

EXCEL STILL MORE
--1ST THESSALONIANS 4:1-2--

INTRODUCTION:

In our passage Paul is urging his readers and all Christians to excel in their Christian living more and more, but unless believers nurture their new nature with its seemingly insatiable longing for God they will not reach the kind of spiritual growth and progress that Paul was urging them to attain.

There is a danger that must be avoided and that is reaching a point in your life where you think that you have no further need to progress in sanctification; but aside from eternity when our sanctification will be complete, no believer has even come close to what God desires for him spiritually. Even a church as strong as the one in Thessalonica that had been instructed in the truth and had a solid foundation for their faith laid down for them by Paul and his companions and built on during Timothy's recent visit, even a church like this might be tempted to settle for the spiritual status quo. Thanks to the teaching they had received when Paul was with them these Christians were living exemplary lives and we saw how Paul commended them for their spiritual progress in the first three chapters. Because of this they may have thought they were fine, that they were doing great with no need for improvement. Paul had prayed that he could complete what was lacking in their faith and he knew they could do better and encouraged them to do just that, to excel still more.

Paul, as a faithful teacher and shepherd, was diligent to not only teach the truth to his people, but also to apply that truth to his own life and to encourage and motivate his readers to also apply it in an ever-increasing way. From this point on to the end of this letter Paul's main goal is to urge the church to reach for spiritual excellence. In these first two verses of chapter 4 Paul introduces the foundational elements of pursuing spiritual excellence.

- I. WHY WE MUST EXCEL STILL MORE (1st Thessalonians 4:1)
- a. Paul begins this chapter with “_____” and uses it to begin a discussion of the goal of spiritual excellence.

- b. Paul again addresses his readers as _____, a term of love and affection, a term that levels the playing field, making everyone equal as children of our God and Father.
- c. Paul did not have to command and order these believers because they already were _____ in a way that was pleasing to God.
- d. This word “_____” is a word that means “to abound, to be abundantly supplied, to overflow, to exist in full quantity.” (Psalm 42:1; 1st John 2:12-14)

- II. HOW WE MUST EXCEL STILL MORE (1 Thessalonians 4:1)
- a. In verse one Paul calls the believers in Thessalonica his brethren and he addresses them as those who are _____ the Lord Jesus. (1st Corinthians 2:14; 1st Thessalonians 3:12; 1st John 5:20)
 - b. This power to excel still more that we have in Christ does not just happen, it works according to _____ laid out for us in God's Word.
 - c. The fundamentals in Christian living taught the Thessalonians how they ought to walk and _____ God and glorify Him in everything.
- III. IN WHAT WAY DO WE EXCEL STILL MORE (1st Th. 4:1-2)
- a. Spiritual _____ does not just happen, it is not a process that happens overnight and suddenly you are a mature Christian. (1st Corinthians 9:24-27; Philippians 3:12-14)
 - b. What was it that kept the Thessalonian Christians on the path of righteousness, that kept them walking and pleasing God and pushed them to _____ still more in this pursuit of spiritual excellence? (1st John 2:3-6)

CONCLUSION:

Paul did not want the Christians in Thessalonica to become content with where they were spiritually. He wanted them to continue to grow in their faith, he wanted them to continue to please God in their pursuit of Him. Christians who want to know God better, who want to love

Him more, and desire to obey Him more fully, must live their lives according to the commands of Scripture. Those who live this way will experience spiritual growth moving them toward spiritual excellence, through the power of the Spirit of God who indwells them and their co-operation with Him by being obedient to the truth of the Word of God. This is the process of sanctification that is carried out in our lives by the Holy Spirit as He is conforming us to the image of Christ. Paul described this progress in 2nd Corinthians 3 as “*beholding in a mirror the glory of the Lord*” and “*being transformed into the same image from glory to glory...*” by the Holy Spirit. In other words, within the pages of Scripture the glory of the Lord is revealed and when that revelation is comprehended by the spiritually alive mind, this progressively changes and raises Christians to increasing Christlikeness. This takes place when the child of God looks into the wonderful mirror of Scripture, which reflects the glory of the Lord.

My request and exhortation to you is do not be content where you are spiritually, do not fall into the trap of thinking you have no further need to progress in sanctification. Instead continue to grow spiritually, continue to get to know our God and Father through the pages of this love letter that He has written to us where He reveals Himself to us and where we can know the eternal God and His great love for us.