1 Thess 4vv1-8

"You do realise Andy, that marriage is not a cure for lust"
I was in my mid-twenties, single, and sat at a restaurant table with an older christian friend, when he told me those words
"You do realise Andy, that marriage not a cure for lust"
… i didn't realise that at the time
and if not married here today, you may sometimes think, as I did then, that marriage would be a cure for lust
… so when he told me, I nodded in agreement but inside i wasn't sure i agreed!..

…why? well TBH, I couldn't see past a guy who was married - *he could have sex any time he liked with his wife* - i thought - *easy for him to say!*
but of course what i should have seen and heard, was a man speaking truthfully
… yes he was married - happily married - but also telling me, first-hand, that lust was still a problem
… lust is problem for those both married and unmarried
it is today, and it was for this young church in Thessalonica
but at it's heart - the issue is not lust or sex, it is *"who are we living to please?"*

so just stop a moment and ask yourself that question, "Who am I living to please?"
who or what do you live for?
… whose applause, approval, affection, acknowledgement do you seek above all else?

Let me put it another way.. using the language of the apostle Paul in our passage for today
"Are you living each day seeking to walk in a manner worthy of God… that is to say, are you looking to live each day in a way that pleases your father in heaven?"

If you're a Christian here this morning then this is the question our passage asks of each one of us.
If you are here and not yet a Christian, then may i say it is great that you are here, and do listen up as you will see how being a christian is not just about a commitment/decision someone makes sometime in the past, but how it impacts the way we seek to live - or rather who we seek to live *for* - each and every day
So let's pray & then read it together…
READ 4vv1-8

We are going to consider this in 2 parts - firstly the principle (vv1-3)… and then a practical application (vv4-8)
So firstly then…
#1 - God's will is that all christians live in a way that pleases Him, and do so more and more

Paul has already reminded those he is writing to that they are Christian believers
he has already commended them on how well they are doing - not only that they *say* they follow Jesus, but that they are following Jesus
And now he encourages them to do so more and more
Read v1
Here then is an encouragement to not become complacent, or distracted…
it would perhaps be quite easy for them to think, *"hey, we are doing pretty well as Christians, Paul is pretty happy with how we are doing (walking = living each day), we certainly seem to be behaving in a pretty godly way… certainly better than those*

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Christians up in Corinth… we can maybe just coast from here on in, focus on other things for a while (house/job/kids/studies)"

But no… Paul is *asking* and *urging*, he is encouraging them to keep going… in fact he is *beseeching* them
"Beseech" is not a word we use v often these days - but it is a great word - it means to ask and implore and beg and instruct…
if you beseech someone to do something… you really want them to do it… you're saying "it is essential you do this"

and so here, these Thessalonian Christians are to "more and more" … "walk in a way that pleases God"
It seems they already know how to do this
in v1 we are told that they have already received from Paul the necessary instruction - which he emphasises again in v2

and so they are to do this more and more - but not because Paul says so, but because these are instructions ultimately from the Lord Jesus Christ himself!

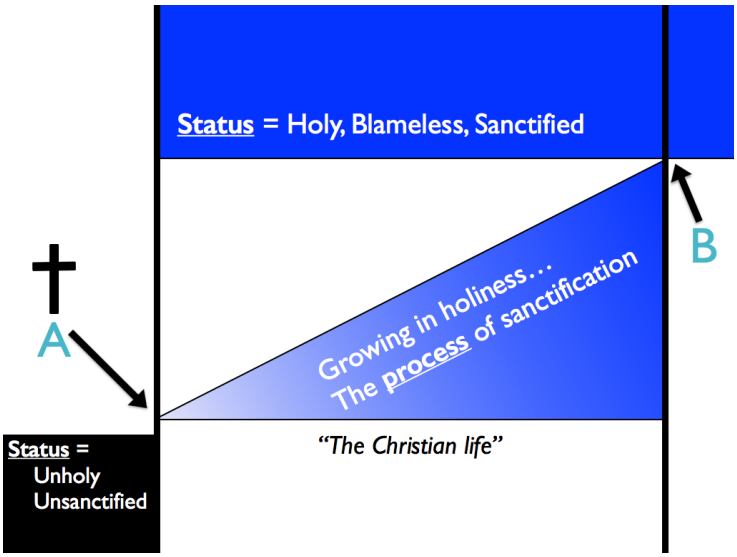
So this is not optional… Paul, or I should say Jesus, is not giving a "take it or leave it" instruction here… No no… Jesus says it, and so they are to do it… as they have been doing, so they are to do it more and more!

which means it is really important you and I know what this actually looks like?…
well v3 is really helpful…
"What is God's will for my life?" it's a question the Christian will often ask
well here is the answer… that we become more and more sanctified!
that is more and more holy
… which does not mean more religious… it does mean more like Jesus
God's will for his children is not only heaven in the future, but Christ-likeness now
Now this doesn't answer the question as to who you should marry, which job you should take, or which house you should buy, but it does give us a context for thinking thru those questions… i.e. will this person/job/neighbourhood help or hinder my sanctification?
… or "is this person/job/neighbourhood more important to me than my sanctification?"

