

1 Thessalonians 4 -- Suggestions for study questions:

1. Is my “walk” (i.e., Personal behavior) pleasing to God? (4:1-2) Are there tangible examples of Christian maturity in my life?

***THEME:*** *The coming of Christ is a purifying hope; the coming of Christ is a comforting hope*

...We like to look forward to the day when we shall be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. But, my friend, in the meantime our feet are down here on the ground and we need to do some walking. We are to walk in a way that will please God.

“As ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.” We should keep improving. We should *grow* in grace and in the knowledge of Him. The walk of the believer is very important. It is emphasized in many portions of Scripture, and it is the emphasis here. A believer cannot do as he pleases; he does as Christ pleases...<sup>1</sup>

**For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus [1 Thess. 4:2].**

In regard to their walk, we will find Paul giving some commandments to the Thessalonians. You will remember that the Lord Jesus also gave commandments. Some of these commandments are new commandments.

Let me say this very carefully: The Ten Commandments have no part in a sinner’s salvation, nor are they standard for Christian conduct. The purpose of the Ten Commandments is to take us by the hand, as a pedagogue would take a little child by the hand, to bring us to the Cross and say to us, “Little fellow, you need a Savior!” The Ten Commandments are like a mirror which lets us see that we are sinners. The Ten Commandments were not given to save us; they were given to show us that we are sinners and that we need a Savior. That is their purpose.

However, there are commandments for believers, and the standard for Christian conduct which they set is on a much higher plane than the Ten Commandments. In chapter 5 we will find twenty–two commandments for believers given.

Now the question naturally arises: If man could not keep the Ten Commandments, how can he keep higher commandments? The Bible makes it very clear that man was not able to keep the Ten Commandments. The nation Israel transgressed these commandments as Simon Peter confessed: “And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.... Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they” (Acts 15:7, 10–11).

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<sup>1</sup> McGee, J. V. (1991). *Thru the Bible commentary: The Epistles (1 and 2 Thessalonians)* (electronic ed., Vol. 49, p. 61). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Now if we can't keep the Ten Commandments, how are we to keep any higher commandments of Christian conduct? Man cannot do it himself. This can be attained only by the power of the Holy Spirit who dwells within the believer (see v. 8).

“For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.” Paul has some commandments for believers. We are not lawless. We should be disciplined, and we should be in obedience to Christ. It should be a love relationship—we should be motivated by love—the Lord Jesus said, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).<sup>2</sup>

2. When I think of “the will of God” (4:3) what immediately comes to mind? Do I reflect on my sexual purity and do I strive to maintain my purity? Can my experiences be used by The Lord to walk along someone struggling in their walk? In what ways do I need to grow in my thoughts, word, and actions? Read Ephesians 5:3-5. Does this passage serve as my consuming passion? In what ways do I tolerate impurity when the Lord is clear that I “must” walk and please God (1Thess 4-1b)

<sup>3</sup> But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints; <sup>4</sup> neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. <sup>5</sup> For this you know, that no fornicator, unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.<sup>3</sup>

[Unrepentant sinners, church discipline] ...Tell it to the community of believers. If he also ignores the community, deal with him as you would a heathen or a tax collector. Mt 18:17

I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. 1 Co 5:11

Can two walk together, except they be agreed? Am 3:3

**For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication [1 Thess. 4:3].**

*Sanctification* is a very wonderful word, but I am afraid that it is greatly misunderstood. If you go through the Scriptures, you will find that sanctification has several different meanings. When it is used in reference to Christ, as it is here, it means that He has been made over to us sanctification—and you cannot improve on that! Therefore, it does not simply refer to a sinless state, but rather that we have been set apart for God. For example, Simon Peter speaks of the fact that “... holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:21). Now some of those holy men have life stories that don't make them sound very holy! Moses, for instance, was a murderer. David, who

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<sup>2</sup> McGee, J. V. (1991). *Thru the Bible commentary: The Epistles (1 and 2 Thessalonians)* (electronic ed., Vol. 49, pp. 61–62). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>3</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Eph 5:3–5). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

wrote so many wonderful psalms, was also a murderer. But they were sanctified, holy, because they had been set aside for God.

