

An Exhortation of Expectation #9

I Thessalonians 4: 1-8

In the previous chapter Paul devoted a substantial portion of this letter revealing his heart and desire for ministry. In case there was any doubt, Paul assured them of his love and devotion for the Lord and His church. He presented a challenge unto them through the life that he lived before them.

As we come to Chp.4, Paul turns his focus toward the church and the life that believers are to live. The text verses that we've read stand as an exhortation to all who read these words to live a sanctified life that glorifies the Lord.

As I read this passage I was reminded of the words of Peter in [2 Pet.3:11 – Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness](#). The matter of sanctification and holy living are little addressed in the day in which we live. Our society has embraced an anything goes mentality and there is little, if any, accountability today. That may have been accepted as modern philosophy, but we as the children of God have an obligation to live a life that honors and reflects our Lord!

That philosophy was prevalent in Paul's day as well and he sought to remind the church of their obligations unto the Lord. As we look at these verses I want to consider the [responsibilities](#) a believer has as we think on: [An Exhortation of Expectation](#).

I. The Priority of the Believer (1-2) – Here Paul discusses the priorities we all should possess and exhibit in our daily lives. First we discover:

A. Our Challenge (1) – This challenge is actually two-fold. It involves:

1. The Expectation (1a) – Paul reminds them yet again of their association with Christ and His church, [brethren](#). He then exhorts them to walk in a way that pleases God, following the example of Christ the Lord and Paul His apostle. This was not something that they were unable to do; it had been modeled for them time and again. They were expected to be imitators of Christ.

- We are all aware of the need for purity in our lives and the obligation that we have to walk in a way that pleases the Lord, but I fear that many times we fail in fulfilling that obligation. I have been challenged as I studied this passage in that I was reminded of my responsibility to live upright before the Lord, seeking to imitate the life He lived.

2. The Excellence (1b) – [so ye would abound more and more](#). This reveals a consistent and continual growth that was expected of the church in Thessalonica. The word [abound](#) has the idea of “*exceeding a fixed number or measure; to literally overflow; to excel, or make abundant or excellent.*” Paul was saying that average was not good enough. Simply living a bit better than the world around them was not all that was required. They were expected to excel in their faith and abound more and more for the Lord. (Illus. how we ought to abound.)

B. Our Commandment (2) – [Here Paul speaks of the commandments they were given of the Lord](#). Christ had given them a charge to fulfill, a life to live, and a ministry to perform. This was not an option; it was an obligation. The Lord has not merely suggested that we live according to His words, but He has commanded that we do so.

- That is one of the biggest hindrances and pitfalls of the modern church today. Many, even those who are willing to serve the Lord, treat His Word and His desire for us as if it were a buffet, take what you want and leave the rest. We don't have the right to pick and choose when it comes to the things of God. We are commanded and obligated to live according to His way and will for our lives. We cannot read any passage of Scripture and pretend that it doesn't apply to our lives. All Scripture is there for our good and admonishment and we must be obedient unto it.

I. The Priority of the Believer (1-2)

II. The Purity of the Believer (3-8) – This is a passage that all need to read and understand. Paul declares that [this is the will of God](#) for their lives. The remaining verses in our text deal with the purity of the redeemed.

- Many today are seeking the will of God for their lives and seem to have a hard time discovering what it is that God wants of them. Much of the lack of knowledge concerning God's will can be attributed to a lack of knowledge of the Bible. Some, however, may know what God's will for their life is and yet refuse to embrace it. These verses are very clear in regard to God's will for our lives. He desires and expects:

A. Our Sanctification (3a) – God expects the believer to live a sanctified life. This speaks of “*consecration, purification, a sanctified heart and life, holiness and purity.*” I believe that we are more familiar with sanctification than we like to admit. We know the life that God expects us to live. We know through the direction and conviction of the Holy Spirit whether our lives and actions are in accordance with the will of God. If you are seeking God's will, seek a life of purity and sanctification!

