

Chapter 4 begins the practical portion of Paul's epistle, in which he reminds the Thessalonians of how they are to behave as believers in Christ. He deals with topics such as sexual purity, love for others, and living peaceful lives. Paul ends the chapter with comfort for those who were concerned that those who had died while waiting for the return of Christ had missed out on the opportunity to participate in the event.

1 Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. 2 For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.

“Furthermore [the remainder; finally] then we beseech [request; beg] you, brethren, and exhort [to urge] you by the Lord Jesus” – Paul is coming now to the next topic he wants to address in this epistle. In the previous chapters he has been looking back to the behavior of his team and himself when they were at Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-10) and the results of that visit. Now he is moving on the practical matters of living for Jesus Christ, begging and urging them in the name of Jesus Christ.

“that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more” – Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he and his team had taught them how they should live in order to please God and he is urging them to continue to grow and mature in that respect.

“For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus” – Paul and his companions had given commandments to the Thessalonians on how they should behave as children of God. They did not give these commandments as if they had the authority to tell the Thessalonians how to live. Rather, these commandments were given based on the authority of Jesus Christ and His word. Today, a pastor can cite commandments from the Bible that his congregation should follow, not because he is the pastor, but because these commandments came from God. This fact is one of many that distinguishes Christianity from the cults where the leader attempts to micromanage the lives of his followers.

3 For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: 4 That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; 5 Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:

“For this is the will of God, even your sanctification [to consecrate; to purify]” – It is God's will that we be consecrated (dedicated to or set aside for the purposes of God). We no longer are at liberty to manage our lives as we please because we belong to Jesus Christ and are His servants. Thus we are to dedicate ourselves to obeying His will for our lives. **2 Cor. 5:14-15** *“For the love of Christ constraineth [compels] us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead: And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.”*

“that ye should abstain from fornication” – This line sets the context for the next several verses (vs. 3-8). Fornication (sexual immorality) was common in the Greek culture of the time but God commands us to avoid it, then and now.

“That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel [body] in sanctification and honour [reverence; esteem]” – Paul is informing the Thessalonians that they were stewards of their body because it now belonged to God. Therefore they should use their body only in a way that would please God since it was consecrated for His use. They should esteem their body highly and treat it with respect because it belonged, not to them, but to God.

“Not in the lust [pathos: feeling] of concupiscence [desire for what is forbidden], even as the Gentiles which know not God” – In contrast to using their body in sanctification and honor, they were not to use their body to satisfy its sexual lusts, which is something that the unbelieving Gentiles frequently did. God commands that we be sexually pure.

6 That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified. 7 For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.

“That no man go beyond [to transgress; to go beyond the bounds] and defraud [to take advantage of] his brother in any matter” – The context of this verse indicates that God prohibits us from going beyond the bounds of sexual purity. Paul speaks of taking advantage of a brother in this context (the word “any” is in italics, meaning that it was supplied by the translators and that “any matter” could just as easily be translated as “this matter”). Sleeping with another man's wife would be taking advantage of an opportunity and sinning against him.

“because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified” – Since Paul was in a Gentile city and fornication was common among Gentiles, he had warned them that such behavior was a sin against God and that God would step in and punish those that are guilty of such sinfulness.

“For God hath not called us unto uncleanness [moral impurity], but unto holiness [consecration to God; purity]” – God did not save them (or us) so that we could continue in sin. He has called them and us to live for Him in obedience to His will.

8 He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.

The Greek word translated “despiseth” means “to set aside.” If a man who has been truly saved has slept with another man's wife, he would have to do so by “setting aside” (ignoring) the leading of the Holy Spirit, Who would be reminding the man of God's command for sexual purity. This man would not just be ignoring human ideas of morality but the commands of God Himself, Who has given us His Spirit to guide us in righteousness.

9 But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

“But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you” – Paul acknowledges that when it comes to loving one another, this was an area where the Thessalonians were not lacking.

