

Men's and Women's Fellowship 2014-15:

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 Study Guide

Study by Pastor John Brackbill at The Bible Church of Port Washington

Discovery Preparation

- Review Reading: 1 Thessalonians 1:1-3:13 (As you review previous passages, make use of the "Review of Past Discoveries" below.)
- Review of Past Discoveries
 - 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10:* Paul gave thanks to God for the Thessalonian believers for three main reasons:
 - ✓ Their Christ-Centered Character (3)
 - ✓ Their Election (4-7)
 - ✓ Their Known and Reported on Testimony (8-10)
 - 1 Thessalonians 2:1-16:* Paul declared that the apostolic ministry among the Thessalonians was not in vain as evidenced both through the apostolic ministry and the reception of that apostolic ministry.
 - ✓ Non-vain ministry is marked by bold gospel ministry in the middle of opposition (1-12)
 - ✓ Non-vain ministry is marked by the reception of apostolic Words as God's Words (13-16)
 - 1 Thessalonians 2:17-3:13:* The apostolic company's (especially Paul's) desire to see the Thessalonians again.
 - ✓ That desire to revisit was thwarted (2:17-20)
 - ✓ That desire to revisit was preliminarily fulfilled through Timothy's visit (3:1-5)
 - ✓ Timothy brought back a good-news report about the Thessalonians (3:6-10)
 - ✓ -Paul prayed for the Thessalonians in light of Timothy's report (3:11-13)
- Present Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

Discovering the Theme:

- After carefully reading the passage try to write down the theme of the passage. Keep in mind that Paul is exhorting the Thessalonians in this passage and that the theme is related to a prominent and twice repeated exhortation.
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Discovering the Structure:

- If you correctly identified the theme of the passage, the structure should eventually be obvious to you. Read through the passage again with the theme in mind and see how it is developed. Within that theme where does the passage seem to change topics? _____
- Read verses 3-8 and try to identify what the main topic is and how it is related to the theme of the passage. Write out your conclusion:

- Read verses 9-11 and try to identify what the main topic is and how it is related to the theme of the passage. Write out your conclusion:

Discovering the Meaning:

- In 4:1 Paul says "finally." What does he mean by this? As you consider this question, keep in mind that the majority of the book is still to come.

 - The word "then" in 4:1 is the same Greek word and functions in the same way as when it is translated "therefore." In light of Paul's main exhortation in this passage, what does this "Then" or "Therefore" connect back to in the previous chapter(s)? _____

 - In 4:1-2, how does Paul support his right to exhort them to "excel still more?" _____

 - In 4:2 Paul says "for you know what commandments we gave you." When did they give the Thessalonians those commands? _____

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Excelling Still More

Throughout this book Paul exhorts the Thessalonians to things he has already commended them for. For example, in 3:6 he commends them for their love, but then in 3:12 he prays that they may increase and abound in their love. Later in 4:9 he mentions they are taught by God to love one another, but then urges them “to excel still more” in that love (4:10). Here in 4:1 he exhorts them to walk in a certain way (a way that he admits they are already doing), but then exhorts them to excel still more in that walk! Paul is not being inconsistent or unreasonable. He is exhorting them to follow his own example as explained in Philippians 3:12-17: *Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. ¹³ Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you; ¹⁶ however, let us keep living by that same standard to which we have attained. ¹⁷ Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.*

The word “excel” simply means to abound or increase in excellence. The life of a Christian is to keep on the “excelling more” trajectory until that day when we see Jesus Christ face to face. It is then that we will be glorified and will be all that we ought to be. Until then we must keep on exceling more and more in the Lord Jesus.

- How does Paul elaborate on the exhortation “excel still more?” Keep in mind when Paul says “that” the first time in 4:1 he actually leaves the main exhortation until he says “that” the second time. However, in between the exhortation is actually filled in more. _____

- In 4:1 what is the relationship between “walking” and “pleasing God?” _____

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- God the Father is well-pleased with His Son (Matthew 3:17). If you are in union with Jesus Christ, is God well-pleased with you? _____
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- Obviously Paul is addressing believers who are in union with Jesus (4:1) and yet he speaks of them walking in a certain way in order to please God. Is there more than one way that God might be pleased with His children? Can God be displeased with His children? _____
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- Twice before in this very book this concept of “pleasing God” has surfaced. Can you find them and relate them to Paul’s exhortation here? _____
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- According to Romans 8:8 who cannot please God? _____
 - According to 1 Corinthians 7:32-34 have a unique opportunity to pursue a life of pleasing God? _____
 - We should strive to walk in such a way that we would live lives that are pleasing unto God who is our Father. But what does Paul say in his exhortation in 4:1 that guards against a moralistic self-generated sanctification in the Christian life? _____

- The command to excel still more is a command regarding progressive sanctification. Verses 3-8 and 9-11 each deal with a specific aspects of progressive sanctification in the life of a Christian. According to v. 3 what is God’s will for you and what does it have to do with your own progressive sanctification? If you read the text carefully there are three interconnected answers to this question:

