

How Shall We Continue To Live?

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First Things

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Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 2:7-13
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This morning, I want to encourage you to open your Bibles to the book of 1 Thessalonians 2 in the New Testament, a little bit toward the end of the New Testament, and if you're a guest or visitor with us this morning, I want to invite you to a journey not only through the book of 1 Thessalonians but what I believe to a very strategic study of scripture and here is the reason: as you look back at the early church, as you look back 2,000 years ago as those early believers began to take the gospel to the ends of the earth, for about 20 years they just went with the message that they had but then the Lord began to speak, the Lord began to communicate very specifically to all the believers, and the very first message that he gives us through whom we know as the Apostle Paul is 1 Thessalonians. And here's why it's critical for you and I today: in our world, some two millennia past the empty tomb, you would have to agree that when it comes to the term Christian or the concept of Christianity, there's a lot of different opinions, there's a lot of different perspectives, there are a lot of corporate and individual expressions of what that does and does not look like, and oftentimes we systematize it into creeds and confessions and denominations and such, but at the end of the day, we observe a lot of fracturing and a lot of division. And so the strategy or the reason for walking through 1 Thessalonians is this: what were the first things that God gave what you and I know as the church, because what he gave us at first, what we're going to see today is what he expects us to continue in in our lives. In fact, today I'm going to ask a very rhetorical question: how shall we continue to live? In other words, what we're going to discover from 1 Thessalonians is the instructions for them are the instructions for us yet in the last half century we have noticed, even within Christianity, a cry or a call to go back to what it was like in the first church.

About 50 years ago, there was a famed Christian author and apologist who asked the question: how then shall we live? In light of technology, in light of innovations and a lot of all the things that humanity has access now, how do we look back 2,000 years and apply these principles to our lives? About two decades ago, another couple of authors wrote a book entitled how now shall we live? Can I continue with that motif? How shall we continue to live, because what we see in 1 Thessalonians today is the call to the Christian life then is the same call that it is today in spite of circumstances or our environment that has changed with 2,000 years.

So today I want to invite you to 1 Thessalonians 2, beginning in verse 7. It says,

7 But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children:
8 So being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us. 9 For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail: for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God. 10 Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe: 11 As ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, 12 That ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory. 13 For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

Now three very basic what appear to be simple questions but are profound in this passage is what does it mean in verse 12 to walk worthy of the Lord? Why is this an important factor for our lives? And ultimately, at the end of the day, how do we accomplish this task that is laid before us?

So let's begin with the "what." Verse 12, it says that you would walk worthy of God. Now let me define what that means. It's a word we're all familiar with, it's called to walk. We know what it means. In fact, sometimes we see concepts in scriptures such as this that we're so familiar with them that we don't realize the gravity and the depth of what that means. Now I know what some of you are thinking, "You're just talking about walking. It's not that big a deal." But let me ask you a very important question: can you walk two different directions at the same time? You cannot. It is kind of a big deal, isn't it? In other words, when it says that we should walk worthy of God, it says that we should place one foot in front of the other in a very systematic strategic means headed toward a purpose, headed toward a goal, headed toward a destination. And what is that destination? That our lives would be seen as worthy before God.

Now that's an incredible challenge. In fact, there's ample scriptures that give a clarity and somewhat color commentary to this. What we know as the book of Colossians 2:6, it says "if you have received Christ," let me push pause there. That phrase means a whole lot of different things to a whole lot of different people. Can I share with you biblically what it means to "receive Christ"? That doesn't mean to acknowledge that he existed as a historical person. That doesn't mean to say that it's a part of the culture or not a part of the culture. When the Bible says you've received Christ, it means that you've acknowledged your sin condition, you have believed that if you continue in your sin you will pay the eternal price of what the Bible calls hell, and you have called on Jesus to save you. You have received his mercy. You've received his grace. You have received adoption into his family. That's what it means.

"If you have received Christ." Notice what it says, "so walk in him." That's what we've been commissioned to do. As believers, we are to, as 1 John 2:6 says, if we believe in him, listen to this, we ought to walk even as he walked. Now just those two verses, you'll get a myriad of opinions of what some people think it means to "walk" after Jesus. Some people think walking after Jesus means I tell Jesus what I want in life and he rubber stamps it and we're good to go. However, there are these two little books towards the very end of your Bible. In fact, you go to the book of Revelation, hang a hard left, you'll find 2 and 3 John. Some of your Bibles may even have them on the same page. They're just that short. In 2 John verse 6, there is no chapter, there's just one chapter, it says that if we love the Lord, listen to this, we will walk, take these steps progressively, in his commandments. You notice the parameters there? Not our preferences. Not our likes, our dislikes. Not what everybody else says is appropriate and/or not. It says we'll walk after his commandments, then you get to 3 John, verse 4 it says and this is my goal, my desire that my children, that's us as his children, would walk in truth.

