

I OVERVIEW OF I THESSALONIANS

PURPOSE: To strengthen the Thessalonian Christians in their faith and to give them the assurance of Christ's return.

AUTHOR: Apostle Paul.

TO WHOM WRITTEN: Young church at Thessalonica and all believers everywhere.

DATE WRITTEN: About 51 A.D. from Corinth. It was one of Paul's earliest epistles.

SETTING: The believers of the young Thessalonian church needed to mature in their faith and to have a misunderstanding remedied concern the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. Some believers thought that the Second Coming was imminent. There were others who wondered whether those who had already died would experience a bodily resurrection at His Second Coming.

KEY PEOPLE: Paul, Timothy, Silas

BLUEPRINT:

- Faithfulness to the Lord (1:1-3:13)
- **Watchfulness for the Lord (4:1-5:28)**

MEGATHEMES

Persecution	Paul and the new Christians at Thessalonica experienced persecution because of their faith in Jesus Christ. We can also expect to experience trials and troubles as well. We need to stand firm in our faith in the midst of trials, being strengthened by the Holy Spirit.
Paul's ministry	Paul expressed his concern for this church even while he was being slandered. Paul's commitment to share the gospel in spite of difficult circumstances is a model we should follow.
Hope	One day all believers, both those who are alive and those who have died, will be united with Christ Jesus. To those Christians who die before Christ's return, there is hope of the resurrection of the body.
Being prepared	No one knows the time of Christ's return. We are to live moral and holy lives, ever watchful for His Coming. Believers must not neglect daily responsibilities, but always work and live as if the Lord was to return today.

II INTRODUCTION

Paul devoted the first three chapters of I Thessalonians to two major concerns:

1. He recalled his earlier ministry in Thessalonica and his memories of the church he founded there; and,
2. He wrote at length about his continuing concern for the believers during the time since he had left them.

By recalling his past ministry among the Thessalonians and reaffirming his present friendship with them he established a basis for the instructions that follow.

In the first 12 verses of I Thessalonians 4, Paul exhorted the believers to live lives of sexual purity and to practice brotherly love, which are cornerstones to effective Christian witnessing. In the final 6 verses of *I Thessalonians 4*, Paul then addressed their misconceptions of Christ's Second Coming and recorded the only passage that directly mentions the Rapture.

In *I Thessalonians 5*, Paul reminded the Thessalonians, that the coming day of the Lord will mean judgment for the world and salvation for the church. This day will overtake everyone as a thief in the night. If the believers are watchful and prepared, they will not be surprised by that day. Paul concluded the epistle with a series of exhortations dealing with proper attitudes on the part of church members for their leaders as well as the need for constant rejoicing, ceaseless praying, and comprehensive thanksgiving.

III SCRIPTURE

LIVE TO PLEASE GOD (4:1-2)

(1-2): How to walk and to please God: "Finally" is not used by Paul to signal the end of the epistle, as he does in many other epistles. In this case, it indicates a transition of thought, as Paul is ready to go on to practical instruction on how God wants His people to live.

He commends the church for their consistency in pleasing God on a daily basis, and was thankful for the growth he saw in the Thessalonians; but still looked for them to abound more and more in a walk that would please God. God has chosen us to be Christ's ambassadors on earth (*Ephesians 4:1; Colossians 1:10*), and we must desire to live to please Him, not ourselves, on a 365/24/7 basis.

This means that Christian maturity is never finished on this side of eternity. No matter how far a Christian has come in love and holiness, they can still abound more and more.

Paul's instructions came under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, which served to establish patterns of behavior that separate (i.e., sanctify) them morally from their worldly society and give them a unique identity. We are exhorted to avoid the Satanically-driven conflicts with our flesh (*I John 2:14-16*), and be transformed (*Romans 12:1-2*) into the image of Jesus Christ by taking on the Mind of Christ.

"When a man is saved by the work of Christ for him it does not like open before him as a matter for his completely free decision whether he will serve God or not. He has been bought with a price (*I Corinthians 6:20*). He has become the slave of Christ." (Morris)

LIVE IN PURITY (4:3-8)

Sexual standards were very low in the Roman Empire, as in many societies today, where the temptation to engage in sexual intercourse outside of marriage is powerful. Giving into this temptation will always have disastrous results for individuals, families, businesses, and churches. Therefore, sexual desires and activities must be placed under Christ's control and limited to the marriage. Besides the physical consequences of sexual sin, there are spiritual consequences, which Paul discussed in *I Corinthians 6:18*.

