I THESSALONIANS 4:9-12

James Ard

We're going to look at the 4th chapter of I Thessalonians; I know that you have already studied the first few verses but I'm just going to touch on a couple of things because I want you to look at the chapter as a whole.

Paul now has sort of switched what he is talking to the Thessalonians about and he is reminding them of some things that undoubtedly they spent a lot of time talking about in the months and weeks that he was with them.

One thing about God's people from the very beginning was that they were different. They were different in many aspects but one of the differences which has been emphasized even in the New Testament is that God called a certain group of people out that believed only in one God and this was unique in the culture that they lived in because it was a culture of many gods and they were noted for their belief in one God.

Paul reminds us and reminds the Thessalonians that the difference of believers not only was in their belief aspect but in their behavior. From the very beginning the thing that characterized God's people had to do with moral purity and this moral purity had its basis in the family. God has always said and Jesus reminded us in the gospels that in the beginning God intended for there to be a man and a woman; a husband and a wife and in this context society created an environment that was good for children and for

people. And so as he begins this change in his letter we note that in the first part of Thessalonians Chapter 4: **Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live…**

Now you can know a lot of things; you can know the truth about a lot of things but if that does not change your behavior what good is it? If you have a headache and you know that an aspirin will help you but you don't take an aspirin we would judge you to not be very wise, would we? Or, if you had any difficulty in life and did not use the proper techniques to help in that then we would judge a person unwise…so what does Paul say? Paul says we instructed you first of all not only about our God and not only about the things about God but we instructed you how to live.

And how did he instruct them how to live? He began to deal with what I believe was and is the basic concept of human relationships and that is about love of the brethren and how we treat each other but he starts off in that relationship that is more sacred. The first thing that God created before the church, even before a lot of other things he created the family unit and here he says that a man and a woman as well should be sexually pure.

In our culture, just like in the day that Paul wrote this Rome had left the early beginnings. Seneca, one of the historians of Ancient Rome said that for five hundred years there was no divorce in Rome. Now, I don't know if that was an exaggeration or statement but it says that for five hundred years there was not a divorce. At the beginning of the Republic because Rome, like we are have changed; divorce was very prevalent. Seneca said a woman married to get divorced and divorced to get married. It was a total breakdown. The Greeks also had this. They had lost their sense of moral purity but Paul said if you are a Christian you are different; you stand out.

I don't know if you caught the little article in the paper the other day; it was a response to something but a father was saying that it was unreasonable and ridiculous to expect young girls to remain free of sex until marriage and really when you think about it that is really what our society says. Ok, now what does that mean? That means that our children and our grandchildren have to be taught very carefully that they are different. They have to understand that there is a difference. You see he does not believe what Paul said **that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen…** Now, what's the key? They key is believing in a God that is pure and subscribing to that concept that we can also be pure.

It really disturbs me more than the political scene that a 15-year old child can be found pregnant and it makes national news and the father of the child as far as I know is still free because she is the sister of Brittany Spears. Do you see what I'm saying? Understand the culture that you're living in and understand what Paul is saying to these Thessalonians because they were living in the same kind of culture that we are – only worse. And he is saying you can do that. That's #1!

We are different because we subscribe to a holy and a pure life and that has to do with how we live. Now, in vs. 9 he introduces another concept and it is a concept that is radical even in our day and that is 'love'. We banter that word about so much but look how Paul uses it. This has to do with how we're to live.

Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another. And in fact, you do love all

the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.

If you go back to II Corinthians, Paul held up the Macedonians; held up the Thessalonians as giving out of their deep poverty. They loved – and this love was transferred into action.

If you go into I John 2 and also I John 3, John says what is the mark of those who love God? That they love one another – that's the mark! That is the mark. Jesus says that you can boil down the commandments of God into two things that are patterns of life – remember what he said? **You should love thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind *AND* your neighbor as yourself** – on these two principles are what God requires.

It made national news this morning; a man found a check for $185,000 and he returned it. Why did that make national news? Why would it be unusual to return something that you found that was not your own? **It's a sad commentary on our culture.* Do you see the world that we're living in? Do you see the concept that they were astounded and they kept pushing the man to say did you not have any hesitation; they just wanted to make him something that he was not. And he said yes, I had an idea, I could pay a lot of my rent with that check. Of course the other problem is cashing it and all of that but I'm just saying yes, we have thoughts. It's not the thought; it's the behavior, it's the change.

Jesus dealt with the problems that we have because on one occasion he told the parable about two sons – the father asked one son to go work in my vineyard and the son

said, no, I'm not going to do it. And he asked another son and the son said yes, I will but didn't. Jesus understands human nature that we have within our own bodies – a struggle but he rejoiced and made the point that the man who said I will not go changed his mind and went…but the man who said I will go never did.

