

LSB 1 Thess. 4:1 - 8 That You Excel Still More Pt. 1

1 Finally then, brothers, we ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us 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 through the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: 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 did not call us to impurity, but in sanctification. 8 Consequently, he who sets this aside is not setting aside man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

We've just passed the eight year mark together with me in the pulpit. We are in our 9th year together. Here's what has never happened in 8 years. No one has ever come to me in private and said, I want more. I am desperate to have more of God. I am famished for God, for the Word of God, to somehow draw closer to God, to know Him more intimately, to experience Him more fully, to walk together with Him hand in hand as an intimate friend.

No one has ever come and said, the Word of God here in the quantity that we receive it is like a drop of water on my tongue, in the shining desert, at 115 degrees. I need more. I need to drink until the thirst has been quenched completely and I am refreshed. 40 minutes once a week simply isn't enough! I thirst! I languish!

In fact I get the feeling if I started preaching / teaching for 50 minutes instead of 40, there might be trouble. And you could retort right back to me; Like people, like priest. That would be equally fair.

We function at a certain level. We've set a bar at a certain level and corporately and individually, apparently, that level suits us just fine. No

one is complaining. At least not to me. And that's actually a good thing because I've been in church's where the people were literally starving and they knew they were starved and they were working to somehow force the pastor out.

That's actually pretty normal. People are upset because they're getting nothing and the quarelling begins. At least we don't have that. What we seem to have is a satisfaction to stay at the level we are at. No one is calling for more. Apparently this is OK. Good enough.

Let's begin by taking our own pulse. How're we going to do that. Well, we've got Thessalonica as a comparison. Paul was very pleased with the Thessalonians. So we'll use that as a comparative to take our own pulse.

I'm going to read through all of the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians and then we're going to pull some phrases out and sort of make an outline, a comparative outline and see how we compare. Here we go.

*1 Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace. 2 We give thanks to God always for all of you, making mention of you in our prayers; 3 remembering without ceasing **your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ before our God and Father, 4 **knowing, brothers beloved by God, your election,** 5 for our gospel did not **come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full assurance**; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. 6 **You also became imitators of us** and of the Lord, having **received the word in much affliction** with the **joy of the Holy Spirit,** 7 so that **you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia.** 8 For the **word of the Lord has sounded forth from you,** not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has gone forth, so that we have no need to say anything. 9 For they themselves report about us what kind of an entrance we had with you, and how **you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God,** 10 and to **wait for His Son from heaven,** whom He raised from the*

dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.

OK, I got 10 things from that paragraph.

- 1. They have a faith that produces works. A faith that causes recordable action. Their faith isn't words, it results in action. Works of love.
- 2. The work they are doing is labor, it's effort, but it's effort motivated by love. Works compelled by faith, wrought in real love.
- 3. They are steadfast, immovable, because of a real hope that Jesus is coming to them. They've already withstood the onslaught of trouble. The waves have come and they're still standing.
- 4. They are elect. Why is that in here? We have no control over election. The reason it's included is because Paul says, I know by your actions, your works of faith, your labors of love, your steadfastness under real pressure, that you are real. No tares in this church. Paul says, I know you're elect.
- 5. They received the gospel with evidence of power, otherworldly outside of what we can accomplish power, in the Holy Spirit, with assurance. God was present in their midst. God was doing stuff in their midst. Things were happening that they could not do, alone, spiritual things were happening with them. Assurance comes easy when God is in your midst causing impossible things to happen in spiritual realms.
- 6. They imitated Paul, who imitated Jesus. Their imitation was based in the Word of God, which they received, even though it came with a great cost. Affliction came along with the Word and they received the word of God at personal cost. Their lives were changed. They re-aligned themselves with the Words of God in obedience to scripture. They modeled that obedience after Paul. They mimicked Paul.

- 7. Along with the word and the affliction, bathed in the Holy Spirit, they also received joy. Real joy. Evidential joy. The Holy Spirit brought them joy. A joy you would choose over anything else this world could ever offer. Otherworldly joy. God's joy given to them.
- 8. They became a model to everyone else. This church is the poster child of churches. It's a model to emulate.
- 9. The word of God poured out from them. It didn't stay inside their 4 walls. It went forth. It was broadcast forth from them, all over the region and beyond. They were a missionary church.
- 10. So much so that everywhere else Paul went, the news about what God was doing with them, would beat Paul to where he went next. Everywhere he goes, someone is talking about what God is doing at Thessalonica. Everywhere Paul goes he hears about how the Thessalonians turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, *and to **wait for His Son from heaven**, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.*

OK, that's the comparative model for us. How are we doing. We've settled for a bar set at a certain common denominator, how are we doing compared to the model church?

