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*By the Book™* A Chapter by  
Chapter Bible Study Series  
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## Let's Begin

*Several years ago, Baptist Press spoke of a pastor in Mississippi who was preaching on the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. After quoting Matthew 24:27, "For as the lightning cometh out of the east, and shineth even unto the west; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be," a large light bulb fell from its socket in the ceiling and shattered on the floor in front of the pulpit. The people were suddenly shaken by the broken light bulb. The pastor held his composure, looked up to the congregation and said, "His coming will be just as sudden, and unexpected, and devastating to dreams that are not Christ-centered."*

*How are we to live until Jesus comes again? What is expected from believers individually and collectively as a church? We noted in the introduction that every chapter in 1 Thessalonians refers to Christ's coming again. In chapter 4, the second coming of Jesus is especially pronounced.*

*As we make our journey through chapter four, let's follow the outline below:*

- I. Christians Must Live Righteously (vv. 1-8)**
- II. Christians Must Live Affectionately (vv. 9-12)**
- III. Christians Must Live Expectantly (vv. 13-18)**

## I. Christians Must Live Righteously (vv. 1-8)

Christians have a tendency to get out of balance. In other words, we easily follow extremes. For example, some believers may get so captivated studying the Bible, they become silent witnesses as it were to the saving news of Jesus Christ. Who could fault someone for wanting to study the Bible? Is not the Bible the centerpiece of our spiritual development? It most certainly is! However, if all we do is sit in a Bible study with other Christians, how will the world be evangelized? The very Scripture one studies commands the Bible student to go into all the world and share the Gospel with every creature (cp. Mark 16:15; Matt. 28:19-20).

No clearer illustration of people given to extremes can be found in God's Word than the church in Thessalonica. Paul transitions to practical matters; that is, the living out of our faith. A Christian's walk must be holy and righteous. The Apostle writes, "Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and

exhort *you* by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, *even* your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour" (vv. 1-4). Paul is profoundly clear. His concern about how believers "ought to walk" in order to "please God" and fulfill the "will of God" cannot be missed.

The key word is "sanctification," a word almost dropped out of today's Christian vocabulary. Nonetheless, it remains imperative to understand precisely what the Apostle means when he says the will of God is the believer's "sanctification."

*If all we do is sit in a Bible study with other Christians, how will the world be evangelized?*



The Greek word for “sanctification” is *hagiasmos*, the root of which is *hagios*, which means “holy,” or “sacred.” The term was used of the “Holy of Holies” in the Old Testament and “saints” and “sanctuary” in the New Testament. Hence, Paul is referring to believers being “set apart” for that which is holy. Hebrews warns us no one who evades holiness may expect to see the Lord (Heb. 12:14). In short, believers are to live holy, righteous lives.

Paul offers a painfully clear example of what it means to be holy: *abstaining from fornication*. We must be careful to understand what the Bible says and what it does not say. The Bible does not condemn sex. Sex is not sinful. God created and designed the human body—both male and female—for conjugal relationships. The difficulty is, our sinfulness skews His design, and we use the beautiful gift God gave us for selfish, fleshly desires. And, just what would constitute selfish, fleshly desires? In other words, how is sex used wrongly?

Paul offers two specific ways sex is misused. The first way sex is misused is *pre-marital* sexual relationships. Note again the Apostle’s words, “... that ye should abstain from fornication... to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence...” (vv. 3-5). Every believer is to “possess his vessel” in both sanctification and honor. While there exist two possible meanings for “vessel”—the body (2 Cor. 4:7) and a wife (1 Pet. 3:7)—the key to understanding which of the two Paul means here is located in the verb “possess.” It basically means “to acquire.” Hence, Paul is obviously speaking of acquiring a wife, since there is little hope of making sense in “acquiring” a body!

*We must be careful to understand what the Bible says and what it does not say.*

### Reflection Connection

*Do you think there is sufficient focus in the church on dealing with sexual sins? Why or why not?*

In the end, Paul is referring to dating and courtship before the marriage contract is fulfilled. A wife is “acquired” through the process of dating and courtship. However, to enter into intimate relations prior to the marriage ceremony is to commit “fornication.” It is to defile the relationship. The Greek term translated “fornication” is *porneia*, which has the idea of illicit sex. It includes many different kinds of sexual perversion, but is clearly distinguished from adultery by the Lord Jesus (Matt. 15:19; Mark 7:21).

Another way sex is misused is by *extra-marital* relationships. Paul writes, “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” (v. 6). The Apostle is concerned some will overstep the line and take advantage of one another. The fact is, when a couple marries, God draws a line and says, “Do not step over this line.” In other words, do not commit adultery (cp. Heb. 13:4). In addition, while physical adultery is mainly in focus here, Jesus made it clear that one may commit spiritual adultery in one’s heart through uncontrolled lust (Matt. 5:27-28; cp. also Eph. 5:4).

While remaining sexually pure is not the sum total of righteousness, purity nevertheless perfectly illustrates Paul’s concern for holy living. Every Christian



must pursue holiness each and every day. We must live righteously until Jesus comes.

## II. Christians Must Live Affectionately (vv. 9-12)

Believers must not only live *righteously*, believers must also live *affectionately*. Paul explains, “But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another. And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more” (vv. 9-10). The Greek word translated “brotherly love” is the word from which Philadelphia gets its name, a love based upon kinship. It is the love which binds children of the same father, a sibling type of love. All believers are brothers and sisters by virtue of the new birth in Jesus Christ.

*Love is one of the marks of the Christian family.*

Moreover, brotherly love is the love taught by God Himself. Paul reminded the Thessalonians they were “taught of God to love one another.” Love is one of the marks of the Christian family. The indwelling Holy Spirit makes sure love is abundantly expressed through the life of the believer (Rom. 5:5). Indeed this love is one mark which must “increase more and more.”

