
a ***Grace Notes*** course

1 Thessalonians

an expositional study
by Dr. Grant Richison

Lesson 5

1 Thessalonians 4

1 Thessalonians

Lesson 5

1 Thessalonians 4

Contents

1 Thessalonians 4:1	3
1 Thessalonians 4:2	4
1 Thessalonians 4:3	5
1 Thessalonians 4:4	8
1 Thessalonians 4:5	9
1 Thessalonians 4:6	10
1 Thessalonians 4:7	12
1 Thessalonians 4:8	13
1 Thessalonians 4:9	13
1 Thessalonians 4:10	14
1 Thessalonians 4:11	15
1 Thessalonians 4:12	16
1 Thessalonians 4:13	16
1 Thessalonians 4:14	19
1 Thessalonians 4:15	21
1 Thessalonians 4:16	23
1 Thessalonians 4:17	25
1 Thessalonians 4:18	26

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 3
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

1 Thessalonians 4:1

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

Chapter 4 begins the practical section of First Thessalonians. The first eight verses present the sanctified life.

Finally

The word "finally" does not introduce the conclusion to the book. Half of the epistle is yet to follow. Rather, Paul moves to the last remaining section of the book. There is a transition here from the historical to the exhortatory, the personal to the practical, the past to the prophetic and the apologetic to the application.

then,

With the word "then" Paul draws inferences from chapters 1-3.

brethren,

Paul appeals to the Thessalonians by affection. They are his brothers in Christ. They come from the same source -- born into the family of God. Paul holds in tension affectionate appeal and authoritative admonition. He does not take any personal liberties but prescribes personal holiness.

we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus

This challenge is so significant that Paul uses two words to describe the importance of this message: urge and exhort. "Exhort" is a little stronger than "urge."

Paul urges and exhorts them "in the Lord Jesus" -- in the sphere of everything that Jesus represents. Jesus personally passed this down to the apostles and they to us. The apostles operate on the authority of Christ.

The Thessalonians lived in a culture that mixed sex with its religion. These new converts went to their temples for sex with temple prostitutes

on a regular basis. Religion was very popular in those days! The Roman Empire was morally debauched during the first century. Men had wives for having children but they had their mistresses for pleasure. Paul will present a discourse on how to deal with our sex drives in this chapter.

that you should abound more and more,

The words "more and more" point to spiritual growth. It is not enough to exist as a Christian, we must move toward excellence. It is one thing to park ourselves in the Christian life but it is another thing to prevail in it. God wants us to move beyond the status quo. We should ask ourselves whether we are making any progress in the Christian life. We do not tell our spouses that we love them the day we get married and that is supposed to last them for the rest of their lives! Neither do we live the Christian life with one fell swoop. Each day with the Lord should be sweeter than the day before but it will take work.

Principle

Status quo in the Christian life always means stagnation, deterioration and decay in holiness.

Application

Doctrine precedes duty and precept precedes practice. The Christian life is not a set of rules but a set of principles. The design of the Christian life is to teach us God's viewpoint on life by forming that viewpoint into principles. When we apply those principles by faith God transforms our lives.

Christians are no more fit for Heaven 25 years after they become Christians than they were the day they accepted Christ. God sanctified them completely the moment they received Christ as Savior in terms of positional sanctification. Progressive sanctification is an ongoing process.

just as you received from us

Paul reiterates what he taught the Thessalonians on his first visit to the city. The

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 4
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

team clearly informed them of the nature of the Christian life. Principles are lifeless without application.

how you ought to walk and to please God

Take note of the word "how" here. Christians should have some know how. They should know how to gain victory over sin in their lives.

The word "ought" is the word "must." There is a logical and moral imperative to walk in order to please God. The Thessalonians lived in a seaport where sin was unbridled. There were many temptations there. No one can be casual about Christianity in the face of temptation. Daily, consistent walk with the Lord is imperative if any victory is going to come their way.

The New Testament repeatedly compares the Christian life to a walk. The Greek word comes from two words: around and to walk. The idea is to walk around as a course of life (Romans 6:4; 2 Corinthians 5:7; Galatians 5:16; Colossians 4:5; Ephesians 4:1,17; 5:8,15; 1 John 1:7; 2:6).

[See Grace Notes topic: **Walking**]

The phrase "to please God" explains "to walk." An acceptable walk pleases God.

Principle

A prime purpose of the Christian life is to please God.

Application

A central characteristic of the Christian life is to please God. Christians accommodate themselves to their God. God never accommodates Himself to us. The idea is not that we appease God or conciliate Him. Christ did that on the cross. We please Him because we honor Him. It is a matter of gratefulness. A holy walk pleases God. We want to walk in a way that puts a smile on the face of God. Many of us make Him frown.

"Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him" (2 Corinthians 5:9).

"And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight" (1 John 3:22).

Wholesome husbands and wives want to please each other. They are not afraid to ask what they are doing that irritates one another. "I want to stay on your right side." We should ask that question to the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 4:2

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

The word "commandments" means order, instruction, command, precept, and advice. The idea is that "commandments" are the prescriptions of the Lord Jesus.

"Commandments" carry a military connotation. Paul issued orders from his superior, General Jesus, the one ultimately in authority.

Paul taught the Thessalonians divine revelation orally before the close of the New Testament. First Thessalonians was one of Paul's first epistles. He wrote this letter about a year after he left Thessalonica.

through the Lord Jesus

The commandments Paul's team taught the Thessalonians came directly from the Lord Jesus. Paul does not preach on his own authority but from the authority of Christ. He does not conjure up his own ideas about life or draw on current philosophies of the day; he speaks from the authority of Christ. His prescriptions were not some arbitrary orders of his own. To the contrary, General Jesus issued these orders directly from headquarters. Paul passed these orders to Christian soldiers on the firing line fighting the battle of purity in a corrupt world.

"If you love Me, keep My commandments" (John 14:15).

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 5
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

"You are My friends if you do whatever I command you" (John 15:14).

The "commandments" that Paul taught did not come from Moses. He taught something that transcended Moses -- the grace of God as a mode of life.

"And of His fullness we have all received, and grace for grace. For the law was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:16-17).

Principle

Jesus gave us the principles of grace to face any challenge we might encounter.

Application

Some Christians want to learn some new thing yet they do not live up to the knowledge they already have. We have precepts or prescriptions directly from our Lord in the Bible. Why do we need anything else?

1 Thessalonians 4:3

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

For this is the will of God,

Paul declares the will of God in unadulterated terms. There are many areas where we do not know the explicit will of God but this is not one of them. We know the will of God when it comes to the boundaries of sex. Here we know clearly what God wishes. Christians can yield themselves to God's sovereign will or assert their own independent will.

We determine God's will from God's Word. We cannot live the Christian life without the Bible. That is the only place we can find absolutes. We can find the will of God in the Word of God.

Principle

God gives believers absolutes so they can make clear, decisive decisions in the area of sex.

Application

Christians cannot set their sail as to how the wind may blow. That is relative ethics. We must set our sail according to the will of God, which may mean that we sail against the prevailing winds of opinion. We want to sail in the same direction God is going.

