

What is it with us preacher-types? The congregation are thinking, “How much longer is this sermon going to be?” And the preacher says “And my final point,”, and everybody breathes a sigh of relief, and then he goes on for another 25 minutes....

You know what? When we do that, we’re just following the example of Paul...

Chapter 4 begins with the word “Finally”, but when you do a word count, he’s only 55% of the way through his letter

But let’s not begrudge him this, because what Paul shares in this “final” bit, is **life**-changing.

I recently shared with you, “A question I get asked most often, is “How can I know God’s will for my life?””

And why **wouldn’t** we want to know that? You want to know God’s will for your life, (don’t you?)...

Now, the thing is, I’m not a prophet, but I can confidently tell you, God’s will for your life. I **know** what God’s will is for your life,,,,, but I suspect, most of us are wanting to know something different... We tend to put more time and effort into decision making, in terms of:

- where should I work?
- who should I marry?

- what house should I buy?
- what car should I drive?
- what subjects should I study?
- Should I go to University?
or do a trade?
- Should I sell some cattle before the dry sets in and the prices drop?
- Should I expand the farming enterprise?
- How much should I put in the offering???
- How should I invest my retirement savings????
- Should I go out with this person?
- Should I (name your big decision dilemma here)..

Most of us tend to put more time and more effort into seeking God's will for that sort of decision making, rather than simply seeking God's will.... Why do we do that????

Jesus told us, that our Heavenly Father already knows what we need – don't stress about that stuff..." Matthew 6:33 (ESV)

³³ **But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and [He'll take care of everything else we need]...**

"What is God's will for my life?" I'll tell you what God's will is, and it's nothing as trivial as:

- "what town I'm going to live in"
- what subject am I going to study; or
- should I buy this farm...

Now, don't get me wrong – I'm not wanting to “make light” of the major life decisions we all have to make... but the will of God (if we follow it), will be something which will mould and shape every other life-decision we face (big & small)...

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

What is God's will for my life? It is for me to be sanctified (to become holy). What is God's will for your life? For **you** to be sanctified – for **you** to become holy.

It is for us to be holy in everything we do.... And even with the big life-decisions that we make, we make these decisions, knowing what God's will is. It is God's will, for us to be sanctified – for us to become holy...

So, e.g.

“Should I date this person?”

Well, is this person, someone who will bring me closer to God?

Is this somebody who has a strong faith, and they're going to walk with me in **my** faith, and encourage me into holiness???

Or are they someone who is likely to make my holiness a little more distant???

Or:

“Should I pursue this career?”

Well, is it a career that will bring me closer to God? Will it aid the development of my holiness??? Or am I being enticed by things of the flesh – something that I just want to do; or perhaps, it's the prospect of financial gain???

Is it something that is going to help me to live a life of worship, with other Christians, because it's my Brothers and Sisters in Christ, who encourage the development of holiness within me??? Or is it something that's going to tie me up so much, that making time for worship, and to be with other Christians, becomes all that more distant...

Are you with me???

With every major life decision we make, keep at the focus, 4:³ **For this is the will of God, your sanctification....**

What is God's will for my life? It is to be sanctified/holy. And **that**, is the life-changing lesson for today.

Paul begins by saying “**we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus..**” alright, for a Christian, there are no stronger terms than this – **we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus,** What? What **does** he urge them to do in the Lord Jesus?

When Paul & Silas (P&S) were with them, they were only with them for 3 weeks, and even with these brand new converts (these ‘baby-Christians’) they must have taught them that part of becoming a Christian, is “repentance”. Repentance, is to turn away from old way of life, and to begin living for Jesus.

And it's a walk. It is a walk, that pleases God.

When it comes to Christian living, it is not a sprint – it is not something we rush into, and we keep it up for a short while, and then a few months later, we reconnect again... It's not about "being godly in a sporadic sort of a fashion".

It's about:

- discipleship;
- walking with Jesus every day of our lives;
- following Jesus, because that's what a Disciple does;
- living a life which is pleasing to God.

This is what we are called to (and P&S had taught them that).

And these brand new Christians had begun to live in a way that **is** pleasing to God,,,,, But now P&S are now urging them to an even greater holiness.

And that's what "sanctification" is about – This is what God's will is, for you and me – every day, to become progressively more and more holy. Being a Disciple of Jesus, is a life characterised by a continual **increase** in holiness. How can it not be? If we are following Jesus – if we are walking with Jesus, where does He lead us? He leads us into holiness.

And if the Spirit of God is within us, and if we are living by the Spirit, the Holiness of God, becomes our own character... And we'll get to that when we get to V8.

Anyway, when it comes to sanctification – when it comes to walking in a way that pleases God, he gives us 2 examples:

The first, is to abstain from sexual immorality.

Biblically, “sexual immorality” encompasses a lot of stuff:

- fornication (sex before marriage);
- adultery (when 2 people have sex, and one of them is married to another person);
- homosexuality;
- bestiality...
- you get the picture...

