

“Service with a Smile” (1 Thessalonians 4:1-12)

One day, Frederick the Great of Prussia was walking on the outskirts of Berlin when he encountered a very old man walking in the opposite direction. “Who are you?” Frederick asked his subject. “I am a king,” replied the old man. “A king!” laughed Frederick. “Over what kingdom do you reign?” “Over myself,” was the proud old man’s reply. This old man was on to something. Each of us is “monarch” over our own lives. By that I mean we are responsible for ruling our actions and decisions. To make consistently good decisions, to take the right action at the right time, and to refrain from the wrong actions requires character and self-discipline. To do otherwise is to lose control of ourselves—to potentially destroy our witness or disqualify ourselves from ministry. When we are foolish, we want to conquer the world. When we are wise, we want to conquer ourselves. This begins when we do what we should, no matter how we feel about it.

Today, in 1 Thess 4:1-12 we will learn how to do what we should. It is important to recognize that we have arrived at the center of the book of 1 Thessalonians. To clearly see this, it will be helpful to return to the theme of the letter found in 1:9-10. In these two verses, Paul summarizes the three components of the argument of his book.¹ He writes, “(1) For they themselves report about us what kind of a reception we had with you, and how you turned to God from idols (2) to serve a living and true God, and (3) to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, that is Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.” The first section entails 2:1-3:13; the second section deals with our present text (4:1-12); and the third and final section encompasses the remainder of the book (4:13-5:28). The structure of the theme verses in 1:9-10 point readers to the center of the letter: “to serve the living and true God.” Or as I shall suggest, “*walk His way*.” In the twelve verses of 1 Thess 4:1-12, Paul exhorts us to *walk His way* by being sexually pure, loving other believers, and working not meddling.

1. Serve God by being sexually pure (4:1-8). In these first eight verses, Paul explains that God’s will is for us to become holy (“sanctified”) like Jesus. In 4:1-2 he writes, “**Finally then,² brethren, we request³ and exhort⁴ you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received⁵ from us instruction as to how you ought⁶ to walk and please⁷ God (just as you actually do walk⁸), that⁹ you excel still more.¹⁰ For you know¹¹ what commandments¹² we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.**” Paul begins this chapter with the word “finally.”¹³ Have you heard the latest definition of an optimist? It is someone who believes the preacher is almost finished when he says “finally.” From a purely statistical point of view, it is interesting to note that in chapters 1-3 there is a total of 43 verses, and in chapters 4-5 there are a whopping 46 verses to add to the total! So the question is, “What does Paul mean when he says ‘finally?’” I would suggest it is almost like a change of gears as he moves into overdrive. He ups the ante. He raises the stakes. The word “finally” serves as the punch line.¹⁴ In chapters 4-5, Paul moves from the theological to the practical. Paul continually affirms believers in their position and encourages them in their practice.¹⁵ In 1 Thessalonians, he affirms that the Thessalonian believers are positionally chosen (1:4), yet he exhorts them to practically live out this positional truth by walking in obedience (2:12). In this passage, he encourages the Thessalonians with their present “walk”—their lifestyle of faith.¹⁶ The Christian life begins with a step of faith, but that step leads to a walk of faith. Christianity is not a sprint; it is a walk of perseverance along the way marked out for us by Jesus Christ. The biblical metaphor “walk” is an appropriate term that most likely came into use because Christianity was originally called “The Way” in Acts.¹⁷ What is of particular interest here is that Paul uses the word “walk” to bookend this section. The Greek word *peripateo* (“walk”) is used twice in 4:1 and again in 4:12 where the NASB renders it “behave.”¹⁸ Hence, the thrust of this passage is that you and I would walk with God, which entails seeking to please Him by receiving His instruction and obeying His commandments.¹⁹ Will you make a conscious decision to *walk His way*? It will be difficult, if not impossible, to continue to work through this passage unless you choose as an act of your will that you are going to obey God, whether you like it or not and whether you feel like it or not. I urge you with all that I am to *walk His way*.

Now the \$6 million question is, “How do we please the Lord and *walk His way*?” There’s a simple answer—by doing the will of God. In 4:3-8, Paul insists that Christians must maintain their sexual purity. In 4:3-6a, Paul gives three specific instructions.

