

We now turn to the fourth section of Paul's Epistle to the Thessalonians. We have seen the salutation (1:1); Paul's thanksgiving (1:2-10); and Paul's defense of his ministry (2:1-3:13). Now we will study Paul's exhortation to the Thessalonian believers.

Just as Paul had a desire to return to the Thessalonians to complete what they were lacking in, he now points out some of those areas where the Thessalonians could improve. This section provides the foundation for Paul's exhortation of holy living (4:1-12); exhortation regarding future redemption (4:13-5:11); and exhortation to the church body (5:12-22). This section comprises the last major portion of the first epistle. Paul uses the term **Finally then** (4:1) to indicate this last section of exhortations to be his final topic.<sup>1</sup>

The recipients of this letter are described as **brethren** (4:1). Again, he highlights their familial relationship with God and other believers as a foundation for the fulfillment of these exhortations. Only those who are elected into the community of faith will be able to live out the exhortations in the remainder of the epistle.

## I. EXHORTATION FOR HOLY LIVING (4:1-12)

Despite their continued growth in the faith Paul realizes their need for more spiritual growth. This section is Paul's exhortation for the Thessalonians regarding holy living.

### A. Continual Improvement (4:1-2)

1. The Appeal for Improvement (v. 1a). The encouragement from Paul is expressed early on **we request and exhort you**. The nature of these final exhortations is one of encouragement. While some may think the verbs serve a synonymous purpose<sup>2</sup> it is probably best to see the terms complimenting and reinforcing one another.<sup>3</sup> The first word **request** has the idea of asking a peer to perform an action. It is as if Paul is seeing himself as their friend, and not an authority, asking them to obey. The second verb **exhort** carries the idea of "exhort, urge, or appeal." This word carries the idea of a formal apostolic request. The two verbs are in the present tense indicating Paul's continual concern for their spiritual growth.

This encouragement is directed is specified to be **in the Lord Jesus**. This phrase sets the groundwork for how the exhortations that follow are performed. None of these activities are done apart from a believer's union with Christ.

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<sup>1</sup> See use of the conjunction, οὖν.

<sup>2</sup> Charles A. Wanamaker, "The Epistles to the Thessalonians," *NIGTC*, 149.

<sup>3</sup> Commentators who see a distinct meaning behind each verb include Robert L. Thomas, "1 & 2 Thessalonians" *EBC* and D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 174-75.

Theologically, our union to Christ has made us dead to sin and alive in Him. This is a paradox that is found all throughout Scripture. We are constantly told that our union with Christ empowers us to live a godly life (Rom 6; Gal 2:20).

2. The Background of Encouragement (v. 1b). Paul's encouragement has certain specifics. These specifics are given as Paul continues. The specifics for which the encouragement is given is for the Thessalonian believers to continue to live a God honoring life.

The missionaries had left the Thessalonians with a specific set of instructions **that as you received from us**. In the short time the missionaries spent with the Thessalonians several instructions for Christian living were established. Instructions regarding how to live the Christian life were given that Paul expected the Thessalonians to apply. The body of doctrine taught to the Thessalonians had a practical impact on the Thessalonians.

The Thessalonians were equipped **as to how you ought to walk and please God**. First we must recognize this to be the duty of the believer. Literally the phrase can be translated “as to how you *must*.<sup>4</sup> For the Christian it is not an option to live pleasing to God, but a mandate. It stresses the importance of fervent Christian living from all who have been redeemed.

The idea of walking is commonly used to communicate the idea of the Christian lifestyle. Believers today use that type of language in small group/accountability settings when the question is asked, “how’s is your walk with God?” It is not a foreign idea, but common even in our day. Just as Paul sought to please God in his life (2:4) the Thessalonians were also given the tools to do so in their own lives.

The second verb expresses the aim of every Christian, the pleasure of God. Christian living cannot be separated from the obligation to obey which is pleasing to God. Every believer lives and exists for the glory of God. The Westminster Catechism begins by stating that the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Leon Morris says, “The whole Christian life is God-centered. Christians do not ‘walk’ with a view to obtaining the maximum amount of satisfaction for themselves but in order to please their Lord (elsewhere Paul warns against walking in evil paths, (2 Cor. 4:2; 10:2). Paul does not specify any particular way in which they should ‘please’ God; he is concerned with the whole bent of the life.”<sup>5</sup>

3. The Confirmation (v. 1c). The Thessalonians did indeed show signs of Christian growth and maturity. Paul had stated earlier in the epistle that they

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<sup>4</sup> The verb δεῖ is traditionally translated “must” as should be the case here. It is used in Mark 8:31 to describe the necessity of the Messiah’s suffering.

