

For GC Discussion

- Have a think at what it looks like to be 'Sanctified' or 'set apart' from the world for Jesus.
- What is our part in seeing that sanctification come about in our lives?
- Though potentially not appropriate for group discussion, we need to think through how we ought to combat the temptations specific to sexual immorality that we face.

Next Week: we'll move on to see Paul address one of the big issues of this letter - the return of Jesus.

Notes and Questions

For Worship: Listen to '*Sanctified*' by Mercy Me. You can find it on YouTube, or on the Hill City Church blog on the website.



1 Thessalonians

Waiting for the King

Week 4: Sanctification

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

This Weeks Summary

This week we saw the Apostle Paul move on in his letter to specifically encourage the church in the area of sanctification, and to warn them of the dangers of sexual immorality in particular.

For Study:

This week we looked at 3 tactics of the enemy that he uses to try and make us stumble - here are some verses on dealing with each one:

Sanctification:

Romans 8:1-13
John 17:6-19
1 Timothy 6:3-11
2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1
Galatians 5:16-26
Romans 6:1-14
Colossians 3:1-17

Sexual Immorality:

1 Corinthians 6:9-20
Proverbs 5:1-14 & 6:20-35
Matthew 5:27-30

In our text this week it's interesting that Paul uses the phrase 'more and more' twice as he encourages the Thessalonian church in their ongoing sanctification. We've already seen that this is a group of God's people who Paul is not disappointed in, or who he needs to rebuke as with some of the other churches he writes to, but in fact their growth in the Gospel gives him great joy. Despite this, Paul in no way writes to them to puff them up, and make them think they've arrived - instead he tells them that they must keep on growing. There is never any room for us to rest on our laurels in the Christian life as if we've got so far along the journey that we can take a break now and worry about other things. We must always be pressing onwards and upwards as Paul himself says in the letter to the Philippian church:

"Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it (the resurrection of the dead) my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 2:13-14)

Paul would urge us too to have this same mind. On the day when we too are raised from the dead we can forget about our growth in holiness and our fight with sin, but until then we must strain forward towards that goal with everything we have. This fact is backed up by Paul's language as he continues to communicate with the church:

The Severity of the need for Holiness

It's very clear from the way Paul writes in this chapter just how seriously he views the matter of the churches holiness. He speaks of the way that he 'solemnly warned' them beforehand, and tells them that the Lord is an 'avenger' of those who wrong their brothers and sisters in the area of sexual immorality. To be promiscuous and sexually perverted isn't just a bit of fun as the world sees it, but is a serious violation of the order of marriage that God created for the fulfilment of His creation and is worthy of the righteous anger and judgment of God. This isn't something to play around with - as the Proverbs tell us, how can you carry fire close to you and not get burnt (Proverbs 6:27) - and yet that is exactly what you are doing in committing any kind of sexual immorality.

Paul goes on to give us one of the primary reasons why sexual sin is seen as so serious - God has given us His Spirit to dwell within us. To sin sexually is unique in being against our own body (1 Cor 6:18) - a body which is now a 'temple of the Holy Spirit' (1 Cor 6:19). In sinning against

your body, you are literally defiling God's house - His dwelling place - with filth, and it doesn't get much more serious than that. Every sin is the same to a degree, but Paul wants to make doubly clear to this church that if you commit this kind of impurity then you are rejecting outright the will of God, and bringing destruction upon yourself.

Love the fulfilment

It's important to recognise that the Christian faith doesn't begin and end with what we've looked at above. Unfortunately we can sometimes think a bit like that - we place purity right at the top of the list of our priorities to the extent that being a Christian can become all about what we don't do rather than something positive. Without doubt, as we've recognised, purity is highly important to God and we should leave much of our old life behind, but if we don't replace that old life with that which is good and right then we've only come halfway.

Thankfully for this young church, Paul isn't concerned about this area of their lives. By a miracle of God's grace they have been transformed from people who undoubtedly looked out for only themselves before their conversion into people who's love for God's people spread far and wide. They weren't concerned with just a religion full of 'don'ts' but wanted their lives to be marked by outward looking care and concern primarily for their brothers and sisters, and I'm sure for the lost people all around them too. We too shouldn't be content with a list of rules as the end of our faith, knowing that if we do not have love, then ultimately we have nothing (1 Cor 13:1-3).

The Witness of a Quiet life

You get the impression that there may well have been a couple of real issues in the church that Paul wants to address. The implication of the text is that there may be those in the church who had a tendency to be lazy busybodies who were sponging off others rather than paying their own way. Paul is concerned at the testimony that this is before those outside the church. These may not seem like hugely important issues, but Paul wants every single area of these believers lives to be a witness to the transforming power of the Gospel. Even the smallest inconsistencies in our lives have the potential to become a stumbling block to those looking on at us, and Paul doesn't want these 'smaller' issues to ruin the amazing impact of the love that is shown liberally in the church, and the way that the truth of the Gospel has sounded widely from the lips and lives of the church in Thessalonica.