



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond

V25 N11

March 12, 2023

NOT HOME YET

“Abounding in Obedience”

1 Thessalonians 4:1-2

THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

Single-Mindedness
I focus on God and his
priorities in my life.

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

Matthew 6:33



Q?

What should
believers do
more and
more?

God’s ultimate purpose for every believer is conformity to the likeness of Christ. Paul writes: “For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters” (Rom 8:29). “Image” does not refer to *physical* appearance, of course. As *The NIV Study Bible* clearly states: “Predestination here is to *moral conformity* to the likeness of his Son” (note on Rom 8:29). Unlike justification, that is, being declared righteous in God’s sight, the conformity about which Paul writes here doesn’t occur the moment people believe. Put differently, unlike with justification, the realization of God’s purpose doesn’t occur instantaneously. It’s the result of a lifelong process that results in believers having a relationship to God like that of the *resurrected* Jesus.

The process believers go through to become like Jesus goes by a number of familiar terms. If the process is thought of in terms of *development*, the term often used is *spiritual formation*. If the process is thought of in terms of *training*, the term often used is *discipleship*. If the process is thought of in terms of *holiness*, the term often used is *sanctification*. All three terms refer to one and the same process. One commentator links this process to *sanctification* using these words: “Paul presents two aspects of this conformity. By a sharing in the suffering of Christ (Phil 3:10) that is based on having the mind of Christ (Phil 2:5-8), the believer is *gradually* being made into his likeness. This is the essence of *sanctification*.” And he pegs the end of the sanctification process to resurrection when Jesus returns, going on to say: “Its second and final aspect is conformity of the *body* to that of the risen Lord, to be realized at the resurrection (Phil 3:21), which is the *culmination of a growth in likeness to Christ* based on the Spirit’s work in the believer (2 Cor 3:18)” (Everett F. Harrison, “Romans,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, 98, italics added).

Unlike with justification, sanctification is a *cooperative effort*. While the Holy Spirit is the one who sanctifies believers, believers are the ones who engage in the behaviors that the Spirit uses to sanctify them. These behaviors are commonly referred to as *spiritual disciplines*. The 10 Central Practices are examples of spiritual disciplines. “Richard Foster divides the disciplines into inward, outward and corporate. *Inward* disciplines are practiced in the privacy of our intimate walk with Jesus [e.g., Prayer]. *Outward* disciplines affect how we interface with the world [e.g., Evangelism]. And *corporate* disciplines are practiced with others [e.g., Biblical Community]. Dallas Willard distinguishes between disciplines of engagement and disciplines of abstinence. Disciplines of *engagement* connect us to the needs of others and the call to be God’s heart and hands in this world [e.g., Compassion] . . . Disciplines of *abstinence* detach us from hurry, clutter and busyness, and open us to being with God alone [e.g., solitude and silence]” (Adele Ahlberg Calhoun, *Spiritual Disciplines Handbook*, 19-20). In any case, while each of the Central Practices, or disciplines, is worthwhile in itself—compassion benefits the one who receives it—each of them is also worthwhile because the Holy Spirit uses each one to transform, disciple, or sanctify Christ’s followers.

Christians who are disciplined and committed to the practice of spiritual disciplines give the Holy Spirit more to work with than Christians who don’t. And as is to be expected, they will find themselves farther along in the process of becoming like Jesus than those who don’t. Salvation by grace doesn’t preclude the need for works—certainly as far as sanctification is concerned! Putting God and his priority for your life *first*—namely, conformity to the likeness of Christ—makes perfect sense in light of what Scripture teaches. To the Thessalonians, Paul writes: “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified” (1Th 4:3). And that requires single-minded cooperation with the Spirit.



EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2

1 As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

Read in other translations

1 Finally then, brothers and sisters, we request and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received instruction from us as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel even more. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. (NASB)

1 Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to live in a way that pleases God, as we have taught you. You live this way already, and we encourage you to do so even more. 2 For you remember what we taught you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. (NLT)

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Bracket "As for other matters" in v. 1.
- Box "in order to" indicating *purpose* in v. 1.
- Circle "ask" and "urge" in v. 1.
- Bracket "in the Lord Jesus" in v. 1.
- Box "For" indicating *reason* in v. 2.
- Circle "instructions" in v. 2.
- Bracket "by the authority of" in v. 2

What one word would you use to describe the TONE of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the THEME of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Most English versions begin 4:1, “Finally.” Why is “As for other matters” better?
 2. Regarding the “other matters” Paul is going to address, do you expect them to be *doctrinal* or *practical*? Explain.
 3. Give some examples of “other matters” from chapters 4 and 5.
 4. Identify the *purpose* behind addressing these “other matters.”
 5. If “ask” and “urge” are nearly synonymous, why use both?
 6. The meaning of the phrase “in the Lord Jesus” is obscure. Put what you think it means in your own words.
 7. If the Thessalonians were already following Paul’s instructions, why bring them up again?
 8. When do you presume Paul gave the instructions (v. 2)?
 9. Whenever he gave them, he gave them “by the authority of the Lord Jesus.” Explain what that means.
 10. **Discussion:** When it comes to *sanctification*, nobody arrives before Jesus arrives. What areas of living to please God do you find most challenging?
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Commentary On The Text

The opening two verses of 1 Thessalonians 4 mark a turning point in the epistle by introducing the additional teaching and moral instruction that continues to the end. One commentator summarizes that part, which he calls the “supplying what is lacking” section of the letter, in these words: “With the narrative of their past relationships concluded by way of the preceding prayer report, Paul now turns to ‘supply what is lacking’ (3:10) by way of letter, since he is unsure as to how soon ‘the Lord will clear the way for us to come to you’ (3:11). In so doing, he shifts from using features common to letters of friendship to those common to letters of moral exhortation. Paul is almost certainly now addressing matters that Timothy has reported back to him. The instructions come in four clear parts. The first two (4:3-8 and 9-12) are basically behavioral matters: how believers in Christ are to live in the world and in relationship with one another. The third one, having to do with believers who have died before the coming of Christ (4:13-18), is the only new instruction in the letter; it is followed by the final, closely related question of the day of the Lord (5:1-11), in which the previous three items are brought together” (Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NICNT, 136).

In 4:1, Paul continues to address his readers *personally*, using the *familial* expression, “brothers and sisters,” which he uses fourteen other times in his short letter. He reminds them that he, Silas, and Timothy instructed them on how to live (cf. “to walk,” NASB) to please God. Note that “‘pleasing God’ does not mean anything so mundane as ‘being pleasant’ toward him but rather points to service him in a way that *makes his interests a person’s primary ambition*” (Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC, 185, italics added), suggesting a single-minded focus on God’s priorities for one’s life that fosters sanctification. Of course, his original readers were doubtless familiar with those instructions; unfortunately, contemporary readers are not. What contemporary readers do know, however, is that more remained to be taught, just as Paul’s opening words imply (cf. 4:1). Some of which must have been revealed in Timothy’s report. Clearly, these immature believers do not know it all. For example, the Thessalonians apparently are expecting Jesus to come soon—so soon that the unexpected death of some raises questions regarding “those who sleep in death” (4:13). Timothy likely reports this to Paul and perhaps recommends that Paul teach more on the subject. So Paul writes: “Brothers and sisters [there’s that expression again], we do not

want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope” (4:13). Then the apostle goes on to explain what will happen to those who have fallen asleep in Jesus (vv. 15-17).

