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This Sunday at MRC we headed back to our studies in Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians where we reached the first 12 verses of chapter 4. It's here really that Paul actually begins to address some of their issues (having spent chapters 1-3 defending himself and his ministry and then outlining how he prayed for them).

*We began by sweeping over the passage and outlining both*

1. ...how Paul strikingly ties their desire for holiness and wanting to please God (v1) with how they treat each other in the rest of the verses...
2. ...that in v1 and v10 Paul wants to encourage them in what they are already good at, but urging them to do so more and more.

We noted that this section relates to how we treat people - v1-8 is primarily about sexual holiness, whilst v9-12 is about our relationships with each other...

### **\* v1-8. Live a holy life**

Thessalonian culture was pretty similar to ours in terms of the sexual immorality that was rife. Temple prostitution would have been common, as would a thriving sex industry. For a young church full of young converts, getting to grips with God's view of sex would not be easy or natural. There are 3 key words for the Christian that we pulled out

1. Avoid. Sexual immorality (any sexual contact outside a heterosexual marriage) is simply not for these new Christians.
2. Learn. 'Learning how' (as the footnote shows) is either a personal 'mastering passions' thing or else about acquiring a spouse. Both are to do with self control and using sex in the way God intended.
3. Not taking advantage. In a 'society of self', people can easily become a means to an end rather than someone to be served.

Again we noted that they were already good at this. Paul's exhortation of them is

challenging because for us it means we may not rest on our laurels but rather seek ongoing sanctification and growth in purity and holiness.

### **\* v9-12. Love each other**

Again this is a strength for them (see Paul's opening comment in 1v3, or when Timothy returns in 3v6 or even his prayer from 2 weeks ago) but he still presses on and urges them to do so more and more.

The love they are to have for each other flows from the gospel of grace and is what sets Christians apart from the world. It then develops in v10 and flows to v11 and 12 as Paul is concerned about how they are relating to each other. We don't quite know what's going on though 2 Thes 3 sheds some light into how things had developed. Commentators think perhaps some believed in the imminent return of Christ such that they were idle and not working, as well as being frantic nosy busybodies.

Paul's concern is for them to mind their own business and be self sufficient so that they will have a good reputation with the cynical watching world. Our love for one another should mean we consider how our actions impact each other, so the world sees the difference that Jesus makes.

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### **Here are some questions for your group to start the ball rolling...**

Brainstorm 1 Thes so far... what do you remember? What's challenged you? What are the things you've been chewing over

How would you describe the Thessalonian church? What are their strengths? Why is Paul writing to them?

Why do you think Paul begins this section (in v1) as he does? Are we ever tempted to divorce our relationship with God from our relationship with others? When? Why?

How would v2-8 impact these young Christians in their culture? How would they impact ours? How would you counsel a Christian who was struggling to live the new life of faith in this area? What things would they need to hear?

What does Paul call them to do? Why? Where do we struggle with these things? Perhaps split into single sex groups to discuss where we struggle?

From v9-12 how are the new Christians to treat each other? Why? What's the outworking of that to be?

Grab one thing from the passage and then pray about them.