

1 Thessalonians

Chapter 4

Introduction:

1. In many of Paul's letters, Paul will begin by writing about things pertaining to sound doctrine. Paul will then follow this with practical instruction regarding daily Christian living.
2. Why is this? Because sound living comes from the understanding and application of sound doctrine. Holy living always proceeds forth from the inward assimilation of sound doctrine. **Titus 2:1-8**
3. Paul knew this, so he always began with the doctrine and then showed them what the doctrine should produce. Sound doctrine works in us to produce outward change. 2:13
4. This is the case again in 1 Thessalonians. Chapters 1-3, for the most part, have been very doctrinal in nature, but in chapter 4, Paul will now get very practical.
5. What good is it to understand sound doctrine and right division of God's Word if it doesn't affect the way we live our daily lives?

Verse 1

1. Paul is now going to "*beseech*" (request), and "*exhort*" them in the practical application of what they already know.
2. What is the basis of His admonishment? It is the Lord Jesus! Jesus, and what He has done for us, must be the motivation of the believer. cf. **2 Corinthians 5:14-15**
3. Paul had taught these believers how to walk and to please God. They had received sound doctrine from Paul and Timothy. Paul encourages them to abound in what they knew.
 - The word "abound" means "to super-abound, to be in excess, to excel."
4. His desire was for them to put into daily practice the doctrine that that they had learned and understood.
5. This is one of the functions of the local assembly. We don't go to church to always learn something new. Many times when we go to church and fellowship around God's Word, we are exhorted and motivated to do something that we have forgotten or let slip.
6. Often we **know** the truth; we simply aren't **abounding** in it. We need somebody to remind us. **1 Corinthians 4:17; 2 Peter 1:12-13, 15**

Verse 2

1. Paul said in verse 1 that they had received from him how to walk and to please God. How did they know how to walk and please God?
2. This verse explains, "*For ye know what commandments we (Paul, Silas, and Timothy) gave you by the Lord Jesus.*"
3. Paul had given these believers commands to obey. Where did Paul get them from? He got them by direct revelation of Jesus Christ. **Galatians 1:12; 1 Corinthians 4:17, 14:37**

4. Let this be a lesson: In this dispensation of grace, we are no longer under the Old Testament law system that God had for Israel, but this does not mean that we are lawless. We are not without clear-cut, straightforward commands.
5. Jesus gave to the church (through Paul) definite commands to be obeyed.

Verse 3

1. As we can readily see in this verse, the will of God is not a mysterious, mystical thing that we struggle to know. The will of God is found in the Word of God.
2. What is the will of God? Paul says, "...*even your sanctification...*"
 - The word "sanctification" is speaking of purity and holiness. It carries the idea in Scripture of being cleansed and set apart for divine use. We see this illustrated in the Old Testament. **Exodus 19:9-11, 29:43-45**
3. In the church age, sanctification in the believer is a work of the Holy Spirit and has a three-fold aspect:
 - **Positional** sanctification - we are cleansed of all sin and set apart for God eternally in Christ at the moment of salvation. **1 Corinthians 1:30**
 - **Practical** sanctification - the Holy Spirit works in our lives through God's Word to produce holiness in our daily walk. The goal is that our daily walk would reflect our eternal position. **1 Thessalonians 4:3**
 - **Total** sanctification - this is future and will happen at the very moment Christ returns for the body of Christ. Our vile bodies will be changed, and there will be a total sanctification of body, soul, and spirit. **Philippians 3:21**
4. In **Titus 2:11-13**, we see all three aspects of sanctification. The child of God has been sanctified (at salvation), is being sanctified (our daily walk on earth), and will be sanctified (at the Rapture).
5. Our text is dealing directly with the second of these, practical sanctification. Paul is dealing with the issue of moral purity, and commands them to "*abstain from fornication.*"
 - This is speaking of sexual sin. The Greek world was well known for its lust and licentiousness. The Thessalonians had been saved out of a heathen lifestyle of idolatry.
6. Paul reminds them that sexual sin is always out of God's will for the believer.