Immorality

There are various Greek words used in the NT that refer to sexual sins. The word used here is *porneia*. This passage is a clear example that this word can (not always depending on context) be used as a general term covering all sexual sins (e.g. adultery, fornication, homosexuality etc.). It would also certainly speak to the rampant problem of pornography both in our culture and in the church. The fact that Paul addressed this does not mean that they were sinning in this way. In fact, Paul says they were walking in the way he was exhorting them to walk. Some churches (like the church at Corinth) needed this command because they were actually sanctioning this kind of sin in their midst. Other churches (like the Thessalonians) needed this because they were saved out of and living in a culture that was full of sexual sin. In addition, they still had the flesh in them that wanted to pursue sexual desires outside of the legitimate boundary of marriage. Whether you as an individual currently resemble the defeat of the church Corinth or the victory of Thessalonica this teaching is for you.

- We must abstain from sexual immorality or to say it another way, we must possess our own vessel in sanctification. What does vessel mean here? Consider 2 Corinthians 4:7 and 2 Timothy 2:21 before answering:
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- Living a life of possessing our vessel in in sanctification and honor is very different than a life of lustful passion. What does it take to “posses” your vessel in sanctification and honor that is lacking in “lustful passion?” _____
 - What is the implication drawn from v. 5 if we as Christians are not abstaining from sexual immorality? _____
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- If we violate God’s will by committing sexual immorality, we will be acting as unbelievers by not possessing our own vessel in sanctification and honor which would have what outcome according to v. 6? _____
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- When the NT epistles speak of “brothers” who is being referred to? Does that shed any light on who Paul is warning believers not to commit sexual sin with? _____

- Verses 6-8 give three reasons or motivations for obeying this command. What motivation does v. 6 give for not committing sexual immorality, for possessing one’s vessel in sanctification and honor and for not transgressing and defrauding his brother (also consider Hebrews 13:4)? _____

- A true child of God will not face eternal judgment and yet very clearly this passage teaches believers can be judged in some sense. We are also told that this is a solemn warning. What would the nature of this judgment be for believers (cf. 1 Cor. 11: 27-32 also)? _____

- What motivation is given in v. 7 for not committing sexual immorality, for possessing one’s vessel in sanctification and honor and for not transgressing and defrauding his brother? _____

- What motivation is given in v. 8 for not committing sexual immorality, for possessing one’s vessel in sanctification and honor and for not transgressing and defrauding his brother? _____

- Remember, 4:1-2 introduces the theme of the passage and 3-8 and 9-12 deal with two topics related to that theme. Recall the main topic of 9-12 and summarize how it is dealt with in the following verses:

- V. 9-10: _____
- V. 11-12: _____

- Considering v. 9-10, what makes the exhortation to love other believers a grace enabled command? _____

- Can you think of any passages that teach that love for others is - something God does in the believer’s life? _____

Defraud?

The word “defraud” means to take something for yourself at the expense of another. Certainly a defrauding happens to a Christian spouse when the other spouse commits adultery. But it is also true that a defrauding can happen outside of a marriage context: “Promiscuity before marriage represents the robbing of the other of that virginity which ought to be brought to a marriage. The future partner of such a one has been defrauded” Leon Morris in *The Bible Doctrine of Judgment* page 126.

- How do you think the Thessalonians practiced this love toward all the brethren in all Macedonia? _____

- How is increasing in love for other believers related to leading a quiet life, attending to your own business and working with your hands? _____

- Can you think of a passage (a previous memory passage) that the exhortation “attend to your own business” seems to contradict? How does this command not contradict that verse? _____

- If a believer is not faithful in keeping their personal finances in order, what is the negative effect (consider v. 11)? _____

Discovering Application

- We are exhorted to “excel still more” in holiness (progressive sanctification). Have you recently and do you consistently pray that God would sanctify you more?
- Not only are we commanded to be holy, we are commanded to advance past the spiritual growth that we currently evidence. What practical steps do you need to take right now to “excel” still more? Take some time and prayerfully list at least three practical steps:

- When you consider of “God’s will” what do you primarily think of? Life decisions? Future plans? Career or educational goals? etc.? Based on the way that Paul uses the phrase “the will of God” in v. 3 what should you be primarily considering? _____
- We live in a society that is very sensual. It is important to realize that Christian brothers and sisters are tempted in this area in different ways.
 - Men are especially tempted toward sexual impurity in what ways? _____
 - Women are especially tempted toward sexual impurity in what way? _____
- In light of the above considerations, list at least 3 practical protections that you have or can practice to personally help guard your brother or sister of the opposite sex against succumbing to sexual temptation:

- In light of the above considerations, list at least 3 practical protections that you have or can practice to personally guard you against succumbing to sexual temptation:

- Such practical protections are very important, but what is the determining factor as to whether or not they will truly assist you in a life of purity? _____
- Go back through verses 3-8 and note all the ways that this is a God-centered command listing them below. In your fight for sexual purity are you truly focused on God? _____

- List some ways that you could or should love other believers in this assembly, that you are currently not doing:

- The command to excel in love for believers in this text clearly includes believers outside of our local assembly. What are some biblical ways to love other believers outside of TBC? _____