Now you might say to me, just a minute Jim. Let's grade on the curve. Where are we at compared to all the other churches? Let's lower the bar some and admit, we're not like Thessalonica, but we're doing better than the Assembly's of God church, right? We're not sure what's going on at the Baptist church, all we know for sure is they don't want anything to do with us, but we've at least got the Assemblies of God church beat.

And all the other choices have so much doctrinal error we can't even include them in the comparison. So, we're sort of up there. By default.

Where am I going with all of this pulse taking? Actually setting the bar by

grading on the curve of the present common denominator of American evangelicalism is troubling. We're the best of the horrible?? We're not quite as lukewarm as the others around us?

We fail miserably in comparison to what Paul says is the model church. Why am I depressing you with all of this. Because of chapter 4 vs. 1. The Thessalonians are a model church that is out of reach, it seems, for us, and yet Paul calls for them to excel even more.

Beloved, we've settled for a bar, a common denominator far below the model, so what do we do with this verse? Excel still more?? Really???

How is that possible for us if we're satisfied to simply bump along at the level we're at?

All of Paul's letters follow a pattern. Doctrine first, then duty. Doctrine, and then duty based on the foundation of doctrine. And this letter is no different. He has spent 3 chapters recounting all that God has accomplished with them. How in the midst of trouble and persecution, it pleased God to call a distinctive body of believers out of the darkness in that place.

They had to hustle Paul out of town for his own safety and theirs. They were bereft of Paul after a very short time to lay a foundation of how they should live and walk and worship.

Paul sends Timothy back to see what is left and Timothy finds them thriving. They're doing great, and Paul spends most of his introduction in this letter praising them and worshipping God for what God had accomplished in them. They are a distinct picture of Christ in the midst of darkness. Standing tall.

Most of the doctrine in the introduction is recounting what has already taken place. But like all of Paul's letters, there is a distinct transition from the doctrinal section into the duty section. This is who you are. Therefore, this is how you live. Who you are positionally. Therefore; How you live

in practice based on who you are.

You are the King's ambassador's His very sons as it were, who represent Him in a foreign land. Therefore, this is how you need to conduct yourselves so that your Father, the King, will be respected and received. The peoples in the foreign place will form their opinions about the King you represent, based on how you conduct yourselves in their midst.

Vs. 1 Finally then, brothers,

Paul shifts gears right here. In view of all that has preceeded, brothers, I have some final wishes and comments.

The word brothers is a division point. A definitive. Paul is addressing a group that are distinctly set apart from everyone else at Thessalonica. This group of people are equals in some way, family with, Paul. Brothers.

To be Paul's brothers indicates that the people Paul is addressing have common parentage and are in a family in common with Paul. How is that possible?

It's possible because God has called them out of this world. Before Paul came these same folks were simply members of all mankind in a fallen and lost and condemned planet. Ordinary folks going about their lives and their business as best they could in a fallen and lost world.

But then Paul showed up and told them they were condemned sinners living in a condemned planet soon to be judged, but the God who created them had also provided a way of safe escape through the forgiveness of their sins, a forgiveness purchased by the blood and death of God's own Son, in their place.

Some who heard that message were instantly quickened from death to life by the Holy Spirit of God. They literally came out of this lost sinful planet and joined a family of those who are also quickened and called out of this

world.

We are a family of people who have crossed from death to life, by the quickening of our spirits, once dead, now alive, made alive together with Christ, who we have received and who dwells in us by the presence of His Holy Spirit. If that has happened to you, you are also a brother, sister, mother, father, children, to Paul. All regenerated to life from the dead people are brothers with each other, and with Christ, God's Son.

You came out of this condemned world and joined with a group of people who are called out of this world and made spiritually alive. Every christian has that in common with every other christian. You have responded to the gospel and God's Holy Spirit has made you alive together with Christ and Christ now dwells inside you. *If any man hath not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His.* Romans 8:9

If Jesus lives inside your heart, you are brother with me, and with Paul, and indeed, even with Jesus who is risen from the dead. We who have Jesus living inside our hearts are a brotherhood together.

So Paul addresses not everyone who lives at Thessalonica, Paul addresses his spiritual brothers. That word brother is inclusive of male, female, old, young, children, anyone who belongs to Jesus through regeneration by the indwelling Holy Spirit.

