



I and II Thessalonians

Lesson 3 Chapter 4

Although Paul was facing many difficulties while preaching the gospel in Corinth, he took the time to write a letter to Thessalonica in order to encourage the new believers to stand firm in their faith in the face of persecution. It must have been very difficult for Paul to have to leave the small church established there so quickly after their conversion, but his own safety was at stake. In every city he ministered in he faced hostile resistance, but God had warned Paul that suffering would be a large part of his life from the point of his own conversion until his death. Although Paul may not have known it, not only was he writing these letters to teach, encourage, and sustain these early believers, he was actually writing God's words to all believers from that point in time onward. Christians to this day desperately need the direction that Paul gave those first century churches in order to walk in righteousness and maintain faithfulness in a very wicked culture.

After Jesus' ascension, Luke records in Acts 1:9-11 that the disciples were gazing up at the sky and an angel appeared to them with a promise: "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just

the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." Matthew wrote in his gospel that Jesus had promised this also: "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with the angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds. Truly I say to you, there are some of those who are standing here who shall not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in His Kingdom."

Matthew 16:27-28 Although the last statement was fulfilled six days later as Jesus appeared to Peter, James, and John in the transfiguration, the actual return of Christ was an eagerly expected event that was assumed by all His followers. Jesus had also promised His return in Matthew 24 and described some of the events that would take place to identify its imminence. The troubled times in which the New Testament church lived prompted many to anticipate the rapture of the church and Christ's impending return. Paul had spoken of it to the Thessalonians but hadn't had time to fully inform them of the events that would surround Christ's appearance. Because of that many were unsure about the event, and the result was fear and confusion. Paul addressed these issues in chapters 4-5 of this letter and in chapter 2 of 2 Thessalonians.

READ CHAPTER 4

1. *In the last verses of chapter 3, Paul prays for God to establish the Thessalonians hearts in holiness. What does he now want to teach them about their part in that process? 4:1-2*

Sanctification is the resultant behavior of those who have been justified by God through faith in Christ and therefore set apart for holy lives.

2. *What behavior does Paul identify specifically that should be part of sanctification? 4:3-5*



In verse 6, the word “transgress” (NAS) means to transcend, to overreach, or to go beyond what is right, and the word “defraud” (NAS) means to cheat, to deprive, or rightfully take what belongs to another. Also, the word “avenger” means one who executes justice.

3. *In light of the above definitions, how would you identify what is at the heart of the acts involved in sexual immorality that Paul is warning so sternly about? See also 1 Corinthians 6:5-11.*

4. *What does Paul say is the seriousness of rejecting this command? Vs. 7-8*

5. *What is the next principle for Christian character that Paul is instructing them about? Vs. 9*

6. *What would be the benefit of a “quiet life,” and what kind of relationships would that help produce? Vs. 11-12 See also 2 Thessalonians 3:10-12*

7. *When Paul was teaching the new believers in the Thessalonian church he had stressed the significance of the rapture, the return of Christ, and the necessity for Christians to live in expectation of that. They now had some areas of confusion that needed clarification regarding those events. From verses 13-14, what seems to be troubling them?*
8. *What assurance does Paul give them to help them understand, and where does he say that information came from? Vs. 14-15*



*The term “caught up” (NAS) in vs. 17 is the Greek word *harpazo* which means “to seize with force, to catch away, to pluck up.” This word in Latin is *rapiemur* which is where we get our English word “rapture.”*

9. *From verses 16-17, give the order of the events that will happen when Christ comes for believers.*



Many, though certainly not all, Christians believe the Bible teaches that there will be an important seven-year period of history before the Battle of Armageddon and triumphant return of Jesus. The debate about this catching away centers on where it fits in with this final seven-year period, popularly known as the Great Tribulation.

- The **pre-tribulation rapture position** believes believers are caught up before this final seven-year period.*
- The **mid-tribulation rapture position** believes believers are caught up in the midst of this final seven-year period.*
- The **pre-wrath rapture position** believes believers are caught up at some time in the second half of this final seven-year period.*
- The **post-tribulation rapture position** believes believers are caught up at the end of this final seven-year period.*

~Enduring Word Bible Commentary

Note: In regard to chapter 4-5 of 1 Thessalonians the rapture of the church is described in chapter 4 followed in chapter 5 with a description of the Day of the Lord. Those who adhere to the pre-tribulation rapture timing see those proceedings as beginning with the rapture, progressing with the tribulation, and ending with the return of Christ. Those in the mid-tribulation camp would see the rapture taking place sometime within the final 7 years of the tribulation. Those in the pre-wrath camp believe the rapture will take place sometime within the last 3½ years of the tribulation but before the final wrath of God judgment begins. Those in the post-tribulation camp see the events of the rapture (chapter 4) and the Day of the Lord judgment (chapter 5) as taking place at the same time. This means that believers would live through the complete 7 years of the tribulation period before the rapture takes place. Most of those in all the above camps believe that the Day of the Lord is not a 24-hour time period, but a time of judgment/blessing that would encompass all of the last 7 years, and some even include the Millennium. The question of which one is correct has been a topic of debate for many years among Biblical scholars and lay people alike. It is not the intent of those of us at Pursue to tell you which one to believe, but to encourage you to pursue that most important subject matter thoroughly in Scripture to base your conclusion on personal Holy Spirit lead study of God's Word. Paul's letters to the Thessalonians were to correct some wrong information they had received regarding these events. Therefore, our intent is to focus on the author's purpose, not our time-related interpretation of his information.

10. *How does Paul describe our transformation from human bodies to spiritual bodies in 1 Corinthians 15:50-57 What does he say in verse 58 and in 1 Thessalonians 4:18 is the purpose for this information?*

Prayer requests:

Group time notes:
