, yes, but we're being made holy more and more. A better kind of temple motif is the garden temple, like the proto-temple of Eden that God established right from the beginning.

And God, he came and made that garden. Adam and Eve didn't make that garden. He began that garden, right? It existed by his doing. It was the place he designed for the purpose of being with and meeting with Adam and Eve.

It was the place of presence and fellowship and provision, all that stuff. But here's the thing. He also left that garden unfinished. He started it and he left it unfinished.

He puts Adam in there and he says, you are to tend it and you are to keep it. You are to cultivate it. You are to bring it. I have designed it. I have purposes for it and you are to bring it into the fullness of all that I had designed and purpose for it.

[13 : 19] Wow. That is amazing. Holiness? Yes. More and more? Cultivation? Growth? Increase? Yes and amen.

And then God says to Adam, it wasn't fit for you to do all that cultivating alone. You need a suitable helper. You can't pull this off by yourself and voila, we know what happens next.

Eve was given and look, that is a beautiful picture of the necessity of community and people walking alongside us and all of that and it set the course for marriage and family and reproduction, all of those things.

But I would say it hints at and it's a typology of something of God's greater redemptive plan revealed in the new Adam, Jesus Christ. You and I also need a suitable helper to bring this new temple into its fullness and that is why God gives us the Holy Spirit.

Jesus calls him the helper and he gives us the Holy Spirit to fill us and to dwell with us. He abides with us as a gift from God as our perfect, suitable helper.

[14:27] Notice his name. His very name is Holy Spirit. He is with us as a seal of God's holiness. God says, yes, you are holy and he is also with us perfecting God's holiness in us as we yield to him and to surrender to him.

that idea of being perfected in holiness is the very word of, it's the very meaning, the very definition of that word sanctification that Paul uses in chapter 4 and verse 3.

Sanctification is this conditional change of our hearts to be more aligned with God's will and his purposes. It involves being more obedient to God's commands to live holy which will involve looking different to the world in many different ways.

and one of the ways we stand out to the world is with regards to the way we control our bodily urges and passions particularly with regard to sex.

That's why Paul gets into it here in 1 Thessalonians 4 for you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus for this is the will of God your sanctification that you abstain from sexual immorality that each of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God and these verses they make it very clear that the sexual ethic Jesus handed to the gospels to the apostles sorry and the apostles handed to the church was very particular which means it wasn't a sexual ethic made up by man nor by the will of man.

[16:07] This is God's will for us. Holy living means obeying God's command for enjoying good things good things like sex. We have to acknowledge that we live at a time where sexual ethics and sexual restraint are kind of at a very low ebb if you look across society and the world and our culture.

But this is a chance for the church to actually stand out all the more as a light to the world to show a better way of living a better way of conducting ourselves and stewarding our bodies particularly with our sexual passions and desires.

Now first I want us to understand that sex was designed by God. We just didn't figure it out on our own right? God designed it. God gave it to us as a good gift and in his design and in that good gift he also set boundaries and said these good gifts and all of God's gifts are good and they're meant to have boundaries around them but that boundary that he said is that gift is meant to be enjoyed in marriage between one biological man and one biological woman.

Anything outside that fits into Paul's category of sexual immorality. When you read that word sexual immorality the Greek there is pornea. It's where we get the word pornography from.

That includes pornography obviously but also adultery. It includes fornication. It's an old school word but you know we don't use it as much that's in essence sleeping with somebody that is not your spouse that you're not married to.

[17:46] It could be sleeping with your boyfriend or girlfriend or somebody else's spouse adultery whatever it is. It can include sexual touching that arouses and stirs up our lust but it's always to the pursuit of that one desired end.

Now God put very clear boundaries on sex and not he doesn't do that because he is a killjoy he designed it so he knows how powerful and beautiful and enjoyable that is.

And also everything that is powerful has the potential of being dangerous. Every good thing God creates Satan wants to corrupt because his intent is to bring destruction.

Think about that. Every good gift that God gives us Satan tries to come and he tries to corrupt its purpose and its usage because he is intent on bringing destruction into our lives.

Is there a form of sexual immorality that is innocent and doesn't bring destruction? It's interesting pornography the more research they have started doing on that these days the more that they're discovering how it is negatively affecting the minds and souls of men and women.

[18 : 57] It's getting into how we have become a society of how we just objectify one another and we create these unhealthy it's creating unhealthy appetites of aggressive sexuality that really dehumanizes the other person in pursuit of just pleasure for myself.

And if you think about the people that are involved in those pornographic videos and everything man they're broken too. Most of those actresses have been raped and sexually abused along the way.

some of what gets produced are people caught in trafficking human trafficking. It's dark stuff. It's not an innocent thing that doesn't hurt anyone.

Hook up culture. It feeds a benefits without cost ethic of our day that can be summed up as low commitment and high pleasure.