I Finally then, brothers, we ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus,

Paul's method is to both ask, as a gentleman and a brother, and also to exhort, as a father would his children.

It's a reminder for us, that Paul's first level of admonishment is as a brother and an equal, but if that isn't quite enough to motivate us, he has the authority as an apostle of the Lord, Jesus, to command us.

The gentleman in him says I'll ask nicely, but the apostleship and

stewardship of spiritual father to them then says; oh by the way, this ins't optional. I'm both asking as a gentleman and an equal, and I'm exhorting with the authority of the Lord of the Universes, Jesus, who spoke all things into being, and who shed His own blood to purchase you.

We can do this the easy way, or we can get tough and call on the authority that backs me up. Let's just do the brother thing, shall we.

I Finally then, brothers, we ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk),

Paul got torn asunder from them after a very short time. Perhaps a couple of months? We aren't really sure. It wasn't very long. You can read the account in Acts 16. Riots broke out because of Paul. But before that happened these folks had already received from Paul, instruction on how to conduct yourself, as a christian, differently from what is normative to the world around you.

In the great commission Jesus laid out a framework for us. He said;

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

And that's exactly what Paul did. He preached. The Lord harvested a church in Thessalonica. And Paul packed up the traveling show and said, "good luck" and boarded the plane for his next crusade.

No. Paul, within just a few weeks, perhaps a couple of months, did exactly what Jesus spelled out in the great commission. He taught them to become obedient to all that Jesus commanded us to do.

Christians do not live like the rest of the fallen world lives. Our lives are patterned after a morality based in God's moral law.

Notice that I delineated God's laws there to His moral law. We can read through all of the old testament laws given to the jews and we can separate three distinct categories of commandments. Moral Law, ie' the 10 commandments. Ceremonial law, which is all of the national laws for religious observance given to the nation of Israel, and then the Civil law that regulated them nationally outside of worship.

The church is NOT Israel. The Ceremonial laws of worship were all pictures of the coming messiah and His sin bearing once for all. Jesus completed the picture. We don't keep the sabbath. Ceremonial law is finished. Completed, in Jesus.

And the civil law of Israel is a good model for true justice, and our nation was based on much of Israel's civil laws, but that portion of the law was what made Israel distinct from all of the other nations surrounding them. Israel is set aside, for now. We are NOT Israel. We're free to adopt what is useful from the wisdom of those God given laws. But Israel's civil law is not binding on christians.

Our nations civil laws are binding so much as they are not in direct opposition to God's moral laws and commands regarding the worship of the church of God.

That leaves the moral law, and Jesus repeated every commandment of the moral law. God's moral law is binding on all peoples in every nation and is the basis for the judgements of God, both now and in the future.

Paul would have spent time with the new christians at Thessalonica spelling out God's moral laws in detail so that they would know how to walk in love towards each other, separated from how the world walks.

The moral law of God comes automatically to those who by the indwelling

Holy Spirit have a source of love for one another not of this world. The love poured out within me is the single law that I need.

If I love my fellow men, I don't lie, I don't steal, I don't commit adultery, I don't murder, and the forgotten law in our current culture, I don't covet what God has given to other folks that He was pleased to not give to me.

Oh boy could we use a giant helping of Do Not Covet these days. You want social justice? Racial justice? You want everything to be equal across the board for all peoples, a total equality of everything? Marxism sound like a viable plan to you?

Nonsense! You signed that away in the fall. You forfeited equality the day you adopted sin and rebellion against God. Nothing in this world is equal! But God has solved that in His moral law. Stop coveting what you esteem some one else has that you do not have.

If you are looking at what someone else has and feeling cheated that you don't have an equal portion, you are breaking God's moral law. That is the sin of covetousness.

17 *“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house; you shall not covet your neighbor’s wife or his male slave or his female slave or his ox or his donkey or **any thing** that belongs to your neighbor.”*

Wow, wouldn't that solve about a million problems in our land if that single portion of God's moral law was remembered. Oh, and by the way, within that law is a framework from God for private property rights.

It's OK for your neighbor to have houses and a wife and slaves of both genders, (those folks apparently didn't have any problems recognizing who was a male and who was a female) and oxen and donkeys and everything else in our world covered by that word "anything" that what? *belongs to your neighbor.*

It's OK in God's moral law to own things. It's NOT OK to covet what your neighbor owns, for yourself. Coveting brings discontent, anger, murder, stealing, lying, and sexual immorality. I assume coveting your neighbor's wife has a sexual connotation. Maybe she's just a better cook than your wife. Either way it's a sin to lust after ownership of her. And vice versa ladies.