So when we talk about defining what it looks like to do this thing called Christianity, it means to progressively walk in motion toward the goal of honoring God, listen, not by what we want, by following and doing his commandments and walking in truth. Now let me describe what that looks like. All the way back in your Old Testament in 1 Chronicles 28 and 29, I know that's one of those sections of the Bible you're like, "1 Chronicles 28 and 29. Haven't read that in a while." Probably not, but it's a very famous story. It's a story where King David, who is seasoned in his year, Solomon, who is now grown up past those teenage years and has become a thriving adult, that King David is going to pass the baton to his son. He is no longer going to be the day-to-day, King Solomon is going to, and the temple that he's so desired is going to be placed in the hands of Solomon.

Why is that an important story for today? Because in chapter 28 of 1 Chronicles, it begins with an event that only takes place 12 times in the Old Testament. It's called a solemn assembly. It means that the leader, in this case David, calls all the people together, everybody, or for those you're not awake yet, e'rbdy shows up, alright? He brings everybody in a solemn assembly, even though the details are not given in chapter 28, we know from other passages, they didn't sing, they didn't celebrate, they got down on their face before God and they confessed their sinful state. That's what a solemn assembly was. Very similar, though not exactly as Nehemiah 9, when the Israelites come out of Babylon, they return. I want you to listen to this worship service for just a moment in Nehemiah 9. Nehemiah records that Ezra the priest got up and for three hours did nothing but read the scripture. That's it. Three hours. You know what they did the next three hours? They confessed their sins for three more hours. Then they worshiped.

Why is that important to today? Because when David calls everybody together, they confess their sin, if you'll allow me to say this, they "get right with God," you know what he does next? He says, "Solomon, that temple that you're going to build now that you're in charge, I need to remind you, you don't get to build it the way that you want to. You don't get to build it the way of 'this generation.' You know how you build it? According to the exact measurements that God has previously laid out." What did David do? David

referred back to when God said it needs to be this many cubits, this many materials, it needs to weigh this amount. Solomon didn't have the privilege of saying, "Why does God want gold, I'd rather have platinum?" He didn't have the right to say, "That building is going to be too small. How are we going to fit everybody in it?" No, he said, "No, you need to do it just like God said it."

Now the big question is why? Why do we need to live a life according to the way "Thus saith the Lord" versus what I'd really like to do just 'cause that's what my flesh wants. Notice what it says in verse 13, "For this cause also we thank God without ceasing because you received the word of God not as it is of men but of God. Do you see how that's defined there, that the word of God is not merely suggestive, the word of God is not merely an opinion from on high, that when God said "Thus saith the Lord," they didn't argue it, they didn't debate it, they didn't question it, they didn't ponder it. They said, "Alright, those are our marching instructions and, listen, we will walk after them." Do you want to know why at the church of Thessalonica they didn't have all the mess and the problems that most of the collective church has today because they did it God's way and not what they wanted. They did it God's way and not what the latest trend was, the latest fad was, or the latest preference was. The reason we see what we see in Thessalonica, by the way, in Acts 17 these are the people that turned the world upside down, is because they eliminated their preferences and their opinions and they said, "Okay, God, what do you say about this?"

So let's describe how this works out. There's one of those verses in the New Testament oftentimes we call it a salient verse, meaning it's not above any other verse, but it just means a little more. 2 Timothy 3:16, it says that all scripture is inspired by God. It is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and instruction in righteousness. If you'll allow me, let me unpack that for a moment. All scripture, not just the parts you like. All scripture. You say, "Well, the Bible doesn't speak about that issue that much." But it speaks about it.

So all scripture is inspired by God. What is it profitable or how does it help us? I want you to notice the first thing the Bible says about scripture: it is for doctrine. Now that's one of those words, kind of a churchy word, so to speak. It's used 52 times in your New Testament. You know what doctrine is? What you believe. You do realize that what you believe ultimately will come out of your life, where do you stand on issues, what are your convictions. The most important thing that this Bible is in your life is to tell you what to believe and what to think about any and every subject matter that could possibly come up in your life.

So here's what's interesting. It's good for doctrine. Great. Notice the next quality, for reproof. I've got bad news for you, not only does the Bible tell you how you should believe, the next quality or the next description is to show you where you're wrong. We don't like that, do we? Why? Because we all like to be right. We all like to be told we've done a good job, anatta boy, so to speak. But you need to realize one of the primary functions of the Bible is to show you where God is right and that where you are wrong, and the more time you spend in the Bible, the more you'll realize how wrong that you

really are. People who think they're right all the time don't spend a whole lot of time in the Bible. You spend time in the Bible and you'll discover you'll read some story about the Israelites in the Old Testament and you're like, "Man, those guys are a bunch of idiots." And God will slap you over the head with a spiritual 2 x 4 and say, "Man, you're just like him." Absolutely. You'll read some story and go, "Man, I cannot believe that guy did that," and then the Holy Spirit will say, "Don't you remember the time you did this?"

