

I THESSALONIANS, CHAPTER FOUR

Chapter topics

1. The Walk of the Christian.

**2. The Dead in Christ
and the Lord's Coming.**



“The dead in Christ shall rise first——.” I Thess. 4:16

THINKING THROUGH THESSALONIANS

THINKING THROUGH THESSALONIANS

I Thessalonians, chapter four

Chapter Topics—1. The Walk of the Christian. 4:1-12

2. The dead in Christ, and the Lord's coming.
4:13-18

1. The Thessalonians had "received _____ how they ought to walk and to please God." 4:1
2. In instructions on how to "walk," Paul urged that they "would _____ and _____." 4:1
3. The commandments of Paul were given "by the _____." 4:2.
4. "Your _____" was the will of God for the Thessalonians. 4:2
5. From what were the Thessalonians to abstain? 4:3.
_____.
6. What should we know how to possess in sanctification and honor? 4:4. _____.
7. What people live in the "lust of concupiscence?" 4:5.
_____. (The notes will explain these words.)
8. No man should "go beyond (or go too far) and _____ his brother in the matter." 4:6
9. Who is the avenger of sins? 4:6. _____.
10. God has not called us "unto _____ but unto _____." 4:7
11. Whom do we despise when we despise Paul's commands? 4:8.
_____.
12. Concerning what did Paul not need to write to the Thessalonians? 4:9. _____.
13. Who taught the Thessalonians to love one another? 4:9.
_____.
14. What three things did Paul tell them to do in 4:11?
_____;
_____;
_____.
15. For what two reasons were they told to work? 4:12.

_____;
_____.

CHAPTER FOUR

16. Concerning what did Paul not want them to be ignorant? 4:13.

17. Paul gave them information so "that ye _____
not, even as others which have no _____, 4:13
18. What event gives us assurance that the dead will rise again?
4:14.

19. The dead Christians are described as "them which
_____ in _____," 4:14
20. Whose word did Paul speak? 4:15. _____
21. "We which are _____ and remain unto the
_____ of the Lord shall not prevent (or go ahead
of) them which are _____, 4:15
22. With what three things will the Lord descend from heaven?
4:16. _____;

_____;
23. Before we are all caught up, "the _____ in Christ shall
rise _____," 4:16
24. After the Christian dead are raised, "we which are
_____ and remain shall be _____ up
_____ with them in the _____,
to meet the _____ in the _____." 4:17
25. How long shall we remain with the Lord? 4:17.

26. What are we to do with these words of Paul? 4:18.

27. Memorize I Thess. 4:13-17.

I THESSALONIANS, CHAPTER FOUR

- Chapter Topics—1. *The Walk of the Christian.* 4:1-12
2. *The Dead in Christ and the Lord's
Coming.* 4:13-18

Outline

- I. The walk of the Christian; 4:1-12
- A. Abound according to the apostles' teaching; 4:1-2
- B. Abstain from fornication; 4:3-8
1. This is the will of God; 4:3
2. Know how to possess your vessel; 4:4-5
- a. In sanctification and honor;
- b. Not in lust like the Gentiles; 4:5

THINKING THROUGH THESSALONIANS

3. No one should defraud his brother; 4:6-7
 - a. The Lord is the avenger of all such.
 - b. God has not called us to uncleanness; 4:7
 4. We despise God when we disobey; 4:8
 - C. Practice brotherly love; 4:9-10
 1. Paul did not need to write about this; 4:9a
 2. They were taught by God to do this; 4:9b
 3. The Thessalonians did this; 4:10a
 4. They needed to increase more and more; 4:10b
 - D. Study to be quiet; 4:11a
 - E. Do your own business; 4:11b
 - F. Work with your own hands; 4:11c-12
 1. As Paul had commanded them; 4:11c
 2. That they might walk honestly toward outsiders; 4:12
 3. That they might have need of nothing.
- II. The Lord's Coming; 4:13-5:11
- A. The dead in Christ and the Lord's coming; 4:13-18
 1. We should not be ignorant about this; 4:13
 2. Jesus's resurrection gives us assurance; 4:14
 - a. We believe that Jesus died and arose.
 - b. Even so will God bring the dead in Christ with Him.
 3. The living shall not precede the dead; 4:15
 4. Events at the Lord's coming; 4:16-17
 - a. The Lord descends;
 - (1) With a shout;
 - (2) With the voice of the archangel;
 - (3) With the trump of God.
 - b. The dead in Christ rise first; 4:16
 - c. Those which are alive are caught up with them; 4:17
 - d. We meet the Lord in the air; 4:17
 - e. We shall ever be with the Lord.
 5. Comfort one another with these words. 4:18

THOUGHTS FROM THE OUTLINE

Of I Thessalonians, chapter four

Chapter four includes two distinct topics.

The first of these concerns the *walk* of the Christian, that is, the way he lives. In this world the gospel depends very heavily upon the lives of those who believe it for its success. Also the salvation of those who believe the gospel depends on how they continue to

walk. For these reasons the teaching about the walk of the Christian is very urgent.

The second section about the dead in Christ and the Lord's coming is always of much interest. The discussion about the Lord's coming extends on into the next chapter (to 5:11), where the matter of the times and seasons of the Lord's coming is brought up and discussed.