OK, no extra cost for that bit of cultural commentary. Marxism and communism is based in the breaking of this tenth commandment. Oppression is not having what your neighbor has. I just fixed all of the perceived injustices with a single commandment. You're welcome.

Back to Paul. *Vs.1 Finally then, brothers, we ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk),*

We don't have the words of Paul to them about how they ought to walk. We weren't there that day. That's why I spent some time filling in that gap for you.

Paul taught them how to walk according to the scriptures, and walking according to the scriptures is what pleases God. And then Paul says; *(just as you actually do walk)*,

Paul doesn't have to spend 22 chapters like he does with the Corinthians straightening them out and trying to get them back on track. There aren't any glaring problems at Thessalonica. They were walking in an obedience that was pleasing to God. Paul actually confirms that about them.

But . . . Paul's not quite finished. Finally, brothers, here's what I'd like to see from you; *that you excel still more.*

To a church that is the model church that all other churches could long to exemplify, Paul says; You could do better. You could do even more. You haven't arrived. You may be out in front of the race, but don't settle for

that. Go faster. excel still more.

we ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more.

What about us? Are we off the hook because our church doesn't have the word Thessalonica out on the board in front? Was this command from Paul only for that church? Or is there application here for us. Is the apostle Paul under the authority of the Lord Jesus who has all authority in heaven and on earth only directing this exhortation to the saints at Thessalonica, or are we included in this command?

If Paul wrote to us by the authority of apostleship under the Lord of the universe, first of all, he might shorten it up a bit. Sadly I think it would be redundant to leave the *still more* in the command. We'd have to be a church that was excelling in order for him to say, excel still more.

We compartmentalize our lives. We work *enough*. We sleep *enough*. We watch TV and enjoy our leisure time *enough*. We enjoy pleasures with our partners *enough*. We recreate *enough*. We spend time with our families *enough*. We juggle all of those things and if we can fit worship in for 2 or three Sunday mornings a month, we say to ourselves, that's *enough*.

God is up there in the air getting juggled with all the other things that are in the air as we keep the juggling going. We don't want to get out of balance now, do we. God, I've carved out a certain amount of time for you in my busy balanced schedule. 5 hours a month. Sorry, that was all I could manage while balancing all the other important things in **MY LIFE**

Meanwhile Jesus has a message for us. *Behold, I stand at the door and knock.* Or maybe; *Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' but not do what I say?*

Beloved, I never thought I would opt in on a new translation of the Bible,

but I have. The text I read at the beginning each Sunday is from a new revision of the excellent New American Standard Bible done by faithful men at the Master's Seminary in Los Angeles, under the complete approval of the Lockman Foundation who owned the rights to the New American Standard Bible. It's called the Legacy Standard Bible, or LSB.

The main reason I switched is because of the faithfulness of the revision and translation team to a single word. That word is used 127 times in 119 verses of the new testament, and it's always used descriptively of our relationship to the Lord, Jesus Christ.

The word is *doulos* and everyone knows exactly what it means. Slave. We are slaves. Jesus is Lord, and that word *Kurios* indicates the authority of ownership. That only leaves one thing for us to be. Slaves.

Paul is pretty direct about this truth to the Corinthian christians;
19 Or do you not know that your body is a sanctuary of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? 20 For you were bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body. 1 Cor.

6:19,20

If, indeed, you are a christian, a regenerated by the indwelling Holy Spirit christian, you were purchased by blood. You don't own you, Jesus owns you. I know it's 2022 America and this kind of speaking is terrifying to some.

The truth is, until we embrace the fact that as christians, we are owned by someone who has full authority to direct every moment, every breath we breathe in the future, it all belongs to Him, by way of purchase, there isn't going to be a change in our excelling as a church.

We don't juggle hours and try to fit Jesus in a few hours each month in OUR LIFE. It isn't your life. It belongs to Him. If that hasn't been your understanding of things, you need to repent. Because that's this books' understanding of your relationship to Jesus. And 127 times as Jesus and

the apostles, the author's of the new testament spoke about the relationship of the redeemed to the redeemer, they used the word slave.

He owns us. We belong to Him. He is our Kurios. Lord. We are His doulos. Slaves. If that isn't the Jesus you accepted, maybe you need to re-evaluate your status as a child of God. He is Master. We are slaves. He owns 100% of our time. He owns your next breath.

Well, we only considered the first verse. Next week, if the Lord allows us to, we'll get busy with vss 2 - 10 in Part 2.