

FIRST AND SECOND

THESSALONIANS

Living in Light of Christ's Return

L E A D E R G U I D E

FAITH AND HOPE

BIG IDEA: In light of Christ's return, we are to live in purity and love, fueled by our faith and hope.

DATE: Wednesday, October 21 and Sunday, October 25, 2026

SCRIPTURE: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-18 (CSB)

OPENING QUESTION

Twice in today's passage Paul points out something the Thessalonians are already doing and says, "Do this even more." What things would Paul say that about in our church? In our LifeGroup? In your life?

SETTING THE STAGE

The moral climate in the Roman Empire was not healthy. Immorality was a way of life; and because of slavery, people had leisure time to indulge in the latest pleasures. The Christian message of holy living was new to that culture, and it was not easy for these young believers to fight the temptations around them.

SCRIPTURE READING

1 Thessalonians 4:1-18 (CSB)

Additionally then, brothers and sisters, we ask and encourage you in the Lord Jesus, that as you have received instruction from us on how you should live and please God—as you are doing—do this even more. ²For you know what commands we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

³For this is God's will, your sanctification: that you keep away from sexual immorality, ⁴that each of you knows how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵not with lustful passions, like the Gentiles, who don't know God. ⁶This means one must not transgress against and take advantage of a brother or sister in this manner, because the Lord is an avenger of all these offenses, as we also previously told and warned you. ⁷For God has not called us to impurity but to live in holiness. ⁸Consequently, anyone who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

⁹About brotherly love: You don't need me to write you because you yourselves are taught by God to love one another. ¹⁰In fact, you are doing this toward all the brothers and sisters in the entire region of Macedonia. But we encourage you, brothers and sisters, to do this even more,

¹¹to seek to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, ¹²so that you may behave properly in the presence of outsiders and not be dependent on anyone.

¹³We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, concerning those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve like the rest, who have no hope. ¹⁴For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, in the same way, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵For we say this to you by a word from the Lord: We who are still alive at the Lord's coming will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the archangel's voice, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are still alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore encourage one another with these words.

DISCUSSION

THE IMPORTANCE OF PURITY

READ: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

From the Commentary: Paul gave four reasons why the young believers should live a holy life and abstain from sensual lusts.

- 1) **To please God (v.1).** Everybody lives to please somebody. Many people live to please themselves. They have no sensitivity to the needs of others. Christians cannot go through life only pleasing themselves.
- 2) **To obey God (vv. 2-3).** When he ministered in Thessalonica, Paul gave the believers the commandments of God regarding personal purity. The word *commandments* is a military term. It refers to orders handed down from superior officers. We are soldiers in God's army, and we must obey orders.
- 3) **To glorify God (vv. 4-5).** This is the positive side of God's commandment. Christians are supposed to be different from the unsaved. The Gentiles (unsaved) do not know God; therefore, they live ungodly lives. But we know God, and we are obligated to glorify Him in this world. "God's plan is to make you holy, and that entails first of all a clean break with sexual immorality" (1 Thess. 4:3).
- 4) **To escape the judgment of God (vv. 6-8).** God is no respecter of persons; He must deal with His children when they sin.

ASK: How do each of these reasons for living a holy life – to please God, to obey God, to glorify God and to escape the judgment of God - apply to us as Christians today?

How do we live a holy life in an unholy world?

From the Commentary: A holy walk involves a right relationship with God the Father (who called us), God the Son (who died for us), and God the Spirit (who lives within us). It is the presence of the Holy Spirit that makes our bodies the temple of God. Furthermore, it is by walking in the Spirit that we get victory over the lusts of the flesh. To despise God's commandments is to invite the judgment of God and also to grieve the Spirit of God.

How does the Spirit of God help us live a life free from sexual impurity? To begin with, He creates holy desires within us so that we have an appetite for God's pure Word and not the polluted garbage of the flesh. Also, He teaches us the Word and helps us to recall God's promises in times of temptation. As we yield to the Spirit, He empowers us to walk in holiness and not be detoured into the lusts of the world and the flesh. The fruit of the Spirit overcomes the works of the flesh.

Why do you think Paul devotes so much space to the theme of sexual purity? (What does that say about the church of that day?) How is this message equally appropriate today - for both genders?

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOVE

READ: 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

God causes our love for one another to increase more and more. How important is emotion in God's kind of love? In what ways are feelings of love important? In what ways is Christian love more than just a feeling?

From the Commentary: The transition from holiness to love is not a difficult one. Just as God's love is a holy love, so our love for God and for one another ought to motivate us to holy living. The more we live like God, the more we will love one another. If a Christian really loves his brother, he will not sin against him (1 Thess. 4:6). The two words most used for love in the Bible are *philia* and *agape*. *Philia* love is the love of deep affection, such as in friendship or even marriage. But *agape* love is the love God shows toward us. It is not simply a love based on feeling; it is expressed in our wills. *Agape* love treats others as God would treat them, regardless of feelings or personal preferences.

Paul lists 3 ways we can love one another:

1. Live a quiet life
2. Mind our own business
3. Work hard

Are these surprising? How do each of these show love to others? How are these three things counter cultural?

From the Commentary: Christians not only have the obligation to love one another but also to be good testimonies to the people of the world. Paul's great concern was that the Thessalonian believers earn their own wages and not become freeloaders depending on the support of unbelievers. "Make it your ambition (1 Thess. 4:11 NIV) seems like a paradox; if you are ambitious, your life will probably not be quiet. But the emphasis is on quietness of mind and heart.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING READY

READ: 1 Thessalonians 13-18

From the Commentary: The word rapture is not used in this section, but that is the literal meaning of "caught up." The Latin word *raptō* means "to seize, to carry off," and from it we get our English word *rapture*.

Will the unsaved world be aware of what is happening? Will they hear the shout, the voice, and the trumpet? First Corinthians 15:52 indicates that this will happen so suddenly that it will be over in the twinkling of an eye. Since the shout, voice, and trumpet apply to God's people, there is no

reason to believe that the unsaved masses will hear them. If they do, they will hear sounds without meanings. Millions of people will vanish instantly, and no doubt there will be chaos and great concern. Except for those who know the Bible, the world will wonder what has happened.

You and I shall meet the Lord in the air, in person, when He comes for us. The Greek word translated “meet” carries the idea of meeting a royal person or an important person. We have walked with Christ by faith here on earth, but in the air we shall “see him as he is” and become like Him. What a meeting that will be!

GROUP DISCUSSION: Gather with 3-4 people and discuss these questions together.

- How does looking forward with hope and faith help us stay strong in our love and purity?
- How can we best prepare ourselves to face God and give an account for how we spent our lives?
- What are some of the good things about this life and world that God gave us that makes us sometimes want to cling too tightly to it? How do those good things point us to what awaits us in Heaven?

GOING FORWARD

As we await the second coming of Christ, we are to walk out our Christian faith with purity and love. If someone were to watch you for a week, would they be able to tell you are a Christian? Would they see a life lived counter-culturally? Where is the Holy Spirit calling you to adjust your focus? Remember, we do not passively wait – but actively prepare and witness to others.

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