The command to be sexually pure: Paul gave these commands to a first-century Roman culture that was marked by sexual immorality, and where chastity and sexual purity were almost unknown virtues. Nevertheless, Christians were to take their standards of sexual morality from God and **not** from the culture. The following is a verse-by-verse breakdown of this command:

(3): Progressive growth in holy living is the expected fruit of a genuine Christian conversion. Although the end product (*Matthew 5:48*) cannot be attained in this life, the process must be diligently and proactively pursued. God desires that we move toward this ultimate outcome until our final transformation occurs in the heavenly presence with the Lord. Holiness, as indicated in the popular book, must be pursued. Those who do not know God do not have the spiritual resources to walk pure before the Lord; but Christians do (*Romans 6-8*).

Paul made it very clear what the will of God was for the Christian. The idea behind sanctification is to be set apart, and God wants us set apart from a godless culture and their sexual immorality. If our sexual behavior is no different than the Gentiles who do not know God, then we are not sanctified, set apart, in the way God wants us to be.

(4): Paul specifically honed in on the area of sexual immorality and the incredible societal and spiritual risks that are hidden from view when Satan tempts us in this area (*I Corinthians 6:18; I Corinthians 7:2; Hebrews 13:4; I Peter 3:7*). Sexual promiscuity damages the physical body (e.g., syphilis, chlamydia, gonorrhea), but more importantly, the spirit. The Gnostics tried to separate the spirit from the body in their false 1st Century A.D. teaching. However, one cannot partake of sexual relations without the entire part of your being fully participating.

We live differently than the world when we abstain from sexual immorality. The ancient Greek word translated sexual immorality (*porneia*) refers to any sexual relationship outside of the marriage covenant. The word shows that it isn't enough to just say that you have not had sexual intercourse with someone who is not your spouse. Accordingly, all sexual behavior outside of the marriage covenant is sin.

God grants great sexual liberty in the marriage relationship (*Hebrews 13:4*). But Satan's not-very-subtle strategy is often to do all he can to encourage sex outside of marriage and to discourage sex in marriage. Why does this strategy work so often?

(5): The heathen succumbed to passionate lusts, which Paul warned against. Without moral calibration and recognition of the dangers of such behavior, the natural human inclination is to pursue them with a great appetite. Millennia of history document the human problem with its sexuality and its inability to operate within the constraints that God has recommended for successful living. Issues such as STD, abortion, broken marriages and lives, unwanted pregnancies, etc., are all tied to our propensity to engage in sexual sin. Those who reject the knowledge of God made available to them in creation and conscience find themselves delivered over by God to sexual impurity and shameful lusts (*Romans 1:24-26*).

We live differently than the world when we possess our body in sanctification and in honor. Immorality is the opposite of honor because it degrades and debases the self. Those who do not restrain their sexual desires act more like animals than humans, following every impulse without restraint (i.e., "If it feels good, do it!").

(6a): When we are sexually immoral, we take advantage of and defraud others:

- The adulterer defrauds his mate and children;
- The fornicator defrauds his future mate and children; and,
- Both the adulterer and fornicator defraud their illicit partner.

Repeatedly in *Leviticus 18*, a chapter where God instructed Israel on the matter of sexual morality, the idea is given that one may not uncover the nakedness of another not their spouse. Nakedness of an individual belongs to their spouse and no one else, and it is a violation of God's law to give that nakedness to anyone else, or for anyone else to take it.

(6b-8): **Reasons for the command:** Paul presents 4 specific reasons to maintain sexual purity; none of which is negotiable in any circumstances:

