

C. V.

1 Thessalonians 4

How many of you know what the letters C. V. stand for?

It's actually a term used more often in England or other European countries than in our country. It's from Latin and stands for Curriculum Vitae. It means the course one's life.

In the U. S. our word resume holds the same idea as Curriculum Vitae. It's the outline or sketch of our life's achievements. When we apply for a job or a position, we'll often forward our resume or C.V. to a prospective employer so they can get a general picture of our work history, the skill set we possess, and the overall direction of our lives.

I bring up the idea of the C. V. for a couple of reasons. First, because the word curriculum is in it. It's probably one of the most common words used in the education field.

Both teachers and students' academic livelihood revolve around the curriculum that they try to teach and learn. For teachers, the curriculum is the road they set out on to hopefully stamp out ignorance.

For students, the curriculum is what strikes fear into their lives and makes them ask the question, "Will I survive the semester?"

This theme of education and curriculum flows like a river through Thessalonians chapter 4 - like a vein of gold running through a mountain.

For example, right off the bat Paul writes, *"Finally brothers, we instructed you how to live in order please God."*

And in the very next verse, Paul immediately ups the ante: *"For you know **what instructions** we gave you **by the authority of the Lord Jesus.**"*

In other words, the lessons you received from us are more than mere suggestions. They are from God himself, so hopefully you didn't play hooky from our school too much!

In other parts of chapter 4 the instruction/curriculum theme pops up over and over again:

Verse 4: *"you should **learn**"*

Verse 6: *"We have already **told you and warned you**"*

Verse 7: *"He who rejects **this instruction** does not reject man but God"*

Verse 9: *"For you yourselves **have been taught by God**"*

Verse 11: *"Just as we **told you**"*

Verse 13: *"We do not want you to be **ignorant**"*

Verse 15: *"According to the Lord's own word, **we tell you**"* and finally ...

Verse 16: *"therefore, encourage each other with **these words.**"*

Now before I get into specifics of what the Lord through Paul was trying to teach the Thessalonians and us, I thought I share a couple of C. V. blunders or resume fails that I found on the World Wide Web. These are actual statements that job-seekers wrote down in hopes of landing a job, and I thought they were pretty funny:

One person described the size of his last employer: "Very tall, probably over 6'5"

Another one wrote that he was “instrumental in ruining an entire Midwest operation.” (I think he meant running an entire Midwest operation. Remember, spell-check is not infallible.)

Reason for leaving last job: “Maturity leave”

Skills: “I am a proo-ficient typist.” (I hate those double vowel words!)

Skills: “I am highly adept at multi-tasting.” Hmmm. That does sound like an unusual skill! Talk about putting your best food forward!

But joking aside, if our C. V. tells someone where we’ve been and what we’ve been up to, then chapter 4 tells where we should be heading and how we are to get there.

This is the second reason I mention the Curriculum Vitae. It refers to the course of one’s life, and in a Biblical sense, this means our path or course to God and in God and for God, where we find purpose, meaning, and life – eternal life!

The Apostle John makes it clear in His gospel that Jesus is so much more than a teacher trying to cover all the curricular aspects of some ancient religion. Jesus is, as John phrased it, “*the true light that gives light to every man.*” John even equates the light with life itself: “*In him was life, and that life was the light of men.*”

So, God does so much more than teach us, though he certainly does this.

He instructs us by general revelation – ponder the night skies and the complexities of the human body, and if you’re intellectually honest with yourself, you’ll believe in God.

He gives us his word, his special revelation that is “*God-breathed and useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.*”

He also blesses us with his promised Holy Spirit: *"But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I have said to you."*

But learning a curriculum about God can take us only so far. It's just the beginning for us. It's but a step in a life-long progression that leads toward godliness, which is God's ultimate goal for us.

In this life, God wants us to put into practice what we know to be true. And it's the application of God's curriculum that determines whether we've learned the lessons God is trying to teach us, so Paul writes, *"It's God's will that you should be sanctified."*

The word sanctified, I think, has a double meaning here.

First, it means to be set apart for a special plan or purpose. It's sort of like our Christmas decorations. We don't typically display the manger scene and tree-topper in the summertime – unless you're Bronners!

They're considered special and make their appearance only during a special time of year.

As Christians, we're also set apart by God to do his particular will on earth for a given time, and the Bible teaches that even now, we live in a unique age of history when our devotion to Christ ought to be on full display.

