**Real Change**

**1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 (ESV)**

July 14, 2019

Dr. Ritch Boerckel

***1*** *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.* ***2*** *For you know what instructions 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 one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor,* ***5*** *not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God;* ***6*** *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.* ***7*** *For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.* ***8*** *Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.*

***9*** *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,* ***10*** *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,* ***11*** *and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you,* ***12*** *so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.*

Our church family is blessed to have a number of medical students and physicians. These folks know the rigors of what it means to enter into medical school. You have to maintain a really high GPA throughout your college years. You have to have scored very well on the MCAT exam. You have to have some really great references. You have to show that you are a well-rounded person with some other accomplishments in life. The entrance requirements into medical school are so high that many people give up without even applying. They realize “I just won’t make it.” Others who do apply find out that they don’t qualify along the application process.

We are right to expect that the entrance requirements into medical school would be lofty. But if that is true, how much more lofty would the entrance requirements be to get into God’s family? We’re right to think this way because God’s family is a much higher representation of perfection. Medical school is a highly academic place and requires really strong students. But heaven is a perfect place, and it’s for perfect people. The Bible says that the entrance requirements to get into heaven, to get into God’s family, is absolute perfection. So we need a 4.0 in every category of life if we’re to qualify. We need a 4.0 in the course called Speaking the Truth, a 4.0 in the course called Sexual Purity, a 4.0 in the course Avoiding Gossip, a 4.0 in the course Attitudes About People and Circumstances, a 4.0 in the course Contentment Regarding Material Possessions, and most importantly, a 4.0 in the class The Worship of the One True and Living God. God demands complete righteousness as an entrance requirement into His family. No errors, no transgressions, no failure! That’s what the Bible says. I don’t want you to take my word for it, so I want to read some Scriptures for you. These are just a small sample of the Scriptures that teach this very thing.

**Romans 2:6** He will render to each one according to his works:

That’s how God is going to evaluate us about whether we’re qualified.

**Romans 2:9-11** There will be tribulation and distress for every human being who does evil, the Jew first and also the Greek, but glory and honor and peace for everyone who does good, the Jew first and also the Greek. For God shows no partiality.

At this point we think, “Well, maybe…” until we get to the next set of verses.

**Romans 3:9-12** For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, as it is written: “None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”

No one does good, not even one!

**Isaiah 64:6** We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.

What does God think of our very best efforts? The very best of that which we have to offer God is like a polluted garment. As a result, our iniquities take us away from God. They take us away from hope. They take us away from qualification. And then that famous passage,

**Romans 3:23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

We fall short of God’s entrance requirements. Everyone! We have all flunked out. We would never get into God’s family on our own merits. We won’t be allowed to live in the Father’s House. We’re not worthy of that honor. We will not receive the Father’s inheritance. If we are given what we deserve, we will be cast outside of His presence forever and ever. And that’s bad, bad news! However, God in love and in amazing wisdom, provides a way for people who have failed, to pass the Righteousness Exam. This is great news! How did He do it? Peter says this, speaking of Jesus,

**1 Peter 2:24** He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

He took our failings upon Himself so that failing might not be on our record and that we would have perfection on our record. By His wounds our soul has been made well. It’s been restored. God in love made a way for us to pass His entrance exam. We were without hope and God sent His Son to provide us with hope. Jesus Himself offers Himself to us. And when He offers Himself to us, He offers His qualifications to us. His qualifications become ours. His righteousness becomes ours.

**2 Corinthians 5:21** For our sake he (the Father) made him (the Son) to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him (in Christ) we (believers) might become the righteousness of God.

So that there might be a change, and we would qualify. We become the righteousness of God in Him.

How is it that Jesus’ righteousness could be placed on my record, on my account, become my possession? How is that possible? The answer is through faith. Believe in Jesus. God offers Jesus’ qualifications to us. Through faith, we become united to Jesus so that His righteousness becomes our righteousness. Our sins were laid upon Him and taken from us and borne away when He suffered upon the cross. That’s the wisdom of the gospel. It’s the good news. Here’s what John says.