- ***Abstain from sexual immorality (4:3b).*** Paul bluntly states, “**For this is the²⁰ will of God,²¹ your sanctification;²² that is, that you abstain²³ from sexual immorality.**” The word “abstain” means “to keep as far away from as possible,²⁴ to have nothing to do with.” As believers we should never ask how far we can go and not step over the line. Instead, we should attempt to do everything to stay as far away from the line as we possibly can.²⁵ This leads to an obvious question: What does Paul mean when he uses the phrase “sexual immorality?” In brief, the answer is everything immoral! Sorry about that! I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but that’s what the Bible says.²⁶ The phrase “sexual immorality” comes from the Greek word *porneia*, which is a broad word that includes premarital sex, extramarital sex, homosexuality, and every form of pornography.²⁷ This term covers sins of the mind, body, eyes, ears, and lips. Paul forbids all expressions of *porneia* because he is concerned with our “sanctification.” The word “sanctification” means “to be separate to God, to be distinct.” This word occurs in its various forms four times in 4:3-7. Sanctification does not mean saying “no” to anything that is fun; it means progressively growing to be more like the Lord who said, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”²⁸ In 4:3, Paul clarifies a very important aspect of God’s will: Christians are to avoid sexual immorality like the plague.²⁹ Certain things in the Christian life are not open to debate.³⁰ Many Christians ask, “What is God’s will for my life?” in the midst of practicing sexual immorality. I would dare say that God will not clearly reveal His will to those who are practicing sexual sin. If we want to *walk His way*, we will abstain from sexual immorality.
- ***Control your own body (4:4-5).*** Paul writes, “[The will of God is] **that each of you know how to possess³¹ his own vessel³² in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God.**”³³ Paul states that it is God’s will for us to be able to sexually control ourselves—to “gird up our loins.” In our flesh, our natural tendency is to say, “I just can’t help myself” or “I’m a guy or I’m a gal” or “I am in love.” Do you know what I find so interesting about these justifications? In the most intense heat of the moment, any one of us could bring our passion to a screeching halt. If a police officer walks up to your parked car and knocks on your steamed-over window, I bet you could stop. If an angry husband armed with a shotgun walked in on you with his wife, I would guess you could stop in a hurry. We can always stop what we are doing...the issue is one of motivation. Paul expects us to live in “sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God.” Many of us have been far too hard on those who do not know God and too light on those who do know God. I don’t know about you, but I expect pagans to live sexually immoral lives. Sinners are supposed to sin, it’s a part of their job description. What’s unacceptable is when saints live sexually immoral lives. Our problem is not with our society; our problem is with our church and the church of Jesus Christ throughout our country. Many believers need to be told, “Either be pure...or stop calling yourself a Christian!” If we want to *walk His way*, we will learn to control our own body.
- ***Protect other men and women (4:6a).*** Paul writes, “[The will of God is] **that no man transgress³⁴ and defraud³⁵ his brother³⁶ in the³⁷ matter.**” The word “brother” in this context indicates any person. The point is, God cares for people. He doesn’t want us to take advantage of any of His creations. Sexual sin steals from others. It steals both from the person and from their present or future mate, parents and other family members, and present or future children. This is no different than stealing someone’s property. We have no more right to have sex with someone’s spouse because they are attractive to us than we have a right to steal their car because it appeals to us. This phrase is a sign saying, “Trespassers Will Be Prosecuted.”³⁸ If we want to *walk His way*, we will protect other men and women.

Young people and singles, perhaps you are thinking, “What kind of sick humor is this? God puts this sex drive in us then says, ‘Oh, but you have to wait.’ It’s cruel.” This is kind of like buying your 16-year-old son a brand new Lamborghini, parking it outside, and then saying, “It’s yours. It’s paid for, but there are no keys, and you can’t drive it.” So every day he has to walk by and look at it, sit in it, but cannot drive it. He has the car but nowhere to go. Is God crazy? No, He is very smart. God understands there are consequences to premature oneness. His design is for you and me to have this beautiful thing called intimacy and oneness in marriage, where two become one for life. When we choose to ignore God’s design, there are consequences.³⁹

[Tear off a single piece of scotch tape, and begin sticking the tape to different people’s pants, shirts, and foreheads.] Each time I stick this tape on someone, when I pull it off, pieces of that person’s clothing stick to the tape. The more people I stick the tape to, the more adhesive was lost. This piece of tape is designed to stick things together, yet the more I use it on people’s clothing, the less sticky it becomes. The same thing happens with our sexuality. Sexuality is who we are. We want to be able to stick together through thick and thin so that we can enjoy the oneness waiting for us. When we go outside God’s principles, our stick-ability in marriage is diminished. Many of us are married and wonder why we don’t have the ability to have a cohesive relationship. This may be the reason why. God is not a killjoy. He’s just smart. He said oneness is what we are to pursue.⁴⁰

In 4:6b-8, Paul shares three incentives to pursue sexual purity.