Text (4:1-2)

1 Finally then, brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as ye received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, even as ye do walk,—that ye abound more and more. **2** For ye know what charge we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

Translation and Paraphrase

1. (Now) therefore, brethren, (changing the subject to some remaining matters.) we ask you and urge (you) by the (authority and goodness of the) Lord Jesus, that, just as you have received from us (teachings concerning) how you ought to walk (that is, how to live your lives each day) and (how) to please God,—as indeed you are walking—(we urge you not merely to continue doing as you are, but) that you will increase (and even exceed) more (and more in doing so.)
2. For you know what (the) commandments (were, which) we gave to you through the (authority and commission of the) Lord Jesus.

Notes (4:1-2)

1. In all of Paul's letters to Gentile churches, there is a closing exhortation to purity of life, a warning against such sins as the Gentiles commonly practiced. These exhortations to the Thessalonians begin with the fourth chapter, and continue through the fifth.
2. It is hard for us to visualize the degeneration of pagan society and morals. In one of the rooms uncovered in Pompeii, the city that was buried by the volcano Vesuvius in 79 A.D., there is a frieze picturing immoral scenes. This was the atmosphere in which many of the Gentiles of Paul's time wanted to live.
3. Paul's prayer that they might be "unblameable in holiness" is carried right over into this new chapter with very specific instructions as to what they should do to be holy. Paul was always careful in his instructions to his converts to dwell on the practical side of Christianity, for—

Vice is a monster of such frightful mien,
That to be hated needs but to be seen;
Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,
We first endure, then pity, then embrace.

4. Chapters four and five of I Thessalonians make up Part Two of the epistle, which is entitled in the outline "Exhortations and Teachings."
5. The first part of chapter four (4:1-12) deals with the "Walk of the Christian." The word *walk* refers to the way we live, as if life were a journey through which we are walking. Paul uses the word *walk* in this manner nearly thirty times in his epistles.
6. No one could ever say that Paul was shy about asserting his authority, and claiming divine approval. Paul declares that the Thessalonians had received "of *us* how ye ought to walk," and that his commandments were "by the Lord Jesus."

Although Paul may appear to have been rather forward, we are thankful that he was not shy about these things, because Paul told us the truth, and we must know the truth to be saved. Throughout this chapter Paul asserts his inspiration.

This leads us to repeat a necessary teaching: We must follow what the *apostles* said if we are going to be saved. The apostles spoke the words which Jesus gave to them. The Holy Spirit led *them* into all truth. John 16:13-14. No church council, pope, or modern day prophet has any thing new from God to add to what the apostles said. Therefore we must do what the apostles said, and abound more and more in the way they taught us to walk and to please God.

7. The American Standard version inserts a phrase, "even as ye do walk," after the words "please God" in 4:1. This addition has much support in the oldest New Testament manuscripts. It indicates that the Thessalonians had made a great change in their way of living since they had received the gospel.

Text (4:3)

3 For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye abstain from fornication;

Translation and Paraphrase

3. For (among other things) this is the will of God (for you—yes, it is even) your sanctification, (the process of your becoming free from sin and consecrated to God—and it is this:) that you should abstain from (every form of) sexual vice.

Notes (4:3)

1. Christianity never delivers us, as by the stroke of a magician, from the lusts and wickedness which have become habitual in the heathen world. Rather a long and constant fight is necessary for vanquishing them.
2. For example, fornication was considered no sin among the Gentiles. Therefore, Paul often had to warn about it in his letters. "Fornication" refers to unlawful sexual intercourse in general. "Adultery" is generally used to describe the sin of married people who are unfaithful. "Fornication" is a broader term. It includes adultery and all related vices. Notice some of Paul's words about fornication:
 - I Cor. 6:13—"The body is not for fornication."
 - I Cor. 6:18—"Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without (outside) the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body."
 - Hebrews 13:4—"Fornicators and adulterers God will judge."
(See also Rev. 21:8)
3. If our sanctification is the will of God, we ought to give more attention to the subject than we usually hear given. "Sanctification" is the action of making us free from sin and consecrated to God. It is the opposite of "pollution." It means "holiness" in its general sense, and the same word which is translated "holiness" is the one translated "sanctification." Sanctification (or holiness) is commanded in I Peter 1:12. In Hebrews 2:11 Christ is described as "he that sanctifieth" us.
4. In this verse Paul makes it very plain that the "sanctification" that he is referring to is "abstaining from fornication." There are other things necessary in sanctification, of course, but that is the only matter that Paul is dealing with in this verse.
5. It would be wrong to quote just part of this verse—"This is the will of God, even your sanctification"—and then by using that part of the verse to urge people to seek a "second work of grace." Some denominations hold to a doctrine that after a person has been saved, he may have a second work of grace, a sanctification by baptism of the Holy Spirit, in which all desire for and practice of sin is taken out of his nature.

John the apostle says, "If we say we have no sin (present tense), we deceive ourselves." I John 1:8. Surely this verse cancels out any doctrine that we can be so totally sanctified that we utterly cannot sin.

6. The two stages in sanctification:

(1) Sanctification at conversion.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified." The spirit of every believer is sanctified, cleansed, and set apart for the Master's use at conversion. I Cor. 6:11; Heb. 10:14; I Peter 1:2; II Thess. 2:13; Eph. 5:26.

(2) Sanctification after conversion.