Verse 4-5

1. It is also God's will that believers know how to possess their Spirit-indwelt bodies in sanctification and honor.
2. In verse 5 Paul contrasts this with the pagan Gentiles who made sex a religion. They lived perverted lifestyles, treating their bodies like nothing more than a trash can.
 - "Concupiscence" means "a longing for what is forbidden."
3. Paul makes it clear that there was to be a distinction between these believers (those who know God) and the pagan idolaters of Thessalonica (those who know not God). It should be like light and darkness. **Ephesians 5:3-8**
4. Paul uses the analogy of a vessel when speaking of the believer's body (**2 Corinthians 4:17**). When you are working in the kitchen, what do you expect from

your vessels and utensils? You want them to be clean and useable.

2 Timothy 2:20-21

5. Our vessels (bodies) have been bought and paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ and indwelt by God's Holy Spirit. Based on these Scriptural facts, Paul taught that the believer should "...glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."
1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Verse 6

1. Paul is explaining in the text how to possess our vessels (bodies) in sanctification and honor. vs. 4
2. One way we can do this is to refuse to defraud our brother in any way. Paul says, "*That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter....*"
3. The phrase "go beyond" carries the idea of transcending and overreaching. There are established boundaries of right and wrong that God has given us (vs. 1-2), and we are not to "go beyond" those boundaries of holiness.
 - Those boundaries are there for our good. **cf. 1 John 5:3**
4. To "defraud" carries the idea of coveting and being eager for gain. If we defraud our brother, it means that we want something that he's got and we're willing to enrich ourselves at his expense. **Leviticus 19:13**
 - In **Ezekiel 34:1-10** we see an example of this. The shepherds were enriching themselves at the flock's expense. This is what it is meant by defrauding.
5. The Corinthian believers were actually taking each other to court in order to get gain. Paul takes this a step further and says that we should allow **ourselves** to be defrauded rather than take a brother or sister to court. **1 Corinthians 6:7-8**
6. Unfortunately, we live in a day in America in which Christianity has been commercialized and it seems that everybody is looking for an angle in which they can turn a buck off of the church or Christians.
7. What does Paul say about those who defraud their brother? "*...the Lord is the avenger of all such.*"
 - "Avenger" means "one who carries out justice."
8. There will be a day of accountability for all believers. It is called the Judgment Seat of Christ. **Romans 14:10-12**
9. So if you discover that you are being defrauded, what should be your response? Read **Romans 12:17-21**.

Verse 7

1. In the paganism of idolatry, their false gods approved of and even encouraged unclean, immoral, sexually perverted lifestyles.
2. Paul makes it very clear that the living and true God has not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. Why? Because our God is holy. **1 Peter 1:14-16**
3. Today it has become very popular to emphasize God's grace and our liberty in Christ, but in a way that encourages and promotes unholy living.
 - People use the word "grace" as an excuse to watch whatever unholy thing they want to watch, to go where they want to go, and to do what they want to do. They use their liberty as an occasion to the flesh. **Galatians 5:13**

4. This chapter of God's Word dispels those ideas. What does God's grace teach us? Let's read **Titus 2:11-12**. God's grace teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. It teaches us to live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.
 - It seems the latest trend is for preachers to use Hollywood movie clips to illustrate Biblical truth. Think about it - using a movie with cursing, swearing, vulgarity, and a satanic world-view to try to teach Biblical truth. It's ludicrous!
5. God's Word is clear. "...*God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.*"

Verse 8

1. The word "*despiseth*" in this verse means "to set aside, to violate."
2. When we set aside God's standards of holiness and defraud our brother, it is God that we are sinning against. We are violating His commandments. vs. 2
3. When a believer chooses to set aside God's Word and live unholy, what happens? The Bible teaches that we:
 - Grieve the Holy Spirit - **Ephesians 4:30**
 - Quench the Holy Spirit - **1 Thessalonians 5:19**
4. Every believer has been given the Holy Spirit (**Ephesians 1:13-14**), and therefore has an acute awareness that God desires for them to live holy.
5. He has given us His Holy Spirit so that we **can** live holy (**Galatians 5:16**). This could not be done through the law because man, in his flesh, could never attain the holiness of the law (**Romans 8:2-4**).
6. This is why God has given to us His very Spirit. As we yield to the Holy Spirit within, He provides power and strength to live a holy life unto the Lord.

