
The Thessalonian Letters

Exhortation in Areas of Concern

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12



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Paul begins the body of his letter (4:1)

- **“Finally”** (*loipos*) ~ “as for what remains.”
- **“request”** (*erōtaō*, “ask or appeal”) and **“exhort”** (*parakaleō*, “urge”).
- They **“received”** (*paralambanō*) his teaching (also in 2:13) ~ literally, to take to one’s side, to bring close, or to accept for oneself.
- They **“ought to walk and please God”** ~ includes their entire lifestyle of walking in faith (see 2:12).
- There is always room for improvement and growth. Paul wanted them to **“excel”** (*perisseuō*) ~ to abound or overflow (also in 3:12). He desired that they continue to make steady progress in their spiritual growth.

Their sanctification is God's will (4:2-3a)

- Paul called on the Thessalonians to recall something they “**know**” (*oida*).
- He had given them “**commandments**” (*paraggelia*) or principles for how they ought to behave in order to please God.
- “**by the authority of the Lord Jesus**” ~ here Paul speaks for Christ.
- So far Paul referred to the believers’ “**sanctification**” (*hagiasmos*) generally. This term identifies something set apart from common things for the exclusive use of God.
- Their sanctification is God’s “**will**” (*thelēma*) ~ designates God’s gracious design or purpose for the lives of believers.

Specific area of sanctification: sexual purity (4:3b)

- They must “**abstain from**” (*apechō*) ~ keep away or remain distant from “**sexual immorality**” (*porneia*) ~ a broad term for any kind of illicit sexual behavior. “Flee immorality (*porneia*). Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral (*porneuō*) man sins against his own body” (1 Cor 6:18).
- Greco-Roman society was permeated by sexual immorality, especially in the pagan religious cults. Just as in our culture today, there was a great deal of social pressure and temptation to conform to the lax sexual standards of those around them.
- Believers need to be reminded and even commanded to maintain sexual purity, especially in regard to the sanctity of marriage.

Possess one's vessel in honor (4:4)

- “**each of you**” (*hekastos*) ~ every single one.
- “**possess**” (*ктаομαι*) ~ to gain control or win mastery over something.
“**vessel**” (*skeuos*) ~ can mean an implement, apparatus, or piece of equipment. Refers to all aspects of human sexuality.
- Indiscriminate sexual behavior is incompatible with Christian sanctification and holiness of life.
- Paul wanted the Thessalonians to gain mastery over themselves in order to act honorably in ways that reflect their growing sanctification in the presence of God.

Believers should not behave as others do (4:5)

- **“Not”** ~ what believers should not do regarding their sexuality.
- **“Gentiles”** (*ethnos*, “the nations”) ~ includes the entire pagan culture of that day which was permeated by lustful passion.
- **“passion”** (*pathos*) ~ anything that is strongly felt, either good or bad. Here it has a negative connotation because it is combined with the word **“lust”** (*epithumia*) ~ a deep desire, uncontrollable craving, or passionate longing for what is forbidden.
- **“They do not know God”** ~ they do not consider it important to retain a knowledge of the one true God.

Negative consequences of sexual immorality (4:6)

- Wrong behavior always results in negative consequences that affect not only the individual but also those closest to him.
- “**transgress**” (*huperbainō*) ~ literally, “to go beyond” or overstep proper limits. “**defraud**” (*pleonekteō*) ~ grasping something that belongs to another or taking advantage of someone for personal satisfaction.
- “the Lord is the **avenger**” (*ekdikos*) ~ one who carries out justice. Violating God’s standards for sexual conduct will incur God’s punishment.
- “**just as we also told you before**” ~ Paul had already taught them about the holy character of God, His righteous standards for the conduct of His children, and that He opposes and punishes unrighteousness.

Live within God's guidelines (4:7-8)

- God has called them to “**sanctification**” ~ contrasts a believer's goal of holiness with the sin of sexual immorality.
- God calls not for the “**purpose of impurity**” (*akatharsia*) ~ uncleanness and lustful, self-indulgent behavior.
- “**He who rejects**” ~ literally, “lays aside.” These precepts were not the opinions of men. Paul had taught them the truths of God by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- “**God gives His Holy Spirit to you**” ~ Believers are not alone in the effort to live in holiness, and they are not required to fight the battle against the flesh in their own strength.

The love of the brethren (4:9-10)

- “**Now**” marks a transition into a new subject that the apostle Paul will address with the Thessalonians.
- “**love of the brethren**” (*philadelphia*) ~ “brotherly kindness.” They were already “God-taught” (*theodidaktos*) through the work of the indwelling Holy Spirit to express this kind of love toward each other.
- Paul affirmed that they were practicing this type of love and that their hospitality was known across the entire province of Macedonia.
- He desired that they should “**excel still more**” (*perisseuō*) ~ see 3:12 and 4:1. There is always room for improvement and growth in the Christian life.

Live a responsible life of self-support (4:11)

- Paul reminds them of his previous “**command**” (*paraggellō*). He had already told them what they were to do regarding this new subject. They were to “**make it their ambition**” (*philotimeomai*) ~ to strive earnestly or make it one’s aim to accomplish a goal.
- “**to lead a quiet life**” (*hēsuchazō*) ~ to live peaceably and tranquilly.
- “**attend to your own business**” ~ literally, “do your own things.”
- “**work with your own hands**” ~ refers to their responsibility to support themselves by earning their own living.
- Apparently some believers were not following Paul’s command regarding this aspect of their “brotherly kindness.”

Results of leading a responsible life (4:12)

- “**behaves**” (*peripateō*) ~ literally “walks” in a decent, honest, and “**proper**” manner. Supporting oneself by earning a living has always been the responsible thing to do, and it enables believers to have an excellent reputation even among those “**outside**” the family of faith. Behaving otherwise will damage a believer’s reputation with others.
- They would “**not be in any need**” (*chreia*) ~ necessity, lack, or want. Paul was saying that working in order to responsibly provide for one’s basic needs will result in a degree of healthy independence, which in turn will allow believers to bless those around them. Behaving otherwise will ultimately damage the reputation of God in the eyes of the world.