

1 Thessalonians

Chapter 4

Living to Please God

Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. ² For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. ³ It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴ that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵ not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; ⁶ and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. ⁷ For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. ⁸ Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit. ⁹ Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. ¹⁰ And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more. ¹¹ Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, ¹² so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

4:1 *Finally.* The main section of the letter is finished, though much is yet to come (see Php 3:1 and note). (CSB)

live. Lit. "walk." Paul uses this metaphor often of the Christian way (see Ro 6:4; 2Co 5:7; Eph 4:1; 5:17; Col 1:10, "live a life"; 2:6; 4:5, "act"). It points to steady progress. (CSB)

The Law is given as a guide for those who are already saved. Paul gives a guideline to those already saved through faith in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. (TLSB)

we ask you and urge you. Paul is not arrogant, but he does speak with authority in the Lord Jesus. He has the "mind of Christ" (1Co 2:16). (CSB)

more and more. Abundance of good works results from being grafted in Christ as a branch to the vine (Jn 15:4). (TLSB)

4:2 *instructions.* Used of authoritative commands and has a military ring (see Ac 5:28; 16:24). (CSB)

Given to Paul by the Lord Himself, who gives it authority. (TLSB)

4:3 sanctified. See note on 3:13. (CSB)

Referring to the ethical or moral implications of the Gospel. A person who has been re-created in Christ must not continue to live in an immoral manner. A Christian's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who enables the believer to live a holy life (1Co 6:15–20). (TLSB)

sexual immorality. In the first century moral standards were generally very low, and chastity was regarded as an unreasonable restriction. Paul, however, would not compromise God's clear and demanding standards. The warning was needed, for Christians were not immune to the temptation (see 1Co 5:1). (CSB)

4:4 how to control his own body. Our sexuality is God's gift for use within the parameters of marriage. "Good people will know how to control the use of marriage, especially when they occupy public offices" (Ap XXIII 43). (TLSB)

4:5 like the heathen. The Christian is to be different. (CSB)

Unbelievers outside of the Church who live by gratifying their lustful passions in wanton self-indulgence. (TLSB)

not know God. Humans have an inherent sense that God exists (Rm 1:19–20), yet they sinfully corrupt that knowledge into idolatry (Rm 1:21–23). (TLSB)

4:6 wrong his brother. Sexual sin harms others besides those who engage in it. In adultery, e.g., the spouse is always wronged. Premarital sex wrongs the future partner by robbing him or her of the virginity that ought to be brought to marriage. (CSB)

Having an intimate relationship with someone else's wife or husband. (TLSB)

The Lord will punish. A motive for chastity. (CSB)

"The wages of sin is death" (Rm 6:23). The anger and wrath of the Holy God will be on those who have not repented of their sin and are not covered by the blood of His Son (Eph 5:6; Col 3:5–6). (TLSB)

beforehand. While teaching in their city (Ac 17:1–9). (TLSB)

4:7 called us. Just as God sought for Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and called them when they sinned, so He seeks and calls us by the Gospel into faith in His Son. (TLSB)

Another reason for chastity is God's call to holiness. (CSB)

4:8 God, who gives you his Holy Spirit. Still another reason for chastity is that sexual sin is against God, who gives the Holy Spirit to believers for their sanctification. To live in sexual immorality is to reject God, specifically in regard to the Holy Spirit. (CSB)

Reception of the Holy Spirit is not our achievement. The Holy Spirit is given when the Word about Christ is heard and the Sacraments are received by faith. The Holy Spirit reveals the meaning of the Word and the Sacraments by testifying for Christ. (TLSB)

4:9 *brotherly love*. Translates *philadelphia*, a Greek word that outside the NT almost without exception denoted the mutual love of children of the same father. In the NT it always means love of fellow believers in Christ, all of whom have the same heavenly Father. (CSB)

This passage is another masterpiece of pastoral exhortation, for it combines a ready acknowledgment of the progress already made in sanctification with a tactful reminder of the fact that the goal has not yet been reached: But concerning brotherly love you have no need to be written to, for yourselves are people taught of God to love one another. With what effective skill Paul brings out his point! By representing the situation in such a way as to call them men taught by God Himself, through the Holy Ghost in the Word, and stating that under the circumstances his writing concerning brotherly love would be superfluous, he places this virtue before their eyes with the sharpest accentuation, putting all those to shame that were not practicing this love at all times.