Hebrews 12:14: "Follow . . . the holiness (or sanctification) without which no man shall see the Lord." Sanctification is something we must follow or pursue (Gr., *dioko*) constantly. We cannot get a one-shot inoculation of sanctification that will permanently guarantee our immunity against sin.

"Now being servants of God, we have fruit unto holiness (or sanctification)." Romans 6:22.

Text (4:4)

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

Translation and Paraphrase

4. (And) that each (one) of you should know (and act like you knew) how to (get hold of yourself and) get possession of your own vessel (your body, so as to live) in sanctification and honor.

Notes (4:4)

1. It is no honor to commit fornication. It is an honor to be modest, pure, and (for the unmarried) virgin.
2. What do you think Paul means by telling us to possess our *vessel* in sanctification and honor? What is the *vessel* he refers to? The natural thought that comes to our minds is that the vessel is our *body*, and that we are to keep control of it, and not permit ourselves to look upon a woman to lust after her, nor to commit fornication. We believe that this is the correct meaning of the verse.
3. However, many scholarly interpreters say that the *vessel* is a wife, and that Paul in this verse is telling the men to procure for themselves wives as vessels for the satisfaction of their passions, rather than for them to commit fornication. Now it is a fact that the word *vessel* is used in I Peter 3:7 to describe a woman. And it is interesting to note that the Revised Standard Version of the Bible and the versions of Moffatt and Goodspeed

all boldly insert the word "wife" into their versions. This is more of an interpretation than it is a translation.

4. Here are our reasons for thinking that the *vessel* to which Paul refers is our body and not a wife:
 - (1) There is nothing particularly spiritual in knowing how to take a wife. In fact the wicked are often the most proficient in doing it.
 - (2) In I Cor. 7:8, 27, 32-33, 38, Paul rather discourages marriage for many people. It therefore seems unlikely that he would here recommend marriage as a universal panacea for fornication.
 - (3) The verses both immediately before and after this one caution us about fornication and lust. This leads us to think that this verse must refer to controlling our bodies and not to marrying a wife.
5. It is beyond question that in the Scriptures our bodies are often called *vessels*. Note I Sam. 21:5: "Of a truth women have been kept from us about these three days, since I came out, and the *vessels* of the young men are holy." Also II Cor. 4:7: "We have this treasure (the gospel) in earthen vessels (referring to the fact that our bodies are made of dust)." See also II Tim. 2:21; Acts 9:15; Romans 9:21-23.
6. We mentioned that some versions of the Bible boldly interpret the word "vessel" as "wife." But others just as openly interpret it as "body." So Phillips, New English Bible, and Amplified New Testament.
7. This verse is similar to Romans 6:19: "As ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity, even so now yield your members to righteousness unto holiness (or sanctification)."

Text (4:5)

5 not in the passion of lust, even as the Gentiles who know not God;

Translation and Paraphrase

5. (By possessing our vessel in sanctification, we shall) not (live) in the passion (which) lust (arouses) as (do) the Gentiles who do not know God.

Notes (4:5)

1. The big word "concupiscence" in this verse (pronounced—kon-KUE-pi-s'ns) will derail the thought of most readers from what this verse says, as it is a stranger in modern English.

4:5,6 THINKING THROUGH THESSALONIANS

Actually, the word simply means "ardent desire, hence, sexual lusts." (Webster's Collegiate Dict.)

The American Standard Version translates "lust of concupiscence" as "passion of lust."

2. There is little difference in meaning between the words "lust," "concupiscence," and "passion." Thayer says that the phrase "passion of lust" is a genitive of apposition. The word translated "concupiscence" (*epithumia*) may be a slightly more comprehensive term, describing desire and lust as a way of life; whereas the word translated "lust" (*pathos*) can refer to a more momentary passion, the ungovernable desire. Hence in our paraphrase we have rendered the phrase, "the passion (which) lust (arouses)."
3. Some men think that nothing can be done about sexual passions except to gratify them. This verse teaches us that this is not so. We can pray to God for deliverance. We can deliberately turn our minds toward other matters. We can do physical work which will absorb the energy that is showing itself in the form of lust.
4. Once again here Paul emphasizes the moral degeneration of the Gentiles. "The heathen moralists condemned unchastity only in the case of a child-bearing wife, as it would wrong her husband not to know the paternity of her children." (B. W. Johnson) See also paragraph 2 of the notes on 4:1-2.
5. The statement that the Gentiles do not know God is more than just a casual bit of information. It is a judgment upon them. The reason that they do not know God is that they refused to have God in their knowledge. Romans 1:28. God will take vengeance on them that know not God. II Thess. 1:8. "Pour out thy fury upon the heathen that know thee not." Jer. 10:25. See also Ps. 79:6; Gal. 4:8; I Cor. 15:34.

Text (4:6)

6 that no man transgress, and wrong his brother in the matter; because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as also we forewarned you and testified.

Translation and Paraphrase

6. (And) that none (of you) should go too far and (covetously) take advantage of his brother in the matter (of sexual vice). Because the Lord is (an) avenger (who will punish severely when He deals with all) of these things, just as we told you previously and most solemnly charged (you)."

