

DEMONSTRATED IN ACTION

BIBLE BASIS: I Thessalonians 4:1-12

BIBLE TRUTH: Jesus wants us to live a holy life—committed to Him and His Word.

MEMORY VERSE: Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more (I Thessalonians 4:1).

LESSON AIM: That your students will identify behaviors and attitudes that exemplify holiness. **TEACHER PREPARATION**

MATERIALS NEEDED: Quarterly Commentary, Adult Quarterly, Adult resources—charts, worksheets, and other teaching tools, Bibles (several different versions)

OTHER MATERIALS NEEDED / TEACHER'S NOTES:

LESSON OVERVIEW

LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON

Holiness is always right.

BIBLE LEARNING

It is important that believers observe the commands of the Lord and revere Him.

BIBLE APPLICATION

Identify what the Bible classifies as holy behavior.

STUDENTS' RESPONSES

That your students will be able to list and identify pure and holy behavior.

LESSON SCRIPTURE

I THESSALONIANS 4:112

1. Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

2. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.

3. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:

4. That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour;

5. Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:

6. That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.

7. For God hath not called us unto unclean ness, but unto holiness.

8. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.

9. But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

10. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more;

11. And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you;

12. That ye may walk honestly among them that are without, and that ye may lack of nothing.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

In verse 3 of today's passage, we come upon a key concept of Paul's epistles: sanctification. The word "sanctify" from the Greek verb *hagiazō* (*hageeADzo*), means "to make holy, to consecrate or separate from the world." It refers to our identity as God's set apart people and the process of becoming holy. As we study the New Testament texts about sanctification, we see first that Jesus prayed for our sanctification: "Make them holy by your truth; teach them your word, which is truth. And I give myself as a holy sacrifice for them so they can be made holy by your truth" (John 17:17, 19, NLT). The agent of our sanctification was to be God's Word, with the goal of our sanctification as preparation for us to be sent out to the world to glorify

God by doing His work.

Not only did Jesus pray for our sanctification, but Paul also prayed that we be sanctified through and through (I Thessalonians 5:23). Finally in Hebrews 10:29, the writer argued that the blood of Jesus sanctifies.

From these passages, it is clear that God sanctifies believers and that the blood of Christ provides the basis for it. The Holy Spirit effects divine sanctification and the Word of God is an active agent in it.

TEACHING THE BIBLE LESSON

LIFE NEED FOR TODAY'S LESSON

AIM: That your students will understand the importance of encouraging other believers.

INTRODUCTION

The Christian Walk

The Hebrew term *halak* (*hawLAK*) is found in over 1500 times in the Old Testament. In addition to a physical movement, "walk" can refer to the spiritual and moral direction of a person's life. It is especially important that believers "observe the commands of the LORD (their) God, walking in his ways and revering him" (Deuteronomy 8:6, NIV).

Translated in the Greek, "walk" is used in the same way. The word can have a strictly literal sense (Matthew 1:16; Luke 4:30; John 5:9). But it is also used figuratively to indicate one's lifestyle. Believers once walked in the ways of the world (Colossians 3:7). But, after being saved and believing on the Lord Jesus Christ, we now walk in the light (I John 1:7), in love and obedience (II John 6), and in truth (II John 4:3; III John 34).

BIBLE LEARNING

AIM: That your students will understand the urgency of Paul's exhortation to please God in daily walk (living).

I. WALK TO PLEASE GOD (I Thessalonians 4:18)

As Paul wrote in this portion of his first letter to the Thessalonian church, he wanted to encourage the believers to walk or live their lives to please God. He acknowledged that they were already doing so, but he urged them to excel even more. The word "furthermore" (I Thessalonians 4:1) means "in addition to." Paul was saying that in addition to his previous teaching, he wanted—indeed, he begged the believers—to continue to make pleasing God their primary concern. The phrase "abound more and more" implied a constant awareness that we are created for His pleasure, with a constant determination to do what is pleasing to Him (verse 1; see also Revelation 4:11). Believers should never be satisfied with their present way of living with God; we should strive continuously to grow in our relationship and our efforts to please Him.

How can anyone live a life that is pleasing to God? The simple answer is this: We commit to living holy lives; this is God's will for us. Living holy lives involves many different aspects of our daily routines. Paul reminded the believers that the principles he taught did not come from him, but from God, and he taught these things in the name and in the authority of Christ. He then listed three areas he wanted the Thessalonian believers to concentrate on: sexual purity, controlling their bodies, and dealing honestly with fellow believers.