Sanctification of the believer is a work of the Spirit of God. We need to review the threefold aspect of it, because this is so very important:

*Positional* sanctification means that Christ has been made unto us sanctification. We are accepted in the Beloved, and we will never be more saved than at the moment we put our trust in Christ. We are never accepted because of who we are, but because of what Christ has done. This positional sanctification is perfection in Christ.

*Practical* sanctification is the Holy Spirit working in our lives to produce a holiness in our walk. This practical sanctification will never be perfect so long as we are in these bodies with our old sinful flesh.

*Total* sanctification will occur in the future when we are conformed to the image of Christ Jesus. Then both the position *and* the practice of sanctification will be perfect.

The literal meaning of the word *sanctification* is to be “set apart for God.” The moment a lost sinner comes to Christ and accepts Christ as Savior, that person is set aside for God’s use. This is clearly taught in the Old Testament in the tabernacle. God taught the Old Testament believers great doctrinal truths through very simple, practical lessons. In the tabernacle there were vessels and instruments which were used in the sacrifices. After they had gone through the wilderness for forty years, those pots and pans and forks and spoons were pretty well beaten and battered. I don’t think they were very attractive. I think that any good housewife would have said, “Let’s trade them in on a new set. Let’s throw these away.” However, God called them *holy* vessels. They were holy because they were set aside for the use of God. That is what made them holy.

In the same way this applies to a person. When he comes to Christ, he is saved. He is redeemed; he belongs to Christ. Paul says, “This is the will of God, even your sanctification.” You have been set aside for a holy purpose, for God’s use. Every child of God—not just preachers or missionaries or Christian workers, but every believer—is set aside for the use of God.

“That ye should abstain from fornication.” Don’t think it was only the Thessalonians who needed this admonition from Paul. Don’t think they were the only ones who engaged in sins, especially the sins of the flesh. Don’t think it was only in Roman times that idolatry involved sins of sex. Today we are seeing the rise of the worship of Satan and the practice of the occult. There are all kinds of amulets and rituals connected with such worship. Also there is astrology which seeks to tell people about themselves. And there is always sex involved in all of it.

The great tragedy today is to hear of some Christian worker who has become involved in sexual sin. And, unfortunately, there are even churches that will defend a minister who has been guilty of such. We are people who are supposed to be set aside for the use of God! Paul says that you cannot be involved in sexual sin and at the same time be used of God. One cannot live in sin and be a preacher or singer or Sunday school teacher or an officer in the church. I don’t care who you are, if you do, you will wreck the work of God.

Now, should a Christian strive for holiness? I think so. But you and I need to recognize that it is only in Christ that we can be acceptable to God. Paul says that we have been sanctified, brought to this high state, set apart for the use of God.

**That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour;**

**Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God [1 Thess. 4:4–5].**

All around these Thessalonian believers were the pagans who combined sex and religion. Sex was a religion among the Greeks. You could go to Corinth and find that out, but you didn't have to go to Corinth—you could find it out right in Thessalonica.

Paul says that we are to live a life that commends the gospel. The loose living that we find among some believers today brings the gospel into disrepute. Such people are not living for God or serving God. You cannot serve God and live in sin. He doesn't accept that.

“That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour.” The immorality that exists in our day is absolutely astounding. A very fine Christian leader who holds Bible classes on the campus of a college here in California told me that the boys' dormitory is Sodom and the girls' dormitory is Gomorrah. These poor kids know all about sex, but they don't know about love. God says that the body should be saved for the marriage relationship, and this applies to men and women. There are all sorts of reasons given for the fact that there is so much unhappiness in marriage. The problem is that the marriage partners are not people who have been set apart for the use of God and who are faithful to each other in a love relationship. When a person saves his body for marriage and is faithful to his partner, he is possessing his vessel “in sanctification and honour.” Such should be the practice of every child of God. Believe me, Paul puts it on the line.