### Reflection Connection

*How may one discern between godly ambition and worldly ambition? Explain.*

Paul also reminds the Christian that affection need not remain empty of godly ambition. He writes, “And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you” (v. 11). Evidently, some of the Thessalonians were obsessed with the second coming of Jesus Christ. Indeed they were so captivated by the idea, their daily lives were disrupted. They became completely unbalanced in their walk with God. Paul exhorts them to “be quiet” and to do their “own business.”

On the one hand, they must learn to be patient, waiting contentedly for the Lord’s return. On the other hand, they were to continue working, not abandoning for a moment their unfulfilled duties. Children must be schooled; wages must be earned; crops must be planted.

In addition, another important factor had to be considered: *unbelievers*. Paul continues, “That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing” (v. 12). A Christian’s walk before the Lord while waiting on the Lord significantly impacts unbelievers in our sphere of influence. How Christians live may mean eternal life or eternal death for lost people. Hence, believers are to walk honestly and lack nothing. Believers are independent and self-supporting. While believers are citizens of this world, their most significant citizenship is heaven. Hence, they cannot be “loafers” or parasites.



### III. Christians Must Live Expectantly (vv. 13-18)

Christians must live expectantly until the Lord Jesus comes again. Paul addressed two problems in relationship to the return of Christ. On the one hand, he addressed those who exploited Christ's return as a "spiritual" reason to be lazy (see above), and on the other, a more genuine concern some believers expressed about dying before the Lord came back. Note carefully the Apostle's words, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope" (v. 13). Paul referred to death as "sleep" (cp. John 11:11-14). Sleep is a temporary state, and so is death. In addition, since sleep is synonymous with rest, the image Paul (and Jesus) employs fits perfectly.

Additionally, Paul tells us three things about dead believers. First, we do not sorrow for them in hopelessness. Second, Christ's resurrection is the basis of the believer's resurrection. Paul is not raising doubts but stating facts. Third, believers who have died will not be slighted when the Lord returns.

*Sleep is a temporary state, and so is death.*

At this point, Paul writes what may be the greatest passage in the Bible on the return of our Lord and our subsequent rapture. He writes, "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (vv. 14-17).

*First, Paul reveals the return of Christ.* His language demands an undeniable *personal* return. "Himself" is emphatic in the Greek. No substitute can come in Jesus' stead (cp. John 14:3; Acts 1:11). The joy of welcoming His blood-bought people will remain His own. Paul's language also demands a *powerful* return. Indicative of the powerful return are three sounds: a shout, an archangel's voice, and a trumpet (cp. John 11:43; Jude 9; 1 Cor. 15:52). Jesus' first coming was relatively quiet and humble. When He returns, it will be loud and exalting!

*Second, Paul reveals a resurrection of Christians.* Believers who are living when the Lord returns will by no means "prevent them which are asleep." Obviously, Paul is referring to the resurrection of dead Christians, the dead in Christ. What a sight to behold when believers come from the realm of the dead! From all over the earth, graves will burst open and give up the dead! They will be raised "first." Understand: *the Bible teaches two resurrections even though the two are at times viewed as one* (cp. Dan. 12:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15). Nothing surpasses the miraculous greatness of the first resurrection. Those who died with cancer will be raised without it! The crippled will walk and the blind will see! New bodies fitted for eternity will be given.



### Reflection Connection

*The Bible makes a distinction between the Lord Jesus coming for His saints and the Lord Jesus coming with His saints. Are you able to detail the differences between the two? Explain.*

*Third, Paul reveals a rapture of Christians.* Some appear to think that because the term “rapture” is found neither here nor in any other passage of Scripture, then we should not believe in the rapture. However, that makes about as much sense as suggesting that because the term “trinity” is not found in any passage of Scripture, then we should not believe in the Trinity! The term is implied in the phrase “caught up together.” It means to seize boldly, to draw by a swift, sudden movement. Hence, the rapture is a “catching away” or a “catching up” of living believers by the Lord Himself.

Indeed the rapture of believers includes both a *transformation* (1 Cor. 15:51-53) and a *triumph* (cp. Eph. 2:2; 6:12). We will be like the Lord Jesus having complete victory over the evil one.

*Fourth, Paul reveals a residence for Christians.* He is clear, “and so shall we ever be with the Lord.” Being with the Lord always is a most blessed thought. Christians will inherit a heavenly home where only happiness dwells. Sin and wickedness will forever remain absent while righteousness and truth will forever remain present. No child will ever die. No thief will ever rob for the simple reason no thieves will be in heaven! Honor will remain preeminent. The Lord Jesus rules with grace, love, mercy and peace everlasting.

### Golden Greek Nugget

In verse six, Paul carefully exhorts the Thessalonians to not “defraud his brother.” The term translated “defraud” means “to take more,” “to overreach,” or “to take advantage of.” And, while the immediate context refers to sexual purity in marriage, the same moral plea would be applicable in all our dealings with others. We are never to take advantage or exploit another person for personal gain.

### Wrap Up

*No wonder the Apostle Paul ends this great chapter with these words, “Wherefore comfort one another with these words” (v. 18). No greater comfort can the believer possess than being at peace with the Lord Jesus’ return. Upon His return, believers dead and alive will be raised to be with Him forever. On the other hand, one cannot imagine the pain, heartache, and suffering of those who are left behind. No hope exists apart from a saving faith in Jesus Christ. The Bible says, if a person will turn from sin and trust Christ, he or she will receive new life. Preparation for the coming of Jesus will officially begin! The promise will then be yours, “so shall we ever be with the Lord.”*

