

THE EPIC LIFE – BOB HALLMAN

Instructions in Godly Living

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

2010

Introduction

Typical of Paul's letters, the first half is focused on doctrine and the second half is focused on the practical conduct that flows from good doctrine.

In our passage today, Paul addresses the following practical questions:

How do I please God? What is God's will for my life? What does the Bible have to say about sex? And if Jesus is coming back soon, isn't it more important to evangelize than to work 40 hours a week?

I Instructions On Pleasing God

A. We instructed you how to live: [Verse 1a]

Live = Peripateo = "To walk"

This term is used metaphorically throughout the New Testament to describe a person's day to day lifestyle.

Examples of the use of this word in the Book of Ephesians:

Eph 4:1 "I urge you to **live a life** worthy of the calling you have received."

Eph 5:1-2 "Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and **live a life** of love ..."

Eph 5:8 "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. **Live** as children of light."

Eph 5:15-16 "Be very careful, then, how you **live** -- not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil."

The Christian life begins with a step of faith, but that step leads to a walk of faith!

1. In order to **please** God as in fact you are living

Please = Aresko = "To be agreeable"

a. Paul made it his goal to please the Lord - 2 Cor 5:9-10

b. Paul encouraged his fellow believers to please the Lord:

Eph 5:8-10 "For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord."

What do we know about Pleasing God?

a. We cannot please God walking in the Flesh!

Rom 8:8 “So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.”

b. We cannot please God and be wrapped up in the affairs of this life!

2 Tim 2:4 “No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.”

c. We know it takes faith to please Him!

Heb 11:6 “But without faith it is impossible to please Him,”

B. We ask/**urge** you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more [Verse 1b]

Exhort = Parakaleo = “To invite, invoke, exhort, implore”

More and more = Perisseuo = “To superabound or excel”

It wasn't enough for Paul that they were then walking in a way that was pleasing to the Lord. He wanted to see them doing so more and more. Practical holiness isn't something that we should consider that we have "achieved", but something that we should continually strive to grow in.

Application: The ever-present danger of spiritual complacency

1. The danger of hitting a spiritual plateau: Jim Garlow, Skyline Wesleyan

2. The remedy to spiritual plateau

Rom 12:11 “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.”

1. You know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus: [Verse 2]

2 Tim 3:16-17 “All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

II Instructions On Sexual Purity

A. It is God's will that you should be **sanctified**: [Verse 3]

Sanctified = Hagiasmos = “To dedicate, consecrate, set apart”

Illustration: Hagan Daz Coffee Ice Cream!!

Don't eat it! It's mine! It's sanctified -- set apart for my use.

You have been sanctified, set apart, for God's use -- completely His.

Taking the New Testament as a whole, there are three aspects of sanctification:

1. **Positional or past:** a position of being set apart to God in Christ, which every believer has at the moment of his salvation (1 Cor 1:2; 6:11)

2. **Progressive or present:** a progressive growth in holiness and Christ-likeness that ought to be true of every believer (1 Cor 1:30; 1 Thess 4:3)

3. **Prospective—ultimate or future:** The believer's future condition in heaven, when believers will be “without blame” (3:13). In this passage the Apostle is clearly dealing with the issue of present or progressive sanctification.

1. You should **avoid** sexual immorality

Avoid = Apechomai = “To refrain or abstain”

Immorality = Porneia = “Fornication (the root origin of pornography)

Defined as “any voluntary sexual intercourse outside the covenant of marriage”, which includes premarital sex, extramarital sex, homosexual sex, prostitution, pornography and any other form of biblically forbidden sexual contact.

1 Cor 6:13-20 “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. By his power God raised the Lord from the dead, and he will raise us also. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with him in spirit. Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

Quote: F.F. Bruce

“In Greek religion, prostitution was considered a priestly prerogative, and extramarital sex was sometimes an act of worship. But to a Christian the will of God is clear: holiness and sexual immorality are mutually exclusive. No appeal to Christian liberty can justify fornication.