And what that is breeding what they're starting to discover in their research on that is it's breeding more and more depression and loneliness. And if you think about adultery and what that does it tears apart households and has impacts that often can resound for generations to come.

[20 : 12] The list can go on and on. What God creates Satan corrupts to bring destruction. It really does. And so the church we have an opportunity here.

We can be a champion of sexual purity and stewardship without embarrassment. God is really straightforward and simple on his sexual ethic. Inside of marriage enjoy it.

Be creative fun intentional honoring faithful and regular with it. It is a good thing. He is saying to you guys that are married be a one woman man be a one man woman ladies.

outside of marriage he says abstain. That's what he says abstain. So singles we celebrate you because you get to champion that your body is so much more than a sexual instrument.

You can have a fulfilled life without sex. Jesus was a truly fulfilled human being and he was never married. He never enjoyed that good gift from God and yet was totally satisfied.

[21 : 17] in his life. Abstinence is a high and holy calling and I want to encourage you if that's your season of life right now and maybe it's just the season and one day you'll be married maybe that's something God has called you to.

We want to celebrate that and encourage you and say like man that is a beautiful thing. Like you don't singleness isn't like a second rate thing until you can get married. Man God can call you to that and he can call you to that for very important reasons and there's very good opportunities for you in that season of life.

Here's the thing whether you're married or single when God becomes the greatest source of our soul satisfaction then every desire we have becomes rightly ordered. That truth right there is the foundation upon which we can begin to control our body's urges with holiness and honor as Paul talks about in verse 4.

without knowing God without being satisfied in him our lusts control us. Trust me I lived that for many many many years addicted to pornography my lusts!

controlled me I didn't have the freedom to say no to them. When you talk about enslavement that is enslavement you're like and I kind of knew God but I wasn't satisfied in him and it was the long road of growing more and more satisfied in God that the tide began to turn for me and I just want to say to you in the room right now wherever you find yourself right now maybe these verses are convicting you for the sexual sin you are in maybe you're feeling guilt and shame for current or past sexual indiscretions and I want you to hear this know that God is full of grace and mercy and forgiveness and patience over you okay he was with me he is with you come to him and repent of those things start that journey of knowing him and being satisfied in him it's not just enough to say I'm going to try to stop doing this something has to become better than that appetite the beauty and the glory and the goodness of God has to replace this appetite that's the only way it works and that doesn't happen like that that's a cultivating thing it takes time start that journey of knowing him to be satisfied in him and in that place every desire that you can have even ones as strong as lust and sex can be rightly ordered and controlled and know this too

[23 : 53] God has given you the helper the Holy Spirit and he fights for you and he fights with you on those things with the Holy Spirit as our helper we have the power to say no and to abstain from all forms of sexual immorality friends it's a fight it is a fight to the very end of your life but it's a fight worth fighting and know that you aren't alone in that fight we all fight it many before us have fought it as well the record of centuries past bear witness to lustful people turned saints who'd learned to love Jesus more than their sexual appetites be encouraged by that God's power at work in us is able to raise us from the dead so if that is true if his power is able to overcome something like death

be assured it can bring you into victory over lust and sexual temptation there isn't a version of following

Jesus where we just get to opt out of this and say ah you know what I'm going to do all the other Christian stuff but you know when it comes to the sex thing I'm just going to do what pleases me we don't get that it's very clear here in verse eight the warning whoever disregards this disregards not man but God who gives his Holy Spirit to you it's that plain to disregard this is to disregard God when we disregard God in this manner what we're saying to him as we indulge in our sexual immorality as we're saying God your ways aren't good for me they're good maybe for other people they're not good for me God I know what my needs are more than you God this particular pleasure is better than being like you and becoming like you God you haven't given me what I truly need so I'm going to go get it for myself which if you go back to the garden that was the first temptation lie that

Adam and he believed in that brought him into sin so let's think about this last one God you haven't! given me what I truly need so I'm going to get it for myself sin what it does it disregards God's holiness and denies his generosity toward us I mean it says he gives us his Holy Spirit he gives us all of himself he says that in verse eight that is generosity God did not hold himself back in any way shape or form he pours himself out into us to be with us he opens his heart to us he holds nothing back that is God's salvation pouring himself out his blood Jesus blood poured out on the cross the Holy Spirit poured into us when the gospel awakens us to God's generosity what it begins to do is we are filled with more and more joy and that joy that fills us more and more leads us into more and more obedience we don't obey from a place of drudgery actually we we obey from a place of joy in who God is and what he's done for us and that changes us more and more we begin to live for something beyond ourselves see when you think about what lust is lust is a drive to bless ourselves in a particular way often it is associated with sex but lust also drives us to be greedy!

