

The background image shows the ruins of an ancient temple, likely the Temple of Apollo in Side, Turkey. In the foreground, there are low stone walls and a path. To the right, a prominent structure with four Corinthian columns and a pediment stands. The ruins are situated on a hillside overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. In the distance, there are mountains under a blue sky with scattered clouds.

Paul's First Epistle to the Thessalonians

CHAPTER FOUR

OUTLINE OF THE LETTER

- **Chapter One**

- Greeting (1:1)
- Paul's Gratitude (1:2-4)
- Their Conversion (1:5-10)

- **Chapter Two**

- Paul's Ministry (2:1-12)
- The Thessalonians' Faith (2:13-16)
- Paul's Desire to See Them (2:17-20)

- **Chapter Three**

- Paul's Concern (3:1-5)
- Timothy's Good News (3:6-10)
- Paul's Prayer (3:11-13)

- **Chapter Four**

- Paul's Plea for Purity (4:1-8)
- A Loving & Laboring Life (4:9-12)
- Christ is Coming (4:13-5:11)

- **Chapter Five**

- Christ is Coming (4:13-5:11)
- Various Exhortations (5:12-22)
- Closing Remarks (5:23-28)

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER FOUR

Paul's Plea for Purity (4:1-8)

¹ Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God;

- Paul “urged” and “exhorted” them “in the Lord Jesus.” His instructions carried the authority of Christ (**1 Thess. 4:2; 1 Cor. 14:37; Col. 3:17**).
- They had earlier “received” instruction as to how they “ought to walk.”
 - It’s not enough to know the truth; we must walk in accordance with it (**Eph. 4:17-23, 5:8-16**).
 - The goal of our walk is to “please God” (**Col. 1:10; 1 Cor. 10:31**).
 - “Ought” expresses necessity. Living to please God is not optional (**2 Cor. 5:9**).
- Although the Thessalonians were already walking faithfully, Paul urged them to “abound more and more” in what they received (**Phil. 1:9-11**).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER FOUR

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- They had earlier “received” instruction as to how they “ought to walk.”
- Although the Thessalonians were already walking faithfully, Paul urged them to “abound more and more” in what they received (**Phil. 1:9-11**).

“There is no finality to progressive holiness while the believer remains on earth. Life is marked either by growth or decay ... Walking implies progress. Standing still is dangerous” (Lipscomb, p. 45-49).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER FOUR

Paul's Plea for Purity (4:1-8)

² for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

- “You know” shows that Paul was reminding them of things they already knew (**2 Pet. 1:12**).
- These “commandments” were given “through the Lord Jesus.”
 - Paul delivered the commands, but Christ was their source and authority (**Matt. 28:18-20; Gal. 1:11-12**).
 - “These men were simply representatives of another who was above them, and the one from whom they received their authority” (Weaver, p.237).*
- To reject Paul's instructions would be to reject God (**1 Thess. 4:8; 2 Pet. 3:2**).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER FOUR

Paul's Plea for Purity (4:1-8)

³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality;

- “Sanctification” – properly, purification, i.e. the state of purity (Strong).
 - This verse demonstrates how “sanctification” has two aspects:
 - There is what God does (**Heb. 13:12; 1 Cor. 6:11**).
 - There is what man does (**Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 6:9-10**).
 - Sanctification is a continual pursuit (**Rom. 6:19, 22; 2 Cor. 7:1**).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER FOUR

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- “Sanctification” – properly, purification, i.e. the state of purity (Strong).
- It is “the will of God” that we “abstain” from sin (**Matt. 7:21; Eph. 5:17; 1 Pet. 4:2**).
- Specifically, we must “abstain from sexual immorality” (Heb. 13:4).

“The exhortation to abstain from fornication was particularly needed among Gentile Christians because their former worship of idols (1:9) often consisted of sexual immorality. In fact, after the conference in Jerusalem in which the apostles and elders determined that Gentiles need not be circumcised according to the Law of Moses to be saved, they sent out letters warning that certain idolatrous practices must cease, among which ‘fornication’ was listed, Acts 15:29” (Harkrider, p.84).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER FOUR

Paul's Plea for Purity (4:1-8)

⁴ each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,

each of you know how to possess his own body in holiness and honor, (NET)

- The key to avoiding sexual immorality is knowing “how to possess” our “vessel.”
“‘Vessel’ is most likely used figuratively for ‘body’ (2 Cor 4:7). Some take it to mean ‘wife’ (thus, ‘to take a wife for himself’ or ‘to live with his wife’), but this is less likely” (NET Footnotes).
- “Know how” implies sexual purity involves learned, deliberate, and continuing self-discipline (**1 Cor. 9:24-27; Col. 3:5; Rom. 6:12-13**).
- The body must be possessed “in sanctification and honor” rather than degraded through immorality (**Rom. 1:24; 1 Cor. 6:15-20**).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER FOUR