**John 1:12** But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,

To everyone who received Him, Jesus, whoever believed in Jesus’ Name, Jesus grants us then the right as the Beloved Son, to become beloved children with Him, and be called children of God, to enter into God’s family. It’s amazing! Let’s never get over that, church!

Becoming a Christian requires that we would turn from our own way and believe in Jesus. It’s that we would say, “My way is going to lead me outside of God’s blessing. I can’t qualify by going my way, and I need Jesus to be my Savior, to be my qualification, to be my righteousness. And when we believe on Jesus we receive this free gift. It’s the gift of eternal life. It’s the gift of adoption. So we ask, “Lord, what must I do to be accepted into your family, to be called one of your very own, to be received into heaven, a perfect place that is for perfect people? What do I need to do?”

God’s reply to us is not “Well, you need to get off drugs. You need to stop stealing other people’s stuff. You need to stop lying to people. You need to stop hating on people. You need to stop having sex outside of marriage. You need to start going to church every Sunday. You need to get baptized. You need to start giving a tithe to your church.” That’s not God’s answer. Never! The entrance qualification into God’s family, into God’s heaven is simple. It is Jesus. He’s the One. If we have Him, we have everything we need. We don’t need any other argument. We have no other plea to make before God on why He should let us into His heaven. We have Jesus. And we gain Jesus when we believe in Him, when we trust in Him. So I would ask you today, have you personally believed in Jesus, rejected your own way, stopped counting on your own merits and just simply embraced Jesus Christ as your own Savior, as your own Lord?

When I shared this amazing message with a person recently, they asked me, “Well, if this is true, why would we ever obey God if all we need to do is believe in Jesus in order to be accepted by God?” It’s a brilliant question! I’m so thankful that this person was tracking with me because that is logical, isn’t it? It’s like, “Well wait a minute.” Because we’re still operating in this old mindset, “We have to obey God in order to fulfill these qualifications. And if you’re telling me we don’t have to do anything in order to fulfill God’s qualifications, we simply have to believe, why would we ever obey?” That’s the question.

God gives us an answer to the question. It’s important to ask it. The answer is that when we believe in Jesus, God changes us from the inside out. That’s what He does. It’s a miracle! Every person who comes to faith in Christ experiences the greatest miracle. It’s greater than the lame walking, the blind seeing, the dead raising from the grave. You see, God is not merely in the business of canceling the punishment of our sin. God also works to crush the power of sin so that sin no longer rules over us, so that we become more like God in our practical expression of every day life.

When we come to faith in Jesus, He gives us a new heart. He does a miracle. We become born again. He places His Spirit in us, and His Spirit in us works motivating us and moving us to now live a God-pleasing life. No one believes in Jesus and continues to live the same old life. No one! If you prayed a prayer or if you walked an aisle or if you were baptized and you’re still living the same old life you were living before you prayed that prayer, before you walked that aisle, before you were baptized, I would say there’s no biblical basis to believe that you are born again, that you have been adopted into God’s family. Because everyone who genuinely believes in Jesus, experiences life change. Any faith in Christ that does not change our practical life is a false faith.Every person who is joined to Christ by faith experiences a radical change of affections, a change of attitudes, a change of thoughts, a change of desires, a change of behaviors. Christ effectively moves us from a self-centered life to a Godward life. And this new life we have in Christ refuses to make a truce with sin. It begins a war. There’s a war now, in the life of the believer.

Listen to what Ezekiel says about this change, this miracle that takes place, the new covenant that Jesus established. God says of this new covenant…here’s what is going to happen.

**Ezekiel 36:26** And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.

The heart that is hardened to God and is resistant to feeling guilty regarding the sins that we cherish, God says, “I’m going to remove that heart. It’s a heart of stone. And I’m going to give you a heart of flesh. It’s a soft heart, a heart that is responsive.” You see, we don’t create this heart of flesh. We can’t say, “Here’s what I’m going to do. I’m going to create a heart of flesh, a soft heart toward God.” No, God must do a miracle if we’re to have a soft heart. But that miracle is exactly what He does every time a person believes.