- ***Avoid God’s judgment (4:6b).*** Paul writes, “[Abstain from sexual immorality] **because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before⁴¹ and solemnly warned⁴² you.**” In the course of his ministry in Thessalonica, Paul has warned these new believers that they must be men and women of purity. For those believers who choose to be sexually immoral, Paul warns that “the Lord is the avenger.” The word “avenger” (*ekdikos*) is only used here and in Rom 13:4, where it refers to the governing authorities that bear the sword and will pour out wrath on the one who sins. The leading Greek dictionary defines this term as “one who punishes.”⁴³ This is a very scary word! Paul probably has in mind the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor 5:10) when Jesus Himself will elevate our sexual purity or lack thereof. It is also likely that God “gives us over” (Rom 1:24, 26, 28) to the consequences of our sin in this life. Believers who cheat are often cheated upon by someone else. What goes around comes around! An immoral Christian teenager may learn the hard way that condoms fail 20-30% of the time. In today’s culture, this is playing Russian roulette with our lives. A gun will give you one in six. A condom will give you one in five, or less. Gals, you may get pregnant and guys you may get a venereal disease. Another severe consequence can be the memories that will stay with you for the rest of your life. There is a chemical called epinephrine in your brain. It is released during physical contact, and what happens is people get married to a wonderful person and all of a sudden the memories of previous encounters come flooding back. There is a term for this called “sex ghosts.”⁴⁴ Can we get over some of these consequences? Yes, with God’s grace we can; however, in Gal 6:7 Paul writes, “Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap.” God is an ethical God. He keeps books on sexual issues and He is a very good accountant. These are all the laws of the harvest. If we want to *walk His way*, we will take the avenger dead serious.
- ***Fulfill God’s call (4:7).*** Paul writes, “[Abstain from sexual immorality] **for God has not called us for the purpose of impurity,⁴⁵ but in sanctification.**”⁴⁶ God “calls” us to both salvation and sanctification. He takes the initiative in both our everlasting life and our spiritual growth. We simply respond to His work in us. Throughout the course of our Christian experience, God issues an upward calling, a high calling, a calling to sanctification, to ministry, and to heavenly reward.⁴⁷ We fulfill our destiny by heeding His call and *walking His way*.

- ***Honor the Scriptures and the Spirit (4:8).*** In the final verse of this first section, Paul issues a warning: “So,⁴⁸ he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit⁴⁹ to you.” Paul says, “If you don’t like what I’ve written, please understand that your “beef” is with God. You are rejecting Him and His authority. Likewise, if you do not like what I have said, your problem is not with me, it is with God. I am just the mailman...I deliver the mail. I am the doctor, I give the prescription.” Before you complain too much, please understand that sexual immorality was even more prevalent in Paul’s day. In the first place Thessalonica was a seaport, which meant that people from all over the Mediterranean world stopped there in transit from one place to another. The sailors and visiting merchants brought with them the usual desires for sexual gratification. More importantly, the Greek religions of that day practiced sacred prostitution. That involved hiring a prostitute at a pagan temple as part of your acts of worship. The famed orator Demosthenes described the moral climate of ancient Greece this way: “We keep prostitutes for pleasure, we keep mistresses for day to day needs of the body, we keep wives for the begetting of children and for the faithful guarding of the home.” So long as a man supported his wife and family there was no shame whatsoever in extra-marital relationships.⁵⁰ Given the moral atmosphere of the day, there must have been enormous pressure on those young Christians to lower their standards to conform to the world around them. But Paul will have none of it. He orders them to abstain from every form of sexual immorality. Fortunately, 4:8 ends with a very hopeful phrase. It mentions “God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.” The word “gives” is a present tense verb. In this case it means that God gives and keeps on giving the Spirit to you.⁵¹ You have the Holy Spirit always within you. Therefore, when God commands you to abstain, He also gives you the power to obey. What a wonderful thought. You are not in this battle alone! Your weakness is His strength. Do you need help? You’ve got it!

Perhaps, you’ve found yourself lost in the above instructions and incentives. If so, here are some other suggestions that may be helpful to you.

- ***Recognize your position in Christ.*** You are a “saint” who is dead to sin.
- ***Ask God for grace and mercy.*** Acknowledge “it” could happen to you. Plead the blood of Jesus.
- ***Saturate yourself with Scripture.*** Read God’s Word to shore up your strength.
- ***Pray when you are tempted.*** Satan flees when we pray.
- ***Have an accountability partner.*** Make sure he or she asks you brutal purity questions.
- ***Beware of raunchy music.*** Research proves that teens who listen to music with sexually graphic or degrading lyrics are far more likely to be sexually active (51% vs. 29%).⁵²
- ***Exercise with a vengeance.*** Cardiovascular workouts will so tire you out that your drive can be diminished.
- ***Refuse to live together before marriage.*** Data from Rutgers University now suggests that 90% of couples who live together before marriage will end in divorce.
- ***Invest in your marriage.*** Pour your time and energy into your spouse. This is the best distraction.