Here this boils down to love of the brethren, love of what is right, treating people as they ought to be treated not only brethren but everyone. The mark of a Christian is purity of life, holiness of life and love.

Next week we're going to talk about the third aspect of it and that is the belief in the resurrection; the belief that one will never die but I want us to spend the next few minutes on this strange thing that he said in vs. 11; listen to what he said. This is behavior of those of us who believe and follow Jesus Christ:

Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anyone.

What does that mean? **Try to live a good life; don't try to press your views on others but to live your life so that others notice. Live so that no man can speak bad against you.* Ok. Scott, what do you think it means to live a quiet life? **I need to look at the verse again but maybe be strong in your faith so that nobody can gain control of your life.…* Ok, be confident in what you believe. Charles?

**Perhaps it's enhanced by the scripture that says let your light so shine that others may know…there are several others. It says to lead your life peacefully, avoid controversy, not necessarily controversy as a Christian but controversy in getting*

involved in other things where you have a cause or a specific thing where you need to get yourself out in front of others but rather be known for someone who kept their head about them and went about their day to day life honorable and peacefully…went to work every day, came home every day, family didn't get in trouble, husband and wife didn't get in trouble…just as we would say "outstanding citizens of the community" but yet not silhouetted as somebody who is faithful or that sort of thing. John! **I'd like to say about Scott; he went to Lithuania, he stayed over there with very little support by the way but he worked. He was not a burden on anyone – not the church here or anybody else. He is an example of what I think Paul is talking about.* Ok, quiet life; of course he was looking for a wife too. ☺ * *I think Paul was saying let your actions speak louder than your words.*

Daisy! **I just get stuck on mind your own business…not gossiping, doing what you need to do without advertising to the world that you're doing it…don't let your left hand know what your right hand is doing…go about your own business.*

Susan! **Really, I guess I just affirm what a lot of people have said, I find that I have my hands full with my own business and the older I get the more I realize I don't have time to meddle in somebody else's although I have tried on more than one occasion. It's a full time job taking care of ourselves and checking ourselves and making sure that we're on the right path.*

One of the things that I think that he's talking about and I think that he uses some words here that are critical and we do have to balance it but I think we have to balance the influence that we have in the world with the techniques that God has given us to balance the world. One of the things that I think that Paul is emphasizing in my mind is

that a Christian as Charles says, lives a life that doesn't call its attention necessarily to the life except that it is reflected in Christ. We tend to want to change the world globally and I think that Paul is saying and has demonstrated that you change the world where you are, you change the world within your own sphere of influence and we have failed in that aspect. We don't mind going to Nigeria or we'll go wherever God wants us except next door; we just can't get ourselves to go next door to meet our neighbors, to find out what they do, how they live, what they need, what their birthdays are, what their anniversaries are; can we carry them a dish? And I think that in one aspect this is what he is saying.

Make you an ambition to live a quiet life where you are. Quiet does not mean passive in what Paul is saying. We forget about that God has a technique for changing things and it is not marching or being part of a protest movement; you do not find that in scripture at all. There was no protest; God technique for changing the world is families living as they ought and prayer.

Paul says pray for the rulers; pray for the emperor who at that time was Nero. Pray for those people. Nowhere in scripture do you find Christians mobilizing themselves to change the world and this is difficult for us to accept…this world is not Christ's. Never will be, never has…it belongs to Satan. Always has…always will! We cannot make this world like our brethren in the past like Alexander Campbell believed. He believed that if we can just make the United States a God-fearing, God-believing nation, we can usher in the millennium and that's why his writings "The Millennium Harbinger"…that was their focus. You make this world the heaven – you can't do it.

But on the other hand: **So that your daily life will win respect of the outsiders…** and that happens where you live. It can't happen in Georgia; it can't happen in Alabama, it can't happen anywhere else, it has to happen in Richardson and Garland, Plano and Dallas…it has to be where you live.

The first mark is the purity and the holiness of life; the second mark is the response that we have and the love of people…of our brethren. The third thing that he's going to remind these people of is why are you concerned about the resurrection? And then in the entire 5th chapter he deals with this problem because it has already crept in to Thessalonica because the Thessalonians, unlike us, believe that Jesus was coming immediately and there were people dying and they were saying "what's wrong?" you told us that the Lord was coming and yet here some of our people are dying; what's going to happen to them which was a realistic concern.

Thank you!

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This is a transcript of a bible class taught by James Ard at the Waterview Church of Christ.
**Indicates comments by class members.*
A blank indicates words/phrases that were inaudible...