In other words, it is to reprove us, it is to show us the error of our ways, and then it's to correct us. This goes to the whole concept of verse 12 of walking. Why? Course correction. It means that you're headed the wrong direction. The Lord nudges us. Sometimes it's just one degree, and sometimes it's a full 180 that he corrects us, he shows us. It would be one thing if God only showed us everything we did wrong, but the beautiful thing is the more we read scripture, he not only shows us where we're wrong, he shows us, listen, how to be right. He shows us how to make the proper decisions. He shares with us how to believe in the convictions we should have.

And then finally it says instructions in righteousness. You know what that is? That's that attaboy that you've been wanting. But you know what the attaboy? The attaboy doesn't come until we accept it as the instruction manual for our life, we allow it to show us where we're wrong, and then we allow it to correct ourselves. Only when we're walking in the way that God would have us does he give us an attaboy. Until then it's a hey now, boy. It's a different statement.

And so what we discover is that when the Bible talks about walking in the steps of the Lord, to honor him, the reason why is that because he has given us the instruction manual, he has given us the tools, he's given us everything we need to accomplish the task. The problem is we often spend more time listening to competing voices than his voice, and some of you have heard this before, so forgive me if you've heard it for a second, third or 20th time, I've heard people say throughout the years, "I just wish God would speak to me audibly." Then read the Bible out loud and he is speaking to you audibly.

So let's get to the "how." How does this work out in everyday life? It's interesting, there's two concepts that are brought up in this passage. The first one is in verse 7 and 8. The second one is in verse 10 and 11. And I want to define these concepts. It says, "But we were gentle among you even as a nurse who cherishes her children." Verse 11, "we exhorted you and comforted and we charged everyone of you as a father does his children." Let me define it, let me peel some layers for just a moment because it seems kind of odd the wording that is used. Why would it say a nurse? Well, if you go back into biblical times, their healthcare system wasn't near as proficient as ours is today, and how many stories even have you read in the Bible where it talks about an individual is born and their mother died in childbirth? Or are their siblings that came after them, their mother died in childbirth? And there are times at early ages where you literally physically need a nurse but what it's speaking of here is more than that, that that individual that maybe it was your aunt, maybe it was a cousin, maybe it was somebody who was close to the family of the female persuasion that came in and mothered you through life. And then

you have verse 11 where it talks about as a father. Oftentimes in biblical days when a young man and woman would get married, he would be at least twice her age. A lot of times, by the time a young man got to the age of marrying, his earthly father was no longer along for guidance, wisdom, etc. But do you remember that famous story in Matthew 22 where the Sadducees come to Jesus about the woman who marries a man, can't have children, he dies, goes to the next man, the next man? In those days, that brother, that kinsman would come alongside and help raise those children.

Now the reason it's important to define this is because this entire passage is bookend with this concept that our life is to look as parents, moms and dads, raise their children. Let me explain what that means. I want you to notice that when it comes to a mom, a nurse in the story, when it comes to a father, have you ever noticed the approach that parents take? Now I understand that in a room, in an audience of this size, I know there's one, if not more of you, who've had an ungodly or unbiblical example of this, and for that I apologize on behalf but can we take the biblical road today, what the Bible says that a mom, what the Bible says that a dad, whether biologically related to or not, the approach they're supposed to take? Notice that it says that the nurse cherishes, the father exhorts. There's something about parenthood that you don't learn until you are one. It'll wear you out. It's exhausting. You know why? Because once God allows those children in your life, you can't not think about them. Now I know that's improper English but that's good preaching. There's never a time where they're not on your hearts and they're not on your minds. When they're young kids, man, they will wear you out physically. Once they become teenagers, they wear you out emotionally, and then you're just done. I mean, it's out. But again, at the end of the day, when you think about that, here's what's important about that: a parent, biblically speaking, never gets to take a vacation. I've heard people throughout the years, you've experienced, "Oh, you'll just get away from the kids for a few days." You can get away physically but you can never get away mentally or emotionally. By the way, just as an aside, one of my favorite statements I've ever heard is mama is never happier than her least happy child. That will preach, by the way.