**Ezekiel 36:27** And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Do you notice that? It’s not because it’s out of fear that if we don’t we’ll be rejected. It is out of this change that God causes us, He motivates us, He moves us inwardly with a real life affection, desire, longing to live a Godward life. That’s the change. Real church experiences radical life change. That’s the issue. No church exists apart from this life change. This is how real churches are planted. It’s through life change. This is how real churches continue. It’s through life change. This is how real churches truly grow. It’s through life change, this kind of change. It’s the change of hearts of stone being removed and hearts of flesh being established, being placed so that the Holy Spirit now dwells inside a people. It’s amazing! It’s amazing and mysterious. It’s so wonderful that it’s hard to describe it.

This radical life change is the work of God. It’s not produced by our own will power, our own efforts, our own wisdom. That’s why we can’t in one sense, become a real church through our own efforts. We first lean upon God, upon His miraculous grace. Apart from God’s working, we are totally unable to be a real church, to grow as a real church. And yet, while God must do the miracle, this work of life change demands our effort. It requires that we never be passive in it. We must fight with God’s weapons. We must run with endurance. We must actively pursue holiness in order for this change to happen. Now that we have this new life in us, God says, “Exercise that new life. Chase after that new life with a passion.”

That’s where Paul is with these Thessalonian believers. He has shared the gospel with them. They are a people that when they heard the gospel, they heard the Word of Christ, they repented of their sin. They turned to God from their idols. They experienced this life change. And now here in chapter 4, the Apostle Paul lays on them their responsibility. He says, “If you want to experience this life change more and more, here’s what you must do. Here’s where your energy must be applied.” So we must never think of the Christian life as passive just simply because it’s a miracle of God. Let’s read about the root first. The root of this life change is

**The Root: A passionate pursuit to live a God-pleasing life. (4:1-2)**

***1*** *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.*

I love that! Underline those words “more and more.”

***2*** *For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.*

Remember that at the end of chapter 3 the Apostle Paul prayed for these Thessalonian believers. He prayed that they might increase and abound in love for one another. Do you catch this in verse 13?

**1 Thessalonians 3:13** 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.

So he prayed that they would become holy and that their hearts would be blameless in holiness. Now, after praying that, Paul just didn’t say, “I wish you all well.” End of letter! No, he prayed it because he knows that first, God must do the work. That’s the first step in this life change. God must be active. But he didn’t stop there. He says, “Finally then, on the basis of this prayer..I know God hears my prayer. I know He’s going to answer my prayer. Now you guys participate with God’s miracle working or else you will not experience God’s miracle working.” So our sanctification, our growth in Christlikeness is at its very core, a miracle of God, but it’s not a miracle of God in which we are passive. We must become active, connecting with the graces that God provides now that we’re in Christ. And that’s what the Apostle Paul is going to press upon these precious Thessalonian believers. I believe he is fearful that they’re becoming passive.

And isn’t it interesting how quickly after becoming a believer…you know, we start off with such energy and such a boost of zeal and effort, to slowly, sort of gradually lose that joy, that energy, that passion and begin to get in such a low state where there’s hardly any real effort in our growth toward godliness whatsoever. We got into a pattern, we get into habits. We think, “Well, those habits are good enough. I’m going to church once a week and reading my Bible maybe five minutes every morning and praying before meals. And that’s good, right?” Well here’s what the Apostle Paul says. He says, “I’m going to urge you, I’m going to wake you up.” He kind of is ringing the bell now in this exhortation, wakening them to spiritual fervor. He says

*that as you received from us how you ought to walk*

“We’ve talked about this when we shared the Gospel. God has a way of walking, a way of living that you want to key into.”

*and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.*

“Don’t hear this as a correction. You’re doing this, but I’m urging you to do it more and more.” There’s no Christian on the face of the planet who is yet alive, who has arrived. A changed life always begins with God. Sanctification is God’s work. Yet God does not do this work without the eager cooperation of His people.

You might underline the little phrase “how you ought to walk.” One of Paul’s favorite word pictures to describe the Christian life is a “walk.” He uses it here. It’s used in many places. Note that the Christian life is not an effortless float trip. The Christian life is not a giant leap over tall buildings. The Christian life is not a beautiful balloon ride; up, up and away in our beautiful Christian balloon. It’s a walk! Eugene Peterson wisely called the Christian life a “long obedience in the same direction.” I’d like to key off that definition, it’s such a good definition, and continue with Paul’s metaphor. The Christian life is a long walk in the same direction. That’s what the Christian life is.It’s a long walk in the same direction.

