

Day 61, 1 Thessalonians 4

by David Servant

Paul teaches the Thessalonians about the importance of holiness, sexual purity, love of the brethren, and hope in death, emphasizing the return of Jesus and the resurrection of believers.

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4:6

Topics: "Sanctification", "Resurrection Hope"

Description

David Servant preaches on Paul's teachings to the Thessalonians, emphasizing the importance of obeying all of Jesus' commandments and living a life of holiness and sanctification. Paul addresses the need for sexual purity, warning against adultery and fornication, stressing the significance of being sexually pure in God's eyes. Additionally, Paul highlights the importance of showing love to fellow believers by meeting needs and working hard to avoid burdening others. He also provides comfort and hope regarding life after death, explaining the return of Jesus and the resurrection of believers who have died in Christ.

Transcript

Two decades after Jesus commissioned His disciples to make disciples, teaching them to obey all that He commanded, Paul was not developing "Pauline theology" that could be scrutinized in seminaries. Rather, he was making disciples, teaching them to obey all of Jesus' commandments. During his few weeks in Thessalonica, Paul instructed the believers how "to walk and please God," teaching them "commandments...by the authority of the Lord Jesus" (4:1-2). Those words are nothing less than a reference to Jesus' Great Commission, which the Head of the Church has never rescinded. As Paul wrote, the will of God is our sanctification, that is, our ever-increasing holiness. To be sanctified means to be set apart for holy use. It is for that reason that God gives His children the Holy Spirit (4:8).

In today's reading, Paul first turns his attention to one area of holiness that was apparently needful for the Gentile Thessalonians, namely, sexual purity. Focusing on the sin of adultery, he specifically addresses men, warning that God is the avenger against one who "defrauds his brother in the matter" (4:6). The adulterer steals what belongs to another. Take note that Paul was teaching the commandments of Christ, who, as you know, warned that adultery, either in flesh or mind, is a damning sin (see Matt. 5:27-30).

Technically, the man who commits fornication (having a sexual relationship as an unmarried person), is also potentially "defrauding his brother in the matter" by virtue that he is having sex with someone else's future wife. God wants His people to be sexually pure in every regard, and Paul warns in his letters that

immoral people will not inherit God's kingdom (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph. 5:5).

Next, Paul turns his attention to "love of the brethren," something that God Himself teaches all true believers by the indwelling Spirit (4:9), but not something that happens without their cooperation (4:10). That love is expressed, of course, by meeting pressing needs, but it is also expressed by working hard so as not to burden others with our pressing needs (4:11-12)! This was apparently something that was also needful for Paul to say to the Thessalonians, as we'll read in his second letter to them, "If anyone will not work, neither let him eat" (2 Thes. 3:10). Generous Christians should be careful not to foster laziness.

Apparently, since Paul's departure from Thessalonica, some believers had died, and the surviving Christians, many of whom were previously ignorant pagans, were grieving without hope. Paul explains basic Christian doctrine regarding life after death and the return of Jesus. Those who have died in Christ are better spoken of as having "fallen asleep" (4:13-14) because their physical bodies will awaken at the return of Jesus, being resurrected then.

This does not mean, however, that those who have died in Christ are in a state of unconsciousness or suspended animation. Their spirits are very much alive and with Christ. In fact, when He returns, they will return with Him (4:14). At that same time, their bodies will be resurrected from the earth and will rise to "the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (4:17). Their resurrected bodies will then be rejoined with their spirits.

Those who are alive when Jesus returns will rise to meet Him in the clouds, and they will also receive new, imperishable bodies. Paul obviously believed that he, as well as the Thessalonians, could be alive for that event. He would later write to the Corinthians:

We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality (1 Cor. 15:51-53).

As Christians, we naturally grieve when a brother or sister in Christ dies. But we don't grieve for them; we grieve for ourselves. Moreover, we don't grieve as the world does, that is, without hope. Rather, we know that our absence from those who have fallen asleep in Christ is only temporary (4:18). Comforting truths indeed!

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