Inspired by the Authority of Christ

(verses 18)

1. Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

The phrase "furthermore then," or "finally" (NLT), marked a transition in Paul's subject matter. The words "beseech" and "exhort" underscored the seriousness with which Paul took the issues he was about to address. At the same time, both words are devoid of any coercion or threats. The nature of his appeal was conveyed in "beseech," or "ask," which laid more stress on the person asked than the thing asked; and "exhort," or "urge," which conveys more than a request, but is less than a command. The missionaries' admonitions are "by (in) the Lord Jesus," that is, their exhortation takes place within a relationship that is defined by the Lord Jesus. They are also grounded in and inspired by the authority of Christ. This phrase also forms the context of the exhortations that are to follow.

Paul urged the Thessalonians "to walk" or live in a manner that pleases God. The apostle had previously given instructions to them in this regard. He gave them credit for obeying his instructions "just as you are doing" (RSV), "as we have taught you" (NLT), a phrase that is omitted by the KJV. Yet the realization of the ultimate goal of pleasing God and receiving His commendation entailed going forward and making continual improvement (3:13). Paul was not suggesting that they had been failing in living the Christian life. They were to abound—more and more. There are no bounds set to progress in grace. The Christian must not rest on his or her laurels. The main lesson we ought to learn from this verse is that the ultimate

purpose of living as a Christian is not to please ourselves but to please God.

2. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.

The word "for" connects the instructions the Thessalonians received in the past to the command just given to live as they had been taught. Paul made it clear that the commandments previously given to them were not by his own authority, but that of the Lord. Therefore, continuing to live in a way that pleased God did not require new instructions or revelations by the apostle. It required obedience to the commands already received and the teachings already given.

3. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:

Paul's exhortations on living a life that is pleasing to God began with an ethical and spiritual injunction that he characterizes as the "will" of God for His people. God's will here is not to be construed as the totality of His will, but an aspect of it. "Sanctification," may denote either the process of sanctification or the outcome of that process. However, given that Paul was addressing one aspect of the process of sanctification in this section, the former sense is considered more appropriate here. Rather than a general declaration of God's will, Paul provided, in this

verse and in verses 48, a precise area with

which God's will here is concerned.

Paul understood that sexual sin always makes a victim of somebody, so he cautioned the believers: "and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of

him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you" (I Thessalonians 4:6, NIV). When we do not control our bodies in the matter of sex, we harm and do wrong to others. People often do not consider that their actions are hurting other people. When a trust is broken, whether it is between a husband and a wife, a neighbor and a neighbor's spouse, a parent and a child, etc.; the misdeed is a betrayal and an act of violence against another person. Paul warns the Thessalonians and us that God will punish every instance of such sins. The life of separation, wrought by the experience of sanctification, challenges the believer to forsake the patterns of the world and to follow the pattern of holiness with Jesus Christ as the model.

4. That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour;

Here Paul stated the course of action a believer must take to avoid sexual immorality. "Everyone... should know how to possess his vessel," literally means, "each of you should learn to control his or her own body." The meaning of the word "vessel" or "body" remains a matter of debate. Some understand it as a reference to one's wife. In that sense, the phrase means "learn to live with his own wife" (cf. footnote, NLT and NIV). Others, considering Paul's usage of the word in other contexts, understand the word as a reference to the human body (Romans 9:22, 23; II Corinthians 4:7). In either case, it is clear that Paul called the believer to maintain his/ her sexual life in a way that is holy and honorable. If a person controls him/herself as Paul here suggested—if s/he is married or not, if s/he conducts a business or works for another, in whatever relationship one enters—these will be characterized by holiness and honor.

Immorality, lust, and any other vices will be excluded because believers are controlling their bodies in holiness and honor. In this context, *hagiasmos* is understood as denoting the personal "ethical purity" of the believer.

5. Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:

Paul continued with the thought expressed in verse 4 with a negative observation concerning Gentiles. The Gentiles, because they did not know God, did not have any notion of holiness and lived in the passion of their desires. The word "concupiscence" refers to this kind of intense desire. They were not guided by God but by their passionate lust. Christians, once they now have a relationship with God through Christ and have been removed from that realm into the church of God (cf. I Corinthians 10:32), are obligated to maintain much higher standards.