Before we move on, I really want you to hear that it is never too late to walk with God. Many of you have already sinned sexually. It is God’s will that you move on. God makes it clear that He will welcome you back and restore you to fellowship. As we trusted the finished work of Christ for salvation, so we trust His finished work on the cross for our sin (1 John 1:9-2:2). What Paul is saying in this section is that through our relationship with God, we can have the power and the discipline to stay sexually pure; or if we have already messed up, we can begin right now. God is simply waiting for you to confess your sin, receive His forgiveness, and go and sin no more. Or, if you prefer, *walk His way*.

[Why should you serve God by being sexually pure? For the simple reason that God loves you and wants the best for you.]

2. Serve God by loving other believers (4:9-10). The transition from holiness to love is not a difficult one (cf. 3:11-13). God's love is a holy love, so our love for God and for one another ought to motivate us to holy living. The more we live like God, the more we will love one another. If a Christian really loves his brother, he will not sin against him (4:6).⁵³ Paul writes, "**Now⁵⁴ as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God⁵⁵ to love one another; for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge⁵⁶ you, brethren, to excel still more.**" In these two verses, Paul reminds the Thessalonians that they should demonstrate "the love of the brethren." The Greek word behind this phrase is *philadelphia*, which means "brotherly love." In the New Testament it is used exclusively of the love Christians are to show to each other.⁵⁷ Outside of the New Testament *philadelphia* is used only of love for blood brothers or sisters.⁵⁸ The idea seems to be that believers should have a fondness for one another. This only occurs when the *agape* love of 4:10 is first implemented. The word "love" (*agapao*) in 4:10 is a different word for love than in the first phrase of 4:9. The word here is a self-sacrificing love produced by the Holy Spirit. This requires believers making a conscious decision of their wills to love and forgive one another. Paul reveals that the Thessalonians are exuding love for not only one another but all the brethren in their entire region. They are a model church, yet Paul urges these believers to "excel still more." How can we accomplish this? First, it is important to recognize that the church is made up of individuals and families. Therefore, it is essential to love believers closest to you. If you don't love those people closest to you, you won't love the body of Christ at large. So if you are married, the most important person in your life is your spouse. You need to love your husband or wife with every fiber of your being. Obviously, you can do this by being sexually pure. But you can also listen to your spouse, verbally affirm your spouse, and support his or her dreams. If you have children or grandchildren, you must love those precious souls with unconditional love. One way I have found of doing this is adopting an area of their interest. If they like a sport, a type of music, or a particular hobby, do that with them—even if you don't like it. If you are a student or a single, you are called to first and foremost love other believers in Christ. This means prioritizing your friendships with those in youth or college groups above those of your coworkers or friends. As a church, we are called to love people within our body. One of the most tangible ways you can do this is by simply reaching out to people on Sunday morning. This is as simple as greeting someone who looks new or lonely and seeking to befriend that person. Additionally, we are expected to love those believers outside of our church walls. On Friday, I had a phone call with a seminarian who is looking for a pastoral job, and he told me about a Presbyterian church in Eastern Washington that learned of a Hispanic Charismatic pastor in their community who wanted to go to seminary but couldn't afford it. They decided to foot the bill! Theologically and philosophically these churches have very little in common, but they love Jesus and they love one another!

What does it mean that our love should "excel still more?" It means that we should increase in our sympathy for those in need, patience for those who are struggling, and tolerance toward those with whom we disagree. We can't be satisfied with our past performance. We must excel still more in our love for others. Research shows that when the unchurched are asked what they are looking for in a church, the answer is always the same: They are looking for a caring church. Not just a friendly church, a relevant church, or a church with plenty of programs for the kids. As good and essential as those things are, they don't touch the deepest heart cry of this generation, which is for a place where they can be loved truly and deeply. When the people of the world find such a place they stand in line to get in. This was the primary attraction of the early church. They had no buildings, no fancy programs, no large budgets, no radio, no TV. They had none of the things that we consider essential for success. Yet nothing could stop them. In just three centuries, Christianity conquered the Roman Empire. How did this happen? It was said of the early Christians, "Behold, how they love one another."⁵⁹ If we want to *walk His way*, we will love other believers.

[Why should you serve God by loving other believers? It pleases God and serves as a witness to the world.]