From 1st grade to 8th grade, I walked a half mile to school every day, uphill, both ways, in six feet of snow. (Laughter!) It really was that hard! (Laughter!) I walked to school, though, from the time I was in 1st grade on through 8th grade, and it was about a half mile. I walked with my two older brothers until they graduated from grade school, and then my sister, through most of those years. Here is what I learned about walking as a young child:

First, no one step is very impressive. So you get out the door and take step one. How closer are you to the school than when you first began? Maybe three feet. That’s not very impressive. It doesn’t look like very much. And then I’d take the next step. But no one step is very impressive. We want impressive things. We go to conferences. We think, “Maybe if I listen to this song, if I pray this prayer, Zoom! Off I’ll go. I’ll just be catapulted to that place, the destination where I’m heading.” That’s not the way it works. It’s a walk. And in life, you look back and think, “I wasn’t very impressed today.” The question is, did you get three feet further? The Christian life is a long walk in the same direction. Walking seems very slow in its progress at the time, but the progress becomes great through a long series of small advances. And that’s what the Christian life is about. It’s a long series of small advances.

The second thing I learned is that walking is much better if other people join you. I do believe that God intends for us to walk together as a family, not alone! So I had my brothers, I had my sister, I had some friends. The walking was a lot more enjoyable. We would tell stories. We would have conversations. We would throw rocks. We would pick pears off of a pear tree. There are all kinds of things that happen when you’re with people. There were days when I got tired and I wanted to rest, but my older brothers urged me on. There were other days when I got distracted and wanted to wander off the path, and not ever really arrive at school. My brothers kept me on point. The Christian life is a family walk. We don’t walk alone. It’s really important to walk together.

The third thing I learned about walking from my early days is that walking is not always fun. Some days it would rain. Some days it would snow. Some days it was really cold. My brothers, before I entered into grade school, literally walked home as a tornado was bearing down. That’s not a fun day! The point is that the Christian life is a walk that is often difficult. Satan uses harsh circumstances to tempt us to quit it or to wander from the path. Our storms are intended to remind us to cling to Christ every step of the way. He is with us! When it rains, we are right to walk with more earnestness, not less.

The last thing I learned, that I thought about of learning about walking and how it relates to the Christian life, is that walking tempts me to take short cuts. I look for them! On my walk to school, I would often leave my house later than I needed to if I was going to get to school on time. I did that by design, because I knew my friend’s mom always drove him to school. If I left late and if I looked forlorn as they passed, they would stop and I’d be able to get in the car and then I’d get a ride to school. (Laughter!) And so I got to time it really well and they actually gave me a ride almost every day. But it was after going a couple hundred yards up the street, when they would be passing me. The Christian life is a walk, not a ride. There are really no shortcuts to this. There’s no way to have someone just stop and drive us. We have to walk it.

What is the goal of our walk? We read it there, don’t we in verse 1. It’s “to please God.” What a precious way of talking about this! It’s amazing that we *can* please God. Before this miracle of rebirth we are totally unable to please God. Romans 8:8 says that those who are of the flesh cannot please God. It’s not that they will not. It’s just that they can’t. It’s impossible for an unchanged heart, a heart of stone, to do anything that would cause God to smile! But now that we’re in Christ, the Father takes pleasure in us like He takes pleasure in His Son. Isn’t that amazing?! And it’s possible to please Him.

Through our union with Jesus, we’re enabled to live in such a way that God smiles at us like a parent watching his or her four year old hit the ball off the T. You know, there’s not a lot of strangers who are going to pay hundreds of dollars to watch that happen. But man, if you’re a parent and you’re watching your little four year old hit a ball off a T, there’s nothing better in the world. It just lights you up. It’s not because the act in itself is so spectacular. It’s because you’re seeing growth in your child and you’re seeing that child use these new formed skills. And that’s what it means to please God. Isn’t it amazing to think about? It’s not like, “You better please Me!” It’s that we get to bring a smile to God, the Holy One’s face, our Creator! For Him to take pleasure in us is the goal. I want that!