6. That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.

Sexual misconduct of any kind, by a believer, affects the entire community. Paul is specifically concerned that no Christian should take advantage of his/her fellow believers in sexual matters. The reference to one's "brother" suggests that Paul was now dealing with sexual sin in relation to those who are members of the believing community (though some commentators regard this reference as not only sexual but any form of defrauding another Christian). Any unlawful sexual relations, within the church in the end, are a wrong done against another Christian and a defrauding of the whole community. Such will amount to a violation of holiness. In verse 6b, Paul clearly stated the

consequences of sexual impurity. The "Lord is the avenger of all such," that is, the Lord will punish all those who engage in sexual misconduct. Paul's language was drawn from the Old Testament (cf. Psalm 94:1). What a solemn warning! Paul was not just speaking of a present vengeance, which may be included (I Corinthians 5:15; 11:30-32), but of the future judgment at the coming of Christ (3:10-17; I Thessalonians 2:19; 3:13)—a judgment to be carried out by Christ in association with God the Father (II Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10; I Thessalonians 3:13). The Lord Jesus, who is the Saviour, is also the One who will act in judgment against those who are sinners in the church.

7. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.

God's judgment alone should not be the motivation or reason why a Christian must keep purity in sexual matters. There is a more compelling reason. This is what Paul submitted here—the nature of God's calling. The reason for purity lies in the purpose of God's call that comes to people who enter into His kingdom (2:12). Those who, having been called and have responded, have not been inducted into a life of sexual impurity, but into a holy life (cf. 3:13; 4:3, 4). They have been called out of impurity and now belong to a community with values different from those of "the Gentiles" (verse 5), among whom they formerly lived.

8. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.

The ethical and spiritual demand for sanctification that was made by Paul rests, not in his teaching or of any person in particular, but in the nature and will of God. Therefore,

rejection of them means rejecting not humankind, but God, who calls His people to be holy because He is holy and "who gives us his Holy Spirit" (NIV). The Holy Spirit is the source of the believer's new life, something that emphasizes the incompatibility of a life of impurity and sin with life in Christ. Paul did not simply express the will of God for these people in these concrete terms, and then assert that they themselves are solely responsible for complying with the will of God. True, obedience is our responsibility; but the possibility of success exists because God has given us His Spirit. Not only is holiness the will of God but also the Holy Spirit, who is at work in the believer's life and is the Agent of true holiness. He empowers us to be holy.

QUESTION 1

What has God given every believer (I Thessalonians 4:8)?

(Answer) He has given every believer His Holy Spirit.

LIGHT ON THE WORD

Walk in Love Toward Others

Although Paul complimented the Thessalonian believers on the love they had for each other and for brothers and sisters throughout all of Macedonia, he again would not let them rest on their laurels. Instead he encouraged them to love one another "more and more" (I Thessalonians 4:10). We should always be alert for opportunities to act in love. God's love always involves a choice and an action. In John 3:16, we read that God chose to love the world, and based upon that choice, He took an action in the giving of His only begotten Son.

Our love should be the same as His. We do not love people because they deserve it; in fact, Jesus told us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:43-44). We love because we choose to. Once the choice is made, we then act on that love by giving of ourselves. God acted on His love for us when He gave His best for us—His Son. Likewise, we should take advantage of every opportunity to give of ourselves. This means that sometimes we must forget about ourselves and help others.

Many will say it is impossible to love in this way and in fact it is humanly impossible; but with God all things are possible (Matthew 19:26). The Holy Spirit gives us the power to love; He lives in our hearts and makes us more like Christ. That is why the apostle Paul encouraged us to love more and more; because the more we love, the more we become like Christ, and this is the hope we have in our Christian walk—to be more like Christ. "And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Romans 5:5, NIV).

II. WHAT IS BROTHERLY LOVE? (I Thessalonians 4:9-12)

When the Holy Spirit comes into our lives to "guide [us] into all truth" (John 16:13, NIV), we find we have the capacity to love each other, despite our many differences in age, background, education, ethnicity, intellect, temperament, interests, etc.! We are the worldwide family of God. However, if we only loved our own family or those like us, we would be no different than unbelievers. Jesus phrased it this way: "If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others?"