Paul alludes to this idea in Romans 11:25 writing, *"I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers, so that you may not be conceited: Israel has experienced a hardening in part until the full number of Gentiles has come in."*

In other words, Paul is telling the Roman Christians that they are not to pass judgment on their Jewish neighbors who have yet to receive Christ by faith. This has been God's plan all along!

In the meantime, you guys better continue to shine in your faith. The Jews may be in disobedience and in darkness now, but I'm not done with them. They've been set aside temporarily so that you can be grafted into God's family. (See previous verses in chapter 11 for Paul's analogy on grafting.)

In the end, if you Christians remain faithful to me, the Jewish folks will be envious of your standing and blessing before God as they observe your bright and shining testimony.

Then, they'll want this for themselves. Your faithfulness to Me will help bring my chosen people to faith.

So, part one of sanctification has to do with being set apart by God for a special purpose. And that is what God does for each of us when we come to Him in faith.

When we think about it this way, we realize that our salvation in Christ is simply the beginning of our new lives in Christ, not the end.

I'm always saddened and frustrated when I hear about people who make a profession of faith but fail to make any effort to grow in Christ.

This would be like going out and purchasing a brand-new Corvette and then leaving it in the garage, never bothering to drive it – never feeling or hearing the power of the engine under the hood or seeing its bright shiny wheels.

God says to each of us, "You've come to me for salvation and new life, now walk in this new life and experience the power that is yours in the form of My Holy Spirit living in you!

Feel the power that is at your disposal when you humbly submit to my will.

This leads me to the **second aspect of sanctification**:

If the first is God setting us on the road of righteousness by forgiving us our sins and offering us new life by living in us, then the second aspect is our transformation into the likeness of his Son – it's having us conformed into the image of Christ.

It is, as Paul says, *"God calling us out of impurity and into holiness."* In other words, we are to be less ... broken, and instead, more complete.

Of course, I could and should say something about sexual immorality here. After all, Paul states emphatically: *"avoid sexual immorality."* This obviously was a serious problem in the Greek culture in which Paul lived, just as it is in our contemporary culture.

Many pagan religions incorporated immoral behavior into their cultic rituals to show allegiance to their gods, but this ungodliness and impure behavior exposes a deeper problem with humanity than a culture's obsession with sex - that being **our spiritual brokenness**.

Our attempt to find physical and emotional gratification through illegitimate relationships just proves the point of how broken and empty our lives are and can be.

It's exhibit A of humanity's misguided attempt to find contentment and significance outside of God's will.

It's a stark reminder of our inability to remain faithful to our word and commitments.

It demonstrates to God and to us that our souls are broken and beyond human repair. We are desperate for spiritual healing.

And this is why Paul says we must undergo the process of sanctification – not only to keep us from doing evil, **but to help us do good**.

The less broken we are, the more we are able to carry God's grace and love and the more we can progress on the way toward holiness.

Perhaps Paul was recalling Isaiah 35 when he spoke about our need for sanctification.

Isaiah writes, "Eyes of the blind will be opened, ears of the deaf unstopped, the mute tongue will shout for joy and water will gush forth in the wilderness. And a highway will be there; it will be called the Way of Holiness, and only the redeemed will walk there."

If we are to have any hope of walking in God's ways – to walk on the highway of holiness, then we must be sanctified.

First, by being set apart by God through our faith in his Son Jesus who forgives sins and shares in righteousness with us. This is called being redeemed.

And second, by appropriating God's transformative power in our lives which is only accomplished by our submitting to the Holy Spirit.

One particular prayer of Paul's comes to mind when I think about Paul's call for us to be sanctified according to God's will: Ephesians 3: 14 – 19:

"For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have the power, together with all the saints, to grasp how and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God."

This is the Curriculum vitae, the course of our lives as laid out by God and his perfect and pleasing will. Let's follow it.

IF we do, look what we get to look forward to:

“God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.” verse 14

“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.” Verse 16

“After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.” Verse 17

(This is the Parousia – the return of Christ and the rapture of the church.)

“And so we will be with the Lord forever.” Verse 17

How about that for the finale of the course of our earthly lives?

It sounds pretty fantastic to me, and I hope you are encouraged with words, because they’re not my words. They are God’s whose word is good, who never lies and makes all things come to pass according to his good and perfect will for his pleasure and honor and glory.

Curriculum Vitae – The course of one’s life in Christ our Lord is sanctification:

Believing in Christ

Being set apart by Him and for Him

Being transformed from the inside out

Doing God’s will for his honor and glory

And living a hope-filled life, knowing we’ll be with our Savior forever.

Amen.