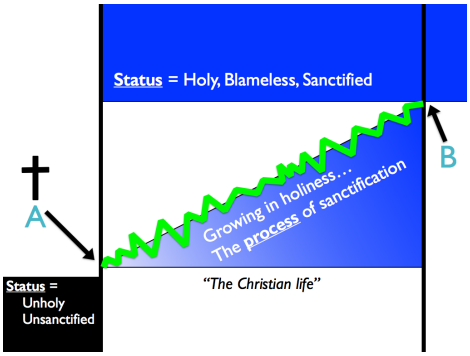
Now this word sanctify is there in vv 3,4,& 7
The word sanctified/holy is actually used in 2 ways in the bible …

1. It can be used in a '*once for all*' way to describe the <u>status</u> change that takes place when you first put your trust in Jesus - [A] - that change from unholy to holy… unsanctified to sanctified… guilty to innocent… lost to found… far from God, to brought near and adopted into his family

it is used to describe a once for all change in <u>status</u>..



not because of our conduct, but because of our relationship to Jesus.
But the word can also be used to describe the ongoing process in the life of a Christian believer, from the day they put their trust in Jesus 'til the day they die… the process of being changed more and more into the likeness of Jesus, not physically, but in what we think and say and do
so that we live as God wants us to live,
… this process then refers very much to our conduct
… which is where this diagram is a little misleading - because the process is never that smooth! So… more like this…



And in our passage, what Paul is reminding the Christians in Thessalonica back then, and us here today, is that as Christians… it is God's will that we be more and more sanctified
… that we, more and more, walk in a way that pleases God

In John 8v29… Jesus says *"I always do the the things that are pleasing to Him"*… … and so should we

For it is gloriously true that while God accepts us as we are… he loves us too much to leave us as we are
we are saved but not sinless
saved from the penalty of sin… but still need to resist the power of sin in our lives and do so more and more - this is the process of sanctification
But the point we mustn't miss here, is that it is "*God's will"* that his people live this way…
… not because God knows the best way for us to live and flourish - although that is true
… and not because when we live His way we will not only be blessed but be a blessing to others - although that is also true
… but because… when we live as he wants us to live… this pleases God

.. that's an extraordinary thing is it not?
that you and I can walk in a way, live in a way that pleases God
… That how I live today, can put a smile on the face of my father in heaven, who also happens to be the creator and sustainer of the universe

So do you see, how the day we put our trust in Jesus, is not the end of things, it is just the beginning… it is then that our 'sanctification' begins, as we seek to live each day in a way that pleases God, and to do so more and more
… and his set Christianity apart from any religion!
Now it is certainly true that many religions will say that we need to please God, but the reason given is very different from the reason given in the Bible.
Religion will say that if we choose to live in obedience to God's instructions… then he will be pleased with us… and will then maybe let us into heaven.
The idea is that if we please God enough, we will *merit* heaven, and *earn* God's favour

Whereas the Christian reason for pleasing God is very different, isn't it
It is because God has saved us by sending Jesus to die for us.
It is because we are saved already and eternally secure
It is because we are already in right relationship with God
and v8 - have his Holy Spirit dwelling in us

… that we are now able, in response to what He has done for us
please our father in heaven by living in ways that will bring him pleasure
… not because our salvation is conditional,
but because it is concrete

Isn't that amazing!

… trying to please someone whom you can never please - a parent, teacher or coach… there is no joy in that, no point in that!
but when we remember that God did all that was necessary so that we can now please him… it's amazing!
… we can live in a way that causes Almighty God to say *"look at that, he/she just obeyed me - that gives me such pleasure"*
what a brilliant motivation to obey God

So we do not obey to merit God's love or earn his approval, or become his children - He already loves us as his children - we obey because we long to make him smile
The Thessalonians are doing this, and are to do so *more and more*!
… as are we, if we are Christians here today
… in response to what God has done for us in Jesus Christ
… because we want to make our heavenly Father smile

… so all we need now, is to know what obedience we are called to, right?…
.. what right walking, right living looks like - well int eh following verses Paul gives us several examples and we are just going to consider the first one this week…

#2 - It pleases God when christians seek sexual purity

Earlier we were considering the question "*who am i living to please?*"
We have seen how for the christian, the answer is to be "God"… and we live each day looking to please him more and more

Well, Paul's practical application in these verses, helps us examine whether in reality we only do so, when such behaviour pleases us as well…

… i guess the true test of whether we really do want to please God,
more than please ourselves… or someone else,
is whether we are willing to live to please Him, even when it is tough, painful, counter-cultural
"Am i willing to walk God's way, live God;s way, even when I, my friends, my culture are eager to live a different way"

Have you ever had that experience of getting off a train or metro, onto a busy platform and trying to walk in the opposite direction to everyone else - its; pretty hard work - dodging people, apologising if you knock into anyone, making sure you don't step on small children!… much easier to just turn around and walk in the same direction as everyone else!