Do not even pagans do that?" (Matthew 5:46-47, NIV)

Brotherly Love (verses 9-12)

9, 10. But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more;

"But as touching [upon]" (KJV) or literally, "now concerning" is Paul's way of introducing a new subject (4:13; 5:1; cf. I Corinthians 7:1, 25; 8:1). The phrase "brotherly love," in its non-Christian usage, was an expression for affection between and among blood relatives. Christians changed it to express the realities of being members of the family of God and the close ties within that family. Paul viewed further writing on the subject as superfluous, in that believers are "taught by God" to show brotherly love toward one another. The proof of the God-given character of the Thessalonians' love is that it reached farther than and beyond immediate friends and acquaintances. It reached to all other Christians in the province of Macedonia. But further progress remained a possibility and goal for them (3:12). There is always room for Christian graces, especially in love. Paul repeated his admonition from verse 1, but became more specific. They were to "increase more and more" in love. "More and more love" is always a potentiality for Christians because the ultimate—the example of Christ Himself (John 13:34; 15:12)—is infinite and can only be approached, not fully reached by humanity.

11. And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you;

Changing the subject, Paul moved from the topic of love to the importance of hard work and individual responsibility in Christian living. Paul gave three instructions: a) study to be quiet, b) do your own business, and c) work with your own hands. That restlessness, that may have been a problem for the Thessalonians, was implied by Paul's exhortation "study to be quiet." The next exhortation, "do your own business" or "mind your own business," implies that a meddlesome spirit which often goes with restlessness, was troubling them. There were busybodies among them and, as such, needed a reprimand (see also II Thessalonians 3:11). Failure to work with their hands may have been the root of the difficulty that Paul addressed. Paul and his coworkers had shown the Thessalonians a practical example of industry and earning their own living. It would appear that some members of the church were ignoring both the admonition and example. Those who were behaving this way were not only burdensome to their fellow Christians, they were incurring a bad reputation among non-Christians.

12. That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.

The twofold purpose of living as is commanded in verses 10b—11 is stated in verse 12. The first goal expressed was that the church members should "walk honestly toward them that are without" or literally, "walk worthily toward those outside." In so doing, non-Christians might be able to observe the proper and respectable manner of life. Even "them that are without," so described because they have no relationship with Christ and hence are outside the family of God (cf. I Corinthians 5:12,13; Colossians 4:5; I Timothy 3:7), recognize and

appreciate honorable conduct. On the other hand, those who call themselves believers but live contrary to their profession and who do not carry their share of social responsibility, are repelled. The word "honestly," meaning "worthily" or "decently" assumed certain social norms or expectations. The second goal of the exhortations was that the believers would be able to provide for themselves. The idlers are not to depend on the charity of others. Christian love will and should lead people to be thoughtful of the needs of the poor or unfortunate, but the Christian must not be a parasite or sponger.

QUESTION 2

What is one principle that God has taught us as believers (I Thessalonians 4:9)?

(Answer) He has taught us to love one another.

STUDENTS' RESPONSES

AIM: That your students will be able to list and identify pure and holy behavior.

Paul gave a list of behaviors that are considered "impure" (I Thessalonians 4:36). Using his list, make a list of behaviors that are considered pure or holy. Then make your own list of behaviors that are impure. Is there anything on either list that you need to work on? Explain.

PRAYER

Lord, You are the Righteous One. We know that You are perfect and holy. As Your children, we desire to live a life dedicated to You. We desire to be holy just like You. Help us live a pure and holy life in a world that is overrun with sexual immorality, addictions, and compulsive behaviors. Let us be holy examples of You in the earth. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

HOW TO SAY IT :

Sanctification. sang(k) 'tuhfuhKAYshuhn.

Fornication. fawr'nuhKAYshuhn.

Concupiscence. kan'kyupes&n(t)s, kan.

Macedonia. mas'uhDOHneeuh;

mas'uhDOHneeuhn.

PREPARE FOR NEXT SUNDAY

Read I Thessalonians 5:111 and prepare for next week's lesson, "God's Cosmic Plan."

DAILY HOME BIBLE READINGS

MONDAY

Encouraging an Encourager (Acts 18:2428)

TUESDAY

The Lord's Counsel (Psalm 16:711)

WEDNESDAY

The Lord's Instruction (Psalm 32:611)

THURSDAY

The Lack of Discipline (Proverbs 5:2123)

FRIDAY

The Blessing of Obedience (Deuteronomy 11:2632)

SATURDAY

The Final Payday (Revelation 22:813)

SUNDAY

Called to Holiness (I Thessalonians 4:112)