**2 Corinthians 5:9-10** So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

We want to please Him. We want to see His smile. We want to hear that “Well done, good and faithful servant.” Aim to live your whole life in such a way that God takes pleasure in us. What a potential joy is ours! I don’t believe there’s any greater joy than a child of God hearing the pleasure of God being sung over him or her. So Christian, I would ask you at this point, are you making it your aim to please God in everything you think and say and do? Is this a driving passion for you? Or is this a passion that you once had, but you’ve been drifting from it? You really haven’t thought about it very much for a long time. You get up and yesterday is like today and tomorrow is going to be like today, and that’s just the way we’re living our life.

***1*** *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.*

God intends for us to grab hold of this together. That’s why He’s speaking to the whole church and not just speaking to individuals. He says, “I ask and urge you all…” It’s a plural y’all. Every one of those Jews who are reading that, it’s y’all. And he says, “I urge you brothers…” Again, that’s a plural term to describe this church. Real church walks toward life change together! That’s what we do. That’s who we are. We look around and we say, “I don’t want to walk alone. I don’t want to leave my brother or sister behind, either. We’re going to walk this life change together. It’s going to be hard. A lot of times we’re going to be discouraged because the progress seems so slow, but we are going to walk together. And if we have this long walk in the same direction, guess what? We arrive at a place that is unbelievable. We think “Man, we actually did this! This is what happened during the course of these short years that we have together.”

Now, what does a God-pleasing life look like? I know our time is so short. I’m just going to touch on three areas that the Apostle Paul touched on.

**The Fruit: All practical areas of life are changed by Jesus. (4:3-12)**

**Area #1: Sexual purity. (4:2-8)**

***2*** *For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.*

In other words, he says, “When I was with you I taught you the commands of God.” The commands of God and meditating upon the commands of God, is not legalistic. God’s instructions need to be embraced and meditated upon so we have clarity, so we have direction, so we have power in our walk. Now as we meditate upon God’s commands, we do so with Jesus at our side, recognizing we’re a miserable failure. Without Jesus, we are totally powerless to obey these commands. We’re not doing it in our own strength to puff up our chest and say, “Look at me and how righteous I am.” It’s not self-righteousness. That’s legalistic. But too often, people think the Christian life is contrasted between God’s grace and God’s commands, and that’s not so. God’s commands are His grace. That’s the issue. They are His grace and they’re to be received by us, meditated upon by us, remembered by us, rolled over. “You know what instructions we gave you. Remember them!” he’s saying in verse 2.

***3*** *For this is the will of God, your sanctification:*

He gets really particular, here. He says

*that you abstain from sexual immorality;*

If you want to know and discover the will of God for your life, it’s simple. It’s your sanctification. Here’s the definition of sanctification from Wayne Grudem’s Systematic Theology. I like it. “Sanctification is a progressive work of God and man…”

Do you catch that? It’s first of God. That’s the priority position. But it’s also of man. That doesn’t mean we’re not exerting effort in it. He goes on to say,

“…that makes us more and more…” I think he’s drawing right from 1 Thessalonians 4. More and more is the language that God uses.

“…that makes us more and more free from sin and more like Christ in our actual lives.” Or our practical lives.

Sanctification is a progressive work. It’s like a walk. Each day, we get further down the road and closer to the goal. It’s a work of God. God gives us a new heart to engage with it, but it’s also a work of man. We make every effort through the means of grace; through prayer and Scripture and faith commitment. What sins does our sanctification remove? The answer is every one! But Paul parks on three. Again, we’ll just look at these very quickly. The first one he parks upon is sexual immorality.