Before we can do the will of God, we must be willing to do His will no matter what the cost. The Christian who is willing to open himself to God's will unconditionally is the Christian God will use.

"If anyone wants to do His will, he shall know concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority" (John 7:17).

It is possible to understand the will of God. It is no mysterious, ethereal, abstruse will. God reveals His will in very clear terms.

"Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord is" (Ephesians 5:17).

It is possible to test the will of God. We do this by a "renewed mind."

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (Romans 12:1-2).

Those committed to living carnal lives cannot prove the will of God. We cannot conform ourselves to the world and find God's will at the same time. These things are mutually exclusive.

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever" (1 John 2:15-17).

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 6
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

It is possible to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.

"Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God" (Colossians 4:12).

The motto of one of my alma maters, William Tyndale College, is "The will of God, nothing more, nothing less, nothing else." Getting into the will of God and staying there gives the believer a great sense of satisfaction.

Certain things in the Christian life are not open to debate. We do not rethink our view of sexuality. We do not rationalize sexual sin so that it meets some convenient need that we perceive that we might have.

your sanctification:

The idea "sanctification" means separation to God (1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Thessalonians 2:13). This is the conduct of separating ourselves from sinful things. This separation befits those separated to God. The Holy Spirit is the agent in sanctification (Romans 15:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). The Christian's body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. We should separate our bodies to the Holy Spirit. The emphasis here is upon one's dedication or consecration to serve God.

Principle

A sanctified person puts himself or herself at the complete disposal of God.

Application

There are three kinds of sanctification in the Bible: positional, progressive and ultimate. Positional sanctification is our eternal status quo with God as completely set apart as His forever at salvation (Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 30; Hebrews 2:11; 1 Peter 1:2; Jude 1). Christ provided for salvation from Hell at the cross (Hebrews 10:10,14). God sets us apart in an eternal, infallible, unalterable position in Christ.

The second kind of sanctification is progressive sanctification. This is our relative growth in becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus. There is a progressive dimension to Christianity.

"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Corinthians 3:18).

This is the process whereby the Spirit of God takes the Word of God and makes the child of God like the Son of God. We do this by walking in the Spirit and applying God's Word to our experience. This continues as long as we live. If we progressively improve, there will be development and growth toward maturity.

"They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. "Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth" (John 17:16-17).

The third phase of spirituality is ultimate sanctification, our final glorification. When we get to Heaven, we will be free from all sin and the capacity to sin.

"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified" (Romans 8:29-30).

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

"Sanctification" is God's will. God wants us for His exclusive use. A sanctified person is a person who is at the complete disposal of God. He can do with us as He pleases. Because we are His, He does not need to check with us first.

that you should abstain from sexual immorality

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 7
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

Three times in verses three to six Paul uses the word "that." The first "that" expresses God's purpose concerning sexual purity.

The word "abstain" literally means to hold oneself off from, be distant. The idea is that Christians must avoid sexual temptations. They should put a lot of distance between themselves and temptation. If there is an area where Christians need to know their limits, it is this one. We should not try to come as close to the fire as we can without being burned. It is interesting that the Bible's solution to sexual sin is to "flee."

"Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body" (1 Corinthians 6:18).

"Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:22).

"Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation" (1 Peter 2:11-12).

The words "you should" indicate that it is our responsibility to do the abstaining.

"Sexual immorality" means prostitution, fornication and of every kind of unlawful sexual intercourse or sexual lust. This term can refer to any form of sexual sin such as adultery, premarital and extramarital intercourse, homosexuality, sex with animals, pornography or any other kind of sexual sin. We cannot practice sexual indiscretion and become more holy.

"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. "These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed

hands does not defile a man" (Matthew 15:19-20).

"It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father's wife!" (1 Corinthians 5:1).

"Foods for the stomach and the stomach for foods, but God will destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God both raised up the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For "the two," He says, "shall become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body" (1 Corinthians 6:13-18).

Sex in itself is not sin. To the contrary, God gave sex for His creatures to enjoy (Proverbs 5; 1 Corinthians 7:1-9). Sex outside the bounds of marriage is sin.

Principle

The onus is upon believers to not put themselves in situations where they might be tempted sexually.

Application

The Bible is very clear on how God wants us to behave sexually. He sets forth unmistakable ground rules for living. There is such a thing as "fouling out" sexually. If Christians enter sexual sin, they disqualify themselves from fellowship with God. They disqualify themselves from God's service (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). God put the rules of the game in His Word. There is no debate about the will of God when it comes to sexual sin.

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 8
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

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. He will welcome you into His fellowship. God makes it clear that He will restore us 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).

"Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

1 Thessalonians 4:4

"...that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor..."

that each of you should know how

Avoiding sexual temptation requires some "know how." We learn from the Word of God. When the chips are down and we face temptation, believers should have know how from the Word of God.

to possess his own vessel

Christians should know how to "possess" their "vessel." The word "possess" means to acquire, procure for oneself, gain. We must know how to apply principles of God's Word to our experience. The idea is to win mastery over our souls in temptation. In doing this, we will save ourselves from grave danger. We control our sex life by knowing how to submit ourselves to God's control.

The word "vessel" is a euphemistic way of referring to our sexual life. We must make a clean-cut break with sex sins. Christians must "repent" of fornication.

"...lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced" (2 Corinthians 12:21).

Our "vessel" is how we use our body for the glory of God.

"But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us" (2 Corinthians 4:7).

in sanctification and honor

Our sex life should be holy and honorable. The antithesis of allowing our sex drive to run uncontrolled is that we operate "in sanctification and honor." There are privileges and responsibilities in becoming a child of the King. The word "in" refers to the sphere or leading milieu that governs our sexual behavior. "Holiness" and "honor" control our sexual drives.

"Sanctification" is what we do in setting aside our lives unto God. "Holiness" is our willingness to set apart our life to God. We belong to another. We are not our own. When we set apart our lives unto God, we give Him our lives for His exclusive use. We are His -- lock, stock and barrel; hook, line and sinker; body, soul and spirit.

Honor is what others see; they see that we live holy lives. "Honor" deems our sexual drive as precious so we deal with it respectfully. A Christian has drastically different attitudes toward sex than non-Christians. For this reason, they carry themselves with "honor." The word "honor" denotes value, esteem. Some of us do not value the honor of our bodies. We devalue it by sexually defacing it. Jesus paid a great price for our salvation, therefore, our lives have great value to Him.

"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price [same word as "honor"]; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

Principle

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 9
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

Christians need to learn how to control latent sex drives in holiness and honor.

Application

Learning how to handle our sex drive is not easy. The sex drive is one of the most powerful drives of our body. The first lesson we must learn is that our body is not our own (1 Corinthians 6:19,20). The Bible says that we cannot satisfy our sex drive just as we satisfy our sleep, hunger or thirst. However, we must control our sleep or eating. If we allow those desires to get out of control, the result is health problems.