Paul's Plea for Purity (4:1-8)

- ⁵ not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God;**
- “Passion” – affection of the mind, emotion, passion ... depraved passion (Thayer).
 - “Lust” – a strong desire of any kind (Vine).
 - The word can describe proper desire (**Luke 22:15; Phil. 1:23**), but, here, the context implies a sinful longing.
 - The Gentiles’ sexual conduct reflected the fact that they did “not know God” (**Rom. 1:21-28; Eph. 4:17-19; 1 Pet. 4:3-4**).
 - Knowing God demands we change what we do with our bodies, i.e. how we live (**Titus 1:16; 1 John 2:3-4**).
- “It is vital that we first come to know God, and then retain God in our knowledge”*
(Mayberry, p.26).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER FOUR

Paul's Plea for Purity (4:1-8)

⁶ that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified.

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

- “Defraud” – to take advantage of, exploit, cheat (BDAG) [2 Cor. 7:2].

“This has reference to the sin of adultery ... None should go beyond what is right and violate the marital rights of his brethren” (Lipscomb, p.47).

- Sexual immorality is never merely private or victimless, especially when it comes to adultery (**Gen. 39:9; Exod. 20:14, 17; 1 Cor. 7:2-5**).
- Paul “forewarned and testified” that “the Lord is the avenger of all such” sins (**2 Thess. 1:7-10; Col. 3:5-6, 23-25; Gal. 6:7-8**).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER FOUR

Paul's Plea for Purity (4:1-8)

⁷ For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.

- God calls people us into His kingdom (**1 Thess. 2:12**), but the “call” is to “holiness.”
 - “Uncleanness” – impurity; frequently used in the context of sexual impurity (**Rom. 1:24; Gal. 5:19; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5**).

“Though it may sometimes denote ceremonial impurity, in this context it is clear that he has sexual impurity in mind” (Weaver, p.258).
 - “Holiness” is the same Greek word translated “sanctification” in **1 Thess. 4:3-4**.
 - A person cannot claim God’s saving call while rejecting the holiness it requires (**Rom. 6:1-2; Titus 2:11-14**).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER FOUR

Paul's Plea for Purity (4:1-8)

⁸ Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.

- A person who dismisses this teaching "does not reject man, but God" (**Luke 10:16; 1 Thess. 2:13**).
- There is debate as to what "God ... has given us his Holy Spirit" means:
 - "Us" refers to the apostles. No one should not reject this teaching because the Holy Spirit spoke it through the apostles (**1 Cor. 2:10-13; Eph. 3:3-5**).

"God had given to his chosen apostles his Holy Spirit that they might know the mind of God. They delivered this mind or will of God to men" (Lipscomb, p.48-49).

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 - "Us" refers to the apostles. No one should not reject this teaching because the Holy Spirit spoke it through the apostles (**1 Cor. 2:10-13; Eph. 3:3-5**).
 - "Us" refers to Christians in general. No Christian should reject this teaching because He has given us His Spirit to dwell in us (**Acts 5:32; 1 Cor. 6:18-20**).

"It is ... the height of inconsistency to live unholy lives while God gives to Christians His Holy Spirit" (Weaver, p.260).

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 - "Us" refers to Christians in general. No Christian should reject this teaching because He has given us His Spirit to dwell in us (**Acts 5:32; 1 Cor. 6:18-20**).
 - Both views are biblically true. Personally, I believe the latter view accurately expresses Paul's intent.

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER FOUR

A Loving and Laboring Life (4:9-12)

⁹ But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; ¹⁰ and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more;

- The Thessalonians were already abounding in “brotherly love” (**1 Thess. 4:10**), but Paul wished they would “increase more and more” in their love (**1 Thess. 3:12**).
 - Abounding in brotherly love is necessary for making our call and election sure (**2 Pet. 1:5-10**).

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- The Thessalonians were abounding in “brotherly love” (**1 Thess. 4:10**), but Paul wished they would “increase more and more” in their love (**1 Thess. 3:12, 4:1**).
- Paul had “no need” to write to them about brotherly love since they were “taught by God to love one another.”
 - This is true in multiple senses. God taught them via:
 - Christ’s command and example (**John 13:34-35; 15:12, 17**),
 - The gospel message (**John 3:16; 1 John 3:11, 16; 4:7-11, 17-21**).

