

Ethics and the Will of God

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Date: 14 November 2021

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[0 : 00] Come now to our Bible reading, so please do grab a Bible and turn to the New Testament to Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians. And a little later in our service, Edward Lobb will be preaching to us from this letter, this great epistle.

And we're looking at chapter 4, verses 1 to 12. And if you're a Christian here tonight, if you're anxious to find out what God's will is for your life, well, worry no more, because this passage will tell you.

Let's hear the Word of God. 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, beginning at verse 1. Finally then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.

For you know what instructions we give you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality, that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor.

Nor in the passion of lust like the Gentiles, who do not know God, that no one transgresses and wrong his brother in this matter.

[1 : 32] Because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.

Therefore, whoever disregards this, disregards not man, but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another.

For that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders, and be dependent on no one.

Well, amen, and may God bless to us this, his word. Good evening, friends. Very good to see you all. Let's turn to our passage for this evening, which is 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verses 1 to 12.

My title for this evening is Ethics and the Will of God. The Apostle Paul has a lot to say about Christian ethical behavior in all his letters.

[3 : 09] And in his thinking and his teaching, he shows a clear, simple, two-fold pattern. It is gospel and behavior.

Now, the gospel comes first. It's God who takes the initiative. In his love for beleaguered, sin-corrupted human beings, hell-bound human beings, he has sent a savior, his son Jesus.

And Jesus, bearing in our place the penalty of our sin, has secured our reconciliation to God and the forgiveness of our sin. And once we admit our need and trust Jesus, we are saved.

We are adopted into the Lord's family. We are justified and redeemed. But we are no longer our masters. We now belong to him.

So how do we go on from there? The answer is we learn Christian behavior, Christian ethics. And the ethical instruction taught by the Bible takes its shape from the character of God himself.

[4 : 19] It is not arbitrary. It's not as though God showers us with do's and don'ts in a haphazard way without rhyme or reason. Not at all. The ethical instruction springs directly from God's own nature.

He asks us to behave in ways that entirely imitate his own ways. For example, he teaches us not to tell lies because he never tells lies but is always truthful.

He teaches us to be faithful in marriage because he is unfailingly faithful in marriage to his bride, the church. He teaches us not to murder human beings because he cares deeply about every human being.

Live an ethically true life in imitation of me. That's the underlying rationale of his teaching in the Bible. Paul echoes this in his letters when he says several times, imitate me as I imitate Christ.

Christ takes his character from God the Father and Paul and others imitate him. And the way that Paul constructs his letters always reflects this twofold understanding, gospel and behavior.

[5 : 35] Now, you see it more clearly in some of his letters than in others, but it's there in all of them. And typically, Paul will spend the first part of a letter unfolding the gospel in which he says, God has done this and that.

And he's showered blessings upon us through the person of Jesus Christ. And he then draws out various aspects of what God has done in his mercy for us.

And then Paul says, therefore, my readers, your response to God's kindness, your response to the gospel, is to live by his ethical teaching. So the gospel comes first.

But our right ethical behavior follows and is shaped by God's character and God's gospel. Now, once we've got that simple twofold pattern in our minds, it becomes a lot easier to make sense of what Paul is saying in all his letters.

And for us this evening, it's a chapter four, verse one, that Paul begins the ethical section of one Thessalonians. So just look with me at verse one, if you will, please.

[6 : 37] Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.

Notice that phrase in the middle there, how you ought to live. Paul is flagging it up that he's about to teach the Thessalonian Christians some ethics, because ethics is always about how we ought to live.

It's about a moral obligation. Now, we'll return to the passage in a moment, but something more needs to be said first about the place of ethics in the Christian church.

In recent times, evangelical Christians have grown rather shy of ethical teaching. Our Bible-believing churches have been very strong on the gospel.

We've proclaimed unashamedly to the world that Christ is the only savior, and we've called people to come to him and put their trust in him. Now, that is good and right and essential and central.

[7 : 43] But we haven't been nearly as strong on ethical teaching as we have been on the gospel. And therefore, the wholesome and lovely qualities of Christian living have not always been clearly seen in the lives that Christians live in the wider community, and even within our own community.

Too many churches have brought the gospel into disrepute because of sexual sin, sometimes in Christian leaders, and because of greed for money, because of dishonesty, and various other types of self-centered and selfish behavior.