But nonetheless, think about that. That means that our walk with the Lord is never supposed to have a day off. We don't have the privilege of saying, "Well, let's come in here on Sunday," but it's a different story on Monday. In other words, consistency when you walk, those of you who have the pedometers on and you've got to get a certain number of steps in every day, you know that the longer you're consistent, the quicker you get to your goal. The life of walking to honor the Lord is not one that you just take on Sunday or Wednesday or whatever, it is something that you walk on Monday and on Tuesday, on Wednesday, and on Thursday, and I will say it with her in the room, one of the best statements my mom ever gave me in life was you better act on that baseball field on Monday the same way you did at church on Sunday. You never not walk.

So what were their actions? Holy. Justly. Without blame. That's right. God has called us to be different. God has called us to be distinct. God has called us to make decisions and to live life where the secular world looks at you and say, "Have they lost their minds?" We haven't lost our minds, we're just walking with Jesus. That's all we do. Holy. Justly. Without blame. But then notice at the end of this passage it says in verse 11, he says, "we

exhorted, we comforted you, we charged you." This is assertive. We talk about parenting and that illustration that's given here. If there's one thing that we as parents are known for is our assertiveness. We are going to tell you our expectations. We're going to tell you what we think and we're going to give consequences on the backside. We're going to "charge you." Why is that verse so important? Because it wasn't just a declaration of concepts. When you exhort somebody, when you charge somebody, you expect results on the backside. As parents, how many times have you given instructions and said, "Do you understand me? Let me know. Nod your head. Do whatever it is." It is a call for response.

Today, as we gather in this place, every one of us the Lord is charging us. He's exhorting us. He is calling us to respond. What do we do with as it's mentioned here twice, with the gospel of the glory of God? What do we do, believers, with the call to live a life of righteousness that is consistent daily and hourly and by the minute in our life? It is not something that we can check the box off today and say, "Glad I went to church. I'm out." We must respond. He charged them and today I have the privilege of charging us.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe today you've gathered physically in this room, virtually online or on the radio, and maybe today's that day where the Spirit of God took the word of God and just did a work in your life. In fact, as Hebrews 4:12, the word of God is sharper than any two-edged sword. Maybe today the Spirit of God has taken the word of God has done a surgical procedure on your heart and you've realized that he's rebuked you. God has shown you today that there is sin in your life. God has shown you there is rebellion in your life. God has shown you that there's areas of your life that do not meet his standard. The Bible calls it sin and the Bible says that the wages or the result of our sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. What does that mean? That means in order to be in a right relationship with God, to be saved, to be forgiven, it's not about joining a church. It's not about checking off a box. It's about doing what Romans 13:10 says, whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Maybe today you're that person that you've lived all these days and all these years of your life trying to be better than the day before and not as bad as the days past. Maybe today you realized, "I need to receive Christ because my actions are never going to meet his standards." If you're that person today, can I encourage you just to cry to God? You don't have to use the same words I would use. You don't have to do it necessarily audibly, but maybe your heart's cry will go a little something like this. "God, today I recognize you've rebuked me. I have a sin condition. God, I've been places I shouldn't have been. I've done things I shouldn't have done. God, I've spoken words and had thoughts that have no business being a part of my life. But God, today you've also corrected me. You've shown me that the only means of forgiveness and salvation is through Christ Jesus and, God, today I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he came on my behalf, he lived a sinless life on my behalf. God, today I believe that when he allowed himself to be nailed to the cross he was bearing the punishment and the pain of my sin, my iniquity, my trespassing, my transgressions. God, I confess to you that my sin put Jesus on that cross. And God, today I believe that three days later when he rose from the grave, he made it possible not only for my sin to be forgiven, but for my soul to be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to the issues and the struggles of this thing called life but, God, one thing I know is this: I've got a sin

problem that only Jesus can fix. The best way I know how, I'm asking you to forgive me. I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed, maybe you're that person today, in just a moment that when I pray and we stand to sing, maybe you're that person who said, "I cried out to Jesus today." Maybe you're that person who needs to step out and step forward. Maybe you're that person who's already believed on Christ, but like five individuals on our campus today you've never followed in believer's baptism. We'd love to have that conversation. Or maybe you're like those we meet each and every week. You say, "This is our church home. This is our family of faith." Whatever decision when we stand in a moment, let me encourage you just to step out and step forward. We would love to have that conversation. But maybe today you say, "Pastor, I'm already a believer, I'm already baptized, I'm already part of this great church. There's nothing for me to step out and step forward for," but there is something for you to step out and step out of this room in a few moments, and that's allowing the word of God to course correct anything and everything in your life that does not honor him and give him glory.

Heavenly Father, today as we come to this time of decision, God, thank you that in spite of us, you love us. That in spite of what we deserve, you offer mercy. And in spite of what we can never attain, you give us grace. Today, at this moment, at this hour, would we simply just respond to that which you've charged us with? It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.