<sup>5</sup> Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 115.

had repented from worshiping idols to worshiping the one true and living God (1:9). They have also been commended for persevering in the faith under hardship (3:6). The news or instruction for the Thessalonians to live to please God may have discouraged the persevering saints. Therefore, Paul does stop to affirm the God glorifying life that they are indeed living, **just as you actually do walk**. The affirmation is given as part of the encouragement. The Thessalonians did show signs of growth and Paul recognized their growth.

4. The Decree (v. 1d). The actual encouragement is given at the end of the verse, **that you excel still more**. The point of the exhortation that Paul gives is for the Thessalonians to continue in their spiritual growth.

The very purpose of the instruction was that the Thessalonians grow all the more in the faith. Paul was well pleased to hear that the believers had persevered under such hardship, but they are instructed to never be satisfied with their spiritual condition.

Paul does not specify as to what the Thessalonians are to excel in, “excel in this or that.” Instead, it is left open ended indicating the general improvement that is needed in *all aspects* of Christian living, “There can be no finality in practical holiness in this life for the believer.”<sup>6</sup>

5. The Source of Instruction (v. 2). The source of instruction is given as a reminder for the Thessalonians, **for you know**. As fond as the Thessalonians were of Paul, the instruction is not given to satisfy a mere man. Rather, the Thessalonians knew that Paul was not acting for selfish ambition but was a man charged by God to minister to them.

The Thessalonians had a specific knowledge about the ministry of the Thessalonians. They knew **what commandments we gave you**. The idea behind **commandments** provides the picture of a military chain of command. Just as a commanding officer delivers commandments for his followers to heed, so too did the missionaries behave before the Thessalonians.

Commandments from men bear no weight and so Paul reminds them that the instructions given were **by the authority of the Lord Jesus**. In the eyes of the missionaries they were merely the messengers who were sanctioned, commissioned, and sent by Jesus. The Lord of all things is identified as the source of authority behind the instructions.

- B. Sexual Purity (4:3-8). The next set of exhortations for holy living is no longer general but specifically a reference to sexual purity. The Thessalonians were

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<sup>6</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 176.

encouraged to live a particular life of sexual purity that was different from the world and distinctly Christian.

This section is related to the previous section in that it explains one aspect of the instructions or commands that the missionaries gave to the Thessalonians.<sup>7</sup> The entire verse encompasses the very will of God.

Perhaps in our society the Christian view of sexuality is quickly diminishing and unacceptable by the world. As early as the sexual revolution in the mid 1900's and prior to that the world has always pushed the limits of sexual purity.

1. Purity as the Desire of God (v. 3a). The first sentence begins with the identification of God's will, **For this is the will of God**. The content of "this" is what comprises of God's will.<sup>8</sup> It is important that readers understand **the will of God** should not be accompanied with the definitive article.

Sexual purity is not **the** only part of God's will. Paul would later describe thanksgiving to God as part of His will also (cf. 5:18). Therefore, the teaching of sexual purity is one among many desires that God has for His people.

Richard Mayhue provides a chart that shows the Scripturally prescribed will of God:<sup>9</sup>

The Will of God	Scripture Reference
Salvation	1 Tim 2:4; 2 Pet 3:9
Sacrifice	Rom 12:1-2
Spirit-control	Eph 5:17-21
Sanctification	1 Thess 4:3-4
Submission	1 Pet 2:13-15
Satisfaction	1 Thess 5:18
Seeking	1 Jn 5:14-15
Serving	Ps 103:21
Suffering	1 Pet 3:17; 4:19
Shepherding	1 Pet 5:2

The believer's purity is part of God's will on the basis of God's holiness. God commands believers to be holy because He Himself is holy (Lev 11:44-45; cf. 1 Pet 1:15-16).

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<sup>7</sup> Use of the conjunction γάρ.

<sup>8</sup> The subject of the sentence in this non-verbal clause is the demonstrative pronoun τοῦτο (NNS) ("this").

<sup>9</sup> Richard Mayhue, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 113.