“Sexual immorality” encompasses a lot of stuff.

But the actual Greek word here is πορνείας (porneias) “fornication” (sex before marriage). And yes, that is the word, from which we get our word “pornography”. And by Jesus' definition, “pornography” – the lusting after someone who is not ours to have, falls firmly in the domain of “sexual immorality”...

Now, the Thessalonians were living in a Greek culture (a very promiscuous culture). And it's pretty-much the same as our culture in Australia (today)... For most people (who are not Christians), “fornication” (having sex before marriage) is not seen as a sin. It's seen more as a:

- rite of passage;
- part of growing up;
- having a good time before you have to settle down & have kids;
- a way to express yourself;
- friends with benefits;
- meeting a need...

Today in our culture, it seems strange, for a person to marry someone they haven't already been living with for a number of years.

And so, our culture is very much like the Greek culture (back in Paul's day). "Fornication" is not considered to be a sin... and even other forms of sexual immorality, our culture would argue, is not immorality...

And that's the thing. What **God** considers to be "good" and "honourable" and "holy", is very different to what the world considers to be "good" and "honourable"... (and they don't care what's "holy").

You see, our standards **must** be different, because God's standards are a whole new realm of holiness...

For most of us (most humans), our natural human desire – the desires of "the flesh", is uncontrolled lust (**passion of lust**)... but God's will, is that each of us, would **know** how to **control his own body in holiness and honour**, ⁵ not in the passion of lust like the *Gentiles*....

Why should we be different? It's because we know God.

We should not be surprised that it's the new "normal" for most people to sleep-around a bit (perhaps a lot)... It's normal, for those who don't know God. (What reason do they have for **not** doing it? (except perhaps to avoid the heart-ache & crushed hopes/dreams))

But as Disciples of Jesus, we **do** know God. And because we are God's holy people (and are becoming **more** holy) it is God's will, for us to abstain from **all** sexual immorality.

It's about:

- holiness;
- honour;
- pleasing God...

In V4, I'm pretty sure he's talking about our "body", but in the Greek, the word is literally "vessel". And that made me think of how (as Christians), we have a treasure in a jar of clay¹.

Our body, is a vessel (a temporary vessel). But, because we know God, we learn how to control our vessel,

We control it for the sake of:

- holiness;
- honour;
- pleasing God...

Promiscuity dishonours:

- ourselves;
- the other person; and
- God...

It is a sin. Paul uses the word "transgression" it is an overstepping of what is right. It is something that wrongs the other person. How does it wrong them???

What a crazy world we live in, where sexual liberation has been so "expanded" and "broadened", and celebrated, that now, even willing participants who embrace multiple sexual partners, are feeling they were "wronged"... And so the latest thing is, Governments are trying to legislate this thing called "consent". And to define, that even when consent is given, at what point, that consent is no longer valid... It is a messy, messy can of worms...

But it is a recognition that in the act of sex, a person can be wronged...

But of course, what it **doesn't** pick up on, is in **all** sexual immorality, a person is wronged...

It wrongs:

- the other, to desire what we have no right to;
- their future husband or wife (sex should only be within the marriage);
- their children / future children (dishonours them);

It takes advantage of another, who:

- may want to be close;
- want to feel loved;
- may be afraid that if they say “No”, you won't be interested in them any more...

Sexual immorality is always wrong...

And reading between the lines here, I suspect that he could be highlighting, that it is **especially** wrong within the Christian church,,,,, when our Godly love for one another and our closeness as the family of God, gets taken advantage of...

And a predator preys on another because of the lust that he holds...

Sexual immorality is always wrong...

And Paul says something very confronting at this point:

the Lord is an avenger in all these things

He had told them this before. He had solemnly warned them, that the Lord is an avenger in all these things

Let's be very clear here.

- Am I going to let God's word cut deep?
Or am I going to try and explain it away?
- Is my theology (understanding about God),
going to shape how I understand God's word?
or is God's word, going to shape my theology???

And before you decide, let me read V8... ⁸ Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

A constant temptation for a Christian, is for a system of theology (my understanding of what God is like), to cause me to disregard the word of God. So let me read it again
V⁸ Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

So, what is he saying? What are we not to disregard? The teaching about immorality, **and the Lord is an avenger in all these things**

He is writing to **Christians**. And he is saying to Christians: The Lord is an avenger. There is punishment on wrong-doers, who violate the demands of the Gospelⁱⁱ... That is why he solemnly warned them....

Now, does that mess with your theology???

V⁷ 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.

This is life-changing stuff. Our God, is a holy God. And He saves us, to **know** Him; and **follow** Him; and be **like** Him...

God has saved us to a whole new sphere of holiness.... To live in sexual debauchery, is a rejection of God's call...

