

A Study of 1 & 2 Thessalonians (NIV 1984)

“To the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Thessalonians 1:1b and 2 Thessalonians 1:1b)

1 THESSALONIANS 3:11-13

Closing this section of the epistle is a summary of Paul’s prayer for himself and the Thessalonians. Formally, this section has been classified as a “wish-prayer,” in which God is referred to in the third person. In terms of content, Paul reiterates several themes of the preceding discussion, implying that the work of God in the lives of the Thessalonians will continue to its completion. This theme prepares for the ethical instruction of this letter that will follow in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12. Also, as with other major sections of the letter, this one closes with the mention of Christ’s return (cf. 1:10; 5:23), preparing for the extended discussion of the subject in 4:13-5:11.

1) Refer back to 1 Thessalonians 2:16-18. What reason does Paul give for the missionaries not being able to go and see the Thessalonians?

2) Note v.11. Who is Paul saying is the solution to overcoming Satan’s stopping the missionaries from going to Thessalonica?

3) Note v.11. What relationship term is used by Paul concerning God?

4) Note v.11. What title does Paul use in connection with Jesus?

5) Reference 1 Thessalonians 1:3. Now note v.12. What had the Thessalonians already been commended for that also appears here in verse 12?

6) Note v.12. What is it that Paul wants them to have more and more of?

Reference 1 Thessalonians 4:9. Who taught the Thessalonians to love?

7) Note v.12. As the verse concludes, what does Paul want the Thessalonians to know about the missionaries’ love for them?

8) Note v.13. What of the Thessalonians does Paul want to see strengthened?

Reference 1 Thessalonians 3:2. What was part of Timothy’s mission to the Thessalonians?

9) Note v.13. What are the 2 goals of this strengthening?

Reference 1 Thessalonians 2:10. Does Paul want something for the Thessalonians that he did not seek for himself?

10) Note v.13. Where does Paul want them to ultimately stand as blameless and holy?

11) Note v.13. When does Paul want them to stand that way?

Reference 2 Corinthians 5:10. Why is it important for us to prepare now for the Day of Christ's return?

12. Note v.13. Who is coming with Christ?

Reference 2 Thessalonians 1:10. What do holy people do for Christ?

1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-2

Paul's explanation of his absence and visit of Silas and Timothy, woven together as it was with many deliberate words of reminder and example, reaches its climax with the thanksgiving of 1 Thessalonians 3:11-12. The subject matter then shifts to what might be seen as the more explicitly instructional section of the letter. Up to this point demands of Paul's message have been largely indirect: reminders of who the readers are and what they have received as Christians, as a Christian messenger and implying that his example be followed, interpretation of the readers' persecution in light of the Gospel and God's judgment, and so forth. From here, though, Paul will address the readers directly, urging them to think and behave according to the Gospel which they have already received.

In a very real sense, every point which Paul makes in this section is a reiteration or elaboration of some aspect of Christian teaching which the Thessalonians already know. And so Paul begins this section making this very point. His words of exhortation are a reminder to live according to the instruction which they have already received, to grow according to the pattern of life that is already theirs. Such growth is exactly what he has prayed for in 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13.

The need for such reminders is clear to anyone who has tried to live as a Christian, but it seems to be especially acute for the Thessalonian believers. Much of what Paul offers in this section counters directly the influences of the Thessalonians' pagan neighbors and habits of their own former lifestyle. Paul's concern apparently stems from the very real possibility that, few in number and subject to persecution, these believers would succumb to the pressure to return to their old way of life. Combined with this danger is the threat of despair or complacency that can come through a failure to appreciate the promise of the Lord's return.

The fact that Paul's letter was written after Timothy has delivered a firsthand report about the Thessalonians' positive progress in the Gospel (1 Thessalonians 3:6) may suggest that while the church as a whole had remained faithful, some specific problems in these areas had arisen. That impression is reinforced by the language of 1 Thessalonians 4:13 and more particularly by the fact that in 2 Thessalonians Paul will repeat in much stronger terms the earlier warnings about idleness (note 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15). Whatever the situation as he writes, however, Paul provides a vital admonition: in thinking and behavior the readers must resist the pressure of their culture in order to flourish in the Truth they have embraced in the Gospel.