in different for fortune for wealth all of those things but God calls us to a holiness a life of holiness that sets us apart from that too and that's why Paul goes on in verse 10 to talk about these things we urge you brothers to do this more and more and to aspire to live quietly and to mind your own affairs and to work with your hands as we instructed you so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one what Paul is saying here is the ethic of get rich or die trying is not a gospel ethic holy living finds sufficiency and simplicity you kind of have to really to get at what Paul is speaking to specifically with the Thessalonians you kind of have to understand the patron client arrangement that was pervasive in that day a patron was someone of greater wealth of greater power of greater social standing and they were able to use their particular position in society to their benefit and what they would do is they would get clientele people they would get they would offer them benefits like legal representation in court loans of money influencing business deals or marriages or supporting a client's candidacy for political office so there would be a bit of a quid pro quo thing happening here it's like

I'm going to render you these benefits but in return there were reciprocal expectations if a patron afforded you any of these benefits you had to render him services and some of those were immoral services to include sexual favors some of them were obligations to accompany a patron to war a war campaign they made upon or even political campaigns that they were on and that's what Paul is addressing here when he says be dependent on no one he isn't calling Christians to live independent lives of each other he says just he's implying like don't tie yourself up into unwise obligations and he's saying also to the rich patrons who were Christians don't play that game of pursuing prestige and power and taking advantage of your clients for your gain and for your pleasure that's not brotherly love what is better for Jesus his disciples

[29 : 57] Paul is saying whether you were a patron or you were a client he's speaking to all of them and both existed in the church he says live quiet simple lives make a quiet living with your own hands rather than bonding yourself to live off the dole of a patron because even in that day patrons had patrons you could be a patron with clients but you often had a patron above you and you were a client of them it was a multi tiered hierarchy Paul says forget all that rather work hard live quietly mind!

your own affairs being tied to a patron with more power than you meant being tied to their affairs and their concerns you were obligated to that and many of those things were typically political or economic in nature and he says don't do that avoid it altogether in that way you are able to walk properly before outsiders before unbelievers here's the thing for you and me today when we live to

gain!

When we live to get easy money when we live wanting bigger and better things when we live pursuing more stuff than we need these things have always been this way of living has always been and will always be a temptation to compromise our holiness it will and we step back from this and we're like man yeah but maybe I can pull that off maybe I can do both but what you're going to find in the end is that as you pursue those things you can't also pour out generously to others you just can't Jesus came and lived and did none of those things he lived for none of those things and so his life was marked by unceasing generous outpouring Jesus lived the simple sufficient life he was born into it and he kept choosing it and he became a notable rabbi and in that day that was a big deal he had a large following and he could have leveraged that into lucrative monetary and political opportunities right today that would look like conference speaking engagements and book deals and political clout

Jesus could have had a seat at the Sanhedrin if he wanted like he could have pursued any of that but Jesus was the personification of low key he didn't pursue those things he didn't pursue money or title or fame that comes from man and so there was no compromise in his life he came to love God and he for us and that's the thing about living in God's kingdom that gospel living that we're talking about that holy living that we're talking about in God's kingdom low key is the right key the simple sufficient life is conducive to holy living that pours out generously toward others as the band comes up and we look to respond in a moment we're going to be taking communion and whether or not you are a follower of Jesus this call to holy living hear me out it is a call first to dependency on God you can't do this alone you cannot do this without his help without

God's grace you and I have no hope to pull this off there is no holy living without first being made holy through salvation in Jesus Christ and if you're not yet a follower of Jesus that's where it begins for you believing that Jesus died for you and by faith in him your sins have been washed away your heart becomes you're made a new creation your heart becomes this temple of God where the presence of the almighty resides and if that's you today I urge you to put your faith in Jesus there's going to be a prayer up on the screen for you to pray in a moment now if you're already a follower of Jesus I want to ask you this where is your dependency where is your dependency what are you living for is it to satisfy your sexual appetites is it for a life of grandeur and greatness communion reminds us that holiness is a cult to a life of something entirely different it's a life set apart unto something much more beautiful much more grand but it's a life of walking in sacrificial obedience to [34 : 35] God and following in the ways of Jesus it's a life of abstaining from sexual immorality it's a life lived towards simple sufficiency being satisfied in God above all other things just like Jesus was so as we come to the communion table consider that marvel in that marvel in what Jesus did for you and me to be called into relationship with him let me pray and you can go to the table nearest you when you're ready Lord Jesus our savior holiness is kind of a scary word but it's something that you have determined for us and designed for us Lord and you call us to holiness because you know in our holiness is where we will be most happy where we will find the most joy because it is what it means to know you and revel in your glory and your goodness and all the things that you have for us to be satisfied in you to taste and see that you are good and as we come to the communion table today we would go beyond tasting the bread and the cup and we our souls would taste the goodness of our

God who loved us and gave himself for us I pray for my friends in the room that are wrestling with giving your life to you surrendering to you for the first time I pray you would open their eyes to behold your glory to see how amazing and wonderful you are Jesus Christ pray that in your name amen