

(15) We tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not meet Him ahead of those who have died.

- Paul appeals to his authority to speak for **the Lord**. His information came from the best possible source.

(16) For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the Christians who have died will rise from their graves.

- Jesus will not come with suggestions or options. He will **command**. The **first** thing happening when the **Lord** comes is the resurrection of **Christians who have died**.

(17) Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever.

- The second thing will be the transformation of living believers.

(18) So encourage each other with these words.

- A great unknown has been removed for these new believers and that is encouragement's finest hour.
- Encouragement is a great component of Christian leadership. In fact, it can be a great component of our interaction with one another.

1 Thessalonians Chapters 3-4

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The Translation:

We have chosen the *New Living Translation* for this study. It is a thought-for-thought translation made by 90 translators.

Resources:

We have consulted and quoted from **William Barclay** (*Daily Study Bible*), and **Wilbur Fields** (*Thinking Through Thessalonians*).

Paul has recounted how they came to Christ and retold their story far and wide. Now he reveals his inner feelings about them as a group of new believers.

(I Thessalonians 3:1) Finally, when we could stand it no longer, we decided to stay alone in Athens,

- Paul had been driven from Thessalonica, then Berea and was finally escorted by his friends to **Athens**, Greece. It was a great city of philosophy, learning and the arts and Paul would introduce Christ to them. Meanwhile his fears about the young Thessalonian Christians were heaping up day after day.

(2) and we sent Timothy to visit you. He is our brother and God's co-worker in proclaiming the Good News of Christ. We sent him to strengthen you, to encourage you in your faith, (3) and to keep you from being shaken by the troubles you were going through. But you know that we are destined for such troubles.

- From his residence in Athens he sent word to Timothy who had remained at Berea (Acts 17:14) to go back to

the believers at Thessalonica. He had a great heart for those brothers and sisters. Timothy was sent to:

- **Strengthen** the new Christians in their convictions. Remind them that following Jesus is the right way to go.
- **Encourage.** Point out how that have been successful so far.
- Help them handle **troubles**. Suffering goes with the territory because the devil opposes what they are doing.

(4) Even while we were with you, we warned you that troubles would soon come – and they did, as you well know.

- These new believers had not been enticed with a promise of life getting easier. Instead Paul rightly warned of **troubles** looming. And the **troubles** are already appearing.

(5) That is why, when I could bear it no longer, I sent Timothy to find out whether your faith was still strong. I was afraid that the tempter had gotten the best of you and that our work had been useless.

- Paul just had to know! And that's why he sent Timothy. Was their faith still strong? There was no once-saved-always-saved thinking with Paul. He knew that the tempter wanted them all back in his domain.

(6) But now Timothy has just returned, bringing us good news about your faith and love. He reports that you always remember our visit with joy and that you want to see us as much as we want to see you.

- The perfect news: They remembered Paul **joyfully** and want him to **visit** again. That was really a spiritual blood test.

- Paul now shifts to the positive of what to be doing: **love one another**. They were **already** obeying this and he is asking them to pick up the pace.

(11) Make it your goal to live a quiet life, minding your own business and working with your hands, just as we instructed you before. (12) Then people who are not Christians will respect the way you live, and you will not need to depend on others.

- **Wilbur Fields** warns about a common view: “Many Bible interpreters have speculated that the Thessalonians were loafing and living off their Christian brethren, because they expected Christ to come at any moment. Nothing in the Scriptures connects any false ideas about Christ’s return with the people not minding their own business.”

“Paul gives two reasons why they should be quiet, and mind their business:

- (1) To present an honorable appearance to outsiders.
- (2) To lack none of the necessities of life.”

(13) And now, dear brothers and sisters, we want you to know what will happen to the believers who have died so you will not grieve like people who have no hope.

- Here is a peek into the future so they won't **grieve** like unbelievers. **Grief** yes, but not hopeless **grief**.

(14) For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus returns, God will bring back with Him the believers who have died.

- The anchor of a believer's hope is that **Jesus was raised back to life** and **when He returns**, so will **believers who have died**.

again has seen a pronounced shift in standards of sexual behaviour.”

(6) Never harm or cheat a Christian brother in this matter by violating his wife, for the Lord avenges all such sins, as we have solemnly warned you before.

- One sexual sin that Paul spelled out was adultery—getting involved with someone else's wife. The Jewish believers would think of King David but the pagan Gentile believer would have no memory of the story.

