

Introduction: Paul emphasizes the importance of holiness with a dramatic plea in 1 Thessalonians 4:1 as well as a warning in 4:8 not to despise God's gift of the Spirit by an immoral life given over to sensual pleasure. The urgency of Paul in this matter of holiness is emphasized by Ken Taylor's paraphrase of verse 1: *Let me add this, dear brothers: you already know how to please God in your daily living, for you know the commands we gave you from the Lord Jesus Himself. Now we beg you – yes, we demand of you in the name of the Lord Jesus – that you live more and more closely to that ideal.*

In verse eight, he proceeds to a sober warning against any who could be tempted to despise God's demand for holiness of life: *Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you His Holy Spirit.*

These verses teach us, therefore, that no matter how hard the challenge to holy living may be, we must recognize its priority in our lives. But let us also be reassured that God knows how urgently we need His promises and His teaching if we are to live lives which pursue holiness.

Mon/Tues: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-9 and Isaiah 54:13. Our moral climate today is much like that of the ancient Greco-Roman world in which Paul lived. Purity is ignored as an overly strict relic of the Puritan/Victorian days of the past. But God's purpose to claim and conform a people to be holy in the midst of an evil and corrupt generation never grows out-of-date. God will ensure, in the words of 1 Thessalonians 4:9, that there will always be a generation of His children who are taught by the Lord. Ah, what a glorious promise for us to unpack in this week's notes! Let us today and tomorrow consider Isaiah 54:13 as one of the Old Testament prophecies where Zion's children are promised God's holy tutelage: *All your sons will be taught by the LORD, and great will be your children's peace.*

In Isaiah 54 God beholds his tawdry and bruised bride (called Jerusalem or Mt. Zion) after she has been abused by the idolatry of her lovers (the surrounding pagan nations) and now suffers 70 years of exile away from her true husband, described in Isaiah 54:5 as the Lord Himself:

*For your Maker is your husband —the LORD Almighty is his name—
the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer; he is called the God of all the earth.*

Having now been abandoned by her false lovers through exile, the Lord promises to be merciful to His bride in Isaiah 54:6-7:

*The LORD will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and distressed in spirit—
a wife who married young, only to be rejected," says your God.
"For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back."*

Out of such compassion comes God's gracious promise in Isaiah 54:13 not only to restore His people as His bride but even to claim generations of her children for Himself – all of them being "taught by the Lord" how to live as a holy and chosen generation. That is why Paul is able to declare to the church in 1 Thessalonians 4:9 that they are **taught by God** to love each other. Such Divine teaching in the church of all ages is in fact a fulfillment of prophecy!

Meditate and Pray: What a security there is for all God's children when they are "taught by the Lord" what true love is! What a protection from all the false lusts and empty promises of this seductive world! Let us pray afresh

with words from the *Valley of Vision* which affirm that God alone, through Jesus Christ, can satisfy our desires and lead us into holy and loving lives: *Heavenly Father, when your Son, Jesus, came into my soul instead of sin, He became more dear to me than sin had been; His kindly rule replaced sin's tyranny. Teach me that, if ever I would have any sin subdued, I must invite Christ to take its place, and He must become to me more than that vile lust had been. Amen!*

Wednesday: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-9. Paul motivates the Thessalonians to pursue holiness by referring to the gift of the Holy Spirit in verse eight: *Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.* But this indwelling of the Holy Spirit is no mere mystical or emotional experience. The Spirit resides in us to do the life-changing work of *teaching* us how to live. As verse nine says, God gives His Spirit in order to **teach** the believer how to love (and to live)! Such a teaching relationship, of course, begins with verse 7's call by which the Spirit comes savingly into our lives: *For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.*

Meditate and Pray: How effective therefore is God's call upon our lives as His people. God never calls a sinner simply to give that person *the option* of responding and living for Christ; God's call to claim a sinner for Himself is *irresistible*! Ask the Lord to continually assert the power of His call in our lives with the help of hymn # 491:

1. *Take me, O my Father, take me;
Take me, save me, through Thy Son;
That which Thou wouldst have me,
make me,
Let Thy will in me be done.
Long from Thee my footsteps
straying,
Thorny proved the way I trod;
Weary come I now, and praying,
Take me to Thy love, my God.*
2. *Fruitless years with grief recalling,
Humbly I confess my sin;
At Thy feet, O Father, falling,
To Thy household take me in.
Freely now to Thee I proffer
This relenting heart of mine;
Freely life and love I offer,
Gift unworthy love like Thine.*
3. *Once the world's Redeemer, dying,
Bore our sins upon the tree;
On that sacrifice relying,
Now I look in hope to Thee:
Father, take me; all forgiving,
Fold me to Thy loving breast;
In Thy love forever living
I must be forever blest.*

Thursday: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-9 and Luke 2:52. God the Father is diligent to teach us what holiness means. But He always does this gently, tailoring His holy requirements to our stumbling steps and child-like immaturities. We know that this gentle manner is in fact the way God teaches when we consider how He patiently taught His own Son in our nature to grow gradually in holiness and calling. In the words of Luke 2:52 (which describe Jesus' sinless but nevertheless real struggle to grow up in our nature) *Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.* This is a fascinating verse from Luke the physician who claims to have studied the life of Jesus in detail – probably by detailed interviews with Jesus' mother Mary.

Meditate and Pray: Use Dr. Sinclair Ferguson's comments on this verse about the Father teaching the Son to grow up in our nature as an encouragement when you face struggles in your efforts to become holy:

The word "grew" originally meant "making one's way forward by pushing aside obstacles." It was a nautical and military metaphor. A ship sailing to its destination would make its way through hazards and difficulties on the high seas. An army, marching through rough terrain might have to hack its way through a forest, or overcome the difficulties of a river... When we say that Jesus Christ grew spiritually and therefore is able to help us to grow spiritually, what do we mean? We mean that, just as we find there are obstacles in our way, things were no different for Jesus. He felt the kind of pressures that we experience to compromise and yield to temptations. He lived in "the likeness of sinful flesh" (Rom.8:3); He experienced weakness, hunger, thirst, fear and opposition, just as we do. Jesus lived in our world.

Fri/Sat/Sun: read 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 and Galatians 5:19-25. Just as Christ Jesus grew in holiness as a man, so God knows how to help us grow up into holiness: progressively, gently and even at times imperceptibly. What a patient teacher! In contrast to a harsh, hypocritical world which continually changes the moral boundaries and then condemns those who fail to keep its perceived standards, God is always the same: repeatedly taking us by the hand and leading us back to the place of our most recent transgression, then showing us where we went wrong, and where we need to direct our steps in the future. In that same quiet spirit of what it means to be "taught by the Lord," we ought not to be surprised that Paul moves from the subject of sexual purity and the pursuit of holy love in verses 1-10 to the subject of leading a quiet, godly life in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12.

It is in the quiet life of "working with our own hands" that the Holy Spirit does His best work, producing the fruit of the Spirit in terms of Galatians 5:22-25 in such a beautiful, soft-spoken way that the conceited and boastful world cannot help but take notice. May 1 Thessalonians 4:12 indeed come true in our lives: ... *that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.*

Meditate and Pray: We can hardly end this week's notes without quoting from hymn # 644 in our Trinity Hymnal:

*May the mind of Christ, my Savior,
Live in me from day to day,
By His love and power controlling
All I do and say.*

*May His beauty rest upon me,
As I seek the lost to win,
And may they forget the channel,
Seeing only Him.*

*May the Word of God dwell richly
In my heart from hour to hour,
So that all may see I triumph
Only through His power.*