The believer is God's vessel. As God's vessel, we must treat our bodies with holiness and honor. Our sexual drive is God's. He has the right to determine how we use it. His standard is two-fold: 1) flee sexual sins, and 2) pursue things of God.

"But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart" (2 Timothy 2:20-22).

If we do only one, we will have done a half job. If we flee, but do not pursue, then we fulfil only half of God's command. A half job will not deliver us from sexual sin. Do you fully "possess" your body for the glory of God? Only a clear-cut, definite decision will do this. We cannot have compartments in our lives reserved for self. Such compartments will eventually result in blatant sin. If you are reserving certain sins for yourself, deal with them with one fell swoop today. Do not look back.

That is not enough, however. You must "pursue" righteousness, faith, love, peace with a pure heart. We cannot trifle with sin or the

Christian life. It takes all that we have and are. It will cost us something in personal gratification. That cost is worth it because of what Jesus did for us on the cross.

1 Thessalonians 4:5

"...not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God..."

not in passion of lust,

"Passion" is whatever we suffer or experience in any way. It is an affection of the mind, a passionate desire in either a good or a bad sense. Here Paul uses this term in a bad sense of illicit sexual passion.

"Passion" is the passive side of our sinful capacity. It refers to affections that have the potential for arousal. "Lust" is the active side. It refers to strong drives and intense cravings. "Lust" denotes coveting, desire, craving, longing, mostly of evil desires. The idea is to desire something greatly or strongly.

"For this reason God gave them up to vile passions. For even their women exchanged the natural use for what is against nature" (Romans 1:26).

"For when we were in the flesh, the sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit to death" (Romans 7:5).

"And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Galatians 5:24).

like the Gentiles

The "Gentiles" are those without Christ. Unrestrained indulgence in sexual passion is characteristic of those without Christ. The Bible divides people into three categories: the Jew, the Gentile and the church of God.

"Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God..." (1 Corinthians 10:32).

who do not know God

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 10
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

Those who know God overcome sexual temptation because of their relationship with Him. It is one thing to know about God; it is another to know God personally. Once we embrace Jesus as our Savior our attitude toward sex changes. To live without restraints sexually, is to live like a heathen.

Principle

Personal relationship with God is the parent of purity.

Application

Christians should never mistake lust for love. Those without Christ often do not know the difference. Hollywood certainly does not for the most part.

"Passion of lust" is mental adultery or fornication as well as the overt act. The battle with sexual sin always begins in the mind. It is as much sin to think it as to act it.

When lusts stir up our passions, we give ourselves over to appetites of the sin capacity. We deny the dignity of that comes from God. We lose all sense of fairness to fellow believers in the family of God.

Overcoming illicit sexual passions begins with a relationship with the Lord. If we allow Him to convict us of these sins and confess them, we have taken the first step toward overcoming. There is far more to conquering these sins but we cannot overcome them without relationship with God.

1 Thessalonians 4:6

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

In verse six, Paul makes another appeal for sexual purity – the impact sexual sin has on your illicit sexual partner.

that no one should take advantage of

The words "should take advantage" denote to go over, used metaphorically as "transgress."

The context refers to "passion of lust" so the topic is sexual sins. Someone who takes "advantage of" someone else steps over God's boundaries.

The New Testament uses this term in the commercial sense as well. Violating someone else's wife is like stealing from them.

Principle

Adultery is like stealing.

Application

Many people's activities fly in the face of God's boundaries or prescribed limits. Sexual sins transgress God's standards in dealing with fellow Christians.

This is no different that stealing someone's property. We have no more right to have sex with someone's spouse because they are attractive to us any more than we have a right to steal their car because it appeals to us.

and defraud

The word "defraud" carries the idea of seeking to get more. This person takes advantage of others. Paul uses the word "defraud" in describing Satan's effort to gain an advantage over the church when they did not restore someone who fell into sexual sin (2 Corinthians 12:17,18).

"Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:10-11).

"Defraud" is another commercial term similar to the words "take advantage." Taking someone else's partner is like stealing some one else's goods. Sexual immorality defrauds sisters and brothers of the fidelity they rightfully expect from their spouses. Sex thieves think little of the wrong done. They think only of gratifying their own greed. They have an insatiable lust for more [Greek]. This word can carry the idea of compulsion.

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 11
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

his brother in this matter,

The word "brother" indicates that the person defrauded is a fellow Christian. We make another Christian a victim of our sin.

Principle

Sexual sin wrongs the partner, the mate as well as the self.

Application

Someone who defrauds others sexually takes advantage of their trust. They outwit and cheat them of their rightful partner. They claim more than their due. Greed is always the motivation behind robbing someone of his or her partner. This person operates on exploitation.

because the Lord is the avenger of all such,

An "avenger" is one who exacts a penalty from a person. The Lord will personally punish sexual sins. God always maintains this right.

The word "all such" refers to any kind of sin: adultery, fornication, homosexuality or sex with animals. Those who commit such sins still have God to reckon with. God keeps books on this issue and He is a very good accountant!

"Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19).

We do not have to get even for immorality perpetrated against us. God will do that for us. There is no need for recrimination because God executes vengeance for us. Commit it to the Lord. The Lord will also mend your broken spirit. He will deal with the shame, sorrow, and disgrace.

as we also forewarned you

The word "forewarned" is literally to say before. This is the idea of warning someone of some future serious consequence.

"...envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who

practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Galatians 5:21).

and testified

The word "testified" is a strong word for giving a testimony. Literally, this word comes from two Greek words: through and testify -- to testify through. Paul thoroughly warned the Thessalonians of God's judgment of sexual sin. Paul bore solemn witness about what God would do with those who "take advantage" and "defraud." The solemn warning here may be due to the close tie between religion and sex in Thessalonica.

Principle

God will deal with sexual wrong against us.

Application

Sexual sin steals from others. It steals both from the person and from their mate. These sins have negative social impact. Sexual sin violates Christian brotherhood.

"You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his male servant, nor his female servant, nor his ox, nor his donkey, nor anything that is your neighbor's" (Exodus 20:17).

Not only do these sins damage families but the people who commit these sins. Children suffer, parents suffer and the self suffers. This is why God "avenges" these sins. No one escapes the pain of these choices. There are predictable costs to these sins. People give the excuse, "Well, I just fell in love. I couldn't help myself." Ministers who run off with someone hurt their congregations. Those congregations suffer for years to come.

"Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge" (Hebrews 13:4).

God will forgive sexual sins, but He will also deal with these sins just as He did with David's sin with Bathsheba. David's scars lasted until he died.

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 12
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

1 Thessalonians 4:7

"For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness" (1 Thessalonians 4:7).

The first reason we should avoid sexual sins is that God will avenge them (4:6). The second reason is that it violates our calling (4:7).

For God did not call us to uncleanness,

"Uncleanness" denotes something impure such as dirt. The word carries the idea of immorality. Sometimes it carries the idea of unnatural sin such as homosexuality (Romans 1:24). Generally, "uncleanness" refers to the state of moral impurity especially in reference to sexual sin.