The reason that we need the ethical teaching is that by nature, we human beings simply do not know how to live. If we're left to ourselves, we lurch from one thing to another without any principles to live by.

Left to ourselves, we will fall into sexual immorality and many other kinds of indiscipline. And all these things bring sadness and confusion into human life.

We see it all around us in the world, and we know how wretchedly unhappy so many people are. It's because they're alienated from God, and therefore alienated from the knowledge of how to live life.

[8 : 55] In the modern world, the world of perhaps the last 40 years or so, we have the additional problem that many people think that there's no such thing as truth, and therefore no such thing as true ethical standards.

But in the Bible, God assures us that there is such a thing as truth. And the truth of the gospel issues in clearly defined ethical standards. And to learn to live by the ethical standards of the Bible is the way, not necessarily an easy way or a pain-free way, but it's the way to a peaceful life.

A life in which God is honored, and human relationships become steady and strong. A life in which we can learn to trust each other, and live at peace with each other.

To use a simple illustration, if you're steering a ship at night through troubled waters and gale force winds, you need a good map and good technical equipment to see you safely into port.

We live our lives today in troubled waters, and we're buffeted by gale force winds. So we need the reliable equipment of the Bible to steer our ship safely into port, and to avoid shipwreck and disaster.

[10 : 09] But too many churches have been shy of teaching the ethics of the Bible. People say, Christian people will sometimes say, we mustn't be legalists. Or they might say, we're not under law, but under grace.

As if that allows us to ignore God's law, or to disobey it. But when Paul teaches, as he does in Romans chapter 6, that we're not under law, but under grace, he means that we can't gain acceptance with God by law-keeping.

It's only by grace that we can be saved. But once we're saved by grace, we have to turn to God's law in order to know how to behave, as people redeemed by grace.

The Puritans of the 17th century used to say rightly that the law sends us to Christ to be justified, and then Christ sends us back to the law to be sanctified.

And that's exactly what Paul teaches in all his letters. We need the ethical teaching, otherwise we shall be like ships without compass or map or rudder.

[11 : 13] I remember hearing our minister, our senior minister, Willie, saying some years ago that we need to teach the wisdom literature of the Old Testament more, because the wisdom literature also teaches us how to live our lives.

In fact, just this year, in the last few months, we've had plenty of preaching from the books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Job teaches us wisdom to live with suffering.

Ecclesiastes teaches us how to cope with life's most baffling features. And Proverbs teaches just about everything else. And Paul's ethical teaching in his letters leads us out of confusion, out of moral dysfunction.

And if we learn to obey it, it will bring great blessing to us, both as individuals and as a church family. Now, before we get properly into verse 1, we'll be there in a moment, but let me give two more pointers about how important this kind of instruction is to Paul.

First, he had already given the Thessalonian Christians plenty of ethical teaching while he spent time with them, those few short weeks with them earlier this year, earlier that year when he was with them.

[12 : 23] Look at verse 1. Finally, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that as you received from us how you ought to live, so you do so now more and more.

When Paul was with them at Thessalonica, it wasn't just gospel, it was gospel and ethics. So he's saying to them, you've already received these things from me. Look at verse 2.

You know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. In other words, we instructed you back then, and now we are endorsing that instruction through this letter.

Or look on to verse 6. As we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. So he's repeating his instructions. Why does he need to do that?

Our heads and hearts are made of pretty resistant materials. We need to keep hearing these instructions again and again. Paul is reminding them of what he's already taught them.

[13 : 24] And then secondly, let's notice the insistent authority with which he teaches these things. Verse 1. We ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus. And verse 2.

You know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. So he's not saying to them, in my humble opinion, I would suggest to you how you ought to behave. Not at all.

He's speaking with the authority of Jesus, which has been delegated to him as an apostle. These instructions come from heaven, from the Lord Jesus, to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given.

Look on to verse 8, where Paul is finishing his instructions about sexual chastity. He says there, Therefore whoever disregards this disregards not man, but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

In other words, these are God's instructions. Christians. If we're to grow as Christians and learn to serve the Lord fruitfully, we need to come to terms with the authority with which God instructs the church.

[14 : 32] Now mankind has had an anti-authority bent ever since the Garden of Eden. But we're living in an age today in the Western world where authority is being resisted at almost every level.

This modern wave of resistance to authority, I think, began back in the 1960s, roughly at the time when the Beatles allowed their hair to grow down over their collars, which caused a sensation.