**That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified [1 Thess. 4:6].**

“That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter.” You have to be honest if you are going to be a child of God.

“Because that the Lord is the avenger of all such.” I've lived long enough as a Christian and as a pastor to see this principle worked out in the lives of many believers. I've observed certain believers who have been dishonest in their dealings with others, and God *is* an avenger—He moves in and judges them.<sup>4</sup>

3. Am I willing to take God's Word at face value? Will I obey the Lord in all that He says (e.g., sexual purity, love for believers, a godly work ethic)? Do I recognize that when I fail to do so I am “rejecting” God (4:8)? How can I be a disciple that is “humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at God's word” (Isaiah 66:2b)?

“But on this *one* will I look:  
On *him who is* poor and of a contrite spirit,

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<sup>4</sup> McGee, J. V. (1991). *Thru the Bible commentary: The Epistles (1 and 2 Thessalonians)* (electronic ed., Vol. 49, pp. 65–66). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

And who trembles at My word.<sup>5</sup>

4. Will I make a conscious decision to love other believers in Christ (4:9-10)? How can I grow in my brotherly fondness (Greek = Philadelphia) for fellow believers? Read Romans 12:9-21. Am I using this passage as my measure of love for those believers who I know and serve with?

### ***Behave Like a Christian***

<sup>9</sup> Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; <sup>11</sup> not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; <sup>12</sup> rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; <sup>13</sup> distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

<sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

<sup>17</sup> Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. <sup>19</sup> Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> Therefore

*“If your enemy is hungry, feed him;  
If he is thirsty, give him a drink;  
For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.”*

<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.<sup>6</sup>

**But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another [1 Thess. 4:9].**

Love is the subject, and the statement he makes is rather amazing. A believer must have love for the brethren. It is a supernatural love that is taught of God: “The fruit of the Spirit is love.” It is not a theoretical kind of love, not just an abstract term. We have mentioned before that it cannot be just love in the abstract, but it must be love in the concrete. Such love can only be produced in the hearts of believers by the Holy Spirit. Notice that after Paul speaks of the Holy Spirit, brotherly love is the first thing that he mentions.

He writes, “As touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.” I believe that love is the identifying mark of a child of God.

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<sup>5</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Is 66:2). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>6</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ro 12:9–21). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

My roommate in college and I could wrestle, fight, argue, try to get dates with the same girl, and all that sort of thing. One day we really had had a knock-down-drag-out fight. We had literally torn up the room. He proceeded to tell me what he thought of me, and it was not very complimentary. Then I proceeded to tell him what I thought of him and that wasn't very complimentary either. All of a sudden it occurred to me, "Look, you are the greatest proof that I am a child of God! One of the evidences that a person is a child of God is that he loves his brother. John emphasizes it and it is in 1 Thessalonians that we are taught of God to love our brother. In spite of the fact that you are the most contemptible person I have ever met, the most unlovely person I have ever met, I love you!" He looked startled and began to laugh. "You know, I love you, and you're lots worse than I am!"

This man is now a retired preacher, just as I am. Once in a while we have an opportunity to see one another. He is still a very ornery individual, but I love him because he is a child of God. And I think he loves me. That is the proof that we are the children of God...

...If you want to put the blue litmus paper down in your life to test it and find out whether or not you are a genuine believer, this is the place to put it down: Do you love the brethren?<sup>7</sup>

5. Am I so conscientious about my work, so skilled at what I do, so helpful to the people around me, that it makes them wonder why I work the way I do (4:11-12)? How can I improve my skills and attitude? Read Ephesians 6:5-9 and Colossians 3:22-4:1. In what ever you do are you doing it unto Jesus?