2. Purity as the Dedication of the Believer (v. 3b). The first aspect of God's will for the believer is a general statement of the Thessalonian's sanctification, **your sanctification**. The term sanctification refers not to the believer's position in Christ, but their progression towards Christ-likeness.

The Scriptures explicitly teach the continued spiritual growth a believer experiences until death or the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This process of becoming conformed into the image of God is called **sanctification** (Rom 6:19; Heb 12:14; 1 Pet 1:2). It is an activity of the Holy Spirit to make a believer more like Christ.

Paul reminds his readers that this activity of sanctification is experienced by *all* believers and they are no exception. The sanctification experienced by the Thessalonians was theirs (**yours**). God desires all of His children to continue to progress in holiness and sanctification.

3. Purity as the Duty of the Believer (vv. 3c-6). This section provides a series of statements that describe the practice and importance of sexual purity.<sup>10</sup>

- i. The Practices of Sexual Purity (vv. 3c-4). There are two practices of sexual purity that are expressed in this passage. The first practice is the discipline of abstinence. The second practice is the discipline of self-control.

Paul says that those who are to be sexually pure must **abstain from sexual immorality**. The term **abstain** demands the believer to be of strong self-discipline.<sup>11</sup> A key characteristic of a believer is one who is able to apply a consistent characteristic of refraining from sexual immorality. This was a discipline that had to be exercised by the individual believer **that you**.

The act of avoiding is specifically directed towards **sexual immorality**.<sup>12</sup> This is a term that applies to believers in any sexual immoral act. It is a reference to any sexual activity outside of the God ordained prescription for sex. These acts of immorality would include adultery, fornication, homosexuality, bestiality, and other perversions. Every believer is bound to abide by God's ordained parameters of marriage which only allows for sexual activity between the married.

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<sup>10</sup> There is a series of infinitive clauses that help us understand how and why a believer must be living a pure life, “ἀπέχεσθαι . . . εἰδέναι . . . κτᾶσθαι . . . ὑπερβαίνειν . . . πλεονεκτεῖν.”

<sup>11</sup> The middle voice could communicate a reflexive idea that involves the desire and effort of the believer. The present tense implies a continued and persistent characteristic action of abstaining.

<sup>12</sup> The term used here is πορνείας which is where the English word "pornography" is derived. Syntactically, it is accompanied with a definitive article in the prepositional phrase which shows forth its specificity.

The second practice of sexual purity exercised by the believer is the discipline of self-control, **that each of you know how to possess his own vessel**. The act of self-control begins with a commitment in the mind. The Thessalonians ought to “know” the practice of self-control. The term communicates the knowledge of ability and execution. The believer should be aware of the practices and procedures of self-discipline. A believer’s self-control is a matter of commitment, habit, or learning and not an impulse. The responsibility is dependent upon the individual believer, **each one of you**. No one can force or perform the work of self-discipline apart from that individual. Discipline is a practice that each believer must manifest in their life.

Each person ought to know **how to possess**. This conveys the idea of “mastery or to gain control.”<sup>13</sup> Believers ought to manifest a consistent practice of self-control. Temporary discipline is an oxymoron. The very nature of discipline implies consistency even under moments of temptation. The mastery of the believer is focused upon the individual’s **vessel**. This is a term that refers to the physical body.<sup>14</sup>

The sphere in which self-discipline is to be applied is **in sanctification and honor**. There are no short cuts to sexual purity. It is achieved in the context of practices that are pleasing to God. Believers must come to grips with the reality that self-discipline in sexual purity requires and demands a path guided by holiness. The body must be used in contexts of sexual purity.

A contrast is given regarding the topic of the discipline of sexual purity. This contrast is made between the believer and unbeliever, **not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God**. While believers strive for spiritual purity, the Gentiles or unbelievers practices self-discipline for the purpose of attaining more lust.

It is the **passion** of the unbeliever to lust after the things in the world. The term is related to the verb “suffer” which shows the intense longing. There is a longing in the unbeliever to do that which is worldly in the

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<sup>13</sup> The verb is not a reference to acquisition, but rather the gaining of control. This impacts how one will interpret the meaning of σκεῦος. The present tense of the verb is not ingressive, but durative communicating the idea that the individual must have the discipline of self-control or mastery over their own vessel/body.