Galatians 5:16-18

 - **Ephesians 5:18** calls it "*being filled with the Spirit.*"
 - **Illustration:** glass of water in a bowl

Verse 9

1. The Holy Spirit of verse 8 does not produce within us hatred, animosity, bitterness, resentment, and anger towards others.
2. The Holy Spirit bears the fruit of brotherly love. This is why Paul says that we are taught of God to love one another. He has given us His very Spirit. The fruit of the Spirit is detailed in **Galatians 5:22-23** and what is the first thing listed? Love.
3. When it comes to this issue of love, Paul says that he shouldn't even need to write to them about this (although he did - 3:12). God's indwelling Holy Spirit instinctively teaches us to love one another. **1 John 4:11-13, 20-21**

Verse 10

1. But what do we learn in this verse? Loving others is an area for growth.
2. Paul commends the Thessalonians for the love they had been showing toward all the brethren in Macedonia, but he exhorts them to "*increase more and more.*" He reiterates what he told them in 3:12.
3. The truth is, sometimes some of the saints aren't too loveable. About the time you think you have mastered this thing of love, one of the saints will offend you, say

something to hurt you, false accuse you, be rude to you, their kid will hurt your kid, etc.

- It is in times like these that you have an opportunity to increase more and more in love.
4. There may be some saints that you will simply have a personality clash with. This is normal unless it happens frequently. What should you do? You don't have to make them your bosom buddy, but you shouldn't harbor any hatred or animosity toward them either.
 5. Part of the Christian life is learning how to love and work with people who are different than you. Loving others will **always** be an area that we all need to grow in! You will never fully master it.

Verse 11

1. The next two verses are as practical as it gets. Praise God, the Bible is such a practical book that we can apply to everyday life.
2. The Thessalonians loved all the brethren (vs. 10), but it appears that in their zeal to love and care for others, they had a tendency to become busybodies in other people's affairs (**2 Thessalonians 3:11**). This can easily happen.
3. The Thessalonians appear to be an out-going, talkative, gregarious group of believers. This is great in the context of loving people and spreading the gospel (1:8). But it can also become destructive when used for gossip and meddling.
4. Paul told them to study to be quiet and do their own business.
 - The word "study" means to be earnest and eager in an endeavor. It is also translated in other places as "labor" and "strive."
 - We sometimes use this word this way. Somebody may say, "I am in college studying medicine." We understand that this means that he is working, striving, and endeavoring to become a doctor.
5. There is a four letter word that will keep people from being a busybody in other people's business. That word is "work."
6. That is what this verse is all about. Paul basically says, "Get busy working so you will be quiet and do your own business." cf. **2 Thessalonians 3:11-12**
 - The word "*quiet*" means "to keep still, to refrain from meddlesomeness or speech."
 - "*Do your own business*" means exactly what it says. It means to mind your own business and keep your nose out of other people's affairs.
7. You have heard it said, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop." It is never a good thing to have too much time on your hands, so Paul says, "Get to work!" People who gossip all the time - guaranteed, they have too much time on their hands.
 - Even if you are retired, you must stay busy doing something productive - either paid or volunteered.
 - **Proverbs 15:19** declares, "*The way of the slothful man is an hedge of thorns...*"
 - When you aren't busy and productive, you become prickly - gossiping, talking about people, being critical, stirring up problems, getting involved in things that are none of your business, etc. If you're busy, you don't have time for all that foolishness.