The word "to" presents the purpose of uncleanness. A Christian tempted to indulge in sexual sin must think about God's purpose for him or her.

but in holiness

"Holiness" refers to sanctification or separation unto God (1 Corinthians 1:30; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). It points to the course befitting those separated unto God (1 Thessalonians 4:3,4,7; Romans 6:19,22; 1 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 12:14). The believer separates himself from evil things and evil ways because he is a child of God.

"Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God" (2 Corinthians 7:1).

"...and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:24).

"For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness" (Hebrews 12:10).

"Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord..." (Hebrews 12:14).

God "calls" the Christian "in holiness." God's purpose in choosing us was to set us apart to Himself. The word "in" signifies in the sphere of holiness. Holiness is the sphere of our calling. Sexual sin sins go against God's calling. We reject God's call when we enter into sexual sins.

Principle

Sexual immorality goes against God's calling of the believer.

Application

The subject of sexual immorality is of the deepest doctrinal importance and touches the very foundation of the Christian life. When God calls the believer, He divinely summons us to a new life. This new life is not for the purpose of indulging ourselves but to move us toward sanctification. Every decision we make should move us toward progressive sanctification. This is the main business of a Christian.

To descend to a lower level of life than God's purpose for us is very serious. It belittles God's standards. It despises Him in the role of Giver of holiness.

A dirty soul does not honor a person called by God. We are the complete property of God. We are not our own. We belong to God.

"This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness" (Ephesians 4:17-19).

"But fornication and all uncleanness or covetousness, let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints..." (Ephesians 5:3).

God summons us to a new kind of life, a life set apart to Him. Every choice we make as a Christian should contribute to our becoming

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 13
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

more and more like the Lord Jesus. This is the call of the believer.

1 Thessalonians 4:8

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

This verse gives Paul's third basis why Christians should flee sexual sins.

Therefore

The word "therefore" is an emphatic marker of result – "for this very reason." A sex life governed by God's call to holiness is the rationale for his next statements. The nature of the child of God stands in antithesis to the natural urges of the man without Christ.

He who rejects this does not reject man,

The word "rejects" means to annul. If we annul God's call upon our lives (4:7), then we thwart the effectiveness of that call. We nullify God's purpose for us on earth. God lays down His purpose and we set it aside. In so doing, we refuse to recognize the validity of His call and claim on our lives.

but God,

If we annul God's plan, we annul God in our lives. Standards about sex are God's standards. The Romans did not base their view of sexuality upon their polytheistic religion. They were essentially utilitarian in their view of sex. If it works, it's right. We can summarize their approach "Does this serve my self-interest?"

who has also given us His Holy Spirit

At the moment of salvation, God gives His indwelling Holy Spirit to each believer. The New Testament characterizes the "Spirit" as "Holy." The Greek emphasizes the word "Holy." The indwelling Spirit inside of each believer is "Holy." The Christian cannot disconnect his life from the ministry of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit can work supernaturally in us to empower us to have victory in our sex lives. He enables us in this area. (2 Timothy 1:14).

Principle

Rationalizing sin diminishes God.

Application

When Christians rationalize sexual dalliance they negate God Himself. Rationalization is just a way of kidding ourselves. God gave us the Holy Spirit to empower us to deal with any sin that might come our way. God wants us to rely on Him in these matters.

If we regard sexual sins as a minor matter, we minimize the whole nature of God. To descend to a lower level of Christian living is to belittle God. We despise God in His role as the Giver of His Holy Spirit. He is the one who makes the privilege of holiness possible. Instead of indulging in sexual gratification, we can live in the temple of the Holy Spirit.

"Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20).

1 Thessalonians 4:9

"But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another..."

Chapter three introduced us to the subject of Christian love. Now Paul develops the subject in more detail.

"And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints" (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13).

But concerning brotherly love

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 14
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

The words "but concerning" introduce the new topic of "brotherly love." Sex sins are self-centered. Love is others-centered.

"Brotherly love" is the Greek term philadelphia. Phila is friendship love and adelphia is brothers. Christians should carry friendship love for their brothers and sisters in Christ. This Greek word for love means rapport love, reciprocal love. Christians experience warmth when they meet other Christians.

"Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another..." (Romans 12:10).

"Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart..." (1 Peter 1:22).

"Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous..." (1 Peter 3:8).

"But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love" (2 Peter 1:5-7).

"Let brotherly love continue" (Hebrews 13:1).

you have no need that I should write to you,

There is no need for humans to teach about reciprocal love because this love is natural amongst believers.

for you yourselves are taught by God

God teaches believers innately that they are to love one another. Christians intuitively know that they are to love other Christians.

to love one another

The New Testament commands us thirteen times to love one another. The word "love" here is a different word for love than in the first

phrase of this verse. The word here is a self-sacrificing love produced by the Holy Spirit.

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35).

Principle

There is a supernatural compulsion to love fellow believers.

Application

God Himself teaches us to love one another with a divinely implanted determination to love other Christians.

1 Thessalonians 4:10

"...and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more..."

and indeed

These words confirm verse nine. The Thessalonians were already living examples of those who show love for fellow Christians.

you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia.

The Thessalonians loved believers throughout the province of Macedonia that included such churches as the Berean and Philippian church.

But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more

Paul urges the Thessalonian believers to develop momentum in their love for one another. God did not need to teach them about loving one another but Paul needed to teach them to abound in their love for one another. Christians are constantly to expand their realm of love.

Principle

God wants us to expand our love to a broad range of believers.

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 15
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

Application

How extensive is your love? Do you, "love us four and no more?" God wants us to love those we already love more than we do. He also wants us to expand the sphere of those we love.

"And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in knowledge and all discernment..." (Philippians 1:9).

An overflowing heart of love is one of the surest evidences of spirituality. It is impossible to love fellow Christians too much. (Galatians 5:22-23).

The more Christians love each other the less they pick at each other. The less they love each other the more they snipe and undermine each other.

"But if you bite and devour one another, beware lest you be consumed by one another!" (Galatians 5:15).

The love that increases and spreads is undaunted love. A shriveled love is a dying love. Those who fall out of love tend toward discord. There is very little harmony without extensive love. The greater the love, the greater the harmony. The greater the volume of love, the less the criticism. This is axiomatic.

1 Thessalonians 4:11

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

Certain members of the church at Thessalonica became fanatics, busybodies and loafers. Paul has a fourfold prescription for these people:

1. Live a calm and orderly life 2. Mind their own business 3. Engage in manual labor 4. Have a mannerly conduct

that you also aspire to lead a quiet life,

First, Paul urges the Thessalonians to aspire to a quiet life. "Aspire" comes from one Greek word with two words joined: to be fond of and honor. "Aspire" has the sense of being strongly

ambitious about something or applying oneself to something. The Thessalonians were to make every effort to pursue a tranquil life.

Apparently, they were bogged down by unscriptural argument and unwarranted criticism. They could channel all this misspent energy into something more advantageous.

Christians should aspire to lead a quiet life. Paul says, "Do everything in your power to lead a quiet life." Christians should have settled souls, not noisy souls. Noisy souls come from having too much time on our hands.

