

Prayer

We are grateful, Lord God, for the privilege of being touched by Your love. You have been gracious to us and pursued us in love. You have taught us right from wrong and brought us to a place of repentance. May we never turn away from this touch of Your love, which has proved to be our healing, our empowerment, and our encouragement. Bring us safely through the trials of life, we pray, to our home in glory; AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Houses

Houses are important to each of us. We need to have not just a shelter, but a space we can feel is 'ours'. Ask God's blessing on your own home and those who share it with you.

On-going prayers

- Give thanks for what the Lord God has done to bless you today
- Pray about the example set to the young by sports personalities
- Pray for people whose governments do not represent them

Meditation

We have been created for love

So let us demonstrate care for one another

We have been created for passion

So let us experience life to the full

We have been created for fellowship

So let us value each other's company

We have been created to be fruitful

So let us use the gifts we have been given

We have been created for fulfilment

So let us live our lives with purpose

We have been created to be productive

So let us be dynamic and fully employed

We have been created to be spiritual

So let us give ourselves for the purposes of God.

Bible Study - 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

¹ Fellow believers, it remains for us to urge and encourage you in the Lord Jesus, that just as you learned from us how you should live to please God, as you are in fact doing, you should do so more and more; ² for you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. ³ It is the will of God and your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to control your own body in holiness and honour, ⁵ not with the passions of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ that no one wrong or exploit a fellow believer in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger for all these things, just as we have already told you and emphatically warned you. ⁷

For God did not call us to impurity but into holiness. ⁸ So whoever rejects this does not reject people, but rejects God who gives you His Holy Spirit.

Review

At the end of chapter 3, Paul's letter appeared to reach a conclusion, and if the rest of the letter did not exist, we might think that Paul had finished what he wished to say to the Thessalonians; however, there was more. Paul was unable to write a single letter without offering some moral guidance (4:1-8), explaining to his readers how they should 'love one another' (4:9-12) and offering comment on a topical thorny issue (in this case, what would happen at the 'End' – see 4:13-5:11). The last two chapters of 1 Thessalonians are very interesting indeed!

The passage we have read today is typical of much of Paul's moral guidance, because he was always insistent that moral guidance was part of the Gospel, not something added on. When Paul preached the Gospel, it is evident from all the reports in Acts (for example, the sermon preached in Acts 13:16-41) and in his letters (1 Cor 1:23, 2:2), that he preached Christ as the Saviour and the crucified Son of God as any evangelist might do to this day. However, Paul also worked with his converts to help them understand how they should live as a consequence of their new found faith, and he wanted the people at Thessalonica to remember this (4:1-5). His message was that people who claimed that God had changed their lives could hardly live in the same way they had done before as pagans. God was holy (see 4:3,5,7,8), and this 'holiness' should surely be demonstrated by those who spoke about Him and testified to His power in their lives.

Paul was glad to hear reports that the Thessalonians were indeed changed people because of the Gospel, but he urged them to go further and pursue what it meant to be people changed by God, saying, 'you learned ... how you should live to please God ... do so more and more'. Paul was right to offer this challenge, because life is always infinitely complex and fascinating and we can never exhaust its possibilities. Moreover, people always like a challenge! The Christian life would surely be boring if all it required was for us to believe a set of principles and then do whatever we want!

As so often in his letters, Paul knew that at the heart of human morality was sexual behaviour, and conduct between men and women. He said, 'abstain from sexual immorality' (4:3), a phrase found in almost all of his letters, and went on to advocate 'self control' of the body, meaning self control of sexual feelings. It is not just in our modern immoral society that men and women have a duty to hold back their sexual desires and say 'no' when natural feelings make the eyes wander or the mind play with 'naughty thoughts' (4:4,5). Paul adds to this wise guidance that by failing to abide by it, people end up being wronged or exploited (4:6). Unfortunately, too many individuals today have been appallingly wronged and abused by the sexual exploitation of priests and other church leaders who have been found to be paedophiles. Some churches are struggling to deal with the damage done by this dreadful abuse, and those involved are already subject to the vengeance of our Lord (4:6). But we cannot look at others merely to deflect criticism elsewhere. There is no man or woman that does not face the choice, at some time, whether to stay close to God and reject all sexual temptations, or whether to give in to the devil's ways. We must all be alert.

Paul called all Christians to live by the 'holiness' of God, and by this he did not mean some higher spirituality, but the practical courage to say 'no' to sexual misdemeanour. Paul was profoundly clear in his teaching that holiness is a matter of the choices we make about how to live; do we do things God's way, or our own way? Of course, the only way that any of us can maintain the Christian lifestyle is to accept the touch of God's Holy Spirit, who can lovingly help us make tough choices at those moments when we feel hard pressed (4:8).

By giving us the Holy Spirit, God has provided us with a way to live according to His laws and His morality, and we would be foolish to turn away from His provision. The Holy Spirit is given to God's people for a purpose!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. In what ways does sexual temptation make life difficult for people today? How can the church fight against this social trend?
2. Apart from sexual temptation, what other key moral issues are important for the life of God's people today?
3. How may God's people be helped to receive the Holy Spirit if they have never known that such help is at hand?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

The fact is that 1 Thessalonians is an early letter of Paul's, and what he says in it is therefore very interesting. We might even say that this letter sets a pattern for what is to come. Certainly, many of Paul's letters speak forthrightly about the negative power of sexual immorality, and this tells us that Paul must have been aware of quite a few instances of bad sexual behaviour in the churches of his day. It is certainly unwise for us to ignore the problem or pretend that it does not exist.

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Ask yourself the very difficult question whether you have succumbed to inappropriate sexual temptations. It may be that you will not feel comfortable to deal with such issues with anyone else, so do your best to seek the Lord's guidance about how you should deal with any issues that arise as you pray and reflect.*
- *Pray for those who have been the victims of sexual abuse within the life of the church, and pray that the church authorities will deal with the matter properly.*

Final Prayer

Teach me, great Lord and Master, all that I need to learn in order to serve You properly. Show me the things I need to learn, the things I need to explore, the things I need to work at, and the things I need to ask You about. Be my teacher, and encourage me in my learning, I pray; AMEN