1) Note v.1. The missionaries instructed the Thessalonian Christians to live in what way?

2) Note v.1. Had the Thessalonians been doing this?

3) Note v.1. What were the missionaries now asking of the Thessalonians? What strong word does Paul use to emphasize this need?

4) Note v.2. Who is the source of the missionaries' instructions?

1 THESSALONIANS 4:3-8

Sexual morality in the Greco-Roman world was markedly lax. While marriage was widely upheld as a cultural ideal, sexual fidelity within marriage was not necessarily expected. The situation was intensified by the presence in various places of religious cults which encouraged the engaging of temple prostitutes as an act of worship. The cults of Dionysus and the Cabirus, both well established in Thessalonica, made use of phallic images and often drunken sexual carousing. Judaism, on the other hand, unequivocally regarded sexual activity as belonging only in the context of faithful marriage. While in practice the ideal was undoubtedly violated, among Jews strong social strictures stood against premarital or extra-marital sex.

Paul's discussion of this issue reflects the Gentile cultural setting assumed in 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10. He bases his discussion on sexuality directly on the concept of knowing God truly. Discipline in sexual matters is not for Paul merely a matter of doing what is best for oneself but of recognizing God's will and His power to enforce it. Immorality therefore represents deliberate ignorance of God and the nature of His call, leaving one subject to God's judgment. As a secondary but still vital point, Paul also stresses that sexual immorality amounts to deception of one's brothers and sisters in Christ and so violates the bond which unites the church. Altogether, Paul's words are a powerful warning against a powerful temptation.

Paul begins with the idea that Christians belong to the God who created and redeemed them with a particular purpose and who will judge them accordingly, and that through that relationship they also are bound to one another for mutual love and self-sacrificial service. Paul puts this basis for his specific behavioral instructions at the forefront of this entire section.

1) Note v.3. Whose will? That you be what?

The concept of sanctification is to be made holy, or treated as holy.

2) Note v.3. They should avoid what?

“sexual immorality” – Paul uses here the broadest and most common term in the New Testament for sexual sin (porneia). In contexts like this one which imply no specific focus, this term refers to any sexual activity before or outside of marriage, including premarital or extramarital sex and homosexual activity.

“avoid” – Greek: apechomai, which when used in this sense in the New Testament indicates abstaining entirely from something one used to engage in (see 1 Thessalonians 5:22; Acts 15:20, 29; 1 Timothy 4:3; 1 Peter 2:11).

3) Note v.4. They should learn to control what? And do so in a way that is what?

“holy” – Greek: hagiasmos, rendered “sanctification” in v.3. Paul’s implication is that Christian sexual behavior should express that the Christian belongs to God. His concept is clearly stated in 1 Corinthians 6:15-20, where he asserts that in sexual intercourse one is joined to one’s partner in a way that transcends the physical. Sexual contact outside marriage, therefore, violates the union that Christian has with the Lord (1 Corinthians 6:17). Consequently, chastity and fidelity are vivid and necessary expressions of the reality that believers are “in Christ,” that the Holy Spirit lives in them, and that they are God’s distinct and eternal possession, His “holy” people.

See the NIV footnote. Thoughts?

4) Note v.5. Not in what? Like what group? Who do not what?

“passionate lust” – translates a Greek expression which literally reads “passion of lust.” The idea is that one has a powerful desire focused on the gratification of the self.

“heathen” – the term used here is not an indication of any national or ethnic status but to indicate those who do not know God because they have not entered into a covenant relationship with Him.

5) Note v.6. In this matter, no one should do what 2 things?

6) Note v.6. How will God deal with such men who choose to sin this way? As they had already been told and what?

7) Note v.7. God did not call us to be what? But to do what?

8) Note v.8. The one who rejects this instruction does not reject whom? But Whom?

9) Note v.8. He gives you Whom?