Quite remarkably, Paul isn’t writing to *correct* the Thessalonians but instead to *commend* them. In his letter to the Corinthians, he rebukes them for one sin after another: their involvement with incest and prostitutes, their lawsuits, and their lack of love. By stark contrast, the apostle doesn’t correct the Thessalonians for any such behavior—he doesn’t need to. Instead, he commends them for living in order to please God as they have been taught. All he *diplomatically* asks it that they continue to do this “more and more.” One English translation puts Paul’s request in this more contemporary way: “You are already living that way, but *try even harder*” (CEV). Paul has their progressive *sanctification* in mind. *Justification* doesn’t warrant that believers “try even harder,” whereas *sanctification* does, because Christians never attain spiritual perfection in this life (5:23). Using this language, Paul both praises the majority and introduces a much-needed reminder to the disobedient few. Another commentator links Paul’s words to *sanctification* in the following way: “The substance of Paul’s exhortation is that they should ‘abound more and more’ . . . Here he is concerned with the thought that the Christian is to grow continually. His life is far from static. Paradoxically it can be said of him that he is the slave of Christ, and that he is the freest of men (John 8:36). The Thessalonians were under the necessity of living to please God, but far from leading them into a narrow and cramped existence, this opened the door for them to live the abundant life (cf. John 10:10)” (Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NICNT, 119).

In 4:2, Paul refers to his previous instructions. This was not an uncommon practice in his day. “In ancient letters, occasionally an author would remind the recipient of things the person already knew, at times indicating that such things should be put into practice. Reminders and repetition of what people had learned were considered essential for moral progress . . . Over and over again Paul urges the Thessalonians to recall what they already knew (cf. 1.5; 2.1,2,5,11; 3.3, 4; 5.2), and when his teaching was remembered, his hope was that the Thessalonians would not ignore it but would put it into practice” (Green, 185). His mention of previous instructions comes with a reminder that those instructions are not mere preferences rooted in his personal opinion, but that they are orders coming by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

Word Studies/Notes

v. 1 *As for other matters* Cf. "Finally" (NIV©1984, ESV, NET). "Most English versions translate the opening as 'finally' [*loipon oun*], giving the impression that the letter is drawing to a close. This is not a good translation, since in this context it means 'beyond that' or 'beyond what I have already written.' When read aloud in the congregation, it would gather afresh the attention of hearers for a new section of teaching, as would 'brothers and sisters'" (Gary S. Shogren, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 13, ZECNT, 155). "Paul uses it in this same way again in 2 Thessalonians 3:1, and in Philippians 3:1 and 4:8, where in each case it means simply, 'as for what remains to be said.' Using the English adverb 'finally' this far from the end of the letter simply fails to con-note Paul's intent. He is not here 'wrapping up' anything; rather, this adverb is his way of moving on to what further needs to be said in the letter" (Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NICNT, 139). "What the transition does mark is a shift from declaration to exhortation. Predominately declarative structures in the first three chapters give way to frequent imperatives in the last two" (D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, NAC, 117).

v. 1 *ask, urge* "The first of these verbs in other contexts means simply 'to make a request' (*erōtōmen*), but in exhortations the meaning is the much stronger 'beseech' or 'entreat' (Phil. 4:3; 1 Thess. 5:12; 2 Thess. 2:1; 2 John 5). The second verb means 'exhort' (*parakalumen*) and appears in these letters where the authors strongly urge the believers to adopt some kind of conduct (5:14, in combination with *erōtaō* in 5:12; 2:12; 3:2, 7; 4:10; 2 Thess. 2:17; 3:12)" (Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC, 183). "The verb 'entreat (ask)' is rare in Pauline exhortations, occurring only in letters of friendship (here; 5:12; 2 Thess 2:1; Phil 4:3). But since 'entreat' might not be heard for the apostolic imperative that is needed, and in keeping with an apparently known idiom, he adds the more common 'we exhort/appeal' (Fee, 139-40). "It is best not to equate the two words, but to understand the former as a gentle, friendly request and the latter as an authoritative apostolic plea" (Robert L. Thomas, "1 Thessalonians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 11, 270).