3. Serve God by working not meddling (4:11-12). In this third and final section, Paul argues that our work is a witness. People are watching. We are witnesses! He puts it like this: “**And to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, so that you will behave [“walk”]⁶⁰ properly⁶¹ toward outsiders⁶² and not be in any need.**” These challenging words should be understood in the context of 4:13-5:11, which teaches Christ’s return. Furthermore, in 5:14 there is yet another warning against slackness.⁶³

- **Lead a quiet life.**⁶⁴ Paul states “make it your ambition to lead a quiet life.”⁶⁵ It is a life that does its best to avoid unnecessary contention and to be at peace with all men insofar as it is humanly possible. The word translated “make it your ambition” (*philotimeomai*) can also be rendered “aspire.”⁶⁶ Paul’s point is: There is a time to share Christ, but more often than not, it is better to listen and draw others out. Don’t have pat answers for all the suffering in the world. Seek to learn from others. Have a pleasant demeanor. Do not have fits of anger or jealousy.
- **Mind your own business.**⁶⁷ Do not be a busybody. Don’t meddle in other people’s affairs. Say no to gossip and slander. You don’t need to know the latest and greatest news on someone else. You have enough to be concerned about yourself.
- **Work with your hands.** The upper classes of Rome and Greece despised manual labor. That’s why they owned so many slaves. They hated to work with their hands. But Christianity brought in a new ethic based on personal responsibility and hard work. Jesus was a carpenter and Paul himself was a tentmaker! It’s important to understand that Paul isn’t being metaphorical here. He literally worked with his hands as a tentmaker whenever he could so that he could support himself while he preached the gospel. Even though he was highly educated, he didn’t mind hard work in the least and he didn’t find manual labor embarrassing. So Paul says “work with your hands” so that you can provide for the needs of your own family and not give the gospel a black eye.⁶⁸ If you’re looking for true welfare reform, it begins right here.

This past week, I met with my men’s group at a deli where we have met for over a year. During the past several months, I’ve noticed a hardworking young woman who buses tables, washes windows, and mops toilets. I have been so impressed with her that I decided to approach her and commend her on her work ethic. After doing so, I told her that I would be glad to fill out a comment card expressing my appreciation. She said, “Why don’t you tell my manager? And tell him I need a raise.” I was happy to comply, because I know her manager. You can imagine my shock when her manager said, “She was just complaining to me about how she doesn’t want to do her job. But she will only be here for four more weeks.” The young woman ran over and attempted to explain herself but I was a bit underwhelmed. As we talked, I wondered if this young woman was a believer. (At this point, I was hoping that she is not!) I told her, “Someone (God) may be trying to tell you something.” By that I mean, “Keep working hard, but have a good attitude.” I then asked her, “What are your future plans?” She said, “I am going to return to BYU.” I laughed at the irony. Instead of Christians receiving a bad name, this time it was the Mormons. The point is this: God longs for us to use our work as a witness. He wants us to represent Him in our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. As we do so, we will see others drawn to Christ.

Let me say it again: *Walk His way*. When you walk His way life is not usually easier but God is glorified in and through you, and eventually the world sits up and takes notice. Will you be a Christian who is characterized by sexual purity, love for the brethren, and a godly work ethic? If so, you can change your world. For when you learn to conquer yourself and allow God’s Spirit to reign in and through you, your life and the lives of others will be changed for eternity. *Walk His way*.

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Scripture References

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

1 Corinthians 6:12-20

Hebrews 13:4

Ephesians 5:3-5

John 13:34-35

Romans 12:10

Colossians 4:5

Study Questions

1. Is my “walk” (i.e., personal behavior) pleasing to God (4:1-2)? What tangible examples of Christian maturity can I share from my own life? Am I seeking to “excel still more” in my obedience to God’s “instruction” and “commandments?” What specific area of my life is God presently working on? Am I aggressively responding to His leadership?
2. When I think of “the will of God” (4:3) what immediately comes to mind? Do I regularly reflect on my sexual purity (4:3)? How do I strive to maintain my purity? What have I learned from my failures and sins in the sexual realm? How can I teach others to learn from my mistakes? In what ways do I need to grow in my thoughts, words, and actions? Read Ephesians 5:3-5. Does this passage serve as my consuming passion? Why do I tolerate impurity when the Lord is clear that I “must” walk and please God (1 Thess 4:1b)?
3. Am I willing to take God’s Word at face value? Will I obey the Lord in all that He says (e.g., sexual purity, love for believers, a godly work ethic)? Do I recognize that when I fail to do so I am “rejecting” God (4:8)? How can I be a disciple that is “humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at God’s word” (Isaiah 66:2b)? Who can help me grow to become this type of submissive disciple? Will I contact this person today?
4. Will I make a conscious decision to love other believers in Christ (4:9-10)? How can I grow in my brotherly fondness (Greek = *philadelphia*) for fellow believers? At this very moment, is there a believer who I am struggling to love? How can I express love and compassion for this person? Will I take the initiative to seek this person out and attempt to bless and not curse? Read Romans 12:9-21. Am I using this passage as my measure of love for those believers who I know and serve with?
5. Am I so conscientious about my work, so skilled at what I do, so helpful to the people around me, that it makes them wonder *why* I work the way I do (4:11-12)? How can I improve my skills and attitude? If Jesus were working beside me, how would my work attitudes and actions change? What will it take for me to realize that Jesus observes all that I do and that His Spirit is grieved when I don’t work as unto Him? Read Ephesians 6:5-9 and Colossians 3:22-4:1.