<sup>14</sup> Many have debated the meaning of the term, σκεῦος (“vessel”). Some would say that the term refers to an individual’s “wife.” This view argues that men ought to acquire a wife if they are struggling with sexual purity. This would provide a sexual outlet for a man that is pleasing to God. The second suggested meaning is that the term refers to physical body arguing for the believer’s self-discipline of their own sexual desires. For arguments see Charles A. Wanamaker, “The Epistles to the Thessalonians,” *NIGTC*, 152; D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 181-82; Gene L. Green, “The Letters to the Thessalonians,” *PNTC*, 191; Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 120-21.

same way a child may long for a specific toy or candy as an immediate object of desire.

The term here for **Gentiles** is a reference to the heathen or the nations. It highlights the unbelieving community. The world will crave and long for things that are ungodly. Scripture describes the world as a place whose priorities are upside down so much so that they begin to pervert and distort that which God has made good (Phil 2:15). The world has worshiped the creation and not the Creator (Rom 1:25).

The reason for the world's behavior is because they have **not known God**. Paul here argues for a definitive change in lifestyle and priorities for those who have come to know God. While the world chases after impurity, believers pursue purity because of their new found status in Christ the Holy One.

- ii. The Importance of Sexual Purity (v. 6). This section stresses the importance of sexual purity by describing the consequences for disobeying the prescribed will of God to be sexually pure.

The Corruption of Sexual Purity (v. 6a). Violators of sexual purity within the walls of the church are charged with taking advantage of the brethren. Paul warns his readers **that no man transgress and defraud his brother.**<sup>15</sup>

The idea behind **transgress** communicates the idea of going beyond the limits. Our language today uses such language when people say, “don’t cross the line” or “you crossed the line.” God has created certain boundaries that believers must follow whether they are single or married.

Scripturally, limitations are given to both the single and the married. Singleness is a gift from God that allows a believer to freely serve the body of Christ (1 Cor 7:32). There are some who even are called to live a life of celibacy (Matt 19:12). The single life is intended to provide the believer with a platform to serve the Lord in a capacity that is not available to the married person. This is pleasing in God’s sight.

The limitations for marriage are simple. Scripture teaches that sexual intimacy is reserved exclusively for the married couple. The Old and New Testament affirm that marriage is a union reserved for only a male and female (Gen 2:24; Mk 10:1-9; 1 Cor 7:1-7).

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<sup>15</sup> While some believe that the term is referring to the topic of business interactions, the context does not allow for a change in topic. Paul continues to address the issue of sexual purity and how the brethren relate to one another in the matter. For arguments and pros and cons for each position see Charles A. Wanamaker, “The Epistles to the Thessalonians,” *NIGTC*, 154-56; D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 185-86.

Christians cannot break these scriptural guidelines. Any activity outside of that which is prescribed in the New Testament is a transgression. All activity that is sexual is only permissible in marriage.

Believers are also instructed not to **defraud** their brother. The term communicates the idea of outwitting, cheating, or exploiting other believers. These individuals are guilty of being in the fellowship and lying and cheating for the purpose of sexual favors.

The area of fraudulence and transgression is expressed **in this matter**. This refers to the context of sexual purity. This doesn't mean that transgression and fraud are acceptable in other areas of the Christian's life. Rather, Paul just specifies that he is continuing to speak of sexual purity and not another topic.

The Consequence for Sexual Purity (v. 6b). The reason why the believer should not break God's will for sexual purity is because God is the judge. All who violate God's will for purity will face God's judgment, **because the Lord is the avenger**. The idea of God as the avenger communicates the direct act of judgment performed by God Himself. The term is used to describe civil authorities as an agent of God's judgment (Rom 13:4). In this context, no agent is described but all attention is given to the Lord as the avenger.

God takes a specific role of judgment **in all these things**. All who tamper with God's children must face His coming judgment. This concept is not new as Paul also taught this principle in 1 Corinthians 3:16-17.

The Certainty of Judgment (v. 6c). This teaching wasn't uncommon for the believers in Thessalonica, **just as we told you before and solemnly warned you**. There was specific instruction time set aside by the missionaries to speak on these matters.<sup>16</sup> They spoke and testified to the Thessalonians about God's judgment.

4. Purity and the Degenerate (vv. 7-8). The final section of Paul's address of sexual purity expresses the purpose of Paul's exhortation. First, the purpose of sexual purity is stated then the quality of the degenerate is described.