B. Our Isolation (3b) – **that ye should abstain from fornication**. Clearly this was a problem that the believers in Thessalonica were forced to contend with. In the Greek society of that day immorality and promiscuity were rampant. Paul exhorts the church there to **abstain** from such behavior, literally “*to hold one’s self from, to refrain.*” The word **fornication** in the text comes from the Greek word *porneia*, from which we get our word pornography. It has to do with all manner of sexual impurity. It isn’t limited to premarital sex or adultery, but includes all manner of sexual indulgence.

- You would have to agree that our modern society is plagued with the lusts of the flesh and the desire for that which is immoral. It even promotes and encourages promiscuity. We, as believers, have an obligation to isolate ourselves from such behavior and refrain from it.

C. Our Presentation (4-5) – Here Paul deals with how we are expected to walk and present ourselves among the world. **We must possess our vessel (our lives) in sanctification and honor**. V.5 reveals a couple of things concerning our presentation. First we discover it must be:

1. Apart from Lust (5a) – **Not in the lust of concupiscence**. That is an interesting phrase. It speaks of “*a desire or craving for that which is forbidden.*” The church was not to engage in sinful acts that served to please the flesh. They were not to covet or desire those things that were forbidden according to the Word of God.

- That is simple enough to understand, but it is a problem of gigantic proportions in our day. There is no restraint among men. There is no thought of the consequences of their actions, only a consuming desire to possess the lusts of their hearts, even if they know it is wrong and “off limits!” Our world today operates under the slogan of “If it feels good, do it!”

2. Among the World (5b) – **even as the Gentiles which know not God**. The church was reminded that they were living among a people who knew not the Lord. They were not to engage in the sinful practices that the Gentiles did; their lives were to be lived separate from the ways of the world.

- We must also consider the responsibility to present a positive witness to those whom we live among. They do not know the Lord. We can’t expect a lost man to live for the Lord because he has never met Christ. They need to see those who do belong to the Lord setting a positive example. We will never reach the lost if our lives are lived no differently than theirs.

D. Our Reputation (6) – The church was admonished not to take advantage of others. They were not to seek personal gain at the expense of a brother. Paul and the Lord expected them to live lives that were above reproach and accusation.

- Do you realize that your reputation is one of the most precious and fragile attributes that you possess? It declares to the world who we are and dictates how we are perceived. It identifies us as who we are. A reputation can take a lifetime to build, but only a few seconds to destroy. We must be mindful of the life we live before others and seek to guard our reputation!

E. Our Obligation (7-8) – Finally Paul addresses the obligation of the church. In these verses he speaks of an obligation in three areas. First we see that we are obligated:

1. To the Call (7) – Keep in mind that he is speaking to the church, the redeemed of God. They were not saved and called to live life unto themselves, indulging in the uncleanness of the flesh. They were called to a life of holiness before God.

- We need to be reminded of our obligation to the call of God. We tend to apply that term only to pastors and preachers, but all believers are called to a life of holiness. We are obligated to maintain a close relationship with the Lord, free of sin and shame. [1 Pet.1:14-16 – As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance: \[15\] But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; \[16\] Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.](#)

2. To the Creator (8a) – [He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.](#) This is a hard verse, but it reveals great truth. We cannot hold a grudge against our brother without also being guilty of having a grudge against God. We are obligated to live for Him, and in so doing, we must love our brother. We cannot be right with God if we are not right with man. We cannot say that we love God if there is anger or bitterness toward another.

3. To the Comforter (8b) – Paul reveals that the Spirit will deal with our hearts when there is anything in our lives that is contrary to God's will for us. As believers, we are obligated and expected to heed the guidance of the Spirit. We will never experience God's abundance if we are unwilling to submit to the leadership of the Spirit.

- It is dangerous to ignore the pleading of the Spirit. We are given the indwelling of the Spirit to guide and direct our lives. We must heed His warnings and follow His direction.

I will have to admit that these have been challenging verses. They deal with where we are living. I want to live a life that edifies my Lord, encourages other believers, and points the lost to the Savior.

I'm sure that we could all live closer to the Lord than what we currently do. Has He spoken to you about an area in your life that needs attention? If so, submit to the direction of the Holy Spirit and allow Him to lead you into the depths of God's greatness!