Notes

¹ Zane C. Hodges, “1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 and the Rapture,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 6 (October-December 2000): 23-24.

² The strong conjunction *oun* (“therefore,” omitted in NIV), closely links the two major portions of the letter (1:2-3:13; 4:1-5:22). Michael W. Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 124.

³ Paul only uses the verb *erotao* (“request, ask”) in the Thessalonian letters (1 Thess 4:1; 5:12; 2 Thess 2:1).

⁴ Paul uses the verb *parakaleo* (“exhort,” “encourage,” “urge”) 54 times in his 13 letters. It is noticeably present in 1 Thessalonians (2:12; 3:2, 7; 4:1, 10, 18; 5:11, 14).

⁵ The word translated “received” (*paralambano*) is used for accepting instructions passed on as fixed traditions from teacher to follower. Paul speaks in these terms about doctrinal traditions as well as ethical instruction that he passes on to his converts and expects them to keep (cf. 1 Cor 11:2, 23; 15:1-3; Gal 1:9; Phil 4:9; 2 Thess 2:15; 3:6).

⁶ The word “ought” is the Greek word *dei*, which means “it is necessary.” This is a very strong word.

⁷ The notion of pleasing/displeasing God using the verb *aresko* is present in Rom 8:8; 1 Cor 7:32-34; Gal 1:10; 1 Thess 2:4, 15; 4:1; and 2 Tim 2:4

⁸ The KJV/NKJV does not include this phrase which is a textual variant that seems to be genuine.

⁹ This is the second of two *hina* clauses (“in order that”) in 1 Thess 4:1.

¹⁰ The word translated “excel” means “be outstanding, be prominent, excel” (see also 1 Cor 15:58 cf. 2 Cor 8:7ab; Col 2:7). In 1 Thess 4:1, 10 the addition of the adverb *mallon* (“still more”) leads to a definition of “progress more and more.” See BDAG s.v. *perisseuo* 1b β.

¹¹ Paul uses the verb *oida* (“know”) throughout 1 Thessalonians (1:4, 5; 2:1, 2, 5, 11; 3:3, 4; 4:2, 4, 5; 5:2, 12).

¹² The word *paraggelia* (“commandments”) is an unusual NT term only used in Acts 5:28; 16:24; 1 Thess 4:2; and 1 Tim 1:5, 18.

¹³ The Greek word *loipon* (“finally”) typically introduces a new, sometimes concluding section in Paul’s letters.

¹⁴ Sam Gordon, *Hope and Glory*. Truth for Today (Greenville, SC: Ambassador International, 2005), 127.

¹⁵ Paul frequently does this in his epistles (e.g., Rom 1-11, 12-16; Eph 1-3, 4-6; Col 1-2, 3-4; cf. Heb 1-11, 12-13).

¹⁶ Wiema writes, “The verb *peripateo* literally means ‘to walk’ but has the metaphorical sense of ‘living one’s life.’ It is not only one of Paul’s favorite words to describe the Christian life (it occurs 32 times in his letters), it is also one of his more strategic terms as it is used to introduce themes that the apostle considered to be fundamental. This metaphorical use of ‘walking’ to describe moral conduct has its roots in Paul’s Jewish background (approximately 200 of the 1547 occurrences of the Hebrew verb ‘to walk’ in the Old Testament are metaphorical).” Jeffrey A.D. Weima, “1 Thessalonians,” *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 419.

E.g., 1 Thess 2:12; Eph 4:1, 17; 5:2, 15; Col 1:10; and 2:6.

¹⁷ See Acts 9:2; 18:25-26; 19:9, 23; 22:4; and 24:14, 22.

¹⁸ The Pauline use of the verb *peripateo* (“walk”) makes for an interesting study: Rom 6:4; 8:4; 13:13; 14:15; 1 Cor 3:3; 7:17; 2 Cor 4:2; 5:7; 10:2-3; 12:18; Gal 5:16; Eph 2:2, 10; 4:1, 17 [2x]; 5:2, 8, 15; Phil 3:17-18; Col 1:10; 2:6; 3:7; 4:5; 1 Thess 2:12; 4:1 [2x], 12; and 2 Thess 3:6, 11.

¹⁹ The word “commandments” (*paraggelia*) was used of military commands passed down the ranks.

²⁰ The definite article (“the”) is absent in the Greek text indicating that this is *part* of God’s will, not all of His will.

²¹ Paul uses the phrase “the will of God” in Rom 1:10; 8:27; 12:2; 15:32; 1 Cor 1:1; 2 Cor 1:1; 7:9-10; 8:5; Eph 1:1; 6:6; Col 1:1; 4:12; 1 Thess 4:3; 2 Tim 1:1; cf. Mark 3:35; Heb 10:36; 1 Pet 2:15; 4:2, 6, 19; 5:2; and 1 John 2:17.