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- Paul had “no need” to write to them about brotherly love since they were “taught by God to love one another.”
- The Thessalonians’ love extended beyond the local congregation to reach “all the brethren who are in all Macedonia.”
 - This would include at least Thessalonica, Philippi, and Berea.
 - Loving and doing good for brethren knows no national boundaries (**Gal. 6:10**).

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- Paul had “no need” to write to them about brotherly love since they were “taught by God to love one another.”
- The Thessalonians’ love extended beyond the local congregation to reach “all the brethren who are in all Macedonia.”
- Genuine brotherly love expresses itself through service, generosity, and sacrifice (**Gal. 5:13; 1 John 3:16-18; Acts 4:32-35; etc.**).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER FOUR

A Loving and Laboring Life (4:9-12)

¹¹ that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you,

And do everything you can to live a quiet life. You should mind your own business. And work with your hands, just as we told you to. (NIRV)

- Brotherly love includes living responsibly to avoid becoming a burden to others (**2 Thess. 4:12, 3:10-12**). This includes:
 - Leading a “quiet life” (**1 Tim. 2:1-2**).
 - We can only control ourselves in seeking this type of life (**Rom. 12:18**).
 - Minding our “own business” (**1 Tim. 5:13; 1 Pet. 4:15**).
 - Don’t grab the dog by the ears! (**Prov. 26:17 vs 1 Cor. 6:5; Phil. 4:2-3**)
 - Working with our “own hands” = honest and productive labor (**1 Tim. 5:8**).
 - Work and brotherly love are connected (**Acts 20:34-35; Eph. 4:28**).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER FOUR

A Loving and Laboring Life (4:9-12)

¹² that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.

so that you may command the respect of outsiders, and be dependent on nobody. (RSV)

- This verse gives two reasons for the commands in the previous verse:
 - Maintain a respectable influence before unbelievers.
 - We should care about our reputation before unbelievers and avoid bringing reproach upon Christ (**Matt. 5:16; Tit. 2:7-10; 1 Pet. 2:12, 3:16**).

“Christians should so excel in the common decencies and duties of life as to afford the unbeliever no occasion to upbraid or suspect them”
(Lipscomb, p.52).

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- This verse gives two reasons for the commands in the previous verse:
 - Maintain a respectable influence before unbelievers.
 - Avoid unnecessary dependence upon others (**2 Thess. 3:10-12**).
 - Paul is not condemning those who become dependent because of sickness, age, disability, etc. (**Acts 11:27-30; Luke 10:25-37; 1 Tim. 5:3-16; etc.**).

“No human being is totally independent, and Christians are a part of a community of believers who are always there to help when a need arises”
(Weaver, p.273).

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 - Avoid unnecessary dependence upon others (**2 Thess. 3:10-12**).
 - Paul is not condemning those who become dependent because of sickness, age, disability, etc. (**Acts 11:27-30; Luke 10:25-37; 1 Tim. 5:3-16; etc.**).
 - Brotherly love neither unnecessarily burdens others nor ignores those who truly need help (**1 John 3:17; James 2:14-17; Matt. 25:31-46**).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER FOUR

Christ is Coming (4:13-5:11)

¹³ I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

- “I do not want you to be ignorant” implies the Thessalonians needed understood the subject but needed a better understanding on it (**Rom. 1:13; 1 Cor. 10:1, 12:1**).
- Seemingly, some Christians had died, creating concern from the Thessalonians that “those who have fallen asleep” would not receive the blessings of Christ’s return.

“The [Gentile] Thessalonians had come out of idolatry that held no expectation or understanding about a future state with God. Torn not only by grief, they also had doubt whether they would ever see their friends again. They must have wondered, “Would these brethren miss the blessedness of Christ’s return?” (Harkrider, p.89).

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- Seemingly, some Christians had died, creating concern from the Thessalonians that “those who have fallen asleep” would not receive the blessings of Christ’s return.
- Christians grieve the loss of loved ones (**John 11:33-35; Phil. 2:27**), but we need not grieve over the condition of faithful Christians who have died (**2 Tim. 4:6-8**).
 - When “others” (those outside of Christ) die, however, there is a reason to grieve over their condition (**Eph. 2:12**).

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- Seemingly, some Christians had died, creating concern from the Thessalonians that “those who have fallen asleep” would not receive the blessings of Christ’s return.
- Christians grieve the loss of loved ones (**John 11:33-35; Phil. 2:27**), but we need not grieve over the condition of faithful Christians who have died (**Rev. 14:13**).
- The Christian’s “hope” is found in Christ’s resurrection (**1 Cor. 15**).
 - God “will” bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus (**1 Thess. 4:15-17**).
 - Death will not deprive faithful Christians this hope (**2 Cor. 4:13-18**).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER FOUR

Christ is Coming (4:13-5:11)

¹⁵ This we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

- Paul's teaching was not speculation intended merely to soothe their grief; he spoke "by the word of the Lord" (**1 Cor. 2:10-13**).

