

A recent survey of Christians in America found that 80% of all Bible believers said that their Christianity *did not* affect the way they lived their life. 80% said it did not affect how they spoke, how they conducted their relationships, what they did in their spare time. Which probably means that 80% of Christians are not pleasing God.

Now if that is true here in Aust and boy, I hope it isn't, then maybe only 6 or 7 of us here tonight are living a life that is pleasing to God. Now that's scary isn't it? The rest of us may believe in God, but unless it changes our lives, that belief will do us no good.

So then what pleases God? Paul says in verses 1 and 2 that by following the teaching that comes from Jesus and from the apostles, the teaching that is in the NT, we learn how to please God. So if we are not exposing ourselves to this sort of teaching in our daily quiet times, in our sermons midweek, in our small groups and if we are not putting this teaching into practice then we might just be fooling ourselves, because we are not fooling God.

For the aim of the Christian is not to be saved and then avoid the miseries of hell. It is not a matter of following God's rules and being obedient. It is pleasing God.

Now this is really hard today because we live in a world that says please yourself. Do what you want. Go where you want. Act how you want. And Paul is saying instead, do what God wants.

Which means we have never finished the Christian walk. We can never say, well I've finally ticked off all the boxes, because there is still more things we can do that *please* God. And it means there is a way of doing the everyday things that *please* God. Every morning we can wake up and say to ourselves what can I do today to please God?

So how do we live a life that pleases God? Well it involves a number of things, but in chapter 4 Paul zeros in on the subjects of sex and of relationships & of work. Three keys areas that say a lot about who we are & what we believe and what is important to us. Three areas that affect our everyday life and that show both God and others that our faith is really fair dinkum. So lets look at v. 3 to 8 as we see we are to

1. Be holy by living in purity (3-8). Paul says in v 3, that it is God's will for us to be holy. That we should avoid any form of sexual immorality. Any form of sex outside of marriage. But what's more we should learn to control our sexual appetites, so that our body only does things that are holy and honourable. So we should not be overcome with lust. We should not use sex to take advantage of someone who is weaker physically or relationally. For we should never wrong others or rob others (is probably a better translation) of anything that is not

ours. We shouldn't take what we have no rights to & if we do that God will punish us.

Wow, there's a lot in that isn't there? Living a sexually pure life involves not just limiting sex to marriage, but also it involves the ability to control yourself and to use sex not in a selfish manner but for the good of your married partner. And that will be hard, very hard, for we live in a red light city, we live in probably the most promiscuous spot in Australia, on the Gold Coast.

And today sex is sold to us as giving us the ultimate pleasure. We can't go anywhere without the advertising billboard, the magazine cover, the internet site, the TV, the music on the radio each telling us that sex is just a bit of harmless fun. Fun that we should grab whenever we can. And its funny because it wasn't that much different in Thessalonica in the first century.

One of the philosophers of this time said *"we have go to prostitutes for pleasure, we have concubines so that we can have regular sex, and lastly we have wives for the purpose of having children legitimately and for looking after our household affairs"*

And here Paul is saying that view of sex doesn't please God. Instead, he says, set limits. Control your body in a way that's holy and honourable. Which are both words which have almost gone from the popular vocabulary. *I'm sorry, I could **never have an affair with you.** Because that would be **dishonourable.** I mean, people would **laugh** if they saw that in a movie, wouldn't they? *I'm sorry, I'm not going to **jump into bed with you.** Because I want to live in a way that **honours you.** And **honours God.** I'm not going to be **driven by lust...** because I want to live to **please God.****

I mean, it's a whole different **mindset.** Not because Christians are **prudish wowsers.** But because we've got a think differently. We should have a mindset that wants to please God & honours each other.

So avoiding sexual immorality, is a command that, *"Builds a wall around marriage that makes the relationship not a prison, but a safe and beautiful garden."* The controlling of ones lusts is not there to tell you that you should never light the fire of passion within our body, but to make sure we light it in within the fireplace where it will be safe and warm rather than in the bush where it could take over and cause a bushfire.

You see we as Christians no longer own our own body, they are God's. He bought us for the price of his Son Jesus' death on the cross. We are not our own, so we should use our bodies to please God and not ourselves.

Which means if we are not married we should wait until we are married. If we are married, we should not have any sort of sexual

relationships with anyone other than our married partner. And if we are having sex with our husband and our wife we need to do so to meet *their* needs rather than *ours*.

Now I think that means that all of us are a little uncomfortable with this teaching. And all of us have probably broken those guidelines sometime. But I just want to remind you at this point of the great **glory of the gospel that Paul has already stated in this book**. It is the message of **God's mercy** to us in Christ. That if we have failed in this way, it is not the end. No God is bigger than our failures. God offers us forgiveness and a new start, living a life that now pleases Him.