taught by God. Cf. Isa 54:13; Jn 6:45; 1Co 2:13. (CSB)

By the words of Jesus and the Spirit Paul passed on to them. (TLSB)

4:10 MORE AND MORE – The apostle names a case of which he personally knows: For, indeed, you do it toward all the brethren in entire Macedonia. There was a lively intercourse between the Christians of those days, not merely in the home congregation, but also with the brethren in Philippi, Berea, and elsewhere in Macedonia. Toward all these Christians the members of the Thessalonian congregation were practicing brotherly love as it was required. (Kretzmann)

4:11 Some Thessalonians, probably because of idleness, were taking undue interest in other people's affairs. (CSB)

Paul warns against being overzealous for spiritual matters. The Christian life is balanced. "It is not only necessary for our life that our body have food and clothes and other necessities. It is also necessary that we spend our days in peace and quiet among the people with whom we live and have dealings in daily business and conversation and all sorts of doings" (LC III 73). (TLSB)

work with your hands. The Greeks in general thought manual labor degrading and fit only for slaves. Christians took seriously the need for earning their own living, but some of the Thessalonians, perhaps as a result of their belief in the imminent return of Christ (see 2Th 3:11), were neglecting work and relying on others to support them. (CSB)

4:12 *not be dependent on anybody.* Or “have need of nothing.” Both meanings are true and significant. Christians in need because of their idleness are not obedient Christians. (CSB)

Paul urges them to live on the fruits of their physical labor. (TLSB)

4:1–12 Paul gives advice on some practical matters dealing with sanctification so that their witness for the Lord may go forward blamelessly. We Christians must lead a sexually pure life so that we may not grieve the Holy Spirit. Our love to one another should not be superficial but honest and from the heart. We should live by our labor without improperly depending on others for support. The Lord—through His Spirit poured upon us—fights for us against the “flaming darts of the evil one” (Eph 6:16) so that we may live pure and blameless lives. • Thank You, Lord, that we are victorious through You and that Your victory is our victory. Mold us by Your Word so that we may imitate Your apostles and You in our daily walks of life. Amen. (TLSB)

The Coming of the Lord

¹³ Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. ¹⁴ We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. ¹⁵ According to the Lord’s own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶ 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. ¹⁷ 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. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage each other with these words.

4:13 *those who fall asleep.* For the Christian, sleep is a particularly apt metaphor for death, since death’s finality and horror are removed by the assurance of resurrection. Some of the Thessalonians seem to have misunderstood Paul and thought all believers would live until Christ returns. When some died, the question arose, “Will those who have died have part in that great day?” See note on v. 15. (CSB)

Although the Thessalonians had been firm in the face of persecution, one thing bothered them. What about their fellow believers who died before Jesus returned in glory? Would they be lost because of this? (PBC)

A euphemism for death (cf 1Ki 2:10). (TLSB)

others. The pagan world, Gentiles who do not know God. (TLSB)

who have no hope. Inscriptions on tombs and references in literature show that first-century pagans viewed death with horror, as the end of everything. The Christian attitude was in strong contrast (see 1Co 15:55–57; Php 1:21–23). (CSB)

Those who live without Jesus have no hope because they do not know of the resurrection. (TLSB)

4:14 *died*. Paul does not say that Christ “slept,” perhaps to underscore the fact that he bore the full horror of death so that those who believe in him would not have to. (CSB)

But the Christians are in an altogether different position: For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so also those who fell asleep through Jesus will God bring with Him. (Kretzmann)

rose again. For the importance of the resurrection see 1Co 15, especially vv. 14, 17–22. (CSB)

That is the belief of all Christians, that Jesus truly died on the cross, but that just as truly He rose again on the third day. The believers in Christ, however, belong to Christ, they are partakers of all His work of redemption and of all the blessings which He earned through His vicarious suffering. (Kretzmann)

those who have fallen asleep in him. Believers who have died, trusting in Jesus. (CSB)

Jesus becomes a mediator through whom the dead are resurrected. (TLSB)

4:15 *According to the Lord’s own word*. The doctrine mentioned here is not recorded in the Gospels and was either a direct revelation to Paul or something Jesus said that Christians passed on orally. (CSB)

A teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ (e.g., Mt 22:23–33) or a revelation given to the apostles in His name. (TLSB)