- This phrase may indicate:

- Paul received a direct revelation concerning the resurrection and the order of events at Christ's return.

"By 'the word of the Lord,' he evidently means a revelation from the Lord direct to him" (Lipscomb, p.57).

- Paul was expounding on what Jesus taught (**Matt. 24:30-31**).

"Paul may have designed a general allusion to all that the Lord had said about his coming" (Barnes, p.46).

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- Paul's teaching was not speculation intended merely to soothe their grief; he spoke "by the word of the Lord" (**1 Cor. 2:10-13**).
- "We who are alive and remain" identifies Christians who will be living when Christ returns; these people will "by no means precede those who are asleep."
 - Since the time of Christ's return was unknown, Paul spoke from the perspective of Christians continually awaiting Him (**Matt. 24:36, 42-44; Acts 1:7**).
 - Living Christians will have absolutely no advantage over deceased Christians when the Lord returns (**1 Thess. 4:16-17; 1 Cor. 15:51-52**).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER FOUR

Christ is Coming (4:13-5:11)

¹⁶ For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

- The same Jesus who visibly ascended into heaven will visibly descend from heaven (**Acts 1:9-11; Rev. 1:7**).
- Christ's return will be accompanied by three sounds:
 - "A shout," i.e. a commanding cry (**John 5:28-29, 11:43**).
 - "The voice of an archangel."
 - Michael is elsewhere called "the" archangel (**Jude 9; Rev. 12:7**), but Paul does not identify him here.
 - In this verse, the Greek says neither "an" nor "the" explicitly.
"Michael is the only archangel we read about in Scripture ... but we cannot be sure that the reference is to him" (Weaver, p.299).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER FOUR

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- Christ's return will be accompanied by three sounds:

- "A shout," i.e. a commanding cry (**John 5:28-29, 11:43**).

- "The voice of an archangel."

- "The trumpet of God" (**Matt. 24:31; 1 Cor. 15:51-52**).

"It is God's trumpet because employed in his ... service" (Lipscomb, p.59).

"'Of God' means that this is a trumpet used in God's service, not a trumpet that God Himself uses" (Weaver, p.300).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER FOUR

Christ is Coming (4:13-5:11)

¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

- The dead in Christ will be raised first, “then” the living will be changed and be “caught up together with them.”
 - “Caught up” – to seize, carry off by force; to snatch away (Mounce).
 - The English word “rapture” comes through the Latin translation of the Greek word translated “caught up.” Therefore, the rapturing of Christians is biblical. However, the Rapture taught by Premillennialism (a separate, secret coming of Christ several years before His final return) is not biblical.

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- The dead in Christ will be raised first, “then” the living will be changed and be “caught up together with them.”
- The passive expression “shall be caught up” emphasizes God’s power. Christians will not ascend through our own ability; God will take us up to Christ (**consider Phil. 3:21**).
- “Together with them” means resurrected and living saints will be reunited as one company, with neither group disadvantaged.

“Together with implies full association. Sundered as the saints will be at the Lord’s return ... they then shall be reunited nevermore to part” (Lipscomb, p.61).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER FOUR

Christ is Coming (4:13-5:11)

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- Clouds are repeatedly associated with Christ's divine glory, ascension, and return (**Acts 1:9-11; Matt. 26:64; Rev. 1:7**).
- Christ's people will be removed from the earth and gathered personally to "meet the Lord in the air" (**2 Thess. 2:1**).
 - Contrary to Premillennialism, nothing is said about the Lord setting foot on earth again.
- The greatest promise is not merely resurrection, reunion, or transformation, but unending fellowship with Christ – "thus we shall always be with the Lord" (**John 14:3; Phil. 1:23**).

FIRST THESSALONIANS CHAPTER FOUR

Christ is Coming (4:13-5:11)

¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words.

- There is “comfort” in “these words” because:
 - Deceased Christians are asleep but not without hope.
 - Christ’s resurrection guarantees our resurrection.
 - The dead in Christ will suffer no disadvantage.
 - The dead will be raised and the living transformed.
 - Both groups will be reunited at Christ’s return.
 - Together they will remain with the Lord forever.
- Christ’s return should produce comfort, faithfulness, and hope, not fear (**1 Cor. 15:54-58; 1 Thess. 5:1-11; Tit. 2:13**).
- We mourn the loss of a saint, but we mourn with confidence and comfort (**John 11:25-26; Rev. 14:13**).