

## To the Church of the Thessalonians – Their Growth

### 1 Thessalonians 4

#### Introduction

1. 1 Thessalonians is Paul's response to the greatly anticipated report of Timothy – **1 Thessalonians 3:1-2, 6**
  2. Paul was impressed by the initial faithfulness shown by the Thessalonians (**1:3**), as well as their steadfastness as reported by Timothy (**3:6**).
  3. However, though Paul rejoiced to know of the Thessalonians' progress, he prayed and wished that they would grow – **1 Thessalonians 3:12**
  4. **1 Thessalonians 4** includes Paul's progression beyond his remembrance of the Thessalonians' active faith to his exhortation for their continued growth – in sanctification, love, and the comfort of Christ.
  5. Paul's exhortations show that pleasing God is only possible in a constant state of progression – static faith is dying/dead faith.
- I. Their Exhortation to Abound (**vv. 1-2**)
    - A. Their Knowledge and Faithfulness
      - a. (**v. 1**) – NASB reflects the Greek order, and provides an additional statement heavily attested by MSS – ***“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.”*** (NASB)
        - i. Paul's time with the Thessalonians fit the pattern the Lord gave – **Matthew 28:18-20** – He taught them all the Lord commanded.
        - ii. They began to walk – **1:3, 9-10** – the beginning.
        - iii. They continued to walk – **3:6** – Timothy's report.
        - iv. They received instruction on how to live to please God, and they followed it – ***“just as you actually do walk”***
      - b. (**v. 2**) – they received it as the word of God (**2:13**) – ***“through”*** – *dia* – the channel of an act – i.e. not merely from His authority, but by means of His activity working through them.
        - i. Denotes inspiration.
        - ii. **Cf. 1 Corinthians 14:37** – commandments of the Lord.
        - iii. (**v. 8**) – coming from God.
    - B. Their Need to Abound
      - a. The apostle's exhortation did not come from doubt or suspicion of unfaithfulness – Timothy's report gave him confidence.
      - b. However, he knew they had a long way to go as babes in Christ, and their environment would be a constant source of temptation.
      - c. ***“that you should abound more and more”*** – his exhortation is not to start something they are not yet engaged in, but GROW MORE IN IT. (**cf. Ephesians 4:13** – even when we reach maturity we are still aiming for being more like Christ.)

- d. The following **verses 3-12** is not new information to them, but reminders with exhortation to increase in them – **(vv. 6b, 9)**
  - i. Part of **“how you ought to walk and to please God”** is to always be increasing!
- II. Their Sanctification **(vv. 3-8)**
  - A. The Responsibility **(vv. 3-5)**
    - a. **(v. 3a)** – Part of God’s desire for them (His will) is their sanctification.
      - i. **Sanctification (“holiness,” v. 7)** – *hagiasmos* – “(a) separation to God... (b) the resultant state, the conduct befitting those so separated” (VINE)
      - ii. **Consecration** – positive – dedication to the service of God – **“faith toward God” (1:8)**
      - iii. **Separation** – negative – from the world, pure – **“turned to God from idols” (1:9)**
        - 1. **(v. 5)** – not like the Gentiles.
      - iv. **Cf. John 17:15-18** – The apostles were commissioned to a specific work, but in that consecration, they were to be kept distinct from the world – the word accomplishes this – **(v. 8)** – by the Spirit.
    - b. **(v. 3b)** – sanctification is a broad term, but Paul specifies – they should be separate from the common practice of sexual immorality.
      - i. **Sexual immorality** – *porneia* – a broad term encompassing all illicit sexual intercourse.
      - ii. **“you should abound more and more”** – this might be a puzzling concept when the object of increase is abstinence from sexual immorality.
        - 1. Paul is not implying that they are currently involved in sexual immorality (though it is possible some among them may still be caught up in it). (Timothy’s return seems to have included some of these things they needed encouragement in.)
        - 2. **Sexual immorality is something you either ARE doing, or AREN’T doing – how do I increase in NOT doing something?**
    - c. **(vv. 4-5)** – Paul gives a principle of how this abstinence is achieved, which demonstrates a particular mindset and goal that gives greater insight into how one might **“abound more and more”** in such abstinence.
      - i. **(v. 4)** – have control over your body, keeping it in the realm of God’s will – sanctification and honor.
        - 1. **Possess** – acquire, but then at times meant the result of acquiring something – possess, control, have mastery over.
        - 2. **Vessel** – body.
        - 3. **Sanctification** – purity, separate from sin and uncleanness.