I remember it well. I was only a boy in short pants, but I remember it. A sense of shock ran through the nation, rather like the shock that ran through the Titanic when it hit the iceberg in 1912.

From the 1960s onwards, every aspect of authority in society began to be questioned and resisted. And inevitably, all of us are infected with this virus.

We twist and turn and try to get away from authority. But if the church is to be truly the church, it must recognize that God is truly God. The ethical instructions of the Bible are God's instructions.

[15 : 34] We need to listen to them. Otherwise, we will simply be playing at Christianity. Well, let's turn to our passage. I'd like to draw three main strands of teaching from it this evening.

First, Paul teaches the Thessalonians the right motivation for ethical living. And it's there in the heart of verse one. How you ought to live and to please God.

Think of that phrase, to please him. So that he should look at our lives and our conduct and be glad. To please him. It's a truth that surfaces a number of times in the New Testament.

So, for example, Jesus says about God the Father in John chapter 8, I always do the things that are pleasing to him. And God the Father says of Jesus in Matthew chapter 17, this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased.

It surfaces in other parts of 1 Thessalonians. Look back to chapter 2, verse 4. Chapter 2, verse 4. We speak, says Paul, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.

[16 : 48] Or look at chapter 2, verse 15, where Paul is speaking about the opponents of the gospel. I quote, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets and drove us out and displeased God and opposed all mankind.

Learning to please God, it's a delightful motivation to live by the ethical teaching of the Bible. Let me say two things about pleasing God. First, it's personal, not mechanical.

It's all about our actual relationship to him, the Father who made us and who loves us. He has his loving eye upon us and we have our loving eye upon him.

Pleasing him is all about enjoying our relationship with him. It's not as though he has simply given us an impersonal book of rules. There's something deadening about a written code of rules, isn't there?

I can still remember some of the school rules that I was asked to follow as a young teenager. For example, boys shall not smoke or possess smoking materials. I had to take note especially of that one.

[17 : 57] Boys shall not drive motorized vehicles around the school grounds. Boys shall not grow moustaches, an unnecessary rule for most of us as 15-year-olds. But there were about a hundred of these school rules like that and reading through them was both depressing and deadening.

But keeping God's instructions is about pleasing him. Now we face many ethical choices. Another way of putting that is to say that we face many moments of temptation.

We arrive at some kind of a moral fork in the road. We can go either to the right or to the left. We have to choose between a wrong decision and a right decision.

Now we have a conscience. It's alert and active and we know full well that one way is right and the other way is wrong. That's the moment to think about God.

That's the moment to pray. Lord, I want to please you. I want you to be able to look at me and be glad. So please give me strength to take the right path.

[19 : 03] And we all know that to take the right path leads to peace and a sense of God's blessing. But to take the wrong path leaves us miserable. And if we go on taking the wrong path again and again, eventually we will harden our conscience and finally walk away from the Lord altogether.

Learning to please him. It's about learning to persevere in the Christian life. Pleasing God is personal, not mechanical. Now secondly, it's progressive, not static.

God wants us to make progress in pleasing him, to learn more and more deeply what it means. Look again at verse 1. As you received from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.

It's a more and more thing. Or look onto verse 10 where Paul is writing about brotherly love. He says, we urge you brothers to do this more and more.

In other words, don't be complacent. Don't give yourself three gold stars and a pat on the back, a sense that you've achieved ethical perfection. You haven't. Paul knows that Christians remain sinners, sinners under temptation until our dying day.

[20 : 23] the battle with temptation never disappears. So learning to please God is a part of the Christian life that has to be pursued every day. The first phrase, first phrase of verse 3 will help us to understand the progressive developing aspect of this more clearly.

Verse 3, for this is the will of God, your sanctification. The very word sanctification sanctification means, the progressive developing work whereby a Christian learns more fully how to please God, how to live a godly life.

It's a matter of what our hearts really value. Just take for one example the commandment not to bear false witness against our neighbor, which really means don't make false allegations about other people, don't tell lies about other people.

Now, a Christian who's a young adult, let's say about the age of 18, understands that commandment pretty clearly. He says to himself, God does not want me to tell lies about other people.

But at the age of 18, he hasn't yet experienced much temptation to tell lies about others. He hasn't yet been in situations where his job or his reputation have been on the line.

[21 : 42] situations where he's been tempted to tell lies. But by the time he's 50, and possibly by the time he's 30, he's going to know a lot about that kind of pressure.