Wow... Where to from here? If I have been promiscuous... If as a Christian, I have been sexually immoral, what should I do???

Well, the message is the same for every sin. Remember, I just introduced this as an example of sin... ⁷ For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness in **all** things...

The answer, is what he said right back in v1: **we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus** to walk in a way that pleases God. And to do it more and more...

If I have sinned, repent, and humbly seek forgiveness. And the Lord will forgive.

Repentance does not end when you become a Christian. It is but the beginning. We continually turn away from sin, and embrace righteousness. Sanctification is being progressively made more holy...

But be in no doubt. If I reject God's call to holiness, and do **not** repent, and do **not** seek forgiveness, it is described here as a life of:

- impurity;
- dishonour;
- a wronging of my brother;

and The Lord will avenge...

If I disregard that solemn warning, I am disregarding God (not man).

So, sexual immorality was, but one example. A second example is brotherly love.

On this matter, he didn't really need to tell them, because they were already loving one another. He actually said: **for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another**

That's the work of The Spirit, that is... The Holy Spirit of God, causing us to love our brothers and sisters in Christ...

But once again, there is to be a constant increase in holiness: **But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more.** The love that we have for other Christians, should be ever-increasing...

And there's 3 other quick points:

Firstly: to aspire to live quietly

Secondly: to mind your own affairs

Thirdly: to work with your hands

Why? ¹² so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

The way Disciples of Jesus live in this world, matters. Being a good citizen in this world, matters.

“Living quietly”, I don’t for a moment believe that this is about being a secret-agent Christian. It’s not about hiding our faith. I suspect what he’s getting at, is “Don’t become a stench in the nostrils of your neighbour”... Some Christians, see it as a badge of honour if they can noisily jump up and down and tell everybody else in the community how evil they are. I don’t see the apostles doing that...

And now, with social media, everybody has a soapbox... And we feel we have to comment on everything, but God’s word is “to aspire to live quietly”

And especially when Christians are facing persecution (like they were in Thessalonica), living quietly helps them to keep under the radar...

And mind your own affairs. It is not our role to point out the faults of the unsaved... They don’t know God... Our

concern should be for ourselves; Our concern should be for our Brothers and Sisters in Christ...

And **work with your hands**. There is something Godly about productive, manual work...

Non-Christians should **never** be given the impression that followers of Jesus are a lazy bunch of free-loaders...

If we are able to provide for ourselves, we should do so...

If I am able to provide for myself, it is Godly to depend on no one.

It is Godly:

- to not live off welfare;
- to not claim Government subsidies;
- to not apply for Government grants

- to not live on a pension if I am quite capable of working...

Now, some of us may find this deeply challenging; Some of us may find it offensive...

But we honour God, when the world know we're not a bunch of free-loaders...

You see, it's not about "entitlement". As a citizen, we may be entitled for welfare and subsidies & whatnot... But as Christians, we give up our rights, and we don't seek wealth; or status; or lifestyle... We seek first the Kingdom of God...

And we Seek first His righteousness... And part of this righteousness, is to work,, and to depend on no one...

The will of God is “sanctification”. The will of God, is for us to become more holy... And this is done through the Spirit, but we have a part to play in it too.

We repent of our old life, because we **were** following and striving for what the world values... But now we walk with our Lord Jesus. We walk in a way that is pleasing to God. And we do it more and more, increasing in Holiness every day.

Questions????

Let’s pray:

Lord Jesus,
we thank You, for Your grace and mercy.
We thank You, that You have called us
to a new sphere of holiness...

Lord, forgive us for when we have disregarded your word.

Forgive us for the sexual immorality of:

- lust in all its forms;
- pornography;
- fornication;

- of all impurity...

Lord, we repent of these things.

We turn away from them,
and we seek Your Holiness.

We thank You for Your work on the cross,
That Your blood washes away our sins,
and purifies us from all unrighteousness.
We thank You for the forgiveness we have in Your
Name.

So that we can walk with You,
not in guilt...
Knowing You have made us holy...

But Lord,
we ask that You would continue to do Your
transforming and sanctifying work in us.
That we can be more holy today than we were
yesterday;
and more holy tomorrow than we are today...

That we would walk in a way
that pleases our Heavenly Father,
more and more
every day...

In Jesus' Name,

Amen.

ⁱ 2 Corinthians 4:7

ⁱⁱ But he probably has in mind here an apocalyptic image of the Lord Jesus as the coming avenger or agent of God's wrath who will inflict severe punishment on wrongdoers who violate the demands of the gospel. This understanding fits with the sense of imminent expectation and the apocalyptic imagery found in 1 and 2 Thessalonians (cf. 1:10; 5:1–11; 2 Thes. 1:7–10; cf. Rom. 12:19; Col. 3:23–25)

in: Wanamaker, C.A. (1990) *The Epistles to the Thessalonians: a commentary on the Greek text*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans (New International Greek Testament Commentary).