The apostle now adds a word of instruction regarding those that will be living on earth at the coming of the Lord: For this we tell you by the word of the Lord, that we, the living ones, that remain over for the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede those that fell asleep. This was a word, a saying, of the Lord which had been preserved by the disciples and is here recorded by the apostle. (Kretzmann)

we who are still alive. Those believers who will be alive when Christ returns. “We” does not necessarily mean that Paul thought that he would be alive then. He often identified himself with those he wrote to or about. Elsewhere he says that God will raise “us” at that time (1Co 6:14; 2Co 4:14). (CSB)

will certainly not precede. The Thessalonians had evidently been concerned that those among them who died would miss their place in the great events when the Lord comes, and Paul assures them this will not be the case. (CSB)

Those who died in Christ will have no disadvantage when the Lord returns. The second coming will be seen by them as well as the living. (TLSB)

4:16 *the Lord himself.* See Ac 1:11. (CSB)

cry ... voice ... sound. Three ways of expressing the same calling (action) of the Lord. (TLSB)

command. It is the quickening Word of the Lord. (TLSB)

archangel. The only named archangel in the Bible is Michael (Jude 9; see Da 10:13). In Scripture, Gabriel is simply called an angel (Lk 1:19, 26). (CSB)

Mentioned only one other time in the NT (Michael, Jude 9). The Lord uses angels to execute His will. The pseudepigraphical book 1 Enoch mentions seven archangels: Uriel, Raphael, Raguel, Michael, Sarakiel, Gabriel, Remiel (1 Enoch 20:1–7). (TLSB)

dead in Christ. Those who passed away while believing in the Lord will rise first. Cf v 15. (TLSB)

will rise first. Before the ascension of believers mentioned in the next verse. (CSB)

4:17 *we who are still alive.* See note on v. 15. (CSB)

cf 2Th 1:5–10. Believers who remain alive on the earth. (TLSB)

caught up.† Or “taken up.” Millennialists read into this verb a “rapture,” from the Latin Vulgate rendering. Note that Paul seems to be describing something open and public, with loud voices and a trumpet blast. (CSB)

Gk *harpazo* carries with it the sense of a sudden and violent action. The point is that we will be gathered together at the resurrection, the dead as well as the living, when Christ returns. (The Vulg used the term *raptus*, from which the modern false doctrine of a “rapture” gets its name. Paul’s teaching is about the resurrection and not a secret return of Christ.) Chrys: “When they see the earth agitated, the dust mingling, the bodies rising perchance on every side, no one [causing] this, but the ‘shout’ being sufficient ... when they see so great a tumult upon the earth,—then they shall know.... What fear will possess those that remain upon the earth” (*NPNF* 1 13:356). (TLSB)

with the Lord. The chief hope of the believer (see 5:10; Jn 14:3; 2Co 5:8; Php 1:23; Col 3:4). (CSB)

In the ancient world, dignitaries were welcomed officially by people who escorted them. The focus is the coming together of the Lord and His people. The air is considered to be the abode of evil spirits (Eph 2:2), who will yield the place to Him who has all authority in the heavens and on earth. (TLSB)

always be with the Lord. In heaven after the resurrection. (TLSB)

4:18 *encourage each other.* The primary purpose of vv. 13–18 is not to give a chronology of future events, though that is involved, but to urge mutual encouragement, as shown here and in v. 13. (CSB)

Some Thessalonians feared that loved ones who had died in Christ might not be able to see the second coming of the Lord. (TLSB)

With the certainty of such joy before us, the admonition of the apostle surely ought to find willing ears and ready obedience: So, then, encourage one another with these words. There is a world of consolation and comfort in this short passage, which can barely be indicated in a brief explanation. (Kretzmann)

4:13–18 Paul comforts the Thessalonians, saying that the dead in Christ will be the first to taste the resurrection and come with the risen Christ. At the second coming, we will all be together once more. Christians grieve over the death of loved ones but not as those who have no hope. The resurrection of our Lord, and the victory we have over death through Him, gives us a living hope, despite the fact that death separates loved ones and causes great pain. • Thank You, Lord Jesus, for making the way through death a path of hope and joy, due to Your resurrection. Create in our hearts the joy and hope of Your victory over death. Amen. (TLSB)