

It Is Written

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Excel Still More

By Andy Sochor

Paul wrote a very complimentary letter to the brethren in Thessalonica. He was mindful of their “work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope” (1 Thessalonians 1:3). He acknowledged their willingness to suffer and to spread the gospel (1 Thessalonians 1:6-8; 2:14). He expressed thanksgiving for the fact that they “accepted [his message] not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God” (1 Thessalonians 2:13). He described them as his “glory and joy” (1 Thessalonians 2:20). He received “good news” from Timothy regarding their “faith and love” (1 Thessalonians 3:6). Yet even though Paul praised them so highly, he encouraged them to excel beyond this.

“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. For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus” (1 Thessalonians 4:1-2).

We need to be faithfully serving the Lord today – as the brethren in Thessalonica were – but we are not to remain in our current state. We also must “excel still more.” Let us consider Paul’s statement above and see how we should apply it to ourselves.

A Personal Decision

Paul requested and exhorted them to excel. To request (beseech, KJV) means to ask or entreat (Strong’s). The same word is used elsewhere to describe imploring or begging (Matthew 15:23; Luke 16:27). The word exhort is from the Greek word *parakaleo*, a compound word from *para* (close proximity) and *kaleo* (to call). It is similar in meaning to request, but with a more personal connotation. However, the fact that Paul requested and exhorted them to do this did not mean that it was optional for them (or us) to excel; it meant they could not be forced to do so. They had to make the decision on their own to do this.

What this means for us in our own lives is that we must take responsibility for our own growth and maturity. Paul told Timothy, “Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you” (1 Timothy 4:15-16). Like Timothy, we must be willing to work toward excelling in our lives.

There is also an application to be made on this point regarding how we deal with others. We cannot force anyone to “excel still more,” just as Paul could not force the brethren in Thessalonica to do so. But we do need to encourage our brethren and “stimulate one another to love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24).

Excel in What Is Right

Excelling is not good if what we are doing is wrong. There is no virtue in being the best drug dealer, hitman, etc. We need to be excelling in what is right.

This begins with the apostles’ instruction. The Thessalonians excelled in walking according to the instructions received from the apostles (1 Thessalonians 4:1). This must be the foundation. But why? It is because these commands come directly from Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:2). The Lord’s words must be the foundation upon which we build (Matthew 7:24-27). The apostles were given the promise of the Holy Spirit to receive the Lord’s words from heaven (John 16:13). This is why the early church “continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42, KJV) and is why we must as well. We find these instructions today in the New Testament. We are to “hold fast” to these instructions (2 Timothy 1:13, KJV) and “stand firm” in

them (2 Thessalonians 2:15).

Beginning with and holding fast to the apostles' teaching must necessarily result in obedience. Paul said these brethren "actually [did] walk" according to these instructions (1 Thessalonians 4:1). James emphasized the need for us to be "doers of the word" (James 1:22). The Lord expects us to obey Him. He asked, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46). There are many ways in which this obedience manifests itself in our lives. In this context, Paul mentioned the fact that we would maintain purity, practice love, and live a quiet life (1 Thessalonians 4:3, 9, 11). Other passages emphasize different ways obedience is carried out.

As we continue in obedience, we must grow (1 Thessalonians 4:1). Jesus said, "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matthew 5:48). John explained that one of the reasons why he wrote his letter was so that those who would read it "may not sin" (1 John 2:1). While perfection may seem like an unattainable ideal, it is the goal for which we are aiming. Therefore, by striving for perfection, we will necessarily be working to excel in our lives.

This Is About Pleasing God

Why were these brethren to "excel still more"? It was not just to make Paul happy or to impress others (though that may have happened). This was about pleasing God. Paul told the Galatians, "For am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I striving to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a bond-servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10).

Pleasing God must be our highest priority. "The whole duty of man" is to "fear God and keep His commandments" (Ecclesiastes 12:13, ESV). Paul emphasized the need to please God in our context. Why must we "excel still more"? We do so because "this is the will of God" (1 Thessalonians 4:3). "God has...called us for...sanctification" and "he who rejects this is...rejecting...God" (1 Thessalonians 4:7-8).

Paul told the brethren in Corinth that "our ambition" must be "to be pleasing to [the Lord]" (2 Corinthians 5:9). The reason why this is to be our highest priority is because "we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be recompensed for his deeds in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). Because of this final appointment, we must work to excel in doing God's will.

Conclusion

God does not want His people to be complacent. No matter what we are currently doing in the Lord's service, we must strive to grow and improve.

UNCOVERING GUILT

By Zeke Flores

In Genesis 44:16, Judah says, "God has uncovered your servants' guilt." He isn't referring to the silver cup. He's referring to the sin they committed against Joseph years earlier. Judah recognizes that God is bringing hidden things into the open.

This is a significant moment in the brothers' spiritual journey. They finally stop blaming circumstances and acknowledge their moral responsibility. God often works this way. He brings truth to the surface so that healing can begin.

This teaches us that confession is not merely admitting wrongdoing. It is aligning ourselves with God's perspective. When Judah acknowledges guilt, he is stepping into honesty, humility, and readiness for transformation.

If God is surfacing something in your life — a pattern, a wound, a sin — don't resist it. He reveals it in order to redeem. Honesty is where healing begins.