Principle

Christians usefully employed have a tendency toward more settled souls.

Application

Christians should not get their liver in a quiver. Turmoil is not of Christ. Tone it down. Why should Christians get exasperated with one another? It does not take much to upset some of us. We fly off the handle very quickly, even at minor things. We major on the minors and minor on the majors.

We get worked up over trivial things. After it is over and we have had time to think about the situation, we say, "How foolish of me to get into a sweat over that! How immature of me to do that." God has remedies for fretful living.

"Do not fret because of evildoers, Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity" (Psalms 37:1).

A quiet soul does not enter into rivalry with fellow Christians. Christians are not to draw attention to themselves by ungodly promotion of self. Some people love to let everyone know how important they are among the Christian herd. They establish a very clear pecking order, because they must be on top of the herd. All this comes from having too much time on their hands.

to mind your own business,

Secondly, Christians should mind their own business. A busybody mentality is not of Christ.

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 16
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

Many people are much better at telling others how to run their business than at running their own. Paying faithful attention to the normal pursuits of life fosters a Christian attitude, especially when we focus on our own business. Personal industry will save busybodies from themselves.

Principle

Industry saves us from ourselves.

Application

It is easier to mind other people's business than our own. Some people are experts at raising their neighbor's children. The saying, "Mind your own business" applies to busybodies.

"For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies" (2 Thessalonians 3:11).

Busybodies are a plague on any church. Some people love to stick their nose in other people's business.

"Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand" (Romans 14:4).

1 Thessalonians 4:12

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

Fourthly, the manner of life before non-Christians should be becoming to Christianity. The word "properly" denotes gracefully, becomingly, in a seemly manner. It is unbecoming for a Christian to drain other Christians dry financially. It's taking advantage of their charity.

Leeching on other Christians does not impress non-Christians. Non-Christians understand propriety. Christianity is not a license to relieve us from work. On the contrary, it establishes the integrity of labor as a means to meet our needs.

and that you may lack nothing

If believers profitably occupy themselves with their own business, they will not need any financial help from anyone. He will work no hardship on their fellow Christians. Faithful pursuit of personal industry makes support by others unnecessary. If we do our job as unto the Lord, the Lord will meet our financial needs.

Principle

An honest day's work is a good testimony to those without Christ.

Application

Credible Christians pay attention to the way they live on a day-to-day basis. A godless world looks upon those who leech off others with askance. Non-Christians can judge us only by appearances, so our walk should fit the fashion of Christ. What kind of testimony would we have to non-Christians if they viewed us as wranglers, gossips, critics, busybodies and lazy?

"Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Colossians 4:5-6).

Christians must put in an honest day's work. We put 40 hours into a 40-hour workweek. The standard for work for Christians is excellence. They are to be so good at their employment or business that others will take notice. Christians should do their job as unto the Lord.

1 Thessalonians 4:13

"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope"

From verse 13 to the end of the chapter, Paul talks about the rapture of the church to meet the Lord in the air. This is the blessed hope of the believer.

But

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 17
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

The word "but" both introduces a new subject but also connects to the previous paragraph. The restlessness of disorderly believers (1 Thessalonians 4:11-12) was, in part, caused by an incomplete understanding of the Rapture of the church. They rightly understood that the coming of Christ was imminent, that is, no sign needed fulfillment before He came again. However, they had not considered the possibility that some of their friends would die before it occurred. They, therefore, plunged into deep grief. Doubts filled their minds as to the status of these prematurely deceased believers.

I do not want you to be ignorant,

This phrase, expressing that Paul does not want them to be ignorant is a formula customarily used to discuss difficult problems and correct false ideas (Romans 1:13; 11:25; 1 Corinthians 10:1; 12:1). Usually, whenever the Bible warns us that we are ignorant about something, it is warranted. The topic of Christians dying is so important to the Thessalonians that it requires an explanation from the apostle Paul.

The only way we can know about the afterlife is through the revelation found in the Bible. If we have adequate knowledge of what the Bible teaches about this subject, then it will dispel excessive grief in our souls. We can only resolve our ignorance by reading the Bible. We will rid ourselves of excessive grief by eliminating our ignorance about the future.

The Thessalonians were clearly looking for the Lord's return at the rapture, but they did not know the state of their dead loved ones until that point. They thought that those who died would miss the Rapture.

brethren,

The word "brethren" occurs in verses one, six and nine of this chapter. Paul appeals to the relationship the Thessalonians have with Paul in Christ. The truth that Paul is about to reveal is strictly for those who know Christ.

Principle

Knowing biblical truth is the foundation of stability, especially when it comes to eternal things.

Application

The Rapture of the church is an important doctrine, because it affects our future and present hope.

It is important that non-Christians know about the first coming of Christ and its purpose. It is also important for Christians to know about the Rapture and second coming of Christ. Jesus' imminent return to planet earth to translate believers to heaven is a glorious truth that comforts Christians.

concerning those who have fallen asleep,

"Fallen asleep" is the literal meaning of the Greek word. Metaphorically, this word means death, the sleep of death (Matthew 27:52; John 11:11-13; Acts 7:60; 1 Corinthians 7:39; 11:30; 15:6,18,51; 2 Peter 3:4). Some believers in Thessalonica died because of persecution. They wanted to know what happened to their fellow Christians who died.

Some cults teach that the soul sleeps in death. They claim that after a long period, God will wake up the soul. Does the Bible teach this?

The Bible never uses the term "asleep" when referring to non-Christians, but always uses the term for believers. Physical death for believers is nothing more than sleep. God will wake them one day to physical resurrection from the dead.

As well, the Bible never uses "sleep" for the soul. Soul-sleep is a false doctrine. The soul of the dead is unconscious in reference to this world (Job 7:9-10; Ecclesiastes 9:5-6; Isaiah 63:16) but wide awake and fully conscious of the glories of the world to come (Luke 16:19-31; 2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:21-23; Revelation 7:15-17). Stephen's spirit went to be with the Lord, but his body fell asleep (Acts 7:60).

The New Testament uses "sleep" either for physical rest or for the physical body resting in

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 18
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

the grave, but never for the soul sleeping. The Thessalonians did not concern themselves with the souls of their departed loved ones, but about the resurrection of their bodies. The sleep of the body is only temporary; it will rise from the dead one day. God does not annihilate the soul and spirit at the physical death of the body. There was no need for the Thessalonians to worry about the fate of their loved ones.

In John 11:12-13, the disciples thought of the normal physical sense of sleep but the Lord used it in the figurative sense, referring to physical death (1 Thessalonians 11:11,13).

The pagan culture of the Thessalonians offered no hope about a future physical life. Many people viewed the body as evil in any case. They wanted to get rid of the body.

"Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, 'because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.'" And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, 'We will hear you again on this matter'" (Acts 17:30-32).

Paul speaks of those Christians who had died since he left a year previously. What happened to them at death? Did their body and soul just go to sleep at death? No, their souls went immediately and instantaneously into the presence of God.

