

First Thessalonians 4:1-8

In 3:10 Paul said he wanted to see the Thessalonian believers again to “supply what is lacking in your faith.”

Paul knows what the weak areas are and what is missing because of Timothy’s report which seems to indicate these four remaining sections of the letter:

1. 4:3-8, Christian lifestyle in the world
2. 4:9-12, Christian interaction with other believers
3. 4:13-18, Christians who have died before the coming of Christ
4. 5:1-11, The Day of the Lord

It appears that Paul is simply reinforcing what he has already taught and encouraging behavior that the Thessalonians are already doing. He just desires them to show continued growth and “to do this more and more.” (4:1)

For the remainder of the letter Paul is going to:

1. Encourage them to not fade, but continue to grow
2. Provide clarification
3. Provide additional insight and instruction
- 4.

4:1 – transition from friendship to apostolic expectation and instruction. (4:1-2 is similar to the language of 4:9-10)

“**Finally**” is *loipon* and does not mean Paul is wrapping up his letter. It should be translated like KJ “furthermore” or Rheims “for the rest”

“**Ask**” – or “entreat” is *erotomen* is used by Paul in his letters to friendly, obedient churches (1 Thes. 5:12; 2 Thes. 2:1; Phil. 4:3). It is a little stronger than the English word “ask”, but it is not an apostolic “command.”

“**Urge**” – is Paul’s most often used verb for appealing believers for righteous conduct. It is the word *parakaloumen* and is used by Paul 55 times. This word is a stronger than “ask” (*erotomen*)

The basis for Paul’s appeal to the Thessalonian believers is that they and Paul are “in the Lord Jesus.” In a sense, outside of the Lord Jesus the Apostle Paul has no authority. Paul is not writing a letter to the world, but to believers. Paul addressed the unbelieving world at other times and places in his ministry with the message of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:11-21).

Paul had brought the Thessalonians to Christ, now based on that standard and that authority, Paul says two things:

1. They have been living
2. They must continue to grow

NOTICE: Faith in Jesus leads to a lifestyle that pleases God.

Our “Faith in Jesus” establishes our relationship with God.

As “Sons of God” we establish our righteous behavior in Christ.

Paul is interested in their continuing to grow in the instruction they have already received.

4:2 – The moral ethics of Christ where not the moral ethics of the Greco-Roman world.

So, the believing Thessalonians were having to follow a higher standard than they did in their pre-Christian days.

They even had to develop a new sense of right and wrong on some issues.

The two broad areas addressed in the rest of the letter are:

1. Morality
2. Idleness (5:14 and, again, in 2 Thes. 3:6-13)

4:3-8 – Paul begins to build with what Paul had said in 3:10, “is lacking in your faith” for Paul’s goal was that they would be “blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.” (3:13)

Sexual practices of the pagans at this time can be summed up by this quote from one of their own: “Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children.”

This section (4:3-8) is three Greek sentences:

1. 3-6, previous instruction on sexual morality is revisited
2. v. 7, viewed through God’s will
3. v. 8, disobedience

4:3 – This is the heading and summary of the next section: “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified.”

“sanctified” is **agiasmos**. (also translated as “holiness”) Paul uses it 3x in this passage and only 5x in the rest of his writings: 2 Thes. 2:13; 1 Cor. 1:30; Rom. 6:19, 22; 1 Tim. 2:15) Some pagan philosophers were concerned with morality, but none wrote of sanctity or holiness. Holiness is to do things the way God intended and to keep in line with God, the creators, own character.

The focus of sanctity here concerns sexuality the way God intended it.

Note: sexuality is not bad, evil, corrupt but it does have purpose and goals established by the creator.

See: 1 Timothy 4:1-5 – notice the contrast that puts sexuality in the ditch on both the side of the ascetics who say “no sex” and the pagans who have “no boundary for sex”.

4:4 – The command is dealt with first positively: “in holiness and honor” (contrast with “not in passionate lust” of 4:5)

Literal translation: “This is God’s will...that each of you know/learn to acquire his own vessel in holiness and honor, not in the passions of lust.”

“vessel” is the direct object

“acquire” is the normal meaning of the verb (KJ translate it as “possess” which is not normal in the present tense, but in the perfect tense.)

Options:

“vessel” is a metaphor for “wife”

-“wife” makes sense of the verb “acquire”

-“wife” makes sense in verse 4:6 where the Christian man wouldn’t mess around with another man’s “vessel”

-1 Peter 3:7 calls the wife the “weaker vessel”

-Sirach 36:24 uses the verb “acquire” with “wife”

But, on the negative side:

- why use a metaphor when Paul does not feel the need other places?

-addressed to “each of you”, but not all men are getting married and many readers are women

-other places in the Bible say plainly, “stay away from other men’s wives” (paraphrased)

-1 Peter 3:7 calls both men and women vessels

-wives in the first century were never acquired based on “love” or “passionate lust” but by contract

OR-

“vessel” is a euphemism referring to the male sex organ

OR-

“vessel” is the your own body.

4:5 – Then the command is dealt with negatively: “not in passionate lust” (contrast with “in holiness and honor” of 4:4)

4:6 – ends the sentence 4:3-6

4:7 –

4:8 – the presence and gifting of the Holy Spirit changed their whole lives, so because of this live in step with the Spirit!