4. **Honor** – a higher purpose of the body, what is according to God’s eternal will.
  5. **Know** – **“that each of you know his own vessel to possess in sanctification and honour” (YLT)**
    - a. Not necessarily “know HOW” – as though there is some specific method to it.
    - b. **Knowledge as a Christian regarding the body’s identification, and purpose precludes such activity as the Gentiles.**
    - c. **5:23** – the body is a part of who we are – **1 Corinthians 6:13-14, 20** – for the Lord.
  6. **“possess...IN sanctification,”** etc. – i.e. have such mastery over your body that it is confined to this space.
    - a. **Cf. 1 Corinthians 9:26-27** – such self-discipline, mastery.
  - ii. **(v. 5)** – unlike the Gentiles (contrasted with spiritual Israel)
    1. Passion of lust – *pathos* (passion) *epithymia* (lusts) – i.e. LUST’S PASSION.
    2. **Lust** – a longing – reaching out.
    3. **Passion** – an abiding affection which the mind suffers – a constant inward burning. (**cf. 2 Peter 2:14**)
    4. **Cf. Ephesians 2:3** – conducting self after lusts, thus with a constant burning for their fulfillment – results in impulsive, unhesitating self-gratification.
    5. They do not know God! – **(v. 4)** – such living is completely incompatible with fellowship with God.
  - iii. **“abound more and more”** – not simply abstaining from the action of sexual immorality, but actively engaging the mind in vigilant deterrence from what would trigger the thought for such activity.
    1. What we view, who we’re with, where we go, etc.
- B. The Warning **(v. 6)**
- a. Implication of adultery.
  - b. **“take advantage of and defraud”** – to take what is theirs through covetousness – **Proverbs 6:30-35** – showing greatness through contrast of normal covetousness. (**cf. Exodus 20:17**)
  - c. **(v. 6b)** – God will take vengeance in the day of judgment – your faithful brother has an advocate you place yourself against in this action.
    - i. **They were warned about this – do not forget it.**
  - d. Even in the lust that precedes it – a part of the deterrent is understanding that one belongs to another.
- C. The Reason **(vv. 7-8)**
- a. They were called, elected by God – **1:4** – made to belong to God.
  - b. This fact is wholly opposite of the way of the Gentiles given to lust and passion – uncleanness.

- c. The fact of God’s election of them leaves only room for holiness – **cf. 1 Peter 1:15-16**
  - d. **(v. 8)** – what he calls them to is of God – **(v. 2** – commandments through Jesus) – one cannot lay claim on God in rejecting this, as though it were a philosophy of Paul’s, but you still belong to God.
    - i. If you want to, and do belong to God, this must be the aim of your life – and growth.
- III. Their Love **(vv. 9-12)**
- A. The Exhortation **(vv. 9-10)**
    - a. **(vv. 9-10a)** – Paul is not telling them about something they don’t already know.
      - i. A principal part of being a Christian is love – **cf. 1 Peter 1:22; John 13:35**
      - ii. They were active in this from the beginning to now – **1:3; 3:6; 4:10a**
    - b. His exhortation is for their increase in this – **(v. 10b)**
      - i. Not only let it continue (**cf. Hebrews 13:1**), but increase.
      - ii. **3:12** – this is something he already mentioned.
      - iii. Here, he elaborates on the way in which this increase will show.
    - c. Increase through knowledge, discernment, and not only doing what is right, but what is best – **Philippians 1:9-11**
      - i. This they would follow – **cf. 2 Corinthians 8:1-5** – a few years later they would be involved in giving much for the needy saints in Jerusalem.
  - B. The Practice **(v. 11)**
    - a. These are not comprehensive of what such an increase in love includes but apparently represent practical ways in which the Thessalonians’ love could increase, and perhaps some things which they would not have considered to be a part of such increase.
      - i. NOTE: **“aspire”** connects to each of these three – *philotimeomai* – *philos* (love, fondness, affection), *time* (honor) – to love it as a point of honor – **THE WAY TO INCREASE IN LOVE FOR EACH OTHER IS TO LOVE TO HAVE THESE THINGS APPARENT IN YOUR LIFE.**
    - b. **Lead a quiet life**
      - i. *hēsychazō* – to live a quiet life or refrain from disturbing activity (BDAG)
      - ii. **Connection with love of others – living in such a way that is so mindful of others that one is not unmindful of self, leading to intrusive behavior.**
        - 1. The following elaborates on this idea.
    - c. **Mind your own business**
      - i. Rather than neglecting your own work and imposing yourself on others.