"For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart [to die] and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh [continue to live physically] is more needful for you" (Philippians 1:23-24).

Those who die simply sleep in body, but not in soul. Even the body will rise from the sleep of physical death one day (1 Corinthians 15:35-57). Physical death is a temporary state that will end when the physical body rises from the dead at the final resurrection.

"Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice "and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation" (John 5:28-29).

Principle

Sleep in Scripture has to do with the death of the body, not soul-sleep.

Application

A corpse looks as if it is sleeping. The immaterial part of human beings [soul and spirit] does not sleep in the body at death. The moment death hits the body of a Christian, the immaterial part of the person goes immediately and instantaneously into the presence of God.

"We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord" (2 Corinthians 5:8).

The physical body sleeps in the casket until Jesus comes again. At that time, He will raise the physical body and make it like His resurrection body (Philippians 3:20,21).

Non-Christians go to a place called Hades. They will stay there until the second resurrection when Hades will be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20). The first resurrection is for Christians (John 5:28,29). Death does not end all, for death is not annihilation. Non-Christians will live for eternity in the lake of fire.

We will meet Jesus one day as our Savior or as our Judge. These are the only two options. Those who straight-arm Jesus, in time, will meet Him as a Judge. Jesus will sit on the great white throne to pronounce their eternal state in a Christless eternity.

lest you sorrow as others who have no hope

"Sorrow" means to cause pain or grief, to distress, vex, be sad. Christians do not have the same pain as non-Christians when it comes to the death of the physical body. Christians know the soul goes immediately into the presence of God. Therefore, Christians grieve, but not in the

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 19
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

same way. Christians do not grieve as those who have no hope.

Jesus grieved over the death of a friend (John 11:35). This does not mean that He despaired over ever seeing His friend again. Normal human beings grieve over the physical death of their loved ones (Philippians 2:27). God does not dehumanize Christians by removing grief from the realm of experience.

Many non-Christians believe that, when they die, they will go into a dark, dank hole and decay until their body is no more. They have no hope beyond the grave. Others have no idea what is on the other side. They have no guarantee about eternity. They hope only in the present, not in the future.

"Therefore remember that you, once Gentiles in the flesh—who are called Uncircumcision by what is called the Circumcision made in the flesh by hands—that at that time you were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:11-12).

Principle

Death does not end all for believers, so there is no need for unnecessary sorrow.

Application

Some Christians grieve over their dead loved ones like pagans do, as if they have no hope of ever seeing them again. Christians sorrow, but they do not sorrow like the lost. God does not keep Christians from human sorrow. But their sorrow is not a final sorrow. There is as much difference between a Christian funeral and a pagan funeral as there is between black and white.

Many non-Christians are afraid to die, because they do not have a hope beyond the grave. They have no Heaven. They know nothing of sins forgiven.

Christians have a glorious hope. Because Christ rose from the death eternally, so we will also rise.

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Romans 15:13).

"To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27).

"Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope..." (1 Timothy 1:1).

"...in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began..." (Titus 1:2).

"...looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ..." (Titus 2:13).

There is no hope apart from Christ. If we put our hope in our church, we will be disappointed. If we put our hope in a political system, that will fail us. Washington or Ottawa will not offer permanent peace. If we place our hope in the United Nations, we will end in disillusionment. Only Christ offers permanent, eternal hope.

It is one thing for Christians to grieve over their loved ones but it is another to grieve inordinately. The resurrection of Christ persuades against surplus sorrow. Christ's resurrection gives us hope. His resurrection kills death; therefore, death does not annihilate the person from existence. It simply separates the immaterial part of human beings [soul and spirit] from the material part [the body]; until the resurrection of the body from the grave.

1 Thessalonians 4:14

"For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus"

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 20
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

For

Paul now sets forth two great features in the work of Christ that banish unfounded grief. Removal of ignorance about these will remove worries about what happens to the physical body of the Christians who die.

if we believe

The word "if" in the Greek means that this supposition is assumed true. Paul assumes that the Thessalonians believe in the death and resurrection of Christ (Acts 17:3). The following truths only carry currency if we believe them. Hope rests on our faith in the resurrection of Christ. The certainty of our hope is inseparable from Christ's resurrection.

that Jesus died and rose again,

Paul here uses Jesus' human name on earth, emphasizing his historical nature. In His humanity, Jesus launched two foundations of the Christian faith – His death to pay for our sins and His resurrection to initiate us into eternal life. Thus, in one statement we have the two foundations of the Christian faith.

Paul does not use the word "slept" for the death of Christ; instead, he uses the harsher word – "died." Christians can enjoy peaceful sleep because Jesus endured death as a penalty for sin. Jesus' death took away the sting of death.

The second great fact is the truth that Jesus rose again. Because of His victory over death, the body of the Christian believer sleeping in Christ will rise to participate in the Rapture and be caught away from earth.

The death and resurrection of Jesus is the irreducible minimum of the gospel. A person cannot become a Christian without believing these two great truths.

"Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; "whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not

possible that He should be held by it" (Acts 2:23-24).

"But you denied the Holy One and the Just, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, "and killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses" (Acts 3:14-15).

"The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree" (Acts 5:30).

"...who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification" (Romans 4:25).

"Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us" (Romans 8:34).

"For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living" (Romans 14:9).

"For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again" (2 Corinthians 5:14-15).

"For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit..." (1 Peter 3:18).

"I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death" (Revelation 1:8).

Principle

A person becomes a Christian by believing in the death of Christ to pay for our sins and in the resurrection of Christ to give us eternal life.

Application

A person becomes a Christian by believing that Jesus substituted His death on the cross for our

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 21
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

eternal death and that He bodily rose from the dead to give us eternal life.

even so

The words "even so" show the parallel between the resurrection of the bodies of believers and the resurrection of Christ. Paul now draws his first conclusion. There is complete concord there. The resurrection of the body of the believer is as sure as the resurrection of Christ. Our physical bodies will rise from the dead since Christ rose from the dead.

God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus

God will personally bring believers with Him in the resurrection of the physical body from the dead. The soul and spirit will reunite with the physical body at that time. God will give us a resurrection body that is like the resurrection body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:20-21).

The Father thus fully acknowledges the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus and acts on it by resurrecting our bodies when Jesus comes back. The guarantee of our bodily resurrection is the resurrection of Christ. This is not a general resurrection for He will bring back only those who fell asleep in Christ and no others.

The comparison would be more exact if Paul had said, "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again even so also will God raise us up."

However, departed Christians are spiritually with Christ in heaven and God will not raise their bodies until He brings back their souls and spirits to earth. This is why they come back "with Him," accompanying Christ in the closest kind of association and fellowship.

Paul will show how God will bring Christians back with Him in 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18.

Principle

One day the Father will undo the work of the undertaker.

Application

Because the undertaker's work will be done, Christians do not fear death because they know that their resurrection is as sure as the resurrection of Christ. Christians will break the bonds of the casket. God will raise us from the dead. Even more, He will rapture us into His presence (1 Thessalonians 4:15-18).

