1 Thessalonians 4:1-2 - 1 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. 2 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. NASU

A. 1 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more – The terms “Finally then,” clearly show Paul transitioning from the main instruction of the letter to concluding remarks. In the first 3 chapters Paul had commended them for their excellent obedience, reminded them of his integrity and example in ministry, and exhorted them by way of commendation to continue and excel in their faith and love. In all of this Paul was careful to acknowledge that their calling and success was a gracious gift from God, whom He thanked more than once, who chose them and powerfully worked within them all the joy and abundant life they were experiencing, even in the midst of severe affliction. Theirs was a remarkable example of God’s mercy and power working in them which caused them to become a fruitful illustration of what true Christianity looks like when it flourishes. But however remarkable an example they had become, neither God nor Paul were satisfied with their progress and so Paul goes on to exhort them to further progress stating, “brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more.” Paul was not overbearing or reprovingly correcting them but rather kindly and gently imploring them as “brethren,” lovingly stating “we request and exhort you.” In this he reminds them of their union with Christ, “in the Lord Jesus,” as to refer to the priority of his reminder “that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God,” something they were in fact doing, (just as you actually do walk), but even further “that you excel still more.” Here learn the great priority of Christian life, the doctrine of sanctification, that no matter how far we may have come in the faith, we must press on to the holiness and perfection which is “in the Lord Jesus.” This was a constant theme in the instruction and prayers of the Apostle.

Philippians 3:12-15 - 12 Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. NASB

1 Timothy 6:11-12 - 11 But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. NASB

Philippians 1:9-11 - 9 And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, 10 so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; 11 having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. NASB

Colossians 1:9-12 - 9 For this reason also, since the day we heard of it, we have not ceased to pray for you and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, 10 so that you may walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. NASB

Paul eagerly desires for these Thessalonians to “excel still more” and not to be content with their own current state of holiness. He reminded them of how he had taught them, “you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God.” In his commentary on 1 Thessalonians MacArthur provides a helpful list of instructions on “how you ought to walk and please God.” He writes, “So the saints already knew the fundamentals of Christian living. They...
knew what they needed to do to please God, (literally to strive to please God) and glorify Him in everything, they needed to:

- confess their sins regularly (Ps 32:5, Isa 1:18-19, Matt 6:12, 1 John 1:9)
- to pray continually and trust Him (Ps 27:8, Phil 4:6, 1 Thes 5:17, 1 Tim 2:8, Heb 4:16, 10:22, Jam 1:6)
- to pursue humility (Matt 20:26-28, Eph 4:1-2, Phil 2:3-4, Col 3:12, Jam 4:6)
- to be content with God’s will (Ps 37:16, 1 Tim 6:6, 8, Heb 13:5), as revealed in His Word (Ps 119:105, Prov 6:23, 2 Tim 3:16-17, 2 Pet 1:19)
- to be willing to suffer for His name (Matt 5:10-12, John 15:20, Acts 5:41, 2 Tim 3:12)
- to evangelize the lost (Matt 4:19, 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, 2 Cor 5:20, 2 Tim 4:5)
- to celebrate the Lord’s table (Luke 22:19, 1 Cor 11:23-28)
- to care for one another (Acts 2:44-46, Gal 6:2, Phil 2:3-4, 1 Thes 5:11, 14, Heb 13:1-3, Jam 1:27, 2:15-17)
- to honor God in their marriages and families (Eph 5:22-6:4, Col 3:18-21, 1 Tim 5:3-16, Tit 2:1-8, Heb 13:4)
- to be diligent and fruitful in all avenues of service (Matt 3:8, Eph 2:10, Col 1:10, 2 Tim 3:16-17, Tit 3:8, 14, Heb 10:24, 13:21)

Now obviously this is not an exhaustive list but it surely is a good snapshot of general Christian living. Here ask yourself, have I attained to the practice and habit of all these things in order to “please God” in my life? In fact “you ought to walk and please God” in this way. These then are the things in which they and we are to “excel still more” as we seek to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Let us be careful therefore not to lose sight of these things and to pursue this life that pleases God and continue to “excel still more.” May I suggest a few more for the list that I believe will be the catalyst to your further spiritual growth in the above exhortations.

- to love God and delight in Him sincerely from your heart (Jos 22:5, Ps 97:10, Matt 22:36-40, 1 Cor 16:22)
- to regularly worship and praise God both corporately and privately (Ps 96:1-9, 111:1, 113:1-5, 135:1-3, 149:1, 150, Isa 12:5-6, John 4:24, Rev 14:7, 15:3-4)
- to treasure, delight in and regularly feed on God’s Word (Ps 112:1, 119:127-128, 165-169, 1 Pet 2:2)
- to commune with God regularly in prayer and meditation on His Word (Jos 1:8, Ps 1:1-3, 119:47-50, 119:91-99)

B. 2 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus – Paul again brings them to remembrance of the things he said, stating “for you know.” It wasn’t Paul’s word that he came preaching, but God’s, and he did it “by the authority of the Lord Jesus.” This he says so that they will not take his gentle exhortations for granted, but understand that what he says here come from the highest authority, even the “Lord Jesus” Himself. God has indeed commanded us to live in a manner worthy of Him, and the Christian faith indeed holds forth divine imperatives that are to be fully obeyed. We don’t keep the commandments in order to be saved, we keep them because we are saved. They are our delight and pursuit.