As Christians, one of the times we feel most like that is there in the second half of v3…
"Abstain from sexual immorality"
I don't think this is problematic for Christians because our culture necessarily *promotes* "sexual immorality", although at times it comes pretty close!

… the problem comes in how our culture *defines* sexual immorality, compared to how God does!

The word 'abstain' is pretty self-explanatory… it simply means 'to make a clean cut'.. in other words, have nothing to do with it!
… and sexual immorality, as Jesus teaches it, is a broad term covering "any sexual activity outside of marriage between a husband and wife, in both thought and action"
if it's outside of that, the christian is to have nothing to do with it
sex outside marriage, whether with yourself or with someone else, whether physically, mentally, emotionally or virtually (online)… is to deviate from God's instructions for his people

hence the call for abstention, not moderation! -
we can view sexual immorality, or any sins for that matter as something we need to moderate - thinking of it perhaps like alcohol or fatty foods - it is ok in small doses
but we are to consider it as arsenic, not alcohol.. abstain… have nothing to do with it
Jesus taught this same thing in Matthew 5, in quite dramatic fashion…
"If your eye cause you to sin gouge it out.. your hand, cut it off…"
in other words…
"if your eye causes you to sin, don't look; if it is your hand, don't touch."
And the reason why this is important, is because it is precisely what, in their "*passion of lust*" (v5), those "who do not know God" do not do.
They look at *whom* or *what* they shouldn't, and touch *where* or *when* they shouldn't. So v4… "each one of you [should] know how to control his [or her] own body."

just as a blazing fire, if used in it's right context (ie in a fireplace) is something that can be enjoyed, but if used in the wrong context (ie a kitchen table) can be hugely destructive, so it is with sex - it is a good gift from God, designed to be used in the right context - and the right context is only marriage between one man and one woman
outside of that - the Christian is to have nothing to do with it
And the point is this… we don't remain sexually pure by accident!
we don't just fall into sexual purity!
… we must be intentional about this [SLIDE]
There are practical things we can do to help in this area…
- make sure we are disciplined in feeding on God;s word each day
- Work out what fuels your lust and cut off the fuel - if the internet is a problem, then get something like 'covenant eyes' to monitor your usage
- seek support and encouragement and accountability and prayer from another Christian

… But on their own, these things will never be enough
… but of course we are not on our own

For the God who calls us, also equips us… *not only* with knowing *how* to live,
… but by also *giving us his sprit to enable us to obey* (v8)
And his power is released, as we actively seek to change our behaviour.

When we honour the boundaries God has set, we honour the God who set those boundaries and his spirit who dwells within us… and we also honour those around us and the result… we make our Father smile

Now, the final thing i want to say, and i shall close with this, is a word to all of us, by which i include myself… for it is a word to those of us who have failed, or are failing in this area

1 Thess 4vv1-8

There is no doubt this is a hard word - Paul's encouragement is accompanied by a solemn warning
And so in one sense, thinking this through, should make us feel uncomfortable - passages like this our a means God uses, thru his HS, to make us uncomfortable when perhaps we have become all too comfortable with a way of living that is contrary what God commands

But just as a surgeon's scalpel is a painful process but for our good, so the Lord showing us our sin is a useful thing as long as we then seek the face of the one who came for the sick… who died for us… so that by his wounds we might be healed
If you are a Christian here today, and the Lord has shown you an area of your life where you are living to please yourself rather than him… do not despair… do not run from him… you are his beloved child… run to him… and receive his forgiveness
When the Lord Jesus said that he gave his life as a ransom.. that included payment for your sexual sins, for my sexual sins

So when we stumble & fall, we need to ask ourselves the question "did Jesus die for my sexual sins?"
how we answer that really matters!
if we think "no he didn't, he couldn't of, not *these* sins" - then we are left with guilt and shame and doubt
but if we know he definitely did - which he did BTW - then we repent, and receive forgiveness and then press on

This is not a passage to cause us to doubt our status, but to encourage the process of sanctification in our lives
… it's purpose is to urge and encourage and exhort and beseech us to go into the week ahead, not living to please ourselves, but living to bring a smile to the face of our father in heaven

Westlake Church… our gathering here today… is not a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners
we do not gather as those who have this sorted… but we gather to help one another as we struggle with our sins, and delight in our Saviour