**Introduction**

**In Chapter 3 of Paul’s letter to the church at Thessalonica, Paul expresses the joy that he felt when Timothy returned from visiting them. Timothy was a young Christian when Paul first met him. Paul offered Timothy the opportunity to follow him in his missionary work (Acts 16:1-3). In doing so, Paul illustrates an important pastoral and leadership responsibility: preparing the leadership for the church of tomorrow. Young Christians must be offered opportunities to grow by exercising their spiritual gifts in ministry. Recall that as a young convert, Paul (as Saul) was himself mentored by a wonderful Christian named Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37; 9:26-30; 11:20-26; 13:1-3). Mature Christians should be prepared for God to bring young disciples into their lives!**

**The Holy Spirit led Paul to say a prayer of thanksgiving, both for the steadfast faith and love of the Thessalonian church, and for their continued growth. We should understand that the faith that brings us to salvation is just the beginning – like a seed. Christian living calls for continued spiritual growth. This growth process is called *sanctification*. In the New Testament, this word appears five times, and two of those are in Chapter 4 of this letter. The word (Greek: hagiasmos) means “purification” or “holiness”. A beautiful illustration is the careful washing of dishes in preparation for using them to serve special guests.**

**In Chapter 4, Paul demonstrates yet another important pastoral responsibility: teaching, modeling, and encouraging holy living. The culture of the Gentile world of Paul’s day was both crude and cruel. Slavery was a fact of life; with few exceptions, women were relegated to a second-class status; the abuse of alcohol was widespread; powerful elites oppressed the poor; and the worship of pagan idols was often merely a front for organized prostitution. Paul and the other apostles *commanded* the followers of Christ to live pure lives in sharp contrast to their impure surroundings. We see some of these “Christian commandments” in this chapter, with more coming in Chapter 5.**

1. **Read I Thessalonians 4:1-8. This passage follows Paul’s prayer request for the Thessalonians to be “unblameable in holiness” as they appear before God, when Jesus returns. What does Paul “beseech and exhort” them to do? (v.1) Answer: He wants them to (or live) in such a way as to God. (See also John 14: 21-24; John 15:10-14; Ephesians 5:1-8; I Peter 1:13-16)**
2. **What did Paul and Silas give the church, and by whose authority? (v.2) Answer: they gave the church by the authority of the . (See also Matthew 28:18-20; I Timothy 4:11)**
3. **In verses 3-5, Paul states in clear terms “the will of God” about what sinful practice? Answer: . Is this still a problem today? Answer: . If so, how does it manifest itself in our culture? (See also John 15:18-21; John 16:33; Mark 4:16-17; II Corinthians 4:16-18)**
4. **What should “each and every one” of the Thessalonian disciples know how to do? (v. 4-5; the word “vessel” refers to the physical body. See also Romans 1:20-32 and I Corinthians 6:15-20)**
5. **Whose example did Paul warn them NOT to follow? (v. 5) Answer: He warned them not to follow the who do not . (Read Romans 12:1-2; I John 2:15-17)**
6. **What else does Paul command the Christians NOT to do to each other? (v. 6) Answer: Christians are not to each other in any matter. (See I Corinthians 6:7-11)**
7. **Who “gets even” with the Christian who defrauds (wrongs or takes advantage of) his sister or brother? (v. 6; see also Romans 12:17-21)**
8. **Why is the “call to holiness” so important for the Christian to obey? (v. 7; See also Exodus 19:3-8; I Peter 1:13-16)**
9. **If we refuse to obey the call to holy living, who are we really “despising”? (v.8; see also I Samuel 8:4-8; Isaiah 5:20-25)**
10. **Read verses 9-12. This passage continues with the “commandments” that Paul had given to the church in Thessalonica when he was there. Why did Paul feel that he didn’t have to teach them any more about “brotherly love”? (v. 9) Answer: They were taught by to love one another”. (See I John 3:10-18; 4:7-12, 17-21)**
11. **Was there any proof that the Thessalonian church demonstrated brotherly love? What did Paul say about them? What was his desire for them? (v.10) Answer:**
12. **What THREE THINGS did Paul command them to do? (v. 11; see also Proverbs 10:19; Proverbs 17:1, 27-28; Ecclesiastes 5:2) Answer:**
13. **What TWO things did Paul say would result if they obeyed those three commandments? (v. 12; see also Proverbs 12:11; 13:11; Psalm 104:23)**
14. **Read verses 13-18. This final passage of the chapter opens our eyes to a wonderful VISION given to Paul concerning one of the final events involving the church. It is widely described as the “rapture” or “catching away” of the church. Why did Paul reveal this vision to the Thessalonian church? (v.13) Answer: Paul did not want them to be concerning those who were (or deceased).**
15. **Should there be a difference between the way Christians and non-Christians cope with the reality of death? Why? (v.13; see also Mark 5:35-43; Luke 7:11-16; John 2:18-22, John 11:19-27)**
16. **When Jesus returns, who will He bring with Him? How are they described? (v.14) Answer: He will bring those who in Him.**
17. **In verse 15, what promise did Paul make to the Christians, and by what authority? Answer: The Christians who are alive when Jesus returns will not (precede or get ahead of) those who are deceased. He said this by the of the .**
18. **From where shall the Lord descend (come down)? (v. 16; see also John 6:37-40; 14:1-6; Acts 1:6-11)**
19. **What TWO sounds will accompany His coming? (v.16)**
20. **Who will rise FIRST? (v. 16) Answer: The in . (See also I Corinthians 15:20-26, 35-50)**
21. **What will happen to those Christians who “are alive and remain”? (v. 16) Describe in your own words.**
22. **Will we ever come back? Why or why not? (v. 17; see also I Corinthians 15:51-54; II Peter 3:10-13; Revelation 21:1-5) Answer:**
23. **Why did the Lord give Paul this glorious vision? (v. 18) Answer: So that it would be a source of to the church at times of tragedy and loss.**

**Conclusion**

**Paul’s letters were written to various churches for many reasons: instruction, comfort, encouragement, thanksgiving, or correction. In nearly every letter, he takes time to remind the churches of the commandments he gave them when he was there. Chapter 4 of this first letter to the Thessalonians contains some of these teachings. We will see more in Chapter 5. Like many skilled instructors, Paul understood that “repetition helps retention” – we memorize and put into practice those things that we experience repeatedly.**

**Paul commands Christians to live holy lives. This has less to do with how we APPEAR than how we ACT, especially during difficult times. Paul was especially pleased with the Thessalonian church because it was being persecuted, but still carried itself with steadfast faith and Christian love.**

**In Chapter 4, Paul gave us a vision of the Lord’s glorious return for His church – an event we call the “Rapture”, when the saints who had died will be raised from the dead, after which we all will be taken to heaven. Then, as now, many have asked the question: When this blessed event will happen? Some well-meaning Bible students have tried (and failed!) to determine the date. In Chapter 5, Paul addresses that important question, and provides additional commandments by which sincere Christians ought to live.**