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 Sunday Morning
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1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

A Life That Pleases God Part 2 – God's Direction; God's Desires; Our Sanctification

Related Topics: Spiritual Challenges;
 Abounding; The Christian Walk; Pleasing
 God; The Will of God; Sanctification;
 Holiness; Sexual Sin; Sexual Purity; Taught
 by God; Brotherly Love; An Orderly life.



1Finally, 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. 2For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6that 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. 7For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. 8Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. 9Now 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, 10for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, 11and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, 12so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

Paul began this section of his letter challenging the believers in Thessalonica to abound more and more in pleasing God. By those words the Holy Spirit describes the trajectory of the Christian life! Paul speaking by the Holy Spirit says that the life of faith is not to be one of existence in Christ; it should be a life of excellence in Christ.

God does not ask us to **park** ourselves in the Christian life. He challenges us to prevail in it. God wants us to move **beyond** the status quo. The status quo is a great ploy of the devil by which he deceives us into settling for the some small fraction of the abundant life that Jesus died for us to have. We also noted that in order to abound more and more in pleasing God you need to know **who** God is and **why** you ought to want to please Him and **what** it is that pleases Him! That is why Paul's method is to always set forth **doctrine** then **duty** – **precept** then **practice**.

We discussed last week that Paul told them that this way of living is not an option; that as you received from us how you ought to live and to please God. They ought to live this way because of who Jesus is and what Jesus has done for them. Because of **whom** Jesus is and **what** Jesus has done for them, they ought to live a life that would **please** God. We saw how this word “please” is closely associated with the concept of walking with God. The King James Version puts it, “how ye ought to walk and to please God.” We saw this

same word used in the LXX in relationship to the life of a man named Enoch.

1) *“Enoch walked with God...”Genesis 5:22*

Enoch was walking in a way pleasing to God for 300 years in the time in which virtually All of mankind was racing wickedly towards the judgment of God in the Noahic flood

2) *“Enoch pleased God...he was commended as having pleased God.”Hebrews 11:5*

3) *Enoch was taken up. “Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.”Genesis 5:24
“By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.” Hebrews 11:5*

Interesting parallel; Enoch walks in a way pleasing to God and then Enoch is taken out of the world just before the world is judged. In 1 Thes. 4, Paul places walking with God in the context of the Rapture. The big idea here is:

- It pleases God to walk with man.

IF it pleases God to walk with man then we can please God **by** walking with Him. Because **by nature**, walking with God implies that we bring our lives into agreement with God.

Amos 3:3 NLT Can two people walk together without agreeing on the direction?

That is why Enoch pleased God. In the midst of a world rushing towards judgment, Enoch said, “I’m in agreement with God.”

We please God **by** walking with Him because by nature, walking with God requires faith, without which it is **impossible** to please God. Because faith is taking the position that God is right when the rest of the world says He’s wrong.

Think of Enoch believing that God was right when the rest of the world was taking the exact opposite position. Because faith is taking the position that God is right when every emotion and feeling and desire says He’s wrong.

We closed our time together last week by taking a little peak into Verse 3:

1 Thessalonians 4:3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification...

The first thing we noted about the verse is that God wants us to know His will! He is the God who speaks. The opening chapter of the first book of the Bible we find it said 10 times – “God said....”

Secondly – In the context of pleasing God, God tells us how ought we walk to please Him. Paul essentially says – God wants you to know **how** to do it! God wants us to know how to walk in agreement with Him, how to walk in faith, and how to abound more and more in it. This is the will of God.

As Christians we so often say, “If I only knew what God’s will is for my life.” In this passage God’s will is clearly and simply revealed. It’s not cryptic. We are not left guessing. It is so clear that once this passage is read, we are left only with a choice. Will it be His will or my will? Do I desire **thy** will be done Or **my** will be done?

There are essentially two ways in which we understand this concept of “the will of God” in Scripture:

First: The **determination** of God – his decrees/directions /plans.

Isaiah 46:9-10 ...I am God, and there is none like me,10 declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose,’

Acts 2:23 this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

The problem is we can easily and often get stuck in viewing the **will** of God in merely in terms of the sovereign and seemingly distant decrees and determinations of God hatched in the annals of eternity, born out of the hidden recesses of His infinite wisdom. But in a large way the term “will of God” speaks of the **desires** of God – that in which He delights.

“Will” derived from the Greek, *Thelema* – conveys the idea of desire; even a heart’s desire primarily expresses emotion instead of volition.

Thus the **determinations** – the plans of God spring from the **desires** of God brought forth from His perfect wisdom.

Ps. 135:6 Whatever the Lord pleases, he does,...
Isaiah 53:10 Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him;...

According to Vine’s Expository, the character of a person is expressed in his will. If we are afraid of the will of God it is because we have a faulty concept of God.

That is why it is so important to know that our God is the God who speaks. He has made Himself known through **general revelation**. He reveals to us His invisible nature and attributes in His creation.

Psalms 19 and *Romans 1* – Creation preaches day in and day out about the invisible nature and attributes of God

God has revealed Himself through **specific revelation**:

1) *The Scriptures*

He has revealed His graciousness to us in the Scriptures. For example, *Jeremiah 29:11* For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for wholeness and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

2) *Through Jesus*

He has revealed Himself – **His character** – to us in the person of His Son.

Hebrews 1:1-3 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, 2but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. 3He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature,...