The purpose of sexual purity is related to the Christian's calling and purpose in life. Believers have been redeemed for the purpose of holiness, **For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification**. The believer's salvation is described as an act of God's calling. The verb **called**

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<sup>16</sup> AAI1P, προείπαμεν. AMI1P διεμαρτυράμεθα.

refers to the specific conversion experience of the Thessalonians.<sup>17</sup> God effectually calls believers to respond to the Gospel, “The priority of God’s call is a major point in Pauline theology. Everywhere the apostle insists that our salvation is brought about not because we have taken action, but because God has. He goes further. When the natural man learns that he cannot remove the burden of his sins but must rely on Christ’s atoning work for it all, he may try to save some shreds of self-respect by claiming at least the credit for turning from sin to God. But that, too, is ruled out. People come to God only because of God’s effectual call.”<sup>18</sup>

It is inconsistent for a believer to live in such sexual impurity and claim to have been called by God. It is a common experience by the believer since Paul says that God has not called **us**. All believers are called to sexual purity.

God’s salvation is not directed towards **impurity, but in sanctification** [holiness]. It is first stated negatively. The power of the Gospel does not allow for a person to remain on in their sin. Rather, the adverse (“but”) must be true, namely, that the believers have been called to become more like Christ (cf. Rom 8:28-30). The past call of God to redeem an individual continues on to the point where the believer is *progressively sanctified*.

The implications of living a life of denial is expressed in 1 Thessalonians 2:8. The argument is made that those who cannot bring themselves to abstinence or self-discipline live in rejection to God. A result is expressed by the use of **so**. There are some people who will display a continual and consistent characteristic of rejecting the discipline of sexual purity, **he who rejects**.<sup>19</sup> Individuals who live in a constant rebellion to God are guilty of **not rejecting man**. These principles for sexual purity are not worldly principles. The world has indulged itself in spiritual depravity. Among the most obvious perversions of sin is seen in sexuality. Rather, the one who consistently lives in disobedience is characterized as a person who *is rejecting God who gives His Holy Spirit to you*.

The Holy Spirit resides in every believer (Rom 8:9-11; 1 Cor 3:16, 6:19; 2 Tim 1:14). The Holy Spirit seals the believer (Eph 1:13-14, 4:30; 2 Cor 1:22; 2 Cor 5:5). The Holy Spirit fills the believer (Eph 5:15ff; Col 3:16-17; cf. overlapping ideas in Gal 5:22-23; Rom 12:1-3). God is characterized as the one who is giving the Spirit.<sup>20</sup> This precious gift and work of the Spirit makes a believer more like Christ. Therefore, since sexual purity is against Christ-likeness there seems to be the indication that the Spirit is not indwelling,

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<sup>17</sup> AAI3S ἐκάλεσεν.

<sup>18</sup> Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 125.

<sup>19</sup> This is evident in the substantive ὁ ἀθετῶν (PAPMNS).

<sup>20</sup> PAPMAS διδόντα.

sealing, or filling; but has rather been rejected and is absent in presence. This gift of the Holy Spirit has been given to the Thessalonians (**you**); referencing those who truly believe. This exhortation of holy living helps to identify those who are truly in the believing community on the basis of consistent Christian character.

C. Filial Love (4:9-10). In this next section Paul exhorts the Thessalonians believers to express love for the brethren. A clear switch from the previous exhortation is in view with Paul's use of **Now as to the love of the brethren**.<sup>21</sup>

1. The Concern for Love (v. 9a). This new topic involves brotherly love in the midst of the fellowship. The term “love of the brethren” is one word in the original (φιλαδελφίας). This is where the Pennsylvanian city, Philadelphia, derives its name. It is a compound word that is literally, “love + brother.” The point of emphasis in this word lies upon the object of one’s love, “love for the brethren” rather than the type or kind of love.

The terms usage is metaphorical and does not refer to literal blood relatives, but is a picture of how those within the believing community ought to view one another. Christians are associated in the closest possible family ties.

Surprisingly, Paul states the lack of need to *know* how to love one another, **you have no need for anyone to write to you**. The details of the exhortation are left out. Later we find that the reason being is that God displays and applies such love towards believers. But for now Paul states there is no need for the Thessalonians to be given specific instructions.

