

## 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 – Sanctification in Holiness and Brotherly Love

### INTRODUCTION:

1. As we continue our study in 1 Thessalonians, we come to chapter 4 where Paul begins the second section of the letter in which the brethren are exhorted concerning how to live the Christian life.
2. This is a change from the first section where the focus was Paul's and Silas' relationship with them.
  - A. In chapter 1 Paul expressed their thankfulness for the Thessalonians' conversion to Christ.
  - B. In chapter 2 he spoke of how Paul's and Silas' sincerity and devotion to the spiritual wellbeing of these brethren was observed in their *work among them*.
  - C. In chapter 3 Paul addresses how *their* love and concern, which now included Sylvanus and Timothy, had *continued despite their long absence from them*.
3. Here in chapter 4:1-12, which is our text today, Paul exhorts them concerning the Christian's walk with God, or how to live their life with God, in pleasing fashion. This pleasing walk concerns...
  - A. Growing in their submission to God's will for their sanctification in holiness.
  - B. Growing in brotherly love.
4. I hope in considering these verses that we ourselves will seek to please God by growing in holiness and brotherly love, which will greatly increase the quality of our lives.

### BODY:

#### **I. Christians must continually grow in holiness (4:1-8).**

- A. Paul urges and exhorts them *in the Lord Jesus* to *abound more and more* in submission to God's will (4:1-2).
  1. To *urge* and *exhort* is like our *begging* and *pleading*, emphasizing the importance of the subject.
  2. Note that Paul wasn't rebuking them for *failing* to obey but was seeking even *greater heights of spiritual growth and submission* in what *they already knew and were doing*.
  3. Growth in submission to these commands was vital because they concerned *how they must walk to please God* (4:1).
    - a. That is to be the life goal of a Christian—to **walk**, or to live, to **please God**.
    - b. Paul tells the Colossians to be “**fully** pleasing to Him” (Col. 1:10). No cutting corners!
  4. So, we need to ask ourselves if our thoughts and actions are filtered through this goal!
- B. The specific application of this exhortation for abounding growth is God's will that they be *sanctified*, or set apart, *in holiness* (4:3-5).
  1. God's word is very strong here! It is, unequivocally, God's will for Christians to **sanctify ourselves** by *abstaining from sexual immorality* (4:3).
    - a. This may have been a special problem for these brethren who had turned from idolatry with its immoral pleasures to serve God in Christ (1:9).
      - i. The pressure to *conform* and *enjoy* would have been strong, as it is today.
      - ii. God's answer to overcome is to *abstain from it*, to *keep oneself completely away from it*, to *cease* from sexual immorality *completely*.
      - iii. That is God will for us, what He expects of us, and what we must do to please Him.
    - b. Now, there is a very real sense in which *God sanctifies us*, setting us apart from sin, when we are saved in Christ (1 Cor. 6:11 – “And such were some of you. But you were **washed**, but you were **sanctified**, but you were **justified** in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.”).
      - i. God sanctifies us, or makes us holy, by His grace and forgiveness.
      - ii. But we are to seek to maintain that holiness by *abstaining from sexual immorality*.
      - iii. We have a role and responsibility in the sanctification process.
  2. This sanctification requires that *every* Christian “know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor” (4:4-5).
    - a. To *possess* our *vessel* means that we know how to *master*, or *control*, our *bodies* (4:4).
      - i. Using “vessel” here may help drive home the point because our bodies are vessels for our eternal soul, which will be awarded with eternal life or death by how we live now.

- ii. Possessing our bodies in *sanctification and honor* means we live as those *separated from the world to God* in holiness which brings *honor* to God and our bodies.
    - iii. This is very important because just as God's grace and forgiveness separates us **for** God's use, sexual immorality *separates us from* God and *dishonors our bodies*.
  - b. We are **to live in sanctification and honor**, and **not in passion of lust** (4:5).
    - i. Living in passion (lit. sexual desires) and lust is characteristic of the Gentiles who don't know God and often allow their lives to be controlled by their bodies.
    - ii. Those who know God are not controlled, or driven, by the body's sexual passion or desires, but by *knowledge of God and His will!*
- C. Three importance reasons for sanctification in sexual purity (4:6-8).
  - 1. First, we must abstain from sexual immorality because God will avenge this sin (4:6).
    - a. Paul states that sexual immorality will defraud, or cheat, one's brethren. How so?
      - i. It could refer to defiling the mate of a brother or sister in Christ. For, the Christian community is close-knit, and we trust one another, which could provide opportunities for this sin.
      - ii. Sexual immorality not only hurts and dishonors the guilty and their mates, but also brethren, the reputation of the local church, and the cause of Christ!
    - b. So, be warned and *abstain* because **GOD WILL AVENGE THIS SIN!!**
      - i. There are no excuses, no pass, in this matter. We have been warned!
      - ii. So, despite our sexually loose culture, we had better let God's word convince us and we our children to be sexually pure.
  - 2. Second, the gospel calls us *not to unclean lives*, but *holy lives* (4:7).
    - a. Those who answer the gospel call of God's grace agree to live a holy life—that is part of the deal.
    - b. What so many miss is that resting our hope on *God's grace* doesn't mean we are free to act as we please, but instead requires that we seek to conform our lives to God's holiness (1 Pet. 1:13-15 – “Therefore **gird up the loins of your mind**, be **sober**, and **rest your hope fully upon the grace** that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; <sup>14</sup> as **obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts**, as in your ignorance; <sup>15</sup> but as He who called you is holy, **you also be holy in all your conduct**, <sup>16</sup> because it is written, “Be holy, for I am holy.”).
      - c. We can't claim to live in God's grace if we refuse to live holy lives!
  - 3. Third, since God calls us to holiness, to reject these instructions is not to reject man (Paul who preached it), but God (who revealed it – 4:8).
    - a. Though the world tugs against us and encourages us to trivialize the Bible's teaching on sexual morality, modesty in dress, lasciviousness, etc., we must not.
    - b. To do so is to be a *despiser/rejecter* of God who gave us His HOLY Spirit.
    - c. I think the emphasis here is on the *holiness* of the Spirit given us, seeing God would not give His *Holy Spirit* to Christians to live *unholy* lives of sexual immorality!
    - d. So, rejecting the call to holiness is to reject God!