John 1:18 KJV No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

We see the heart, the desires of God, in Jesus. Spurgeon said, “What more can he do to prove his sincerity than to die for us? His life is the mirror of love, but in his death the sun shines on it with a blaze of glory.” The revelation of God in Scripture and in the person of Jesus Christ clearly declares that God is holy. Since God is holy, His **desires** and His **determinations** (plans) must also be holy. He can only desire for His children those things that are holy including lives that are holy.

1 Peter 1:15-16 15but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

Here is the conflict: God IS holy. His **determinations** are holy. His **desires** are holy. But, fallen man is not. By nature – fallen man follow the desires (*thelemata*) –of the flesh and of the mind.

Ephesians 2:3 3among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body (KJV-flesh) and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

The world outside of Christ (that was us before Jesus) is in complete opposition to the holy direction and desire of God and to the will of God.

Romans 8:7-8 7For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. 8Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

1 Corinthians 2:14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

That is why religion can **never** save a man. That is why spirituality can **never** save a man.

Last week we saw that it pleased God to walk with man, but man chose to have **his desire** above **God’s desire**. From that moment forward mankind has lived for the desires of his flesh bringing himself constantly into opposition to the desires of God. But it **pleased** God to send His Son to die on the cross so that through the death of His Son, God might reconcile sinners to Himself. When a man or woman believes with their heart on the Lord Jesus Christ they are reconciled to God. Their sins are washed away and they are saved from the wrath that is to come. Though they were once dead in their sins, they are made alive to God! At the moment of conversion they become partakers of the divine nature – the **otherness** of God. We are **set apart** from the world and our old lives lived in it.

That is what God calls us, “Set apart.” In our English Bibles we are called **Saints**.

Philippians 1:1 KJV To all the saints in Christ Jesus...

It is the Greek word *hagios*, meaning “Holy” or “set apart.” **in** Christ we are **positionally** holy - set apart - from the rest of the world in rebellion against God. By the miracle of the second birth we begin to desire what God desires.

1 Peter 4:2 so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God.

That is proof of being born again. I am no longer living to satisfy **my** desires, but instead desiring to live for the will of **God**, His directions and desires. As a Christian it is my new found desire to live for the will of God.

Philippians 2:13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

It is crucial to know that God not only places within us a **desire** to do His will, but He defines His will for us.

1 Thessalonians 4:3 3For this is the will (direction and desire) of God, your sanctification:

So far we have seen that there is “positional” sanctification where we are placed in to Christ at the moment of believing. Paul is now addresses the subject of “practical” sanctification.

Last week we saw this practical sanctification /holiness in the life of Enoch. We saw that it is a very **directional** thing. If I am walking **with** the Lord –two things happen:

First – I find that my closeness to Him causes me to know more and more:

- The things that are in His heart for me (His desires)
- The plans that He has for me (His direction)

Both of which equal His will for me! And my nearness to Him makes me at home or comfortable with His will.

Second – I find that as I am walking with God and moving in a direction towards God, who is separate from His creation, I am inescapably moving in a direction away from the course of this world. In a **practical** sense I am becoming **more separate** from the world, Separate from all of its desires and its directions. That is **sanctification** in **practical** living. It is the **direction** of God and **desire** of God that we are not just found positionally in Christ, but that we are **near** Him. He took us out of this world and placed us in Christ for the purpose of **practical nearness** to Him.

The Old Testament illustration of this is in the Exodus – the **outgoing** – of the Israelites from Egypt. Taking them **out** of Egypt was not the end of God’s Desires for them. He brought them out of Egypt in order to bring them **into** a Land of Promise. God took them out of Egypt in a day! But it took 40 years to get Egypt **out** of them and get them into the Land of Promise. How does this apply to you and me? Egypt is a picture of the World living outside of God and in rebellion to God. Pharaoh represents the ruler of this world holding us in bondage to sin. By His power, God took us **out** of “Egypt.”

Colossians 1:13 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness...

But, merely taking us out of the world is not the end of God’s Desires for us. We have in a real and powerful way been taken out of the domain of death and darkness and placed into the Kingdom of Life and Light ruled by Jesus.

Colossians 1:13 13He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,

1 Peter 2:9 ...called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

There is now a **life** to be lived **in** Christ. Our “Land of Promise” is the abundant life promised to us by Jesus

and experienced by us as we live in and walk after the Spirit. In the process of participating in the fullness of our redemption we can often look like the children of Israel **after** they had been redeemed from bondage in Egypt and were en route to the Promised Land.

There was an irrational yet powerful desire to look backward at Egypt and a long to go back to Egypt.

F.B. Meyer p.41 said, “**That** is the very thing Paul was addressing when he wrote, ‘For **this** is the will of God, your sanctification.’”

Here are a couple of closing thoughts on Sanctification: Sanctification is **directional** in that it is moving towards the Lord and by default away from our old lives lived after the desires of the flesh. It also is moving towards the **one** who alone has the power to transform us.

1 Corinthians 1:30 who has become to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,...

Sanctification is **relational**. Walking with God speaks of **intimacy**. Our sanctification means **seeing** Jesus more clearly. F.B. Meyer p.35 said, “(It is) seeing Jesus more clearly, **loving** Jesus more deeply, **desiring greater intimacy** with Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 4:3 3For this is the will (direction and desire) of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;...