2. The Appraisal for Love (v. 9b). The appraisal is given immediately after commanding them for their love. Paul states the reason why there is no direct need for specific instructions regarding their love for the brethren.

There is a point of emphasis expressed by Paul **for you yourselves**.<sup>22</sup> These believers were **taught by God**. In the original this is a singular word (θεοδίδακτοι). It combines the term for God and the passive form for *taught*. This term refers to the divine relationship that was established between God and them. Those who have been born again will express love that overflows.

A believer of any maturity level should have an intimate understanding of God’s love. All who come to an intellectual and experiential knowledge of God’s saving work have come to know God’s love. The New Testament often bunches the concepts of love and sacrifice together with God as the ultimate

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<sup>21</sup> Literally, this can be translated, “but now concerning the love of the brethren” (Περὶ δὲ τῆς φιλαδελφίας).

<sup>22</sup> Gk., αὐτοὶ γὰρ ὑμεῖς.

example. The sacrificial death of the Messiah serves as the picture for true biblical, sacrificial, God-honoring love. Those who have come to know God become the most capable of reciprocating such a love. Consider the following passages that speak of God's love and sacrifice demonstrated through Christ:

John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life."

Romans 5:8, "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

John 17:17-18, "For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."

John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends."

1 John 4:7-11, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another."

While many think this to be a large commendation, there is the possibility the Paul wrote this to point out that they did lack in loving one another. The context does indicate the Thessalonians were practicing their faith, but still needed more improvement (vv. 1-2). Therefore, it does seem likely that the Thessalonians in some ways were not properly loving the brethren.

The goal of God's instruction is love for one another, **to love one another.**<sup>23</sup> Believers who have come into experiential contact with God's love show that love to others. Sacrificial biblical love is directed towards other believers. The Christian community ought to be characterized by love for one another in a sacrificial way. This love is present and active. The believer cannot arbitrarily decide when to dispense such a sacrificial love, but ought to continually pursue and apply such a love.

This type of service considers the spiritual well-being of the individual above all other needs. While physical provisions are part of the Christian community

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<sup>23</sup> The grammatical construction communicates purpose as we have seen in the previous constructions in the letter, *eiç τὸ ἀγαπᾶν* (PAInf).

(Acts 2:45), the spiritual health of a believer is more important. Jesus Christ Himself exemplified this when He washed the disciples feet (Jn 13).

D. Lifestyle for Believers (4:11-12). The next two verses speak of how the believer ought to conduct himself in the work place. The exhortation is to be diligent in the work place as a Christian.

1. Lifestyle Defined (v. 11). There are three exhortations that are given to the people. (1) to live a quiet life; (2) to be concerned with one's own matter; and (3) to work with one's own hands. These three instructions are suggested to have targeted three problems among the Thessalonians, “mental excitement, meddlesomeness, and idleness.”<sup>24</sup>
  - i. Living the Quiet Life. Paul's first detail of living an industrious life is stated **make it your ambition to lead a quiet life**. The Thessalonians were instructed to make it their ambition or literally, “to love honor.” This term was used to describe the attitude of rich Greco-Romans, “In lieu of being taxed, the wealthy were expected to make generous donations to their cities, in public works, entertainments, food distributions, and so forth. In many cases this became a contest of who could outstrip one's peers, wince the greater gift bespoke the power and wealthy of the donor as well as his magnanimity.”<sup>25</sup> The Thessalonians were expected to have this strong desire for living a quiet life.

The quiet life here speaks of silence after speech (Acts 11:18), rest after labor (Lk 23:56), and peace after war (Jdg 3:11 [LXX]). The term is a reference to people who do not cause commotion within the community.<sup>26</sup> Believers are instructed not to live in contention with people until the return of Christ. The word should communicate, “a life that does its best to avoid unnecessary contention and to be at peace with all men in so far as it is humanly possible (cf. Rom 12:18; 14:19; Heb 12:14).<sup>27</sup>

There is a word play and tension behind the idea of “ambition” (φιλοτιμεῖσθαι) and “quiet” (ἡσυχάζειν).<sup>28</sup> To be ambitious implies a lot

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<sup>24</sup> D. Edmond Hiebert, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 194.

<sup>25</sup> Gary S. Shogren, “1 & 2 Thessalonians,” 170.

<sup>26</sup> Gene L. Green, “The Letters to the Thessalonians,” 210.