²² The word *hagiasmos* (“sanctification”) is used in Rom 6:19, 22; 1 Cor 1:30; 1 Thess 4:3, 4, 7; 2 Thess 2:13; 1 Tim 2:15; Heb 12:14; and 1 Pet 1:2. In 1 Thessalonians, the term is referring to experiential sanctification, not positional sanctification.

²³ Paul uses the verb *apecho* with the meaning “abstain” in 1 Thess 4:3; 5:22; and 1 Tim 4:3.

²⁴ This definition has been modified from BDAG s.v. *apecho* 5.

²⁵ In Eph 5:3-5, Paul says that we are to avoid even the “hint” (NIV) of sexual immorality.

²⁶ “Only if your God can say things that outrage you and make you struggle (as in a real friendship or marriage) will you know that you have gotten a hold of a real God and not a figment of your imagination.” Tim Keller, *Belief in God in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton Adult, 2008), 114.

²⁷ Paul uses the word *porneia* (“sexual immorality”) in 1 Cor 5:1; 6:13, 18; 7:2; 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 5:3; Col 3:5; and 1 Thess 4:3.

²⁸ See Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7; and 1 Pet 1:16.

²⁹ The motto of William Tyndale College is “The will of God, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else.” Grant C. Richison, *1 Thessalonians* (<http://www.gracenotes.info/> 1997), 89.

³⁰ Later in 5:18, Paul says that it is God’s will for the Thessalonians to give thanks in all things. So God’s will includes obedience to Him in several areas.

³¹ This is Paul’s only use of *ktaomai* (“possess”); cf. Matt 10:9; Luke 18:12; 21:19; Acts 1:18; 8:20; and 22:28.

³² See René Lopez, “To Possess One’s Vessel: 1 Thessalonians 4:4,” *Chafer Theological Seminary Journal* 11:2 (Fall 2005): 23-51.

³³ In 2 Thess 1:8 Paul declares that God will deal out “retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.” Mayhue suggests, “This phrase probably has its origin in the Old Testament (cf. Ps 79:6; Jer 10:25).” Richard Mayhue, *First and Second Thessalonians*. Focus on the Bible (Great Britain: Christian Focus, 1999), 111.

³⁴ The word *huperbaino* (“transgress”) is only used here in the NT.

³⁵ The word *pleonekteo* (“defraud”) is only used by Paul in the NT (2 Cor 2:11; 7:2; 12:17, 18; 1 Thess. 4:6).

³⁶ This may refer to taking liberties with another brother’s family (cf. 4:9) or to the term “brother” could refer to any other human, similar to “neighbor” in 4:12. It is likely that the term is a generic reference to humankind.

³⁷ The definite article (*to*) demonstrates that Paul is referring to 4:3-5.

³⁸ Gordon, *Hope and Glory*, 146.

³⁹ In his book, *Forbidden Fruit: Sex & Religion in the Lives of American Teenagers*, sociology professor Mark Regnerus says evangelical teens are slightly more sexually active than their non-evangelical peers. Non-evangelical teens have sex for the first time at age 16.7, versus 16.3 for evangelicals. Worse, 13.7% of evangelical teens have had three or more sex partners, versus 8.9% of their non-evangelical peers. World Magazine reports 80% of U.S. teens claiming to be born-again agree that sex outside of marriage is morally wrong, yet 66% violate their own beliefs. “Evangelical teens don’t have sex less than their non-evangelical friends; they just feel guiltier about it.” He credits the clash of cultures in the evangelical youth experience: urged to drink deeply from the waters of American individualism and its self-focused pleasure ethic, yet asked to value time-honored religious traditions like family and chastity. “Who can serve two masters? Teens need a pure community of true believers who teach the truth about sex, including its beauty in marriage.” Church Leaders Intelligence Report Enclosed - 05.14.08 *OneNewsNow* 3/29/08

⁴⁰ Kenny Hibbard, “What’s a Single to Do?”

<http://preachingtoday.com/sermons/mediacollectionsn365/whatsasingletodo.html?start=3>.

⁴¹ The verb *proeipon* (“told you before”) is used in Matt 24:25; Mark 13:23; Acts 1:16; Rom 9:29; 2 Cor 7:3; 13:2[2x]; Gal 1:9; 5:21[2x]; 1 Thess 3:4; 4:6; Heb 4:7; 2 Pet 3:2; and Jude 17.

⁴² The verb *diamarturomai* (“solemnly warned”) is used in Luke 16:28; Acts 2:40; 8:25; 10:42; 18:5; 20:21, 23, 24; 23:11; 28:23; 1 Thess 4:6; 1 Tim 5:21; 2 Tim 2:14; 4:1; and Heb 2:6.