Friends, there are so many people out there who are hurting because the sexual revolution has not delivered better sex or better relationships. Instead it has delivered more broken hearts. And God is saying that our faith must affect us in this critical area. Be holy by living in purity. And according to verse 9 and 10

2. Be harmonious by loving one another. Love not just your husband and wife or your family, but your spiritual family, the Church. Love not just the ones who love you, love your neighbour, no love your enemy. Love people not just for a while, but as Paul urges do so more and more. Be taught that God is love. Allow the teaching of God to show you how he has loved you with an everlasting love. And use that same love to love each other.

Now how does God cause our love to increase more and more? I think by allowing us to be put in circumstances that force us to practise love. Which means the difficulties that we believers have with one another are opportunities for us to grow in our love.

Have you ever thought why God puts us in families and why God wants us to be part of a Church family? Because there we come across all sorts of people and we have to learn to get along. No more than that, we have to learn to love them.

In Churches we have extroverts and introverts. We have visionary people and small detail people. We have people that like reverence, others that like relationships. We have some who would like communion every week, others who would be quite happy to go without it. Some who like classical music, others who choose to listen to rock and roll. Some who would love an interactive service, others who like a monologue. Some who would like to lift their hands during singing, others who like to kneel while they pray. Some who would like me to preach longer and others who would like me to preach shorter. And God has put all of us together in the one Church and he says to us, love each other.

What did the poet say in jest? *To love God up above, Oh that is our*

glory. To love his children down below , Lord that's another story.

But Paul is saying more than just we should love each other. I believe he is saying that love for one another should influence what we do and how we act. So not only do we ask ourselves what will please God, but we can rightly ask ourselves how can I show my love for one another today? How can I show others that my fellow Christians are an extension of my family?

A while back, Sharon Fletcher volunteered to pick up Samuel from primary school. When she went to the gate, she had a word with his teacher and Mrs Benner asked her "Are you Samuel's grandmother?" And she said "I wish I was!" Now that's the sort of love for others we should have. Sharon does love my kids as if they were her very own family and that is the model we need to have for all of us. For we all need to love each other as if they were a part of our family, because we all are a part of your family.

We need to be holy by living in purity, be harmonious by loving one another & in verses 11-12 we should **3. Be honest by looking to work hard**

Paul continues, make it your ambition to live a quiet life. Or probably better translated, *make it your ambition to have no ambition*. Be busy, not be a busybody. Work hard with your hands, so that you will win the outsider's respect by your work ethic and also so you will not be dependent upon other people's constant hand outs.

It seems some of the Thessalonians were saying it is no use working hard because Jesus is coming soon. Paul says, No, the fact that Jesus is coming soon, should make you work harder. For your work says something about who you are and how you work says something about what is important to you.

And so one of the things that pleases God is to work hard. But not to work just so you make lots of money, but instead so that you can serve others, so that you can show your love for others, so that people might see in your love and actions, God's love and actions to his world.

Which is why traditionally Christians have encouraged careers in the caring professions so that when we do work hard it can be seen that we are not just doing it for ourselves or for money, we are doing it to serve people So careers like teaching, nursing, medicine, mission and social service have had a steady stream of Christian people go into it.

But unfortunately this is no longer true. Now Christians are going into jobs more and more for the pay packet we earn or the status it gives us rather than saying how can this job show off my faith in God? I admit I never even considered this sort of thing before I signed up to become an accountant, but when I left accountancy to go into the ministry, I

have had hundreds of conversations about why I would leave a good paying job for a career in the Church and those conversations have been mostly with people within the Church!.

In our work, we can please God by both what we do and how we do it. In our relationships we can show off God's love by loving one another deeply. And in our use of sex we can show the world we are holy, different and honourable in all we do.

But let me leave you with one further thought. If we try and do these things, our losses will be more obvious than our victories, but that doesn't mean we should lose heart.

Recently there was an interview on the 7:30 report between Kerry O'Brien and the Deputy US Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, And Armitage was asked about the US war on Terrorism. And he answered by saying "When our State Department has a loss it is obvious, like on September 11, or with the World Trade Centre bombing. And when we lose, everyone knows about it. But when we have a victory (which by the way is most days) nothing happens and so nobody notices our victories."

Now when we think about it, isn't that true of us when we assess ourselves in this light. When we have victories, when we don't look at that cute girl, when we don't watch that TV show, when we don't allow ourselves to find that internet site, nobody knows, nobody knows, except God who know everything. When we are not selfish and instead show our love for one another, we try and do that in a way that nobody knows about, because we don't do it to be noticed.

You see when we work hard and live quiet and serve others honestly, it always seems to go under the radar. Its not exciting, nobody notices, except God. But when we fail, we hurt so many people. We fail sexually and we hurt our spouse or our further spouse. We fail relationally and we hurt those around us. And when we do these things, we also hurt our witness for God, for we are called to be holy, like he is holy.

But in all these things we know if we are attempting to please God. And God knows if we are going forward in the faith. Friends don't think that Christianity is just about faith, or rules or worship. Its about pleasing God. So if we fail, seek out his forgiveness. And if we succeed thank God that he has given us this incredible privilege - that as we live our everyday lives we can do something that has an eternal significance.