

# Be Who You Are But Don't Do You: I Thess 4:1-12

November 5, 2023

## Pre-Reading

1. When to *Imago Dei* last week
2. What I learned about my own preaching → my **two new resolutions**

## 1 Thess 4:1-12

<sup>1</sup> Finally, brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God (as, in fact, you are doing), you should do so more and more. <sup>2</sup> For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. <sup>3</sup> For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication; <sup>4</sup> that each one of you know how to control your own body in holiness and honor, <sup>5</sup> not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; <sup>6</sup> that no one wrong or exploit a brother or sister in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, just as we have already told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. <sup>7</sup> For God did not call us to impurity but in holiness. <sup>8</sup> Therefore whoever rejects this rejects not human authority but God, who also gives his Holy Spirit to you.

<sup>9</sup> Now concerning love of the brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another; <sup>10</sup> and indeed you do love all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more, <sup>11</sup> to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you, <sup>12</sup> so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and be dependent on no one.

## Introduction

### A. Today

- **Not** going to talk about **sex** specifically
  - **Series** not sermon
  - and my **mom** here!

B. **Conversation** with my college friends:

- “You do you”...
- This is a sermon about an *entirely different moral code—the heart of our moral, ethical life as Christians*

I. “Now therefore”: Be Who You Are

A. My dad and **Justin Allen**

B. **“Now, therefore”**

- The turn from the **indicative to the imperative** in Paul

C. Not principles—*instead, story of a relationship*

II. “Live” “to Please God” “More and More”: Not Principles

A. **Ole Anthony**...

- Ole Anthony<sup>1</sup> was a nuclear-sensor tester, a political aide, a politician, a public-relations consultant, a Christian-TV show host, and, finally, the founder of the Trinity Foundation (more in a minute).
- At age 33, listening to a talk by a Christian speaker, his life was gripped by Jesus Christ. *“It was like being taken into the heart of God.”*
- Started the Trinity Foundation: an intentional community, soup kitchen, rehab center, Christian publishing house, and private detective firm in Little Mexico in East Dallas...
- Waged a wage against televangelists and their prosperity gospel: *“untaxed and unregulated... [it] preys on the elderly and desperate.”* Dumpster-diving investigations have led to fraud prosecutions and exposes on national television.
- He started what he called The Dallas Project. Went around Dallas in 1988 asking churches to have 10-20 members form an extended family for one homeless person. Local press covered this; George W. Bush sent an

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<sup>1</sup> Burkhard Bilger, “God Doesn’t Need Ole Anthony,” *New Yorker* 80 (December 6, 2004)

admiring letter. But instead of housing the poor, the churches sent them to Anthony.

- Judges would send him delinquents: ***“You don’t come here because you choose to; you come here because you’re desperate.”***
- ***“He held up a Bible and said, ‘You can burn this book, because these are just words about the Word,’... ‘The true Word is in your heart.’”***
- **COMMENT**

#### B. Karl Barth

- Heard it said: ***“I am not a pacifist because I would be committed to pacifism instead of to God.”***
- Apocryphal; Barthian but reductionistic; problematic, but...
- ***We are not in the business of following rules but of following Jesus***

#### C. In the passage

- FIRST, “live” “to please God” “more and more” [2x] (v. 1, 10) AND ● “Your sanctification” / God calls us to holiness (v. 3, 7)
  - Problem with rules is they set a **ceiling, not a floor**—or, better, an **asymptote**
  - One implication: ***“A few months of Christianity could not be trusted to undo the habits of a lifetime”***<sup>2</sup>
- SECOND, “this is the will of God” (spelled out specifically) (v. 3) AND ● the “Holy Spirit” / “taught by God” (v. 7, 9)
- **SYNTHESIZE**, revealing **the point**

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<sup>2</sup> Ernest Best, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003), 160. (quoting Bicknell).

### III. “In”/ “through” / for Christ

#### A. Back to my conversation about “you do you”:

***Back to where we started; SUMMARIZE...***

##### 1. FIRST, Haidt

Moral psychologist, social psychologist, working with anthropology → ***Why do people believe what they believe?***

We are **W-E-I-R-D**: Western, educated, industrialized, rich, democratic:

- Least representative people if you want to know about human nature; most extreme outliers—and that gets more and more true the higher you climb the socioeconomic ladder.<sup>3</sup>
- “The WEIRDer you are, the more you see a world full of separate objects, rather than relationships.”
- Researchers asked participants to complete the sentence, “I am \_\_\_\_.” Americans wrote things like happy, outgoing, interested in jazz; East Asians wrote things like a son, a husband, an employee of Fujitsu.

Many of us, to different degrees, emphasize harm and fairness—but there are four other moral principles widely held by humans:

- Care/harm
- Fairness/cheating
- Loyalty/betrayal
- Authority/subversion
- Sanctity/degradation
- Liberty/oppression

Particularly with regard to sex: If it doesn’t harm anyone, it is moral

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<sup>3</sup> Haidt, p. 113.

Anemic morality out-of-step with the rest of the world

## 2. SECOND, Alasdair McIntyre and emotivism

- Attacks emotivism: we reject tradition, religion, history—all the things outside ourself—and simply choose whatever “I” personally feel is good.
- ***“What is good is whatever I feel and what I feel is what is good.”***
- It’s insular and circular and empty; it’s arbitrary and self-defeating
- ***I would argue that the idol of our society is self-expression and self-expression is the religion of emotivism***

***We’re raising a generation of Youtube influencers whose purpose is likes/subscribes and whose means are saying ever more outrageous things bound only, in some cases, by harm/fairness***

### B. NYT Magazine article quotations

**Depending on your essential qualities, this song of oneself [You Do You] is cause for joy or tragedy... What if, like the Scorpion, your you is not so good? “There’s been so much blood lately — should I cut back maybe on the pillaging today?” The lieutenant gestures with his longbow: “You do you, Genghis”... —Colson Whitehead**

- My point: “You do you” has **a poor account of you**

### C. Using Scripture

- You are a child of the Father (Eph 1:5), member of God’s household (Eph 2:19), God’s own people (Eph 1:14), the very temple (Eph 2:22) and body of Christ himself (cf. Eph 1:23)
- You were chosen before the foundation of the world (Eph 1:4) to be a holy one, a saint (Eph 1:1).
- You were created for good works (Eph 2:10)
- You were destined to live for the praise of His glory (Eph 1:12)

- You are a new creation (cf. Eph 2:15)
- You will be filled with all the fullness of God (Eph 3:19)

—BTW, that's **just Ephesians**—and excerpts at that

*If we bask in...*

*...then we will be on our way...*

*...to living the Life that is Life*