"But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming" (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

"When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory" (Colossians 3:4).

God will resurrect our physical body and transform it into a resurrection body first. Then He will translate that body to Heaven [the Rapture]. We will meet the Lord in the air with a new resurrected body.

1 Thessalonians 4:15

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

For

Verse fifteen explains verse fourteen. "Since Jesus died and rose, it follows that God will...." Paul, building on the two great facts of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, does not present some novel analysis of his own about the Rapture. Rather, he makes these statements on the authority of Christ.

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 22
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

this we say to you by the word of the Lord,

Paul's authority for making statements came personally from the Lord Jesus by direct revelation. Jesus made no such statements when He was on earth. The Lord gave to Paul special revelation about the church (Ephesians 3:1ff) and the Rapture (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). Nowhere in all the history of Israel or the teachings of Jesus was there any information on the Rapture until this special revelation to Paul.

Paul's special revelation included two things: 1) there will be a special resurrection of departed saints in the church prior to the Tribulation period, and 2) Jesus will rapture the church to Heaven.

This is the first time the New Testament explains the Rapture of the church in writing. This is brand new truth. The Lord alluded to the Rapture in John 14:1-3, but this is the first formal presentation of the Rapture in writing [John wrote long after 1 Thessalonians].

that we who are alive

First, Paul deals with the special resurrection of all church saints prior to the Tribulation period. Those who "are alive" here are believers still alive when Jesus comes again. They never experienced death.

The idea of resurrection was not new. The Old Testament taught about resurrection and so did Jesus. The Old Testament consistently associates the resurrection of Israel with the Tribulation, particularly at the end in connection with the millennial kingdom (Isaiah 26:19 with 16-18, 20-21; 27:1; also 26:1-15 for Millennium; Daniel 12:1-2). Martha knew that there would be a resurrection of Israel when the Messiah returned to set up His earthly kingdom (John 11:24). This is a resurrection of Israel at the Second Coming [in distinction from the Rapture] at the end of the Tribulation.

Paul includes himself in those he named as living and remaining at Christ's return, because he was not at all certain whether he might die first. He believed the Lord's return could occur

at any moment in his lifetime. He was disappointed, but not mistaken. The Rapture is a signless, timeless event that is always imminent. Jesus can come at any time. Each generation of Christians have justification to expect the Lord to come in their generation.

and remain

The word "remain" means be left behind, survive. These are those who survive bodily until Christ comes back. No Christian will leave until God wants them to leave. None of us can stay here if God wants us to go and none of us can go if God wants us to stay.

until the coming of the Lord

The second component God uniquely revealed to Paul was the Rapture. The idea that the Messiah would come to earth and raise the dead saints of Israel in the Old Testament was not unique to New Testament Christians. However, the idea of a Rapture was unique because there is no hint of this concept from Genesis to Malachi.

The word "coming" means a presence. It comes from two words: with and being. The coming of the Lord will be the time He will be with us. He will arrive and we will stand in His presence. Paul uses this term for His presence in contrast to His bodily absence.

"Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling..."
(Philippians 2:12).

When the New Testament uses "presence" for the Rapture of the church, it signifies not merely the momentary coming of Christ, but His presence until He manifests Himself to the world. It is a reference to His advent, arrival. Jesus at that time will be at hand in person.

There are three Greek words for Christ's coming. The New Testament uses both terms for the Rapture and for the Second Coming (when He comes to earth on the Mount of

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 23
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

Olives). Only the context can determine whether it is the Rapture or Second Coming.

There is an important distinction between the Rapture and the Second Coming. The Rapture is a private coming for the church, whereas the Second Coming is a public coming where every eye will see Him. The Rapture is for the church only. In the Rapture, Jesus will come in the clouds to catch away the church. The indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit is no longer in the church. At the Rapture, God changes the believer's body into a body like the resurrected body of Christ. In the Second Coming, Jesus will come to earth to establish His millennial kingdom on earth (Zechariah 14:1-4). Satan no longer is loose on earth. At the Second Coming, the desert will blossom like the rose.

Principle

The Rapture is a New Testament revelation.

Application

The blessed future of the church is the Rapture. The church will not enter the Tribulation.

"...looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ..." (Titus 2:13).

will by no means precede those who are asleep

The word "precede" means to come before. Those still living when Christ comes back will not precede in the Rapture all those who died before the Rapture. Jesus will raise all dead bodies of all Christians of all ages before He raptures the church.

The words "no means" are very emphatic. The reality of deceased Christians joining live Christians at the Rapture is without doubt. God has a plan, not only for the resurrection of Israel but also for us as individuals.

The body sleeps, not the soul. The New Testament guarantees that those forming the class of living believers at Christ's return shall in no wise precede Christians who died before

the Rapture. This shows that those who died did not die by accident. The Lord deliberately chose a specific number to die, whereas the living were deliberately left over. It is absolutely impossible for living saints to get the advantage or start over departed saints.

The reason is obvious. Deceased believers whose souls are in Heaven have a part in the coming of Christ from the very start. They are like those in the first division of a parade that are associated with the dignitaries, marshals and escorts. Living believers are like a division that joins the parade along the line of march.

Principle

Souls in heaven will joins living people on earth in the resurrection of their bodies from death.

Application

Christians should not get the idea that when believers go to heaven they are somewhere in outer space sleeping in nylon nighties! That is a fairy tale that is more like a nightmare! When we go to Heaven, we will be more awake than we are now. Our souls and spirits will be in heaven fully conscious, but our bodies will remain on earth until just before the Rapture when God will resurrect our bodies and transform them so they will be just like the resurrection body of Christ (Philippians 3:21).

Christians in heaven will join living people on earth in the resurrection and rapture of their bodies to Heaven. Their souls and spirits will join their bodies in the Rapture of the church.

1 Thessalonians 4:16

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

Paul now shows why the living will not precede the dead by elaborating on the prophetic order of events at the Rapture.

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout,

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 24
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

The word "descend" literally means to go down. The Lord Himself will descend personally from heaven to the sky. If there is to be rapture, He can employ no lesser agency or person than Himself. He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25).

The word "shout" carries the idea of a call, summons, shout of command. This shout is a signal for the church to get ready for the Lord to rapture it. Jesus will summon His church to be with Him forever just as a general would summon his soldiers or an admiral, his sailors. Such a shout both demands and expects instant compliance even in the heat of battle. The call knows no defeat in the conflict and conquest. There can be only one result once the life-giving voice of the Son of God rings forth (John 11:43; 5:25, 28-29).

with the voice of an archangel,

An "archangel" is an angel of exalted rank, the highest rank of any angel. Jesus' shout will be with the authority of the ultimate rank of an archangel. The rapture is one of the greatest interventions into the affairs of men in the history of the universe. It is backed by all the authority, power and majesty of heaven.

The Rapture not only marks the culmination of the progressive sanctification of the saint but also the completion and glorification of the church. No wonder Jesus shouts with the voice of an archangel. This is an announcement of the victory of the redeemed over sin and the world.

and with the trumpet of God.