When the decision was made that had God welcomed Gentiles into the church, only few things were required of them as presented in a brief letter:

“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden on you than these few requirements: You must abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality. If you do this, you will do well. Farewell.” Acts 15:28-29

(7) God has called us to live holy lives, not impure lives. (8) Therefore, anyone who refuses to live by these rules is not disobeying human teaching but is rejecting God, who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

- Behind the **rule** is that it is **rejecting God** Himself who has given believers **His Holy Spirit**.

(9) But we don't need to write to you about the importance of loving each other, for God Himself has taught you to love one another. (10) Indeed, you already show your love for all the believers throughout Macedonia. Even so, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you to love them even more.

(7) So we have been greatly encouraged in the midst of our troubles and suffering, dear brothers and sisters, because you have remained strong in your faith. (8) It gives us new life to know that you are standing firm in the Lord.

- The result for Paul was **encouragement**. He had been through many trials at Corinth and this good news was a breath of fresh air for him. He can see the hand of the **Lord** at work.

(9) How we thank God for you! Because of you we have great joy as we enter God's presence. (10) Night and day we pray earnestly for you, asking God to let us see you again to fill the gaps in your faith.

- Paul's prayer time was enhanced. He could see God working on earth. He had been asking God to allow him to return the Thessalonica to fill the gaps that he could not address when he was there the first time.
- **Barclay** observes: “There is joy. Paul was glad that his converts were standing fast. He had the joy of one who had created something which would stand the tests of time. There is no joy like that of the parent who can point to a child who has done well.”

(11) May God our Father and our Lord Jesus bring us to you very soon.

- Paul's first prayer was to see them **soon**. God did let Paul return later as **Wilbur Fields** observes: “The prayer of Paul that he might get to visit the Thessalonians was answered in due time, for Paul visited Thessalonica on his third missionary trip, and again afterwards.”

(12) And may the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow and overflow, just as our love for you overflows.

- **Love** is more than a one-time event. Rather, it **grows** as we live for Christ and Paul is praying that they will be **flooded in love for all people.**

(13) May He, as a result, make your hearts strong, blameless, and holy as you stand before God our Father when our Lord Jesus comes again with all His holy people. Amen.

- His third request is that their love will enable them to be blameless when Jesus comes again. **Barclay** has it right when he says, “At this time his mind was full of thoughts of the Second Coming of Christ when men would stand before the judgment seat of God. It was his prayer that God would so preserve his people in righteousness that on that day they would not be ashamed. The only way to prepare to meet God is to live daily with him. The shock of that day will be not for those who have so lived that they have become God's friends but for those who meet him as a terrible stranger.”

===== **End of Chapter 3** =====

Paul has been writing mostly about the past. Now he looks the other way and points to the future. This is where the progress takes shape.

(4:1) Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to live in a way that pleases God, as we have taught you. You live this way already, and we encourage you to do so even more.

- Just as love is not a one-time event but a progression, so lifestyle change begins at repentance, but takes place over time. The changes are those that **please God**, the very core of our relationship with Him. Instead of thinking of boundaries to limit our conduct, we are to

take the action that is most pleasing to Him. He puts obedience in our court.

(2) For you remember what we taught you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

- The changes that Paul had already taught them were not his own ideas, but came directly from the **authority** of the **Lord Jesus**. Bear in mind that he was an Apostle.

(3) God's will is for you to be holy, so stay away from all sexual sin.

- Many of these new believers had been pagans a short time before and for many, sexual activities were not even a moral issue.

(4) Then each of you will control his own body and live in holiness and honor — (5) not in lustful passion like the pagans who do not know God and His ways.

- **William Barclay** sets forth the then current practices: “In Greece immorality had always been quite blatant. Long ago Demosthenes had written: ‘We keep prostitutes for pleasure; we keep mistresses for the day-to-day needs of the body; we keep wives for the begetting of children and for the faithful guardianship of our homes.’ So long as a man supported his wife and family there was no shame whatsoever in extra-marital relationships.

“It was to men and women who had come out of a society like that that Paul wrote this paragraph. What may seem to many the merest commonplace of Christian living was to them startlingly new. One thing Christianity did was to lay down a completely new code in regard to the relationship of men and women; it is the champion of purity and the guardian of the home. This can not be affirmed too plainly in our own day which