Notes (4:6)

1. The phrase "in any matter" is interpreted by some scholars to refer to business dealings. Therefore they say that the teaching of this verse is that we should not cheat one another in business. (Indeed we should not do that.)
2. However, the fact that the matter of sexual vice is discussed in the verses immediately before and after this verse leads us to think that this verse also deals with that subject.
3. Also the phrase "in any manner" is rendered "in *the* matter" in the Greek text and the American Stan. version. While this reading is a bit uncertain, it is probably the correct one. *The* matter to which it refers would, therefore, seem to be the matter under discussion in the verses just preceding, the matter of sexual vice.
4. For us to covet and take another man's wife would be to "go beyond" (and overreach) what we have a right to do. It is "going too far." (The same word is used in 2 Cor. 7:2; 12:17-18.)
5. No one can commit fornication without defrauding and wronging someone. It is a sin that always wrongs and hurts others, and not just ourselves. By it men can wrong someone's wife, or future wife, someone's sister, someone's marriage or future marriage, someone's home or family life. Besides that, it is a sin against GOD. Psalm 51:4. And it is a sin against our own body. I Cor. 6:18.
6. Many Scriptures teach that God is an avenger, one who punishes and takes vengeance. Psalm 94:1-2; II Peter 2:3; Rom. 2:9-11, 16. The successful thief may conclude that crime has no penalty. But God's justice will not be thwarted.
Heathen gods were often pictured as indulging in human vices. But the true God is the avenger of vices.
7. Paul reminds the Thessalonians that he had already forewarned them about this matter of sexual vice. Compare Gal. 1:9. Evidently when the apostles of Christ once spoke, their teaching was not to be modified later to suit someone's pleasure and convenience.

Text (4:7-8)

7 For God called us not for uncleanness, but in sanctification. **8** Therefore he that rejecteth, rejecteth not man, but God, who giveth his Holy Spirit unto you.

Translation and Paraphrase

7. For God has NOT called us (into his kingdom) upon (the basis of liberty to practice moral) uncleanness, but (he has called us) in sanctification (or holiness).
8. Consequently, he who disregards (this command) is not disregarding (any mere) man (like myself) but the (very) God who also gives to you His Holy Spirit.

Notes (4:7-8)

1. God told the Israelites in olden times: "I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy." Leviticus 11:44.
2. The same instructions are given to Christians: "Be ye holy; for I am holy." I Peter 1:16. Therefore we beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims in this world, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul. I Peter 2:11. Avoid entertainments, reading material, and thoughts which are immoral and lustful. These things are fighting against your soul.
3. "For God did not call us with a permission of impurity, but in sanctification." (Rotherham's translation of 4:7.)
4. It is a serious thing to despise the preacher's message, for you are actually despising and rejecting God in so doing. Jesus said to His disciples, "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that despiseth you despiseth me; and he that despiseth me despiseth him that sent me." Luke 10:16.
5. Note that it is in the voluntary power of a man to resist or accept truth. But it is not in man's power to escape the consequences of that choice.
6. The Holy Spirit is given to every one who repents and is baptized. Acts 2:38; 5:32; Gal. 4:6. "What, know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?" I Cor. 6:19.

The Holy Spirit had brought joy to the Thessalonians. I Thess. 1:6. God had given them the Holy Spirit. They therefore could not honorably disobey God when He had given them such a blessing.

Text (4:9-10)

9 But concerning love of the brethren ye have no need that one write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another; **10** for indeed ye do it toward all the brethren that are in all Macedonia. But we exhort you, brethren, that ye abound more and more;

Translation and Paraphrase

9. But concerning brotherly love, you have no need that (anyone) should be writing unto you. For (verily) you yourselves are God-taught to love one another.
10. For indeed you do that (very thing) to all the brethren which are in all of Macedonia. But we (must) urge you, brethren, to exceed (your past good works and abound yet) more (and more).

Notes (4:9-10)

1. In the second century, the scoffing writer, Lucian, in speaking about Christians, declared, "It is incredible to see the ardor with which the people of that religion help each other in their wants. They spare nothing. Their first legislator has put it into their heads that they are all brethren."
2. Lucian was right. We are brothers. We have brotherly love, because we are taught of God to love one another. Brotherly love is not a natural thing in man. Hatred is the natural instinct in sinful mankind. Titus 3:3. Love is "God-taught." (Rotherham.) Compare John 6:45; Isa. 54:13. God taught the Thessalonians to love one another. Love is a fruit of the Holy Spirit, Gal. 5:22. The love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Spirit which is given unto us. Romans 5:5.
3. INTERPRETER'S BIBLE observes that the word "brotherly-love" (*philadelphia*) is almost absent from the Greek of the pre-Christian period, and where found, refers to love for a natural brother. In the New Testament it is always love for a Christian brother.
4. Brotherly love as a Christian duty is laid upon us in other verses also. See Rom. 12:10; Heb. 13:1; I Peter 1:22; II Pet. 1:7. Brotherly love is combined with hospitality in Heb. 13:1-2.
5. Jesus said, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you." John 13:34. The whole gospel taught us to love one another, and love is the essence of the gospel.
6. Love of the brethren is quite the opposite of the passion of lust, concerning which Paul spoke in preceding verses. Uncleaness is an offense against brotherly love.
7. We may love one another and do many other good things, but it is always needful for us to increase and abound more and more in doing good. I Thess. 4:1, 10; 3:12; Phil. 1:9; II Th. 1:3.

Text (4:11-12)

11 and that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your hands, even as we charged you; **12** that ye may walk becomingly toward them that are without, and may have need of nothing.