“for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another” – The word “taught” is in the present tense, indicating that the teaching was ongoing. Not only were they taught in scripture to love one another, but the presence of the Holy Spirit within them also led them to love one another.

10 And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more;

“And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia” – Not only did they love the other believers in Thessalonica, but their love extended to all the believers they encountered in Macedonia.

“but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more” – Paul urges them to not only continue loving one another and the believers in Macedonia, but to allow their love to grow, not only in intensity, but even in magnitude, beyond the borders of Macedonia.

11 And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you; 12 That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.

“And that ye study [to make the aim of one’s life] to be quiet [to be silent; to lead a quiet life]” – Paul reminds the Thessalonians of the command that they make it their goal to lead a quiet life. This is the opposite of being a troublemaker, a busy body, or to always be publicly expressing criticism. The protesters making the news these days are definitely not “studying to be quiet.”

“and to do your own business” – We should mind our own business and not be sticking our nose and opinions in other people’s business.

“and to work with your own hands” – Greek culture frowned upon manual labor, considering it to be the work of slaves. Here, Paul is promoting manual labor as an honorable way to keep yourself busy and out of other people’s business. Today we use the saying “idle hands are the devil’s workshop.”

“as we commanded you” – Paul and his companions had given these commands during their first visit to Thessalonica.

“That ye may walk honestly [decently; properly] toward them that are without” – “Them that are without” refers to unbelievers. We are to behave properly (v. 11) toward unbelievers as a good witness. We discourage unbelievers from following Christ when we exhibit bad behavior toward them.

“and that ye may have lack of nothing” – Believers should endeavor to not be a burden to others, working to provide for their own needs. **2 Th. 3:10** “For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.”

13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

“But I would not have you to be ignorant [to be lacking information], brethren” – Paul had been forced to leave earlier than he wanted, which meant that he had not been able to teach the Thessalonians everything that they needed or answer all their questions. Thus the Thessalonians’ understanding of spiritual things was incomplete and he wanted to help them understand a subject they were worried about.

“concerning them which are asleep” – Christians use the metaphor of sleep when referring to the dead because death is not permanent for a Christian. Jesus used this description before He raised people from the dead (**Luke 8:52** “And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth”; **John 11:11** “These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep”). The Thessalonians were concerned about Christians who had died before the return of Christ.

“that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope [expectation]” – The “others” refers to non-believers who have no expectation of seeing their loved ones again who have died. Christians have the “hope” (expectation) of seeing their believing loved ones again in the resurrection. Death is the end for non-believers but it is just the beginning for Christians.

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. 15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him” – Faith in Christ is based on His resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12-20). Paul states that if we accept the resurrection of Jesus as being true, we should have no problem believing that God will resurrect those who died with faith in Jesus Christ so that they can return with Christ at His coming.

“For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord” – What Paul is about to state is not his opinion or some hypothesis derived from human understanding. It comes directly from the Lord.

“that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [precede] them which are asleep” – Paul uses the pronoun “we,” indicating that he believed that he would be alive when Christ returned. He states that Christians alive when Christ returns will not have an advantage over Christians who had already died. All will be given their glorified bodies at Christ’s return (**1 Cor. 15:51-52**

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we will be changed”).

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

Jesus will not send an angel or other emissary but will personally leave heaven to retrieve the believers, heralded with a shout, a voice, and a trumpet blast. Commentators debate on whether the shout is that of Jesus or the archangel. At the moment of Christ’s return, rather than being left behind, the dead will actually become the first participants in the event, being resurrected in a glorified body.

17 Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. 18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Immediately after the dead are resurrected (in a “moment” – 1 Cor. 15:51), but before meeting the Lord in the air, we who are alive at Christ’s return will be “changed” so that we also have a glorified body. Then together we will be “caught up” (raptured) to meet the Lord in the air, never to be separated from Him ever again. Paul’s purpose here is not to provide all the details concerning the rapture but provide the Thessalonians the encouragement that whether dead or alive, they will all be forever united with Christ when He returns.