Story: With well-chosen, direct words, the minister delivered his sermon on *premarital sex*. Sex was good, he said, but it should be reserved until after the marriage ceremony. The congregation was unusually quiet. As the minister neared the end of his sermon, my husband, the director for church music at the time, spotted several people trying desperately to suppress their laughter. He was even more shocked to discover that I was among them. It was then he realized that the hymn he had chosen to follow the sermon was **"O Why Not Tonight?"**

So, why not? Is it because God's a killjoy? Not at all! To the contrary, God is protecting us from:

- a. Broken hearts and loneliness
- b. Unwanted pregnancy or abortion
- c. Emotional connection and trauma that lingers for a lifetime
- d. Debilitating or even fatal disease

2. You should learn to **control** your own body: [Verse 4]

Control = Ktaomai = “To acquire, possess”

Prov 25:28 “Like a city whose walls are broken down is a man who lacks self-control.”

a. In a way that is **holy**

Holy = Hagiasmos = “To be pure, sanctified, set apart”

Heb 12:14 “Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.”

b. In a way that is **honorable**

Honorable = “Dignified, esteemed, noble”

Immorality is the opposite of honor, it degrades and debases us, reducing us to slaves – or as Proverbs 6:26 states, “A loaf of bread!”

Examples of powerful men who failed to control their own bodies:

1. Sampson: Judges 14-16
2. King David: 2 Samuel 11-12

Application: Assume you (or the other person) are capable of anything!!

Rom 13:14 “Clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how [make provision] to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”

B. It is not God’s will for you to: **[Verse 5-6a]**

1. Live in passionate **lusts** like the heathen who do not know God

Passionate = Epithumia = “A longing for what is forbidden”

Background: Chastity was an unknown virtue of the day!

The Jews – From Strict to Lax Rabbis.

Romans – In the first 520 years of the republic there was no divorce! Then in Rome morality died! Seneca said of marriages, “Women were married to be divorced & divorced to be married!”

The Greeks – Demosthenes said, “We keep prostitutes for pleasure; We keep mistresses for the day to day needs of the body; & we keep wives for the begetting of children & for the faithful guardianship of our homes.”

The Greeks and Romans - In the words of R. Flaceleire, “The domains of religion and sexual morality were then regarded as completely separate.”

Hugh Hefner: “Sex is a function of the body. A drive which man shares with animals. Like eating, drinking and sleeping. It's a physical demand that must be satisfied. If you don't satisfy it you will have all sorts of neurosis and repression psychosis. Sex is here to stay. Let's forget the prudery that makes us hide from it. Throw away those inhibitions, find a girl who's like minded and let yourself go.”

2. Wrong you brother or take **advantage** of him

Wrong = Huperbaino = “To transcend, overreach, go beyond”

Take advantage of = Pleonekteo = “To defraud”

Paul is here referring to what I’ll call “the ripple effect” in any immoral situation.

People argue all the time that they “aren’t hurting anyone” by their immoral actions. It’s just not true.

- It hurts your relationship with God and hinders your spiritual walk
- It hurts your spouse: drawing you away from them.
- It hurts your children: Tension in the home, separation, divorce.
- It hurts the spouse family or the future spouse/family of the other person.
- It hurts those who turn to you for spiritual guidance
- It hurts your friendships because you force people to choose sides
- It hurts unbelievers who know you profess to follow Christ
- It hurts children who are victims of perversion or dysfunctional homes
- It hurts the babies who are aborted from having to face the consequences of immoral choices.

C. The Lord will **punish** men for all such sins: [Verse 6b-8]

Punish = Ekdikos = “Avenge” (Rom 13:4)

1. Passive punishment

Gal 6:7-8 “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.

The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”

2. Active punishment

Eph 5:3-7 “But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people ... For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person -- such a man is an idolater -- has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God’s wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them.”

Heb 13:4 “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.”

Note: This is a comforting promise to those damaged by sexual immorality, but terrifying for those who have to face God’s wrath.

1. For God didn’t call us to be **impure** but to live a holy life

Impure = Akatharsia = “To be physically or morally unclean”

Holy = Hagiasmos = “To be pure, sanctified, set apart”

1 Peter 1:13-16 “Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.

As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is **holy**, so be **holy** in all you

do; for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

2. He who **rejects** this instruction:
 - a. Does not reject man
 - b. But rejects God who gives you his Holy Spirit
Rejects = Atheteo = "To set aside, violate, cast off"

No matter how we rationalize sexual immorality, at the end of the day, we are rejecting God's leadership, authority and Lordship over our lives!