Translation and Paraphrase

11. And (we beseech you) to make it your goal (because of your love of honor) to lead a quiet (settled) life, and to keep busy with your own affairs, and to work with your own hands, just as we commanded you;
12. So that (by thus working) you may walk (or live) in a manner that will present a good appearance to those (who are) outside (of the kingdom of Christ), and (so that) you may have a lack of none (of the necessities of life).

Notes (4:11-12)

1. There is nothing that some people dread as much as being quiet. They delight in a row, and if one is not in progress, they stir one up.
2. "The Greeks were naturally mercurial and restless." (McGarvey.) Note how the Athenians sought only to hear some new thing. Acts 17:21.
3. We must *study* to be quiet. This means to make it our ambition to live a quiet settled life. A peaceful spirit cannot be attained without studied effort. The word "study" (Gr., *philomeomai*) means "to be fond of honor . . . to be ambitious, to strive earnestly, to make it one's aim." (Thayer)
4. Being "quiet" (Gr., *esuchadzo*) means "to lead a quiet life, rest, keep quiet." It describes those who are not running hither and thither, but staying at home and minding their business.
It is very hard to live quietly in our age with its blare, honking horns, hurry, clatter, rush, activities, TV, etc. How can we "be quiet"? We grant that it is not easy, but its rewards are great.
5. The exhortation to "Study to be quiet," is repeated as a *command* with greater force in II Thess. 3:12. Obviously they did not heed Paul's *exhortation* to work in this letter. So a stronger approach was used.
6. We should be ambitious to work at our own business and not meddle in other people's business. The Greeks were a restless

people, often given to intermeddling in the business of other people.

7. "Every fool will be meddling." Prov. 20:3. Christians do their own business and leave other people's business alone. "Be not eavesdroppers, or news droppers. Wide ears and wide tongues dwell together." (Jewell)
8. Supporting ourselves by working with our own hands is definitely commanded in God's word. See Eph. 4:28. Paul's own hands often supported him. Acts 20:34. He left us an example, and Paul's example of a gentleman is not one whose hands are too dainty for work.

Many people make it their life's pattern to do just as little work as they can get by with, and then to depend upon unemployment compensation, or state, county, or federal welfare to care for them. Such people need the nobly independent attitude of Paul.
9. Many Bible interpreters have speculated that the Thessalonians were loafing and living off their Christian brethren, because they expected Christ to come at any moment. There is utterly no hint in the Scriptures that this was the case. Nothing in the Scriptures connects any false ideas about Christ's return with the people not minding their own business.
10. Paul gives two reasons why they should be quiet, and mind their own business, and work:
 - (1) To present an honorable appearance to outsiders.
 - (2) To lack none of the necessities of life.
11. I Thess. 4:12 brings out the stern reality that people on the outside of the church view our manner of living as being more important than what we teach, and that idleness and parasitic behavior are especially reprehensible to them. Human nature is more impressed by appearances than by doctrines.
12. A spirit of quietness, combined with honest labor, brings to us a satisfying independence, causing us to "have need of nothing." (The Revised Standard Version renders "nothing" as "nobody." This is a permissible rendering, as the word may be either neuter or masculine. We should have need of nothing, and have to depend on nobody.)
13. With the close of verse 12, we end, the section 4:1-12, which is entitled "The Walk of the Christian." Notice again, and memorize the six points in this section:
 - (1) Abound according to the apostles' teaching; 4:1-2
 - (2) Abstain from fornication; 4:3-8

4:12,13 THINKING THROUGH THESSALONIANS

- (3) Practice brotherly love; 4:9-10
- (4) Study to be quiet; 4:11
- (5) Do your own business; 4:11
- (6) Work with your own hands; 4:11-12

STUDY SUGGESTION

Turn now to the "Did You Learn?" questions at the close of chapter four, and see if you can answer questions 1 to 26.

Text (4:13)

13 But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall asleep; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, who have no hope.

Translation and Paraphrase

13. But we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those (of our Christian brethren) who are sleeping (in death), so that you may not be burdened with sorrow as indeed the rest (of mankind) who have no hope (so often are).

Notes (4:13)

1. A Christian missionary to American Indians wrote in Dec. 1962: "Tonight there is heard the sorrowing of our poor Indian people as they chant their sacred funeral songs, beat the seven sacred tom-toms, mingled with the weeping and wailing of those who have no hope. Oh, how the FEAR of DEATH seems to GRIP those who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ." (John Runyan, McKinley Indian Mission)
 2. The sorrow of the brethren at the time of death is aggravated by their ignorance of the future destiny. Upon the walls of the catacombs beneath Rome are found epitaphs for the dead who were buried there long ago. Some of the pagan epitaphs say things like these:
 - "Live for the present hour, since we are sure of nothing else."
 - "I lift my hands against the gods who took me away at the age of twenty though I had done no harm."
 - "Traveller, curse me not as you pass, for I am in darkness and cannot answer.
- But on the tombs of the early Christians in the catacombs are found epitaphs that sing with the bright cheer of immortality:
- "Here lies Marcia, put to rest in a dream of peace."
 - Lawrence, to his sweetest son, borne away of angels." (From *Fox's Book of Martyrs*)

3. This verse (4:13) opens a new section, having the topic "The Dead in Christ, and the Lord's Coming." The section covers 4:13-18. Paul opens this section by saying, "We would not have you to be ignorant." Paul used similar expressions in numerous places in his writings to introduce new topics. See Rom. 1:13; 11:25; I Cor. 10:1; 11:3; 12:1; II Cor. 1:8; Phil. 1:12; Col. 2:1.