- ii. Making yourself dependent on others.
  - d. **Work with your own hands**
    - i. Be diligent, not idle, causing problems for yourself that end up being a burden to others.
    - ii. **5:14** – where Paul would exhort to uphold the weak, he also exhorts to not place oneself in that position through negligence.
  - e. **NOTE: Sometimes people become unloving in the name of love. They act entitled to the actions of love from others and in doing so show no due regard for them. (EX: a child’s understanding of “sharing”)**
  - f. These exhortations may be evidence of the incipient forms of what would later have to be addressed more emphatically – **2 Thessalonians 3:11-12**
- C. The Reason **(v. 12)**
  - a. **Provides for the world** – i.e. provides for the world’s high estimation of Christianity, and thus, attracts them to Christ.
    - i. Opposite – “These Christians are just lazy manipulators seeking handouts.”
    - ii. **“properly”** – *euschēmonōs* – “eu, “well,” *schema*, “a form, figure”” (VINE) – in behaving this way you become a good model of Christianity. (cf. **Titus 2:9-10** – adorning the doctrine of God)
  - b. **Provides for self** – **cf. Proverbs 6:6-11** – trials will come, it is best not to put our faith in a difficult position by causing the tribulation ourselves.
- IV. Their Comfort **(vv. 13-18)**
  - A. The Danger **(v. 13)**
    - a. The prior matters represented things of which the Thessalonians were already knowledgeable – **(vv. 6, 9-10)**
    - b. **Here, Paul speaks of something which they do know – sorrow as a universal response to death – yet which he is concerned they may be ignorant respecting a Christian’s perspective.**
      - i. This may have been something reported to Paul by Timothy as a request of the Thessalonians for further clarification.
    - c. **“fallen asleep”** – a euphemism for having died.
    - d. **“lest you sorrow...”** – implication of a danger which he seeks to direct them away from.
      - i. **Sorrow is NOT the danger** – Paul is NOT implying that Christians do not or should not have sorrow.
      - ii. **Sorrow DEVOID OF HOPE is the danger** – **cf. 2 Corinthians 2:7** – Satan can use sorrow to swallow us up.
        - 1. While life in Christ offers great comfort, if Paul does not inform them, they may be deceived by Satan to think there is only comfort in LIFE with Christ – **cf. 1 Corinthians 15:17-19; Revelation 14:13**
        - 2. This ignorance was especially culturally shaped by the pagan religions and philosophies, and their erroneous views of what happens in death, and after.

B. The Solution (vv. 14-17)

- a. (v. 14) – based on Jesus’ resurrection from the dead, God will bring with Jesus’ resurrection that of all those who are in Him. (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:22-23).
- b. (vv. 15-17) – the apparent concern of the Thessalonians was that brethren who had died since the establishment of the church in Thessalonica, and before Christ’s return, would somehow be left out.
  - i. 1:10 – they joyfully awaited the return of Christ.
  - ii. 2:12 – they eagerly anticipated the fullness of the kingdom and God’s glory
  - iii. **They won’t be left out – the living have no advantage over them at Christ’s coming, they will rise first, all will be caught up together in the clouds to be with the Lord forever.**
    1. NOTE: “first” (v. 16) is in relation to those who are alive being with the Lord – they will not “precede” the dead, but the dead will be raised, and then all will be caught up to be with the Lord. (I.e. there is only ONE resurrection – Paul does not speak of the wicked here who will be raised at the same moment.)
  - iv. **By this knowledge (not ignorance, v. 13) their comfort in Christ is made to “abound more and more” by its introduction to new territory that demonstrates the power of hope.**

C. The Responsibility (v. 18)

- a. With this knowledge comes great responsibility.
- b. 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 – those who had felt the sting of death in the loss of their loved ones would find great comfort in this truth and would be equipped to aid others when they experience the same.

**Conclusion**

1. We should always remember that life is a constant progression toward an end, and the Christian life is no different.
2. As we aim for the standard of Christ, we are in constant need of growth.
3. Christians are holy people who love each other fervently and find comfort even in the death of those who are in Christ. These areas are to be nurtured and increased.