John 3:19-20 "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that his deeds will be exposed."

Summary: 5 incentives to fight this battle.

1. The incentive of pleasing God: Sexual purity pleases God
2. The incentive of doing the will of God: Sexual purity is God's will
3. The incentive of honor: Sexual purity is the honorable thing to do
4. The incentive of Christian love: Sexual purity expresses agape love
5. The incentive of God's vengeance: Sexual impurity invites God's wrath

III Instructions On Brotherly Love

- A. We do not need to write you about **brotherly love** [Verse 9a]
Brotherly love = Philadelphia = "Fraternal affection, filial kindness"
 1 Thess 1:3 "We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."
- B. You have been **taught** by God to love one another [Verse 9b-10]
Taught by God = Theodidaktos = "To be divinely instructed"
Love = Agapao = "Sacrificial, divine love"

How has God taught us His love?

1. God the Father: 1 Jn 4:19 "We love because He first loved us."
 2. God the Son: John 13:34-35 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."
 3. God the Holy Spirit: Rom 5:5 "... God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."
- C. We **urge** you to do so more and more
Urge = Parakaleo = "To call near; exhort, implore"
More and more = Perisseuo = "To super abound or excel in both quantity and quality"

Application: The ever-present danger of failing to grow in the area of love
 Phil 1:9-11 “And this is my prayer: that your love may abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight, so that you may be able to discern what is best and may be pure and blameless until the day of Christ, filled with the fruit of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ -- to the glory and praise of God.”

IV Instructions On Work

- A. Make it your ambition to lead a **quiet** life [Verse 11a-12]
Make it your ambition = Philotimeomai = “To aspire, labor, strive”
Quiet = Hesuchazo = “To keep still, refrain from meddlesomeness or speech”
 These two words together mean, “To restlessly strive to be quiet”!!

This phrase encompasses three different issues:

1. Quiet/still rather than hurried
 BUSY: “Being Under Satan’s Yoke”
2. Quiet rather than anxious
 He wants them to be at peace fully trusting God
3. Quiet rather than obnoxious
 Avoid being excessively zealous about politics, sports, faith, etc.

- B. Mind your own **business** and work with your hands: [Verse 11b]
Business = Idios = “Personal affairs”
Work = Ergazomai = “To be engaged in labor”

Ignoring the fact that no one knows the precise day nor hour of the Lord’s return (Matt 24:36), some of the believers at Thessalonica had evidently quit their jobs and became idle busybodies as they were looking for the Lord to come back. They ended up becoming dependent on other people because they weren’t earning a living anymore, and instead, they were taking advantage of the liberality of the Macedonian Christians (cf. 2 Cor 8:1-5) in accepting financial help while making no effort at self-support.

1. So that your daily life may win the **respect** of outsiders
Win the respect = Euschemonos = “Decently, honestly”
 Col 4:5 “Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity.”
 No one is impressed by the testimonies of lazy, unreliable, freeloading Christians.
 Certainly, there will be times when a person finds himself in a financial disaster, but that disaster should never be self-inflicted due to poor stewardship or slothfulness.
2. So that you will not be **dependent** on anybody

Not be dependent = Meadeis = “Not a whit, nothing”

2 Thess 3:6-11 “In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, **nor** did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies.”

The biblical value and benefit of work:

1. To provide for our family’s needs (1 Thess 4:12; 1 Tim 5)
2. To keep us from being a burden on others (1 Thess 2:9; 2 Cor 11:9)
3. To give to those in need (2 Thess 3:10; Eph 4:28)
4. To be productive and beneficial to society
5. To avoid idleness which leads to temptation/meddling (2 Thess 3:6ff)

Quote: “Don’t work the system – work your hands!” Pull your own weight!
Resist the “entitlement” mentality!

Conclusion

Unbeliever: Accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior

Believer: Find out what pleases the Lord and do it!

Will you be a Christian who is characterized by sexual purity, love for the brethren, and a godly work ethic? If so, you can change your world. For when you learn to conquer yourself and allow God’s Spirit to reign in and through you, your life and the lives of others will be changed for eternity.

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