Christians have no excuse for being ignorant about their faith, and there certainly is no honor in being ignorant.

4. "Sleep" is a common metaphor for death in the Scriptures, being used fifteen times in the N.T. See I Cor. 15:6, 20. "Sleep" implies the possibility of an awakening. The grave become the couch in which the body rests until the awakening at the resurrection.

But those who say that the spirits of the dead also sleep, greatly pervert the meaning of "sleeping" in death. For use Scriptural descriptions of souls after death, see Rev. 6:9-11 and Luke 16:22-24. See also Special Study VI page 253, "Questions About Spirit and Soul."

5. Does this verse teach that it is wrong to weep at the death of our loved ones? Of course not. Jesus himself wept at the tomb of Lazarus. John 11:35, Devout men carried Stephen to his burial weeping. Acts 8:2. See also Acts 9:39.

The thing which we are not to do is to weep *as those who have no hope* weep. They often wail and carry on in uncontrollable sorrow. We who have a hope of reunion at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ should not weep as if death ended everything eternally.

6. Aeschylus, the Greek tragic dramatist (525-456 B.C.), said, "Once dead, there is no resurrection more." The apostle Paul said, "The trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible." The pagans had no hope in death. Eph. 2:12. Christians have great hope in death.
7. This paragraph about sorrowing over the Christians who had died, indicates that the Thessalonians had a misunderstanding about the subject. What we know about the difficulty is only what we can infer from this paragraph (4:13-18). But it appears that the Thessalonians, expecting a speedy return of the Lord, feared that in some way the Christians who had died would not share the glories and benefits of the Lord's return.
8. It has been well suggested that Christians should mourn for those who are living in sin, and not for the dead who are in the Lord.

Text (4:14)

14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

Translation and Paraphrase

14. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose (again from the dead, we have the assurance that) in the same manner (as God raised up Jesus) God will also through Jesus (and the salvation Jesus provides) bring those who have fallen asleep (into eternal life and glory) with him (that is, with Jesus).

Notes (4:14)

1. Although Paul begins this verse by saying, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again," we must not think for a moment that Paul doubted that Jesus died and rose again. While our version uses the word, "If," to begin the sentence, the Greek construction (*ei. w. indic.*) is one which is used when one wished to assume that what he said was true.
2. The evidence that Jesus did rise from the dead is overpowering. He was seen alive after his death and resurrection on at least ten occasions, over a period of fifty days, by as many as five hundred people at once. We must believe that Jesus arose, if we expect to be saved, Romans 10:9. See also Rom. 4:25.
3. The phrase, "sleep in Jesus," is literally translated "those who have fallen asleep *through* Jesus."

This phrase, "through Jesus," should probably not be connected with "asleep" but with God "bringing" them.

We say this because the Devil has the power of death. Heb. 2:14. And it is therefore not likely that Paul meant to say that Christians fall asleep through the work of Jesus. Rather, Paul surely meant that through Jesus (and the salvation He provides) God will bring those who have fallen asleep back from the dead with Jesus.

The Revised Standard Version renders this clearly: "For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep."

4. I Corinthians 15:12—"If Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some of you that there is no resurrection of the dead?" The fact that Jesus arose never to die again is a proof that we also can rise from the dead. The fact that Jesus promised that He would resurrect the dead, combined with the power He exhibited when He arose Himself, makes us absolutely con-

fidant that "there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust." Acts 24:15; John 5:28-29.

5. The word "sleep" in this verse is an aorist (a kind of past tense) passive participle, and is probably best rendered "those who have fallen asleep," rather than as "them which sleep." Concerning the use of the word "sleep" to describe death, see notes on I Thess. 4:13, par. 4.

Text (4:15)

15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord, shall in no wise precede them that are fallen asleep.

Translation and Paraphrase

15. For this we tell you (not by our own guesses or hopes, but) by the (very) word of the Lord, that we which are living (and) remaining (alive on earth) until the coming of the Lord, (that) we shall most certainly not go ahead of those who have fallen asleep.

Notes (4:15)

1. If we had only Paul's hopes or opinions as support for our hope that the dead will be raised, it would not be very solid assurance. But Paul informs us that what he speaks is the very "word of the Lord." Since the Lord Himself informed Paul about this matter, we place our total reliance upon it.
2. The expression, "word of the Lord," is often used to describe the prophetic messages which God gave to various men. See Micah 1:1; Hosea 1:1; Jer. 1:2; Luke 3:2, and many other such references.
3. Paul uses the phrase, "*We* which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord." But the *we* in this verse does not indicate that Paul expected to be living when Christ returned. In II Cor. 4:14, Paul used the word *us* in such a manner that indicates that he expected to be resurrected: "Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise up *us* also by Jesus."

Neither here, nor elsewhere in the New Testament is the coming (parousia) of the Lord stated to be very soon (by human standards of time). Some people in New Testament times assumed that it would be that way, but Paul never said so.