He will have seen friends and colleagues telling lies in order to keep their jobs or in order to win a contract. He will have seen company bosses telling lies to their employees.

He will have seen global companies lying to the world in order to uphold their reputation and keep selling their product. He will have seen national governments telling lies to the world so as to maintain their financial income.

And if he is determined to be a more and more Christian in terms of his ethical behavior, he will be developing increasingly a hatred for deceit and a growing love for truthfulness.

He'll be learning to delight in truthfulness and honesty and transparency. The commandment against bearing false witness will be becoming more deeply embedded in his soul.

[22 : 47] And the same will be true of his attitude towards all of God's commandments. He'll be learning increasingly to hate murder, to hate adultery, to hate stealing. He will learn to love human life, to love marital fidelity, to love respect for other people's property.

In short, the character of God himself will be increasingly shown in that man's life. It's a progressive, developing thing. And let's thank God that progress is possible.

There is a ripening of Christ-like behavior which is gloriously possible for all of us. It's a more and more thing. And this sanctification, says Paul in verse 3, is the will of God.

It's what he wants for us. So if we ask, what is the will of God for my life? The answer is our sanctification, our progress in godliness.

The will of God for you and me is not primarily about where I should live or what work I should do or which person I should marry. The will of God is about how we conduct ourselves at work and in marriage and in every part of our lives.

[24 : 01] So there's the first thing. The heart of Christian ethics is about learning to please God. And it's at this point, halfway through verse 3, that Paul begins to write about three particular aspects of human life where growth in godliness is required for all Christians.

And those three aspects of human life, and I'm looking right the way down through the chapter now, are first of all, sex, verses 3 to 8, secondly, work, verses 9 to 12, and thirdly, death, verses 13 to 18.

Though we shan't look at that passage, 13 to 18, until next week. But aren't those three areas absolutely crucial? Sex, work, death, three fundamental ingredients of life which we have to tangle with and which we cannot avoid.

Sex, we're all sexual beings and we have to cope with these powerful desires. Work, we all have to work in one way or another. And death, it comes to high and low, rich and poor, and is the conqueror of all mankind except for Jesus and those who belong to him.

But we need instruction in those three critical areas of life. So let's turn then, and this is my second main point, let's turn to Paul's instruction about sex.

[25 : 28] His basic imperative in verse 3 is this, that each, sorry, yes, verse 3, your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality.

That's the basic instruction and he then develops that and unpacks it in verses 4 to 8. Abstain from sexual immorality. That's the teaching. And that means any kind of sexual activity outside the boundaries of marriage.

And marriage, in the Bible's teaching, is the union of a man and a woman, a union publicly recognized and broken only by death. That's the Bible's view on marriage.

So for Paul and for us, abstaining from sexual immorality means saying no to homosexual activity, to adultery, to premarital sex, to extramarital sex, to bestiality, that's sex with animals, and pornography, which in the end can damage and even destroy a person's sexual ability.

Now does all that sound terribly negative? Well, it's strong. But God commands it this way for our good.

[26 : 41] He loves us. He knows what is best for us. Let me use an illustration that I've found very helpful. Sex is like fire. In the right place, it's very good.

And in the wrong place, it's utterly destructive. Just imagine coming into your house on a cold afternoon in the winter and somebody says, go into the living room. There's a nice fire there.

Sit down and enjoy it. So you go in and there's a log fire blazing. You sit down and warm yourself. But imagine coming home one day and somebody says, there's a fire in the sitting room and you rush in and the curtains are going up in flames and the sofa and the armchairs are beginning to catch.

In the right place, fire is very good. In the wrong place, fire is very bad. Now sex is like that.

Within marriage, it is lovely. It's at the very center of married life. It brings joy and comfort and it wonderfully unites a man and his wife. It's the adhesive that keeps the marriage together.

[27 : 45] In fact, every time a man and his wife make love together, it's like a gentle reaffirmation of their marriage vows. Historically, of course, some Christians have taught that sex is in itself a bad thing, even that marriage should be avoided or even outlawed.

But that is not the Bible's way. The Bible teaches that sex and marriage are wonderfully good gifts of God. It is God who has put this powerful impulse inside us.

He's given us so much, hasn't he? He's given us eyes, ears, noses, hearts, lungs, livers, kidneys, five toes on each foot if you're lucky, and sex. It's his idea.