### ***Bondservants and Masters***

<sup>5</sup> Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; <sup>6</sup> not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, <sup>7</sup> with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, <sup>8</sup> knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether *he is* a slave or free.

<sup>9</sup> And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Bondservants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh, not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but in sincerity of heart, fearing God. <sup>23</sup> And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, <sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ. <sup>25</sup> But he who does wrong will be repaid for what he has done, and there is no partiality.

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<sup>7</sup> McGee, J. V. (1991). *Thru the Bible commentary: The Epistles (1 and 2 Thessalonians)* (electronic ed., Vol. 49, p. 68). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>8</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Eph 6:5-9). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

**4** Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.<sup>9</sup>

6. What was the general attitude about death in my family growing up? Who was the first person I was close to who died? How did this person's death affect me? What else has shaped my view of death and dying? How have I responded when I have lost a non-Christian loved one in death? What was the difference when losing a Christian loved one?

<sup>13</sup> But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.<sup>110</sup>

7. The Bible teaches that the moment a believer dies he or she goes immediately and directly into the presence of Christ. Read 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 and Philippians 1:21-23. How does this comfort my fears and uncertainties? Paul anchors the Christian's hope in the death and resurrection of Jesus. According to 1 Corinthians 15:14-19, what are some of the consequences if Jesus did not truly rise from the dead?

<sup>6</sup> So *we are* always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord. <sup>7</sup> For we walk by faith, not by sight. <sup>8</sup> We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>21</sup> For to me, to live *is* Christ, and to die *is* gain. <sup>22</sup> But if *I* live on in the flesh, this *will mean* fruit from *my* labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. <sup>23</sup> For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, *which is* far better.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up—if in fact the dead do not rise. <sup>16</sup> For if *the* dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ is not risen, your faith *is* futile; you are still in your sins! <sup>18</sup> Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. <sup>19</sup> If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable.<sup>13</sup>

8. Could Jesus return today? Why or why not? How is this reality affecting my life today? Do I remain in anticipation of Christ's return? Is there anything that I need to make right before Christ's return?

<sup>19</sup> For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Is it* not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? <sup>20</sup> For you are our glory and joy.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Col 3:22–4:1). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>10</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Th 4:13–14). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>11</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (2 Co 5:6–8). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>12</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Php 1:20–23). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>13</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Co 15:15–19). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>14</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Th 2:19–20). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>13</sup> looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ<sup>15</sup>

9. Is there someone in my life who is currently going through grief? How can I comfort, encourage, and show the love of Christ? Read 2 Corinthians 1:3-4. Have I been comforted and encouraged? Read Hebrews 10:23-25.

### ***Comfort in Suffering***

<sup>3</sup> Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>41</sup> So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Let us hold fast the confession of *our* hope without wavering, for He who promised *is* faithful. <sup>24</sup> And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, <sup>25</sup> not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.<sup>18</sup>

10. Do I have a balanced understanding of the end times? Are my views based upon Scripture, the opinions of others, experience, or personal preference? How can I ensure that I do my best to seek the Scriptures when deriving my theological convictions on the end times?

### THE VARIOUS RAPTURE VIEWS:

The Pretribulational Rapture

The rapture will occur  
before the tribulation  
period begins.

The Partial Rapture

Faithful Christians will be  
raptured while those who  
are unfaithful will be left to  
go through the purging of  
the tribulation.

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<sup>15</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (1 Th 2:13). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>16</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (2 Co 1:3-4). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>17</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Ac 5:40-41). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>18</sup> *The New King James Version*. (1982). (Heb 10:23-25). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.



The Midtribulational Rapture

The rapture will occur at  
the midpoint of the  
tribulation.

The Prewrath Rapture

The rapture will occur five-  
and-a-half years through  
the tribulation, when the  
wrath of God begins to be  
poured out on the earth at  
seventh seal.

The Posttribulational Rapture

The rapture will occur at  
the end of the tribulation  
right before Christ's second  
coming.

From a series on the teachings of Thessalonians by Keith Krell