1 Corinthians 7:19-20 - 19 Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but what matters is the keeping of the commandments of God. 20 Let each man remain in that condition in which he was called. NASB
In fact, the keeping of God’s commandments is the assurance that we have that we both love Christ and that our faith is real and genuine.

1 John 5:3 - 3 For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments: and His commandments are not burdensome. NASB

John 14:15,21 - 15 If you love Me, you will keep My commandments. 21 He who has My commandments and keeps them, he is it who loves Me: and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him.” NASB

1 John 2:4-6 - 4 The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; 5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: 6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked. NASB

It should be pointed out that God’s commandments are not unclear. They are contained in both the Old and New Testaments. God has given us imperatives and we are to obey them. Every Christian should be able to make clear distinctions between the Law and the Gospel, and understand the context in which the commandments apply to their life.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-6 - 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. NASU

A. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification – This statement is Paul’s unequivocal affirmation that God’s desire for Christians is that they be holy and in a state of blameless holiness. In fact he had just finished praying in 3:13 and asking that God would “establish your hearts without blame in holiness.” In order to clarify and instruct further, he says in no uncertain terms that “this is the will of God, your sanctification.” Your “sanctification” is your holiness, your continued growth in His perfection, your abstaining from sin and living and walking in continual repentance and righteousness before Him. The word for “sanctification” is the Greek hagiasmos, meaning the state of purification or purity, holiness. Paul here makes it crystal clear that the “will of God” or His commanded and moral will of desire is that we be pure, without sin, and live in a state of purity and blameless holiness. This is no foreign idea to the teaching of Jesus or the Apostles.

Matthew 5:48 - 48 Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect, NASB

2 Corinthians 7:1 - 7 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. NASB

Philippians 2:15 - 15 that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, NASB

Titus 2:11-13 - 11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, 12 instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, NASB

1 Peter 1:14-16 - 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, 15 but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; 16 because it is written, "YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY." NASB

1 John 3:6-10 - 6 No one who abides in Him sins; no one who sins has seen Him or knows Him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; 8 the one who practices sin is of the devil: for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, that He might destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. 10 By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother. NASB

In fact, it is clear that it is because of the sin and impurity that is in the world that God’s wrath is coming upon the world, and it is from this sin and impurity that we turn to Christ when we

Questions? shaansloan@att.net www.heavenslight.org
repent, the first step we took in trusting Christ for salvation. The wrath of God is coming upon the world because of its sin and impurity.

Romans 1:18 - 18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, NASB

Ephesians 5:5-8 - 5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience. NASB

Colossians 3:5-7 - 5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry. 6 For it is on account of these things that the wrath of God will come, 7 and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them. NASB

In fact God will destroy all people who live in the practice of all such sins and willfully belittle Him by their sinful rebellion against Him. No one who lives in the practice of sin shall enter Heaven or God’s presence at any time.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 - 9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, shall inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God. NASB

Revelation 21:8 - 8 "But for the cowardly and unbelieving and abominable and murderers and immoral persons and sorcerers and idolaters and all liars, their part will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." NASB

It is therefore “the will of God” that those whom He has called and chosen should live in a state of purity and holiness, continuing to grow in “sanctification.” Another way to state this is to say that the Christian’s life should demonstrate a pattern of decreasing frequency of sin and an increasing frequency of righteous and godly behavior accompanied by the worship and service of God.

B. that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God – Now Paul wants to make it really clear that “sexual immorality” is a grievous sin that is to be abstained from. This is because the pagan culture of the Greco Roman world was one that was steeped in “sexual immorality,” as it was not only the featured practice in many of the hundreds of pagan religions and worship of false gods there, but also a part of everyday life. Many Greco Roman men would have not only wives, but also mistresses and concubines as well. A quote from the 3rd century B.C. Greek Demosthenes states, “Mistresses we keep for our pleasure, concubines for our physical well-being, and wives to bear us legitimate children and to serve as trustworthy guardians over our households.” Note well the hardened heart toward sin and the calloused attitude that accompanied such blatant and brazen sinful behavior that permeated the culture in Thessalonica. This is not very much unlike the current culture in America which is even now in a moral freefall, becoming more and more like this ancient culture in its tolerance of sexual immorality. Despite the benefit of Christian morality that once governed our culture’s laws and practices, the public display and wanton promiscuity of our culture deepens and plunges further and further, almost exponentially, as the days go on. But the standard of God for His holy people has not changed, nor will it ever. His will is for our “sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God.” This again was no foreign idea to Christians throughout the New Testament.

Ephesians 5:3-8 - 3 But do not let immorality or any impurity or greed even be named among you, as is proper among saints; 4 and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. 5 For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. 6 Let no