It’s not a surprise that he starts here, because the culture in Thessalonica is rife with sexual immorality. Both Corinth and Thessalonica were well-known throughout the world for the chaos that existed in the sexual lives of the citizens. They had goddesses and temples there in Corinth and in Thessalonica where the servants of these goddesses would roam the streets as prostitutes. Part of the worship of God would be to have immoral relationships with these temple prostitutes, temple priestesses or priests. That would be part of the worship service! While our world expresses its chaos in sexual relationships differently, I don’t know if it’s any less. Sexual immorality, abstaining from sexual immorality is a broad term. It refers to every form of sexual activity outside the bounds of marriage between one man and one woman. And God says simply. “Abstain!” That’s what sanctification means. It means we abstain from that. We push ourselves away from it.

Sexual intimacy in marriage is God’s gift to us. It’s not as though God gives us permission after we’re married. No, He designed us for this kind of relationship. It’s a relationship which involves God bringing two together and joining them as one. And not just in body, but also in their emotions, in their soul. It’s a brilliant design that God made! And through that design, we reflect who He is, His goodness. We’re also binding together in family so that there is a means by which we can continue the worship of God through strong relationships that bind all of culture together. Now, Satan sees that. He hates the glory of God in the expression of marriage. He hates God’s design for marriage, and so he attacks it. And that forceful tool he uses is sexual immorality. He uses sexual immorality as a means to defy the God who gave sexual union to us as a gift, as a help. So here’s the truth. God wills you to be sexually pure. He provides for purity in Christ and He commands it through Christ.

So the Apostle Paul says don’t let sexual immorality, something that is so fleeting, rob you of the true joy that God has for us to experience in our worship of Him. Whether we’re single or whether we’re married, God calls us to sexual purity and to abstain from sexual immorality. He doesn’t do that because He wants to rob us of joy. He does that to protect our joy, to keep us in that joy in Him and in His good design. So how severe must we act in order to abstain? How important is it, in other words? Here’s what Jesus said. It’s so solemn!

**Matthew 5:28-30** But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.

So it’s not just actions that is sexual immorality. It’s also lustful intent. We read further now in 1 Thessalonians 4-6. Here’s what he means.

***4*** *that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor,*

Holiness is devotion to God. Honor is that which brings glory to God and praise to God. Here’s the contrast of holiness and honor.

***5*** *not in the passion*

These raging fires that aren’t directed, that aren’t controlled, but they burn out of control and they are destructive.

***5*** *not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God;*

It makes sense that the Gentiles who don’t know God would be overcome by these fires, but why are we? That’s what he says.

***6*** *that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter,*

In other words, it’s always an unloving act that is destructive to the church body.

*because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.*

Notice the solemn warning. Reading this is a little uncomfortable for our modern ears, isn’t it? As I read that out loud, it’s like, “Oooo! Could you soften that up a little bit? Let’s see what the New Living Translation has to say. Maybe it’s not as hard as this.” Right? It sounds really harsh! Pastors don’t typically even speak this way. When we read these words that say

***6*** *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.*

It’s like, “Oh! Couldn’t you lighten up a little bit?” And I don’t think we can. I think we must not skip past the sobriety of this truth. You see, what Paul is saying is that what happens in Vegas does not stay in Vegas. That’s what he’s saying. Don’t think that way. Isn’t that little motto one of the most deceitful mottoes you’ve ever heard? It ought to crush your soul every time a Christian hears it, because it actually works. People actually think, “There’s a place I can go to and I can sin to my heart’s content, and then I leave it and it’s though it didn’t happen.” There’s no place like that. What happens in Vegas does not stay in Vegas! “Everything hidden will be revealed. Everything concealed will be declared from the housetop,” Jesus says in Luke 12. If not in this life, certainly in the life to come. The Lord is an avenger in all these things.

I had a number of great things to say about this to help you, and someday I will say it. Let me move on to the second area just briefly, these last two. I don’t want us to think this passage is only about sexual purity. It’s about sanctification. Now he does spend the most of his time on sexual purity because this is where the people in Thessalonica need help the most. And I would ask you, is there any area of your life that you are not growing more and more in holiness regarding sexual purity? Are you pursuing it with a passion? Satan is going to whisper, “It’s okay. You don’t need to break the power of sin.” And this is the opportunity that God has for us to listen to what He has to say. He who rejects this is not just rejecting the word of man, but we’re rejecting the Word of God!