And like every part of his creation, it is very good as long as it's used within the God-given framework of marriage. It's the thing that draws a young man and a young woman together in the first place.

And then when they get married, they go on honeymoon. It's the central point of interest. Well, think of this. They perhaps rent a cottage somewhere up in the highlands of Scotland for a week or two. They don't take the best man with them or the bridesmaid or their mothers or their aunts.

[28 : 57] They're alone together. It's wonderful. After dinner, in the evening, he doesn't say to her, shall I teach you now how to play chess? And she doesn't reply, I'd rather study Egyptian hieroglyphics.

No, they head for the bedroom because they're beginning to enjoy the defining activity of married life. Look again at verse 3.

Paul is not saying abstain from sex. In fact, he strongly encourages married couples in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 to enjoy sex regularly because it is a great preventative against adultery.

If there's joy in your own bedroom, you don't start looking for joy in somebody else's bedroom. In verse 3, Paul is saying abstain from sexual immorality.

And he then begins to give reasons for this instruction. Look with me at verse 4. That each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.

[30 : 08] That Gentile world that the Thessalonians lived in was full of sexual license. So a man of standing, a man of some wealth in society, would often have not only a wife but a mistress.

If he had slaves, he might expect them or some of them to provide him with some kind of sexual gratification. And there was plenty of prostitution available in every city in the Roman Empire.

The function of his wife was to manage the household and to produce his legitimate children and heirs. Paul is very understated in his language there in verse 5.

But his meaning is quite clear. Not in the passion of lust, unbridled lust like the Gentiles who do not know God. So a culture that gives itself over to sexual immorality is turning its back on the knowledge of God.

Things haven't changed much in 20 centuries. So any church that is serious about the knowledge of God will keep on working to develop a culture within the church family, a culture of sexual purity.

[31 : 16] When a church is committed to chastity, it means that we can really trust each other. The young women in the church will be able to trust the men, both the young men and the older men.

Married people in the church will be able to trust their spouses deeply. Husbands will come to trust the fidelity of their wives and wives the fidelity of their husbands.

Now I think that in our church there is such a culture but we can't afford to be complacent. We need to be constantly vigilant, constantly watching our own hearts. Then in verses six to eight, Paul brings the Lord God right into the picture.

Verse six, he says, if we wrong a brother or a sister or a fellow Christian, in our sexual behavior, we must fear the Lord himself because he will be the avenger of such wrongdoing.

That verse six is a solemn warning. Then verse seven tells us that God has called us not for impurity but for holiness. Be holy.

[32 : 21] That's his call throughout the Bible. Be holy because I am holy. And then in verse eight, Paul tells us that if we disregard these instructions, we're disregarding not man but God.

So it wouldn't be Paul that we're despising if we disregard these things but God himself. And if we're disregarding God, we're resisting the Holy Spirit whom God has given to us and who lives within us.

Now friends, I know that in a crowd as large as we are here tonight, there are bound to be some who have transgressed the Lord's instructions about sexual purity. So let me say this.

If you have, don't despair. Don't despair. Heartfelt repentance will always be met by divine forgiveness. Come to the Lord. Tell him about it.

Tell him that you want to put it behind you and ask him to give you a powerful determination to abstain from sexual immorality in the future. And isn't it true that all of us have transgressed to some degree?

[33 : 25] If not in body, then certainly in our thoughts, in our imaginations. None of us has lived a squeaky clean life. Each one of us has to battle with sexual temptation every day.

So here is Paul's instruction which is God's command, God's will, as verse 3 puts it, that we grow in godliness, that we abstain from sexual immorality.

Well now thirdly, let's turn to Paul's instruction about work in verses 9 to 12. You might be a little surprised when you read verse 9 to hear me say that the paragraph is about work because at first blush it seems to be about brotherly love.

But Paul's real point here is that by working steadily at our daily jobs, we're showing love to our brothers and sisters in the church. So let's work through these verses and I think you'll see what I mean.

In verses 9 and 10 Paul is commending the Thessalonians for the way that they're showing brotherly love to each other. In verse 10 he says, this is indeed what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia, that's the whole of the northern part of Greece.

[34 : 39] But we urge you brothers to do this more and more. And as he moves into verse 11 he focuses on exactly what he means by showing brotherly love, love to other Christians more and more.