4. Concerning the word "coming" (parousia), see notes on I Thess. 2:19, par. 7.

4:15,16 THINKING THROUGH THESSALONIANS

5. What did Paul mean when he said that we which are alive when the Lord comes back shall not *prevent* them which are asleep? The word *prevent* now means to hinder or restrain. But in 1611, when the King James version was translated, it meant to "go before" or "come before." It is from the Latin word *praevēnio*, meaning "to come before, to get the start of."

David said in Psalm 119:147: "I prevented the dawning of the morning and cried." David did not keep the morning from dawning. What he meant was that he got up before the dawning of the morning to pray.

Paul meant, then, that those who are alive when Christ returns will not go ahead of, or have a head start on, those who will have died before that time.

6. Paul uses a very strong negative (*ou me*) to affirm that we who are living will most certainly NOT go ahead of those who have died before the Lord's coming.
8. For the significance of the word "sleep" as applied to the dead, see notes on I Thess. 4:13, par. 4.

Text (4:16)

16 For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first;

Translation and Paraphrase

16. Because the Lord himself shall come down from heaven with the awakening cry, (and) with the voice of (Michael) the archangel, and with the trumpet of God (sounding forth), and (then) the dead (which are) in Christ (the Christians) will rise first.

Notes (4:16)

1. Jesus is not going to send any substitute or assistants back to the earth for Him. "The Lord HIMSELF shall descend from heaven."

Rev. 1:7: "Behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they *also* which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen."

(The fact that those who pierced, or crucified, him will see him, indicates that they too will be resurrected.)

2. Three sounds are to accompany the Lord's coming:

(1) *A shout*. We think that this shout will be the Lord's own cry. For John 5:28 says that all that are in the graves shall

hear *his voice*. This word *shout* (Gr., *keleusma*) means an order, or command, specifically a stimulating cry such as is given to rouse animals or horses by charioteers, or as a signal to men.

When our Lord was on earth, he did not cry nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. Isa. 42:2. But when He returns, "Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence." Psalm 50:3,4

(2) *The voice of the Archangel*. Michael (not Gabriel) is the archangel. Jude 9; Rev. 12:7. (Where did people ever get the idea that Gabriel will blow the trumpet?) Rotherham translates the word "archangel" as "chief-messenger," and that is literally correct.

(3) *The trumpet of God*. The trumpet of God was heard at Mt. Sinai, when God gave the law to Moses. It blew "exceeding loud," so that all the people that was in the camp trembled. See Ex. 19:16; Heb. 12:19. This trumpet will be equally frightening when it is heard again.

I Cor. 15:52: "At the last *trump*, for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible."

Matt. 24:31: "And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet."

3. When the Lord comes and the dead are raised, "the dead shall be raised INCORRUPTIBLE, and we shall be CHANGED." I Cor. 15:52. Christ is going to change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body. Phil. 3:21.
4. Personally, we believe this verse about the Lord's coming, and the trumpet, etc., literally. However, one author says in reference to this verse: "We must not look for literal exactness where things are depicted beyond the reach of sense." Such an attitude as this is often only a pious way of explaining away what the Scriptures say.
5. Sometimes people connect this verse with Rev. 20:5:
 - "The dead in Christ shall rise *first*." I Thess. 4:16.
 - "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." Rev. 20:5.

This is a good example of "grasshopper exegesis," that is, the practice of jumping around in the Scriptures, combining pieces of verses here and pieces of verses there, and producing conclusions not actually taught by any of the Scriptures.

We cannot connect I Thess. 4:16 with Rev. 20:5, because the word *first* in I Thess. 4:16 has no reference at all to what is to happen to the rest of the dead, such as are mentioned in Rev. 20:5.

6. With what, then, is the word "first" in I Thess. 4:16 contrasted?

It is contrasted with the catching up of the living Christians.

"The dead in Christ shall rise *first*."

"Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them." (I Thess. 4:17)

To place any other significance upon the expression that the "dead in Christ shall rise *first*" can only be speculation.

Actually the Scriptures indicate rather plainly that there is only going to be ONE resurrection of all the dead. John 5:28-29: "The hour (singular) is coming in the which ALL that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good—and they that have done evil." Acts 24:15: "There shall be a resurrection (singular, not plural), both of the just and unjust."

"The first resurrection" mentioned in Rev. 20:4-5 is a resurrection of "the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus." Nothing is said about any bodily resurrection there. It is a resurrection of souls, whatever that may signify. The bodily resurrection is mentioned later in Rev. 20:13.

7. To gain a true picture of the events connected with the coming of the Lord and the resurrection of the dead, we should by all means notice Matthew 24:29-31:

"Immediately AFTER the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."

Notice that this Scripture destroys the idea that Christ will come secretly and take the church out of the earth leaving sinners behind. (See Special Study II page 242, "A Secret Rapture Considered.") For Christ's elect are to be gathered at the same time that all the tribes of the earth shall mourn.

It also rules out the idea that there will be a tribulation period AFTER Christ returns. For notice that the elect will still be here after the tribulation, and that then Christ will come and send his angels to gather them. (See Special Study IV page 247, "The Coming of the Lord With All His Saints.")

8. Besides this Scripture in Matt. 24:29-31, we ought also to consider Matthew 13:40-42. It tells what is going to happen to the wicked when Christ comes:

"As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire: so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity, And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Text (4:17-18)

17 then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Translation and Paraphrase

17. Then (after that,) we who are living (and) remaining shall at the same time be caught up with them (the resurrected saints) in (the) clouds, unto (the) meeting with the Lord in the air. And in this manner we shall be (united) with the Lord (to be with him) always.
18. Wherefore (seeing that we have such a glorious hope), comfort (and exhort) one another by these words.