**Area #2: Brotherly love. (4:9-10)**

Sanctification affects not just our sexual lives, but also our corporate life, our communal life together with the body of Christ. He’s just kind of going through a list here of ways that sanctification makes a radical change. He could have listed hundreds of things. He really parks on three in particular. And number four, we’ll look at next week.

***9*** *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,* ***10*** *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,*

A God-pleasing life cares for brothers and sisters in the family of God. There is a holy discontent every time a person chasing after a God-pleasing life, comes to church. They say, “Last week I loved my brothers and sisters, but I want to do it more this week.” And there’s this holy discontent like, “I’m not doing enough. I want to do more to love my brothers and sisters. I want to press into that.” That’s what a God-pleasing life does. That’s one of the ways in which God is going to evaluate our life. It’s not just, “Did you remain sexually pure in this life? If you did, you’re great!” No, a person can be sexually pure, but if they’re not loving their brothers, they still are not living and pressing into a God-pleasing life.

**Area #3: Meaningful labor. (4:11-12)**

I love this! Again, a whole conference could be on these two verses.

***11*** *and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you,* ***12*** *so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.*

What he’s saying is that our work life is part of our worship life. We please God by how we labor in our jobs. He says, “Live quietly.” In other words, aspire to that. Don’t complain and grumble and be the person who is a pain to everybody. Just live quietly. Mind your own affairs. Don’t get involved in office gossip and office slander. Mind your own affairs. Stay in your lane. Don’t damage other people in the workplace. Work with your own hands. Stay busy! Don’t take extra breaks. Just work with your own hands. Do what you’re asked to do. Work properly with outsiders. Earn unbelievers’ respect by your example, by the way you work, by your attitude, your conversation. Be dependent on no one. God has given you talents. Use them to feed yourself and to feed your family. Don’t ask other people to work to feed yourself if you have health and abilities to do that. Labor! Work hard!

Sanctification affects our daily work. We can please God as much on Monday as we do on Sunday. So let’s not think that a God-pleasing life is about a segment. All life is sacred. We must not divide it between sacred and secular. Here’s what Colossians says.

**Colossians 3:22-24** Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

In other words, desire to please God! You’re serving the Lord Christ. That’s what is happening there. It’s an act of worship. God designs the Christian life to be one of daily, joyful growth in godliness. Isn’t that wonderful?! Too many believers begin to rust out after two or three years following their conversion. Why is that? God calls us to grow and grow more and more and more. And that’s what our life can be like. There’s nothing more joyful than growth.

Like me, perhaps when you were little and as your children grew up, you had one of these Growth Charts on the wall. I think most people have those in their houses. Why do you do that? It’s really cool, especially as parents, to see your kids grow. And they get a kick out of it. A week goes by and you measure. “I grew this much!” There’s great joy in growth. There was a story of a little girl who said, “Daddy, why don’t you have a Growth Chart? We have a Growth Chart. Why don’t you have a Growth Chart?” He said, “Well, because when you get older, you stop growing.” “Daddy, why do you stop growing when you’re older?” Of course, physically, there’s a reason for that. But not spiritually! And that’s why Paul is saying, “This is the will of God, your sanctification.” Pay attention with the Growth Chart. Ask yourself, where am I now? Where am I heading?

I’ll tell you one last story to encourage you. We had a gal in our church who was in her 80’s when she got pancreatic cancer. The Lord allowed her to live a couple years after her pancreatic cancer diagnosis. They first told her she had weeks to live and she ended up living, I think, a little over two years. I’d go over and visit her. She was in her 80’s with Pancreatic Cancer, and do you know what she would have? She would have a commentary from Dr. James Boice on the book of Romans right next to her chair. She would open that thing up and she started asking me questions about the interpretation and the application of the book of Romans. And I thought, “May your tribe increase! I want to be you.” I want to be in my 80’s…I don’t want to have pancreatic cancer, but if I had it, I want to have that attitude. This is not the time to start winding down and shutting things up. As long as there it today, there is time for me to grow one more inch. There is time for me to take one more step in my walk so that when I see Jesus, I have walked as far as I possibly could toward this amazing prize of Christlikeness. Amen? (Amen!)