## II. Christians must continually grow in brotherly love (4:9-12):

- A. There is a connection between *holiness* and *brotherly love* which the Holy Spirit has already established (see 3:12-13).
  - 1. Thus, true sanctification in *holiness* requires that we *love one another!*
  - 2. Without both our sanctification is incomplete and we cannot please God!
- B. Paul praises the Thessalonians because they were doing so well in brotherly love that he did not have to instruct them in this matter (4:9-10).
  - 1. Here Paul uses language which was common to his day that would both *soften* and *emphasize* the importance of the appeal that follows.
  - 2. In other words, Paul says that they are doing so well that he doesn't have to write about this, *but he is still going to write about it.*

3. He begins by stating that these brethren had already been “taught by God [lit. God-taught] to love one another” (4:9).
  - a. This recognizes that the instructions from Paul and company were inspired of God.
  - b. But it may also refer to how God’s sending Jesus to die for sinners teaches such love (1 John 3:16 – “By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”).
4. So, even as Paul expressed his appreciation for their brotherly love toward all the brethren in Macedonia, he also wanted to urge (plead with) them to do *more and more* (4:10).
  - a. God never wants Christians to be satisfied with their level of sanctification, whether it be in holiness or love.
  - b. It is important that I ask myself what I am doing to assure that I grow in the area of brotherly love. For, brotherly love cannot be neglected if we hope to please God.
- C. Finally, Paul’s specific application of brotherly love may come as a surprise (1 Thess. 4:11-12).
  1. Paul’s application is for them to *aspire* (be ambitious, strive), as they had been commanded earlier, to lead quiet lives, mind their own business, and work with their hands (4:11).
  2. But, how do these commands relate to brother love?
    - a. To **lead a quiet life** means to not be agitators, or ones causing strife with others.
    - b. To **mind their own business** means we are to focus on our own Christian living and not be meddling in the affairs of brethren.
    - c. To **work with their own hands** means Christians must labor and be productive to support themselves so that they need nothing from others—are not a drain on others.
    - d. When considered like this, we see how these goals are related to brotherly love.
      - i. If one is a constant source of agitation, is a busybody in their brethren’s affairs, and continually mooches off their brethren, they are not showing love and will strain their relationship with faithful, stable brethren.
      - ii. This may have been their problem (2 Thess. 3:10-12 – “For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. <sup>11</sup> For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. <sup>12</sup> Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.”).
      - iii. It seems that the Thessalonian brethren did so well in showing love to one another that some decided to take advantage of it and live off this love rather than work.
    - e. This is a delicate subject, seeing Christians are to be *generous toward their brethren* and others and *brethren do need to be helped from time to time*.
      - i. This willing, sacrificial attitude of generosity toward one’s brethren is a distinguishing characteristic of the church as seen from Pentecost on!
      - ii. So, although 2 Thess. 3:10-12 shows we are not to be parasites living off the brethren, we must also “not grow weary in doing good” in our generosity (2 Thess. 3:13).
  3. The benefits of these goals are that they allow one to live a proper life before those outside and to be free from want, or to have what you need (4:12).
    - a. This is important because the world is always looking to criticize the church. And, disorder and personal misconduct among brethren are the very things the world will use to damage the church’s reputation and the cause of Christ.
    - b. Yet, on the positive side, being a good worker has the benefit of allowing one to have what he/she needs to live and to help others in need (Eph. 4:28 – “Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.”).

#### CONCLUSION:

1. God wants His people to be *sanctified*, or set apart for Him, by living lives characterized by abounding more and more in holiness and brotherly love.
2. So as always, God’s word lays a challenge before us to obey and “abound more and more” in...

- A. Holiness by resisting the temptation of sexual immorality.
  - B. Brotherly love by opening your heart, your life, your home, your time, and your wallets for one another, choosing to take advantage of every opportunity offered to grow in brotherly love, as well as creating opportunities of your own!
  - C. THIS IS GOD'S WILL FOR US!!
3. The gospel is before you. What will you do with Jesus the Savior who calls you to salvation and hope of eternal life through sanctification of holiness and brotherly love?
  4. Will you come today in repentance of sin in straying from God's way of sanctification? Or if you are not saved and desire forgiveness and hope in Christ, will you come in faith in Jesus as your Lord and Savior, repenting of sin, confessing Christ, and being baptized into Him for salvation?