<sup>27</sup> Richard Mayhue, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 120.

<sup>28</sup> F.F. Bruce, “1 & 2 Thessalonians,” 90.

of activity, yet quietness demands the ceasing of activity. This indicates the forceful nature of the admonition by Paul for the Thessalonians.

- ii. To Mind One's Own Business. Paul then exhorts the Thessalonians not to meddle in the affairs of others. The basic exhortation is for the Thessalonians to mind their own business. There were some people who were being busybodies (2 Thess 3:11). Here, they are told to be concerned with their work for the day.

Some of these individuals had neglected their own affairs to meddle in the affairs of others. Paul makes a strong exhortation for believers to keep their heads down and to focus on their own tasks.

This is not an exhortation to neglect the *concerns* of a brother. Christians are instructed to care for the needs of others (cf. Phil 2:4). Rather, the exhortation is not to meddle with or agitate the life of another believer.<sup>29</sup>

- iii. To Work with One's Own Hands. This last exhortation encourages believers to be industrious workers. By implication, there may have been some within the church who were so misinformed regarding the return of Christ that they quiet their jobs. Some may have seen no purpose to work since the return of Christ was imminent.

Although the return of Christ is an imminent return, Paul exhorts believers not to neglect the normal course of life for a foolishly lazy life. The context will quickly turn to an exhortation related to the second coming of Jesus Christ.

The passage indicates that these individuals were manual laborers. These individuals were using doctrine as a means to live an idle life. It is because of this false doctrine that led to unchristian behavior. Paul seeks to correct the improper behavior. Later, he will correct the improper doctrine (4:13-5:11).

The Thessalonians were restless, meddlers, and lazy. The exhortation is given for the Thessalonians to refrain from such activity and embrace a life of quiet, peaceable, and industry.

These instructions were nothing new to the Thessalonians, **just as we commanded you**. The first visit of Paul was accompanied with teaching regarding this particular issue.

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<sup>29</sup> Gary S. Shogren, “1 & 2 Thessalonians,” 171.

2. Lifestyle Defended (v. 12). The purpose for why the believer must live with such restrictions and limitations are now given. Paul wants his readers to know that such a lifestyle has a greater purpose than self. Rather, the purpose of such a lifestyle is two-fold: (1) the believer's evangelism and (2) the believer's employment.

i. The first reason for living such a lifestyle is for the believer's evangelism to the world. The Christian testimony is explicitly tied to their lifestyle. Paul's reason is **so that you will behave properly toward outsiders**. Literally, this phrase can be translates, "so that you might walk becomingly towards those outside." In other words, the believer lives a quiet and hard-working life so that they may be found as people of integrity among unbelievers. **Outsiders** are clearly identified as unbelievers; Paul would elsewhere use this term to refer to unbelievers in Colossians 4:5, and 1 Corinthians 5:12-13.

It would be a detriment to the Christian faith for a believer to be found as an unsettled, meddlesome, and lazy individual. This particular lifestyle should not be associated with one who has been redeemed by the Lord.

Paul was concerned for the believers to never undermine or give cause to the unbeliever to question the morality of the believer. While unbelievers may not understand the driving force behind the believer's behavior, the purity and integrity of the believer should be seen as fundamentally different from those living in the world.

ii. The Believer's Employment. Paul expressed a second purpose for such a lifestyle. Paul's expression is stated, **and not be in any need**. They were to work quietly in this life so as not to lack in their need.

This highlights the God given means of provision for the believer. While some among the Thessalonians may not have been working on account of their false doctrine regarding the eschaton, Paul exhorts the believers to live such a lifestyle so as to have daily provisions. While Christians understand that it is ultimately God who gives, many must realize that He does so through instruments and agents such as vocation.

Christians have a God who will provide for their daily provisions (Matt 6:33). The believer will have the necessities in life and are not to be dependent at the mercies of the world for sustenance. A believer is not to be considered a parasite to anybody, but should rather understand his place in economy and the world.

Leon Morris properly states, "This whole section on earning one's living is closely connected with the previous one on brotherly love, and that not only in syntax. Those who imposed on the generosity of their

fellows were not living in love. Or, to put the same thing the other way around, the exhortation to brotherly love carries with it the necessity for providing for one's own needs, so that undue strain may not be placed on the brother (though Paul does not specifically mention this point).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, 134.