

I Thessalonians 4:1-12

Chapter 4:1-12 – Purity in Practice

Verse 1

Finally then, brethren – Used in the sense of introducing the practical instructions.

Request and exhort you – Both words carry the idea of asking or beseeching. *Exhort* literally means “to call to one’s side” and is the stronger word.

Instruction as to how you ought to walk – Paul did not just teach doctrine but always the proper application of truth. This word for *walk* is used again in verse 12.

And please God – Pleasing God should be the major motive of our Christian lives. Enoch is a great example. In Genesis 5:22, 24 we read, “*Then Enoch walked with God three hundred years... Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him*”. In Hebrews 11:5 we read, “*By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not taste death...for he obtained the witness that before his being taken up he was pleasing to God*”.

That you may excel still more – Christian maturity is a growth process that never ends. Peter tells us to, “*...grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ...*”
“*But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil*”.
Hebrews 5:14

Verse 2

What commandments we gave you – This is a military term which denotes a command or charge given. Notice its use in Acts 5:28 and 1 Timothy 1:5 and 18.

By the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ – The apostles never spoke or wrote on their own authority but on the authority of Christ. Note 1 John 1:1-4.

Verse 3

For this is the will of God, your sanctification – The word *sanctification* means to be consecrated or set apart. It is from the root *hagios* which means holy.

That is, that you abstain from sexual immorality – There is nothing ambiguous or unclear about this command. It is God’s will that we be set apart to Him in holiness. One way that we obey His command is abstinence from sexual immorality. God wants us to be sanctified, set apart to Him.

Verse 4

That each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor – The word *vessel* was a common Greek metaphor for “body”. “*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, so that the surpassing greatness of the power will be of God and not from ourselves.*” (2 Cor. 4:7). “*For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.*” (1 Cor. 6:20).

Verse 5

Not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God – Immorality was a common practice in Greek society of that day. They even incorporated it into their religious meetings.

Verse 6

And that no man transgress and defraud his brother in this matter – Sexual immorality always has consequences. In Jewish law adultery was punishable by death. Immorality within the church always defrauds others.

Because the Lord is the avenger in all these things - This probably speaks of future judgment at the judgment seat of Christ.

As we told you before and solemnly warned you

Verse 7

For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification – Why be pure, holy and sanctified? Because that is God's purpose for us.

“As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, but, like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in your behavior; because it is written, ‘You shall be holy for I am Holy.’”

1 Peter 1:14-15

“For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

Ephesians 2:10

Verse 8

Consequently – Only here and in Hebrews 12:1. Most versions use therefore to translate this word. It probably stresses the conclusion or consequence a little stronger.

He who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you – To ignore these commands would not be to simply reject Paul's instruction but God Himself.

Who gives His Holy Spirit to you – Some might think that the standard was too high but Paul reminds them that God has given the Holy Spirit to enable all believers to do His will. Paul expands on the Holy Spirit's power in our lives in Galatians 5:16-25 and Romans 8:1-17.

“If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit”.

Galatians 5:25

Verses 9-10 Loving one another

As to the love of the brethren...you are taught by God to love one another – The fruit of the Spirit is love... (Galatians 5:22). Jesus also taught us to love one another:

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

John 13:24-25

For indeed you do practice it... but we urge you, brethren, to excel still more – There are never any limits to true sacrificial love. The Thessalonians did actually respond to Paul's charge by giving sacrificially to the needs and support of the saints (2 Corinthians 8:1-5).

Verses 11-12 Orderly Living

Make it your ambition – Three practical areas of behavior demonstrate brotherly love in action:

1 – *Lead a quiet life* – Not running to and fro but holding your peace, to rest or cease from labor.

2 – *Attend to your own affairs* – Don't be a busybody meddling in the affairs of others.

3 – *Work with your hands* – Greek culture degraded manual labor.

Verse 12 Orderly Living

So that you may behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need -

“...it was not Paul's intent that the church disrupt society or overthrow governments. Rather he encouraged Christians to be good citizens and exemplary members of their families and of their society but to do so in a manner consistent with the teachings of Christ.”¹

Michael D. Martin

¹ Martin, D. Michael. *1, 2 Thessalonians*. The New American Commentary series. N.c.: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995, p. 138.

So that you may behave properly – The word “behave” is the same word translated “walk” in verse 1. Paul begins and ends this section on purity in practice with the word *walk*! We are to walk in purity in light of the coming of Christ.