



Background

The closing couple of verses in chapter 1 of the letter saw Paul setting out the essential components of conversion: “*you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath*” ([1 Thess.1.9-10](#)).

Three verbs – turning, serving, waiting – which together highlight the core ‘ingredients’ of what the Bible understands by conversion: and you’ll see how closely those three verbs correspond to the faith, love and hope, which feature so repeatedly as the characteristics of our new life in Christ.

But what does this look like in practice? What does it mean to turn from idols to live a life that’s directed towards God and finds expression in service? It’s that issue that Paul now turns in the rest of the letter.

It’s worth noting a key phrase which recurs in these verses – ‘more and more’. You *are* living to please God, do so more and more (v.1): you *do* love all of God’s family, do so more and more (v.10). Paul recognised, wise pastor that he was, the tendency we have as believers to ‘level off’ in our living for the Lord Jesus Christ: we reach something of a plateau, and don’t go any further.

It happens very easily, and it happens very commonly. There’s a change in our lives and in our living: we’re aware of it ourselves, and others can observe it too. We no longer live the same way, our priorities have changed: the ways in which we act and speak, what we do with our money and time – they’re all markedly different.

And complacency can then kick in. The initial enthusiasm, in coming to Christ and giving our lives to Him, wears off: we’re living in line with the Lord’s own word. And the foot comes off the pedal, we plateau out and years down the line we’re not really any further on in our walk with the Lord than we were when first we turned to Christ. There’s little or none of the ‘pressing on’ to which Paul refers in [Phil.3.12-14](#): and it’s that whole outlook of pressing on, living our lives towards the Lord ‘more and more’ which Paul is impressing and exhorting on these believers.

Read the whole passage and start with ‘**days**’ (1), (4) and (7).

1) Monday 30th October – pleasing the Lord

Read [1 Thessalonians 4.1](#)

“.. *we instructed you how to live to please God ..*” (1 Thess.4.1)

The gospel is inherently relational. Walking humbly with your God (Mic.6.8) means seeking to please Him, in all things. Every moment, every activity, every sphere, every conversation, every thought. The Bible is the manual which shows us how thus to live.

Paul *instructed, asked and urged* them to lead lives pleasing to the Lord: how have all three found expression in your life and why are all three necessary?

How do you avoid reading this verse without falling into legalism?

To what extent can you recognise that tendency towards a measure of ‘complacency’ in your living for the Lord?

How can you guard against that tendency and ensure that you are, like Paul, ‘pressing on to take hold of that for which Christ took hold of (you)’?

Prayer: *Refiner’s Fire, my heart’s one desire is to be holy, set apart for You, Lord: I choose to be holy, set apart for You, my Master, ready to do Your will* ([B Doerksen](#))

2) Tuesday 31st October – proclaiming His lordship

Read [1 Thessalonians 4.2](#)

“.. *by the authority of the Lord Jesus ..*” (1 Thess.4.2)

Jesus is Lord. That’s the claim we make with our lips, and the testimony we bear with our lives – lives lived under His authority and in response to His direction. His authority is exercised through the teaching of His apostles, and we gladly learn to embrace it all.

What have you found to be the hardest part of submitting your life to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ?

When you read the Bible are you careful to hear its instructions as from the Lord Jesus Himself?

Prayer: *King of kings, all within me falls at Your throne: Your majesty, I can but bow, I lay my all before You now, in royal robes I don’t deserve I live to serve Your majesty.*

3) Wednesday 1st November – under new management

Read [1 Thessalonians 4.3-5](#)

“.. *it is God’s will that you should be sanctified ..*” (1 Thess.4.3)

All Saints Day! God's at work in His people, taking the unpromising raw material of our sin-tainted lives to fashion out of them the likeness of Christ. That's 'sanctification'. And it begins with our lives being submitted to Jesus, now entirely under His control.

How would you describe what it is to 'be sanctified' to a friend who was keen to learn what God's will for the lives of His people is?

The Holy Spirit gives us self-control ([Gal.5.22f](#) & [2 Tim.1.7](#)): what do you find hardest to control in yourself (ask the Lord to help you with this)?

Prayer: *Verses like these can really convict me, my Lord! I so easily succumb to all sorts of desires in what I say and do and think. Help me in my weakness and make me strong.*

4) Thursday 2nd November – family obligations

Read [1 Thessalonians 4.6](#)

".. no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister .." (1 Thess.4.6)

'Identity' is a big issue today. Who are you and how are you to understand yourself? As a believer, you are a child of God: and your primary tie as such is now to the family of God. You are bound to your brothers and sisters for eternity. Honour such ties now.

What might Paul have had in mind when speaking about 'wronging' and 'taking advantage of' a brother or sister in Christ?

Are there fellow believers whom you've been wronging, or taking advantage of, and how may that have found expression?

Why does Paul draw particular attention to this sin, and what is it about it that incurs such a clear response of punishment from the Lord?

What form does the Lord punishing those 'who commit such sins' take?

Prayer: *Forgive me, Lord, for those times when I have spoken ill of my brothers and sisters in Christ, or done them harm; and grant me grace today to do them good.*

5) Friday 3rd November – living by the Spirit

Read [1 Thessalonians 4.7-8](#)

".. the very God who gives you His Holy Spirit .." (1 Thess.4.8)

God calls His people to live holy lives – His life reflected in us. God instructs His people (through the apostle) to expound that call and show what such living entails. And God indwells His people by His Spirit to empower such living in our daily lives.

In what ways would those who know you recognise the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in you?

Do you read the Bible, both eager to learn what the Lord has to say to you and quick to embrace what He teaches?

Prayer: *Holy Spirit, living Breath of God, breathe new life into my willing soul: bring the presence of the risen Lord to renew my heart and make me whole.*

6) Saturday 4th November – more and more

Read [1 Thessalonians 4.9-10](#)

".. we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more .." (1 Thess.4.10)

This is the second time he's used these words – 'do so more and more' (see v.1). It's easy to make some progress and then become complacent. Don't sit on your laurels. Press on, always, to 'take hold of that for which Christ took hold of (you)'.

While recognising that this love for other believers is part of the fruit of the Spirit ([Gal.5.22](#)), how can we cultivate such love in our fellowship?

Paul speaks of their love 'for all of God's family throughout Macedonia': how does your love for the wider 'family of God' find expression in your life?

Prayer: *How quick I am, O Lord, to criticise or side-line others in the fellowship: forgive me, and grant me the grace both to show and to know a real love for such individuals.*

7) Sunday 5th November – living unto the Lord

Read [1 Thessalonians 4.11-12](#)

".. so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders .." (1 Thess.4.12)

Like the prayer of a righteous person ([Ja.5.16](#)), so too the living of a godly believer is 'powerful and effective'. No histrionics, nothing dramatic; no nosiness or gossip; just regular hard work, done as unto the Lord – that gains respect and prompts questions.

How do you square what Paul writes here in v.11 with the uproar his ministry produced in Philippi ([Acts 16.16-24](#)) or the turmoil his ministry occasioned in Thessalonica ([Acts 17.1-9](#))?

In the light of what Paul writes here, is it appropriate to take the initiative and engage with others with a view to sharing the gospel with them?

In what ways can you see your 'daily life' gaining the respect of others in the cause of the gospel?

Idleness was an issue Paul had to deal with among the Thessalonian (see [2 Thess.3.6-13](#)): how do you maintain a right balance between expecting the return of the Lord and applying yourself to the work of the kingdom here?

Prayer: *Come upon Your people again today, O Lord, as we gather once again for worship: bathe us afresh in the grace of Your Spirit and equip us to live for You.*