v. 1 *in the Lord Jesus* "That is, the apostles make their appeal as those whose sphere of existence is 'in the Lord Jesus'. . . Though not said

here, this usage likewise carries the assumption that this is also the sphere of the Thessalonians' present existence. At the same time, it seems inherently also to be an appeal to the Lord's authority with regard to the content of the exhortation" (Fee, 140). "The authority behind the exhortations is not that of Paul himself but rather derived: in the Lord Jesus (cf. 2 Thess. 3:12; Rom. 4:14). This point is again highlighted in v. 2 . . . Over and again in this and the following sections the divine authority of the Lord Jesus is put forward as that which gives weight to the apostolic exhortations (4:3, 5, 6, 7, 8 and commentaries). What follows is more than 'good advice' or 'friendly suggestions'" (Green, 183).

v. 2 *instructions* The term is "used of authoritative commands and has a military ring ('orders,' Ac 5:28; 16:24)" (*The NIV Study Bible*, note on 1Th 4:2).

v. 2 *by the authority of* Cf. "through the Lord Jesus" (ESV, NET). "Perhaps Paul refers to: 1. teaching that has its source in some specific sayings of Jesus, that is, oral tradition that would later become a part of the written gospels; 2. teaching that has its roots in the preaching of the apostle of Jesus, but not necessarily referring to a specific saying of Jesus; 3. teaching that was revealed through charismatic prophecy (see 'word of the Lord' in 4:15) . . . Option 2 has the benefit of a parallel in 2Thess 3:6, where 'command . . . in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ' turns out to be the apostles' teaching about work" (Shogren, 156). "This may mean that the commandments they gave came through the revelation of the Lord Jesus (John 1:17; Gal. 1:12; cf. 1 Cor. 14:37) or that the source and foundation of their authority was the Lord Jesus (Rom. 15:30; 1 Cor. 1:10). In this context where the necessity of obedience is highlighted, the latter rather than the former sense is primarily in view" (Green, 186).



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

Try even harder to live your life in order to please God by obeying the instructions given you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

Remember the opening race of *Cars* where Lightning McQueen limps over the finish line? That's me. I have a disease called Spring Fever and I'm barely making it across the end-of-school finish line. It's ridiculously contagious, which means my kids have it, too. We're on the home stretch of the fifth six-week period and Spring Break is around the corner. There's a very dim light at the end of the tunnel but I see it and I'm so ready to be done. I'm tired of checking grades and reminding kids of due dates for projects, reports or tests. I don't want to fight the "get out of bed" battle one more day. I've reached into my parenting toolbox and dusted off the "Finish Strong" speech but there's no life behind my words. We're reminded in this week's passage not only to keep going strong but to do our very best. Did you catch that? Our very best. Friends, this is a booster shot from God. This is Paul on the sidelines cheering us on as we limp across the finish line. We can stop grumbling and complaining. We can be patient. We can be encouraging. We can be loving. We can do hard things because His strength shines through our weakness. In order to live to please God, we need to be laser-focused on Him. Are you starting your morning in prayer? How often are you reading His Word? Do you have a friend you can turn to for accountability? We're in this together. Let's change our focus and enjoy this season, thanking God for the amazing gift of parenting our sweet and special kids.

What Does The Bible Say?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2

1. In what did Paul instruct the Thessalonians?
2. What did Paul want the Thessalonians to do more of?
3. By whose authority did the instructions come?

What Do You Think?

What does it mean to live to please God?

What Do You Do?

Make a list of things that will please God. Draw a line numbered 1 to 10 (1 is not much and 10 is a lot). Where on the line do you rate on doing these things?

CORE COMPETENCY: Single-Mindedness

I pay attention to what God thinks is important for my life.

MEMORY VERSE: 1 Peter 1:15

"But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do."

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRALKids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- _____ I completed my Bible Study
- _____ I memorized this week's verse
- _____ I brought my Bible to church
- _____ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)
I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)
I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)
I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)
I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)
I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)
I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)
I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)
I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)
I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)
I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)
I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)
I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)
I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)
I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)
I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)
I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)
I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)
I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)
I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)
I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)
I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)
I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)
I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)
I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)
I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)
I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)
I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)
I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)
I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)
I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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The Scrolls Bible Study is a spiritual growth resource of Central Bible Church, Fort Worth, Texas.

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