⁴³ BDAG s.v. *ekdikos*.

⁴⁴ Hibbard, “What’s a Single to Do?”

⁴⁵ Paul uses the term *akatharsia* (“impurity”) in Rom 1:24; 6:19; 2 Cor 12:21; Gal 5:19; Eph 4:19; 5:3; Col 3:5; and 1 Thess 2:3; 4:7.

⁴⁶ The repetition of “sanctification” in 4:3 and 7 forms an inclusio or “bookend” encasing the warning about immorality, all of which undergirds the reason Christians should please God. F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. Word Biblical Commentary series (Waco, TX: Word, 1982), 81.

⁴⁷ Michael Eaton, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*. Preaching Through the Bible (Kent, England: Sovereign World, 1997), 57.

⁴⁸ The particle *toigaroun* (“so,” “therefore”) is very rare and is only used elsewhere in the NT in Heb 12:1.

⁴⁹ The unusual Greek construction *to pneuma hagion* (“the Spirit holy”) lays stress upon the Spirit as holy.

⁵⁰ William Barclay, *The Letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians*. Daily Study Bible series. 2nd ed. and reprint ed. (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew, 1963), 231.

⁵¹ Paul’s description of God’s giving his Holy Spirit “into you,” is an expression that echoes exactly the words of Ezekiel (see Ezek 37:6, 14 [LXX]; see also 36:27).

⁵² Preaching Today citation: Sunil Vyas, “Raunchy Lyrics Trigger Earlier Onset of Sexual Activity Among Teens,” www.earthtimes.org (8/7/06).

⁵³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Ready: 1 Thessalonians*, Electronic ed.

⁵⁴ The phrase *peri de* (“now about”) typically introduces new topics that were likely raised by the Thessalonians and communicated through Timothy back to Paul (1 Thess 4:13; 5:1; cf. 1 Cor 7:1, 25; 8:1; 12:1; 16:1, 12). Nevertheless, 4:9-12 is still related to 4:1-8 and 3:12-13. G.K. Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. IVP New Testament Commentary (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 124.

⁵⁵ The word *theodidaktos* (“taught by God”) only occurs here in the NT and seems to refer to the teachings of Jesus in the Upper Room (John 13:34; 15:12, 17). Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 90 and Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 125. An almost exact statement is made in Isa 54:13 and quoted in John 6:45. A similar idea is contained in the New Covenant promise of Jer 31:33-34. This appears to be the ministry of the Spirit spoken of by John (cf. 1 John 2:20, 27). See Mayhue, *First and Second Thessalonians*, 114. “Taught by God” refers to the teachings of Jesus in the Upper Room (John 13:34; 15:12, 17).

Bruce, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 90 and Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 125.

⁵⁶ The Greek text has one command, “we urge,” an object, “you,” followed by four infinitives (4:10b, 11), and a final clause that gives the intended outcome (4:12).

⁵⁷ The phrase “love of the brethren” is a translation of the word *philadelphia* (see also Rom 12:10; Heb 13:1; 1 Pet 1:22; and 2 Pet 1:7).

⁵⁸ BDAG s.v. *philadelphia*.

⁵⁹ Ray Pritchard, “Your Reputation Matters” (1 Thess 4:9-12):

<http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/1996-10-20-Your-Reputation-Matters/>.

⁶⁰ The ESV, HSB, and NKJV accurately translate the word *peripateo* as “walk” (cf. 1 Thess 4:1). By interpreting this term, the NASB, NET, and NIV prevent the English reader from noting this chiasm.

⁶¹ The word *euschemonos* (“properly”) is used elsewhere only in Rom 13:13 and 1 Cor 14:40.

⁶² The phrase *tous exo* (“the outsiders”) is only used by Paul in 1 Cor 5:12 and Col 4:5.

⁶³ I. Howard Marshall, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*. New Century Bible Commentary series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans and London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott Pub. Ltd., 1983), 117 and Beale, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 128.

⁶⁴ The word *hesuchazo* (“lead a quiet life”) is only used in the NT in Luke 14:4; 23:56; Acts 11:18; 21:14; and 1 Thess 4:11.

⁶⁵ A related word (*hesuchios*) is used to describe the wife with a “quiet spirit” in 1 Pet 3:4.

⁶⁶ See BDAG s.v. *philotimeomai*: “have as one’s ambition, consider it an honor, aspire.” The word *philotimeomai* is used in Rom 15:20 and 2 Cor 5:9.

⁶⁷ This is the way the NIV translates this phrase.

⁶⁸ Unfortunately, Paul will have to deal with the problem of idleness again in 2 Thess 3:6-15.