Notes (4:17-18)

1. There is a gospel song entitled, "The Meeting In the Air." That is a fine title. I Thess 4:17 talks about *meeting* the Lord in the air, and the word *meeting* is actually a noun (Gr., *apantesis*, meaning "meeting"). Will you join in that "meeting in the air" with the Lord?
2. I am sure that no Christian will have acrophobia (fear of heights) when our bodies have been transformed, and we have been caught up in the air. "Caught up" means "to seize, carry off, snatch out or away." It is the same word used in Acts 8:39 to describe how the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip after he baptized the Ethiopian.
3. Many Scriptures teach that the Lord is coming with clouds. Rev. 1:7; Matt. 24:30. The Lord's presence is often associated with clouds and smoke. Exodus 19:18; Isa. 6:4; Psalm 18:11-12; Matt. 17:5

4:18 THINKING THROUGH THESSALONIANS

4. Note that we are to meet the Lord in the *air*, the atmospheric region.
5. The glorious meeting with the Lord shall never end.
6. This Scripture brings to our minds other blessed passages:
John 14:3—"I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also."
John 17:24—"Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am." (Jesus wants us to be with him. Death can be a fulfillment of the desire of Jesus for us to be with him personally.)
Rev. 21:3 and 22:3 speak of eternally dwelling with God.
7. Because of all the glorious hope we have in Christ's second coming, we are commanded to tell Christians who mourn, that they will meet their dead in Christ on that day when Christ appears, and that in sweet union and communion they will ever be with their Lord and their loved ones.
8. The word "comfort" is the same word also translated "exhort." The coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead is both a comfort and a stimulus to us to serve Christ more fully. On the meaning of "comfort" or "exhort," see notes on I Thess. 2:3, par. 2.

STUDY SUGGESTION

We urge you now to turn to the "Did You Learn?" questions which follow immediately, and try to answer (preferably by writing out the answers) questions 27 to 46

DID YOU LEARN?

(Questions over I Thessalonians, chapter four)

1. What is the title and Scripture limitation of Part Two of I Thessalonians?
2. What is the first topic of chapter four, and what are the Scripture limitations of it?
3. What did Paul include in all of his letters to Gentile churches? Why? (4:1-2)
4. What does Paul mean by the word "walk"? (4:1-2)
5. List the six points (A to F) in the outline of the first topic of chapter four.
6. By whom did Paul give the commandments which he gave? (4:2)
7. What is fornication? (4:3)
8. What is sanctification? (4:3)

CHAPTER FOUR

9. What are the two stages in sanctification? (4:3)
10. What is the "vessel" which we should know how to possess? (4:4)
11. What other interpretation is sometimes given to the word "vessel"? (4:4)
12. Did the Gentiles regard immorality as sin? (4:5)
13. What is concupiscence? (4:5)
14. How had it come about that the Gentiles did not know God? (4:5)
15. What does the phrase "go beyond" in 4:6 mean?
16. By doing what sin will we "go beyond and defraud" our brother? (4:6)
17. Who is the avenger of sins? (4:6). What is an avenger?
18. God has not called us unto uncleanness, but unto what? (4:7)
19. If we despise (or disregard) Paul's teaching on holiness, whom are we actually despising? (4:8)
20. Concerning what subject did Paul not need to write them? (4:9)
21. Who taught them to love one another? (4:9)
22. Explain the sentence, "Study to be quiet." (4:11)
23. Whose business should we do? (4:11)
24. Were the Thessalonians loafing because they expected the Lord's coming very soon? (4:11-12)
25. Was Paul's exhortation about working carried out by the Thessalonians? (4:11-12). How do you know?
26. For what two reasons should we be quiet and work? (4:12)
27. What is the second chapter topic of I Thessalonians, chapter four, and what are its Scripture limitations?
28. Concerning what did Paul not want them to be ignorant? (4:13)
29. For what is "sleep" a common metaphor? (4:13)
30. Are we forbidden to sorrow for our dead? (4:13)
31. In what way are we to "sorrow not"? (4:13)
32. What misunderstanding did the Thessalonians apparently have about the dead Christians? (4:13)
33. What fact gives us assurance that the dead shall rise? (4:14)
34. Did Paul teach that Christ was coming within his lifetime? (4:15)
35. What does the word "prevent" in 4:15 mean?
36. With what three sounds will the Lord descend? (4:16)
37. Who is the archangel? (4:16)
38. At what occasion on earth has the trumpet of God been previously heard? (4:16)

THINKING THROUGH THESSALONIANS

39. Who shall rise first when Christ returns? (4:16)
40. With what does the word "first" make a contrast? (4:16)
41. Why cannot we connect the statement that the "dead in Christ shall rise *first*," with Revelation 20:5? (4:16)
42. What will happen after the dead in Christ are raised? (4:17)
43. Where shall we be caught up to meet the Lord (4:17)
44. How long shall we be with the Lord? (4:17)
45. What should we do with the words about Christ's coming and the resurrection? (4:18)
46. Write out (or recite) from memory I Thess. 4:13-17. It begins, "But I would not have you——."