A trumpet is a wind instrument usually made of bronze or iron broadening out to a megaphone. Ancients blew the trumpet on solemn occasions to stir up others to get their attention. This was true of the seven angels of Revelation. They used the trumpet in war for various signals of military actions.

Trumpets in the Old Testament were a signal to God's people (not to the lost). This signified the approach of God to His people and their assembly before Him (Exodus 19:13,16-17,19),

the ongoing march (Numbers 10:2), movements in battle, divine deliverance and great festival occasions. God's trumpet sound is an indication of something momentous. This is the divine summons that the church has awaited for centuries.

And the dead in Christ will rise first.

This phrase is an explicit statement about the resurrection of the believer from physical death. The word "rise" literally means to stand up or to make to stand up. Jesus will cause Christians to live physically again.

Dead believers will rise before living believers (1 Corinthians 15:52). Not just any person will rise from the dead but only those who are "in Christ." This phrase refers to the spiritual position into which God places Christians when they believe in the death of Christ to forgive their sin. The Bible never claims that the Old Testament saint is "in Christ." Christ makes positional truth possible by virtue of His work on earth. Death does not disturb our spiritual union with Christ.

Principle

God is able to rebuild a decaying body into a resurrected body.

Application

God will restore our present physical bodies in the resurrection into a likeness of the resurrected body of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself" (Philippians 3:20-21).

This resurrection of physical bodies into the likeness of Christ's resurrected body is only for those who have a right relationship with God. We enter this relationship when we place our trust solely in the death of Christ to obtain forgiveness for our sins.

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 25
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

1 Thessalonians 4:17

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

This passage gives us a chronological sequence of events related to the Rapture.

Then

The word "then" means afterward, thereupon, thereafter. This word denotes succession in numbering and shows chronological sequence. The word "then" strongly opposes the former state of resurrecting the dead. This is an entirely different event. The previous verse explained the place of the dead bodies at the Rapture. This verse explains what happens to those living when Jesus comes again.

we who are alive and remain

By the word "we," Paul includes himself in those who might be living at the Rapture. He was disappointed but not mistaken. Paul's expectation of the Rapture kept him on the tiptoe of anticipation of meeting the Lord face to face.

Principle

Healthy Christians live in anticipation of the Lord's return.

Application

A healthy Christian lives on the tiptoe of expecting Jesus' return. Jesus may come today, glad day! Are you living in anticipation of the Lord's return?

shall be caught up

The words "caught up" mean to seize, snatch away, carry off by force. This is the idea of rapture. We get the English word "rapture" from the Latin rapture -- to catch up.

Jesus will take the church away from earth suddenly and by force in the Rapture. This is a signless and timeless event. Note the use of the Greek word for "caught up" in the following

verses: Matthew 11:12; 12:29; 13:19; John 6:15; 10:12, 28,29; Acts 8:39-40,40; 23:10; 2 Corinthians 12:2,4; Jude 23; Revelation 12:5.

together

The word "together" marks a link in place and time. Living Christians associate with the resurrected bodies of past saints in the Rapture. The Rapture of the church into Heaven is the next event on God's prophetic timetable.

Christians will accompany Christ back to Heaven. He will take us by force. He will suddenly seize us and carry us off in order to claim us for Himself.

"Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. 'In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. 'And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also'" (John 14:1-3).

Principle

The Rapture is a signless, timeless event whereby we will accompany Christ to heaven, body and soul.

Application

No prophetic event needs to occur before the Rapture. The church does not need to enter the final apostasy. Israel does not have to possess fully the land of Palestine from the Euphrates to the River of Egypt. The church does not have to evangelize the world before the Lord comes for her. None of these things need happen before the Rapture. However, all these things must occur before the Second Coming. It is crucial to distinguish between the Rapture and the Second Coming to keep a proper prophetic perspective.

The Rapture is a signless, timeless event. No one knows the time. Therefore, we must live in the light of His unannounced coming.

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 26
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

"Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure" (1 John 3:2-3).

with them

The "them" here are those physically raised from the dead in verse 16. We will reunite with our loved ones who died as Christians.

in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air.

The New Testament used the word "meet" for the arrival of a magistrate. This word carries the idea of an official welcome of a newly arrived dignitary. Our meeting of the Sovereign Lord of the universe will be the most auspicious and awe-inspiring occasion of the ages. This is when He takes us, His bride, the church, to Heaven.

The church will meet the Lord in the "air." This is the earth's atmosphere, the space immediately above the surface of the earth.

And thus we shall always be with the Lord

The principal purpose of the Rapture is to "be with the Lord." We will live in fellowship with Him eternally. We will never be separate from Him. As well, nothing will separate us from fellow believers either. We will never say "goodbye" again.

Principle

Jesus will bring the church into endless, blissful fellowship at the Rapture of the church into Heaven.

Application

At the Rapture, bodies of Christians who died and went to Heaven will rise first (4:16). These are those who died before the Rapture. Immediately after Jesus comes, they will rise from their burial place.

Immediately following that, God will rapture both those whom He resurrected bodily and

those then living into the air. From this point, all Christians will be with the Lord forever. What a blessed reunion! First and foremost, we will reunite with the Lord and then secondly, we will reunite with those we love. The Rapture completes the church. From this point on, there will be no more division or separation.

1 Thessalonians 4:18

"Therefore comfort one another with these words"

Therefore

The "therefore" shows that a purpose of the Rapture is "comfort." Christians will reunite with their bodies. God will both raise the physical bodies of believers and rapture them. He will rapture those living when He comes. This is comfort for Christians.

comfort one another with these words

God puts His promises on paper. He challenges believers to comfort one another with the promise of the Rapture. Paul asks the Thessalonians to comfort one another in the loss of their loved ones with this truth. They can rest on God's truth.

There is a difference in the Christian's grief verses the non-Christian. His grief is not permanent. We will meet our loved ones again. We anticipate that day. This changes our view of life and death.

Principle

The Rapture comforts those who lose loved ones in death.

Application

The idea of the Rapture frightens some people. Those who live in unconfessed sin probably do not anticipate Christ's coming. Sin blunts one's desire to meet the Lord.

Death is a certainty. Christians may meet physical death [if the Rapture does not occur] but they will never face eternal death.

1&2 Thessalonians – Lesson 5	Page 27
1 Thessalonians 4	a Grace Notes study

"And as it is appointed for men to die once,
but after this the judgment..." (Hebrews 9:27).

"There is therefore now no condemnation to
those who are in Christ Jesus..." (Romans 8:1).

Christians pass into eternal life the moment
they accept Christ. This is our great hope. The
bleak, barren pit where we put our loved ones
will come alive at the Rapture.

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears
My word and believes in Him who sent Me has
everlasting life, and shall not come into
judgment, but has passed from death into life"
(John 5:24).

"You also be patient. Establish your hearts, for
the coming of the Lord is at hand" (James 5:8
).

"He who testifies to these things says, 'Surely I
am coming quickly.' Amen. Even so, come,
Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).