8. Hard work is commended in the Bible (**Proverbs 14:23; Ephesians 4:28**). It cuts down on a lot of people problems.

Verse 12

1. Here we have another reason why people need to work and stay busy. So they can live honestly, paying their bills on time, and meeting their physical needs.
2. When Paul talks about walking "*honestly toward them that are without*" he is referring to those outside of the local church - unbelievers in the community.
3. If the Thessalonians didn't work, they would soon find themselves unable to pay their bills to those outside of the church.
4. Such a lack of integrity and honesty dishonors God and the message He has committed to us. Paul encourages the saints towards integrity, industry, and old-fashioned hard work, which would result in gaining the respect of those in the community.
5. Paul says, "*Walk honestly.*" Believers should be the most ethical, hard-working, honest people on earth.
 - As a Christian, we should never want something for nothing.
 - We should be willing to work for whatever it is we want or need.
 - If we owe a bill, we pay it. We would never dream of making someone else eat our unpaid bills, even if we think it is unfair. If we made an agreement, we keep it and we should rather eat any loss rather than lose our testimony.

Romans 12:17

6. Paul says that we work that we "*may have lack of nothing.*"
 - The Christian is not to be dependent on others for their material needs, but he is to secure his own livelihood by honest, hard work. **2 Thessalonians 3:10, 12; Acts 20:33-34**
 - Paul isn't referring to destitute widows, orphans, or disabled people, but rather able-bodied people who are able to do some sort of work.
 - Parents who support their grown kids are making a big mistake. They must learn to work and then live within their means.
7. This is God's plan. We work to provide for our material needs. If you don't work, don't expect to eat. **Proverbs 6:6-11, 19:15, 20:4, 21:25**
8. But for the Christian, it goes even deeper. We don't just work so we can take care of ourselves, but so that we can also take care of God's work. We work so we can experience the joy of giving to God's work. **Ephesians 4:28**

Verse 13

1. This passage describes for us the next event on God's time-table - the rapture of the church.
2. What is the rapture? The rapture refers to the time when the body of Christ will be caught up together to meet Jesus in the air and live with Him for eternity.
3. Although the word "rapture" does not occur in the New Testament, the words "caught up" mean "to catch up or grasp hastily, to snatch up, to lift, to transport, to rapture." So, whether you call it "the catching up" or "the rapture," the meaning is the same.

4. When Paul initially discipled these people he must have instructed them regarding future events (the rapture and prophecy).
5. But here was the problem, some of the believers in Thessalonica had died since Paul's last visit. It could have been due to persecution. The Thessalonians wondered what would happen to them. Would they miss the rapture because they died? Would they see their loved ones again?
6. These questions must have come back to Paul from Timothy so Paul writes to them and says, "*But I would not have you to be ignorant...*"
 - Paul used this phrase often in his writings. Paul couldn't stand spiritual ignorance, therefore he was constantly teaching. He traveled and taught, and he also taught through writing. His heart was to teach people God's Word.

2 Timothy 2:2
7. Paul did not want them to be ignorant concerning them which were "asleep." Paul is obviously referring to those who had died. From this word, some have derived the doctrine of "soul sleep."
8. They teach that upon death, the soul is in a state of unconsciousness until the rapture. What are the problems with this teaching?
 - Whenever the Bible refers to death as sleep, it is always in reference to the body, not the soul. The body sleeps in the sense that it rests until God resurrects it into a new immortal and incorruptible body at the rapture. In **1 Corinthians 15:52**, it states that the dead (those who sleep – vs. 51) will be raised incorruptible. What is he referring to? Verses 42-44 tell us – the body, not the soul.
 - The Bible teaches that when a believer dies, his soul is instantly in the presence of God. It doesn't stay in a state of unconsciousness for hundreds or thousands of years. Examples: **Luke 23:42-43, 16:19-31; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23; Acts 7:59; Revelation 6:9-11**
 - **Ecclesiastes 9:10** is often used as proof of soul sleep, but this verse is referring to the body, not the soul. **Ecclesiastes 12:7** clears it up.
 - Jesus is bringing those who sleep with Him. This must mean that they are already there! vs. 14
9. Paul is giving them instruction so that they won't sorrow as the pagan idolaters who have no hope. When our loved ones die, will there be sorrow? Absolutely – but not a hopeless sorrow. Deep down, we know that we have hope. What is our hope? The next verse reveals our hope.

