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# 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” (*ktaomai*) ~ 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.