1. **Because the Lord is the avenger of all such:** We can trust that God will punish sexual immorality, and that no one gets away with this sin; even if it is "undiscovered" (*// Samuel 11:27*).
2. **For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness:** We should be sexually pure because the character of the Christian life is defined by the divine call. That call is not to uncleanness, but to holiness. Therefore, sexual immorality is simply inconsistent with who we are in Jesus Christ. Paul developed this same line of thought in *I Corinthians 6:9-11* and *I Corinthians 6:15-20*, concluding with the idea that we should **glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's**;
3. **Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God:** To reject God's call to sexual purity is not rejecting man, but God Himself. The Christian's life is to be lived in fellowship with Christ that produces sanctification or growth in God's holiness (*Leviticus 11:44; I Peter 1:15*). Despite the petty ways many rationalize sexual immorality, we still reject God when we sin in this way; and,
4. **Who has also given us His Holy Spirit:** We have been given the Holy Spirit, who **empowers the willing, trusting Christian** to overcome sexual sin. By His Spirit, God has given us sufficient resources for victory and we are responsible to use those resources. Uncleanness is a sin against God, and in particular, against God's gift of his Holy Spirit (*Romans 5:5; I John 3:24*). Such activity grieves the Holy Spirit (*Ephesians 4:32*) and quenches the power of the Holy Spirit in your life (*I Thessalonians 5:19*). Its end result is always misery. The only variables are the extent of time you will be miserable, and how deep the misery is for you and others close to you.

As Christians, we must remember that we are always ambassadors for Jesus Christ and do not want to link our witness to cheap worldly behavior (*Romans 6:1-2*).

LIVE IN LOVE (4:9-10)

(9-10): **We should live a life of increasing love:** Paul shifts from discussing sexual purity to talking about brotherly love (i.e., philadelphia), or love between believers within the Christian family. The Church at Thessalonica, learning their lesson through Jesus Christ, did very well in this area and that is why Paul indicated that he does not have to write about it any further.

Although their love was so strong that it had national implications, God's love is limitless. Accordingly, Paul exhorted them to broaden their love base even further. Never ever think that, as a Christian, you have exhausted God's supply to love Him and to love others. Always look for additional opportunities to love God and your neighbor.

These principles are so basic that Paul knew they were obvious to the Thessalonian Christians, who were taught by God about the importance of love, yet we must all be reminded. It wasn't that they Thessalonians were without love; their love toward all the brethren was well-known, but they had to increase more and more in their love.

LIVE TO WIN RESPECT (4:11-12)

Christian living is more than simply loving other Christians. We must be responsible in all areas of life. Some of the Thessalonian Christians had adopted a lifestyle of idleness, depending on others for handouts. Paul told the Thessalonians to work hard and live quiet lives; thus being a positive force in society.

(11): We should live a life of work: This is part of what it means to live as a Christian. It is to be responsible and accountable in all areas of your life. You can hardly be effective when you share your faith with others if people don't respect you. Therefore, whatever you do, do it the very best you can and do it for the Lord and not for man (*Colossians 3:23*). God wants you to be beyond reproach.

- **We should aspire to lead a quiet life:** Quiet has the thought of peace, calm, rest and satisfaction. The quiet life contradicts the hugely successful modern attraction to entertainment and excitement. This addiction to entertainment and excitement is damaging both spiritually and culturally. The religion of excitement and entertainment seduces people into living their lives for the thrill of the moment. We need to live the quiet life so that we can really take the time and give the attention to listen to God. When we live the quiet life we can listen to God and get to know Him better.
- **We should mind our own business:** We should focus on our own life and matters instead of meddling in the lives of others as a busy body.

"Paul, however, does not mean that every individual is to mind his own business in such a way that all are to live apart from one another and have no concern for others, but simply wants to correct the idle triviality which makes men open disturbers of the peace, when they ought to lead a quiet life at home." (Clarke)

- **We must recognize the dignity and honor of work:** Work is God's plan for the progress of society and the church. We fall into Satan's snare when we expect things to always come easily, or regard God's blessing as an opportunity for laziness (*Proverbs 6:6*). This is why the welfare system of our society is doomed to failure.

Manual labor was despised by ancient Greek culture. They thought that the better a man was, the less he should work. In contrast, God gave us a carpenter King, fisherman apostles, and tent-making missionaries. No one who is well-known in history obtained that stature from a life full of laziness. Noblesse l'oblige literally means "the noble are obliged"... to help the less fortunate.

(12): We should live a life that is an example, lacking nothing: When we combine the love of our brothers with a strong godly work ethic, the result is that we walk properly. People who are not yet Christians will see our example and be strongly influenced to become followers of Jesus.

Paul completes the thought he began in *1 Thessalonians 3:10*. If they followed his teaching and example, they would lack nothing and come to the place of genuine Christian maturity.