So what is this brotherly love? It is, verse 11, to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs and to work with your hands as we instructed you so that, verse 12, you may live properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

So real brotherly love is shown in getting on quietly and unostentatiously with your work so that you can support yourself and those who are dependent on your income.

Now when modern people like us see that phrase brotherly love, we tend to think that it's all about fuzzy-wuzzy feelings in our hearts. Oh, I love my brothers and sisters in the church so much.

That sort of thing. Well, Paul loved the churches. Nobody loved the churches more powerfully than Paul. But he expressed his love for the churches by working for them. When Paul was personally short of money, in the words of verse 11, he worked with his own hands making tents and leather goods.

[35 : 54] He didn't expect other Christians to put food on his table. Now there does seem to have been some kind of idleness problem in the church at Thessalonica. It's hinted at here in 1 Thessalonians but it's confronted strongly in 2 Thessalonians.

And perhaps you just turn over with me a couple of pages to 2 Thessalonians chapter 3 verses 6 to 12. 2 Thessalonians 3 6 to 12.

It's a very strong passage about this problem. So Paul writes in verse 6, keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness. Look at verse 10.

If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. That's powerful, isn't it? Verse 12. Such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

Now that's the same message that we have in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 but the volume is powerfully turned up in 2 Thessalonians. So to come back to our passage now in 1 Thessalonians 4.

[37 : 00] Why is Paul so insistent on people working at their jobs? Well he tells us in verse 12, so that you may live properly before outsiders in the view of outsiders, so that people outside the church will respect the church and not dismiss it, not be able to say these Christians they're all lazy cadgers.

And verse 12, that you be dependent on no one, that you take responsibility for supporting yourself and your dependents. Now this strong teaching of course does not apply to those who cannot earn their own living because they're disabled or they're elderly or they simply cannot find work even though they want to find it.

They're very willing to work. Paul knows that very well. Just look on in this letter to chapter 5 verse 14. 5, 14. Admonish the idle he says.

Yes indeed, that's necessary, but encourage the faint hearted, help the weak. Paul knows full well that some people have to depend on others.

It's the way society works and the church. Paul is not writing in chapter 4 about those who cannot work. He's writing here about those who are not willing to work even though they're well able to.

[38 : 19] When I was at school there were some teachers who'd come into a classroom and look at us and they'd say, you're all of you bone idle. I don't suppose a teacher's allowed to say that, are they, nowadays? But they certainly said it to us and probably they were right.

Bone idle. Idle right down to the bones. Now we all have a tendency in that direction, don't we? But if we work steadily at our jobs, according to our capacity, we show brotherly love to our fellow Christians.

And I think it works like this. A Christian earns money, gets paid a wage or a salary. Much of that money he's got to use to support himself and his dependents, to pay for food, accommodation, domestic bills, taxes, lots of other things.

But a proportion of his earnings can be directed to the church, to the Lord's people, to pay for the buildings that we meet in, the salaries of those set aside to lead us, to support our missionaries, and so on.

And the fact that we work benefits the Lord's people in other ways. Think of it like this. In our places of work, we develop skills. Skills in many things.

[39 : 31] Skills in building, teaching, office work, medical work, financial planning, catering, electronics, music, many other niches of expertise. And we use our skills, which are developed out in the workplace, in all sorts of ways to help and support each other in the church.

And we wouldn't be able to develop those skills if we didn't go out to work. The secular workplace brings great benefits into the Christian fellowship. Our work enables us to show love to each other in many different ways.

things like that. And we're not going to be able to help us. We're nearly done, but let me just say this in closing. God's ethical teaching is designed to enable us to live in peace and to live happily and purposefully.

His clear teaching on sexual ethics is not easy to keep, especially when we're young, but it's vital that we keep it. And his clear teaching on the ethics of work, that is not easy either.

It's demanding to keep on working steadily through the years of our strength and ability. But it's a key way in which we express love to each other. Sex, work, two of the most fundamental concerns of the human race.

[40 : 48] And in his care for us, God teaches us how to cope with the demands of both of these things. But let's allow verse 3 to remain with us finally.

This is the will of God, your sanctification, your growth in godliness. Well, let's pray together.

Dear God, our Father, help us, we pray, to discipline ourselves in the area of sex and work. We are by nature weak people and frail, so we ask you to put into our hearts and to develop it a powerful desire to please you, to learn to love what you love and to hate what you hate, so that your church and especially this, our congregation, may display increasingly the character of our Lord Jesus, in whose name we pray.

Amen.