Verse 14

1. Our hope is Jesus Christ. Because he defeated death and rose again, all of those in Christ will rise again and be reunited. cf. 2:19
2. Notice, the body is sleeping, but the souls and spirits of those who have died will return with Christ at the rapture.
3. As Christians we sorrow when our loved ones die simply because we will miss them. But we know it is not a permanent separation. It is only temporary.
4. We have hope in Christ! **1 Corinthians 15:19-20**

Verse 15

1. Paul assures them “*by the word of the Lord*” that those loved ones who have died in Christ will have a part in the rapture.
2. In fact, their resurrected bodies are going up **before** those that are still alive.
 - The word “*prevent*” simply means “precede.”
 - The end of verse 16 confirms this by saying, “...*the dead in Christ shall rise first.*”
3. From the way Paul words this verse, he fully expected to be alive when Christ returned for all those in Christ. Paul never thought this time of grace would be extended for nearly 2,000 years.
 - There are no signs that have to occur before the rapture can happen. Every generation for the past 2,000 years has expected Christ to come in their lifetime.
 - When will Christ return? We do not have any way of knowing, but “by the word of the Lord” we know He is returning!

Verse 16

Paul describes Jesus’ coming in three ways:

1. “*With a shout*”
 - This word “shout” means “a cry of incitement.” It refers to moving somebody to action.
 - Jesus will shout “come up hither” and there will be immediate action. Christ is the Head and we are His body. The body is supposed to respond to the Head.
 - Jesus will shout and there will be an instantaneous response.
 - **Illustration:** Lazarus – **John 11:43-44**
2. “*With the voice of the archangel*”
 - It did not say that He would come **with** the archangel, but with the **voice** of the archangel. Christ’s voice will be majestic and full of authority.
 - You do not see angels associated with the rapture of the body of Christ, as you do the Second Coming of Christ to earth. Christ doesn’t send angels to gather us up. Christ descends from heaven Himself.
 - We are His body. Christ (our Head) comes **in person** to receive us.
3. “*With the trump of God*”
 - When Christ speaks, it sounds like a trumpet. **Revelation 1:10-11**
 - When Christ returns for His body, He won’t need Gabriel to blow his horn. This is foolishness that you hear in songs.
 - Christ will speak and it will happen. The bodies of those in Christ will respond immediately. Those who are dead in Christ will come up from the grave and those who are alive will ascend.

Verse 17

1. Paul dealt with the dead in Christ in verse 16, but now he turns his attention to those who are alive at Christ’s return. As we mentioned in verse 14, Paul fully expected to be one of those who would be alive.
2. What will happen to those which are alive? They will be “*caught up.*” Those which are alive will be “*caught up together with them* (the dead in Christ)...”

3. We will be caught up where? “*Caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.*”
4. Notice that Christ does not come down to the earth as He will seven years later at His Second Coming. He descends to the heavens and we ascend to meet Him there.
 - The body of Christ is a heavenly people and we will occupy the heavens in the ages to come. **Ephesians 2:6-7**
 - Israel is an earthly people with earthly promises of a heavenly kingdom that will come down to earth. **Matthew 6:10**
5. Paul says that when the rapture occurs, “...*and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*”
6. We will enjoy unbroken fellowship with Christ in the ages to come. Neither sin nor Satan will ever be able to break our fellowship with Christ again.

Verse 18

1. He starts out with the word “*Wherefore...*” In other words, “Based on what I just taught you in the previous five verses about the rapture, comfort one another.”
2. 1 Thessalonians is a book of comfort. The word “comfort” (or its derivative) is used six times in this little epistle.
3. He didn’t say “Terrify one another with these words.” The reality of the rapture is a blessed hope. **Titus 2:13**