

# CHAPTER 4

In this chapter the apostle gives earnest exhortations to abound in holiness, with a caution against uncleanness, enforced with several arguments (v. 1-8). He then mentions the great duties of brotherly love, and quietness with industry in our callings (v. 9-12). And concludes with comforting those who mourned for their relations and friends that died in the Lord (v. 13-18).

## 1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-8

### EXHORTATIONS TO HOLINESS

Here we have,

**I.** An exhortation to abound in holiness, to *abound more and more* in that which is good, v. 1, 2. We may observe,

**1.** The manner in which the exhortation is given — very affectionately. The apostle entreats them as brethren; he calls them so, and loved them as such. Because his love to them was very great, he exhorts them very earnestly: *We beseech and exhort you*. The apostle was unwilling to take any denial, and therefore repeats his exhortation again and again.

**2.** The matter of his exhortation — that they would abound more and more in holy walking, or excel in those things that are good, in good works. Their faith was justly famed abroad, and they were already examples to other churches: yet the apostle would have them yet further to excel others, and to make further progress in holiness. Note,

**(1.)** Those who most excel others fall short of perfection. The very best of us should *forget those things which are behind, and reach forth unto those things which are before*.

**(2.)** It is not enough that we abide in the faith of the gospel, but we must abound in the work of faith. We must not only persevere to the end, but we should grow better, and walk more evenly and closely with God.

**3.** The arguments with which the apostle enforces his exhortation.

(1.) They had been informed of their duty. They knew their Master's will, and could not plead ignorance as an excuse. Now as faith, so knowledge, is dead without practice. They had received of those who had converted them to Christianity, or been taught of them, *how they ought to walk*. Observe, The design of the gospel is to teach men not only what they should believe, but also how they ought to live; not so much to fill men's minds with notions as to regulate their temper and behaviour. The apostle taught them how to walk, not how to talk. To talk well without living well will never bring us to heaven: for the character of those who are in Christ Jesus is this: *They walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit*.

(2.) Another argument is that the apostle taught and exhorted them in the name, or by the authority, of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was Christ's minister and ambassador, declaring to them what was the will and command of the Lord Jesus.

(3.) Another argument is this. Herein they would please God. Holy walking is most pleasing to the holy God, *who is glorious in holiness*. This ought to be the aim and ambition of every Christian, to please God and to be accepted of him. We should not be men-pleasers, nor flesh-pleasers, but should walk so as to please God.

(4.) The rule according to which they ought to walk and act — *the commandments they had given them by the Lord Jesus Christ*, which were the commandments of the Lord Jesus Christ himself, because given by authority and direction from him and such as were agreeable to his will. The apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ were only commissioned by him to teach men to observe all things *whatsoever he had commanded them*, ~~(189)~~ Matthew 28:20. Though they had great authority from Christ, yet that was to teach men what Christ had commanded, not to give forth commandments of their own. They did not act as lords over God's heritage (~~(188)~~ 1 Peter 5:3), nor should any do so that pretend to be their successors. The apostle could appeal to the Thessalonians, who knew what commandments he gave them, that they were no other than what he had received from the Lord Jesus.

**II.** A caution against uncleanness, this being a sin directly contrary to sanctification, or that holy walking to which he so earnestly exhorts them. This caution is expressed, and also enforced by many arguments,

**1.** It is expressed in these words: *That you should abstain from fornication* (v. 3), by which we are to understand all uncleanness whatsoever, either in a married or unmarried state. Adultery is of course included, though fornication is particularly mentioned. And other sorts of uncleanness are also forbidden, of which it is a shame even to speak, though they are done by too many in secret. All that is contrary to chastity in heart, speech, and behaviour, is contrary to the command of God in the decalogue, and contrary to that holiness which the gospel requires.

**2.** There are several arguments to enforce this caution. As,

**(1.)** This branch of sanctification in particular is the will of God, v. 3. It is the will of God in general that we should be holy, because *he that called us is holy*, and because we are *chosen unto salvation through the sanctification of the Spirit*; and not only does God require holiness in the heart, but also purity in our bodies, and that we should cleanse ourselves from all *filthiness both of flesh and spirit*, <sup>4001</sup>2 Corinthians 7:1. Whenever the body is, as it ought to be, devoted to God, and dedicated and set apart for him, it should be kept clean and pure for his service; and, as chastity is one branch of our sanctification, so this is one thing which God commands in his law, and what his grace effects in all true believers.

**(2.)** This will be greatly for our honour: so much is plainly implied, v. 4. Whereas the contrary will be a great dishonour. *And his reproach shall not be wiped away*, <sup>3068</sup>Proverbs 6:33. The body is here called the vessel of the soul, which dwells therein (so <sup>4015</sup>1 Samuel 21:5), and it must be kept pure from defiling lusts. Every one should be careful in this matter, as he values his own honour and will not be contemptible on this account, that his inferior appetites and passions gain not the ascendant, tyrannizing over his reason and conscience, and enslaving the superior faculties of his soul. What can be more dishonourable than for a rational soul to be enslaved by bodily affections and brutal appetites?

**(3.)** To indulge the lust of concupiscence is to live and act like heathens? *Even as the Gentiles who know not God*, v. 5. The Gentiles, and especially the Grecians, were commonly guilty of some sins of uncleanness which were not so evidently forbidden by the light of nature. But they did not know God, nor his mind and will, so well as Christians know, and should know, this his will, namely *our sanctification* in this branch of it. It is not so much to be wondered at, therefore, if the Gentiles indulge their fleshly appetites and lusts; but Christians should not walk as unconverted

Gentiles, *in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings,* etc. (<sup><404B></sup>1 Peter 4:3), because those who are in Christ *have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts.*

(4.) The sin of uncleanness, especially adultery, is a great piece of injustice that God will be the avenger of; so we may understand those words, *That no man go beyond or defraud his brother* (v. 6), *in any matter — en to pragmati*, in *this* matter of which the apostle is speaking in the preceding and following verses, namely, the sin of uncleanness. Some understand these words as a further warning and caution against injustice and oppression, all fraud and deceit in our dealings with men, which are certainly criminal, and contrary to the gospel. And Christians should not impose upon the ignorance and necessity of those they deal with, and so go beyond them, nor should they by equivocations or lying arts defraud them; and although this may be practised by some and lie long undiscovered, and so go unpunished among men, yet the righteous God will render a recompence. But the meaning may rather be to show the injustice and wrong that in many cases are done by the sin of uncleanness. Not only are fornication and other acts of uncleanness sins against his own body who commits them (<sup><416B></sup>1 Corinthians 6:18), not only are they very injurious to the sinner himself both in soul and body, but sometimes they are very injurious, and no less than defrauding, acts of injustice to others, particularly to those who are joined together in the marriage covenant and to their posterity. And, as this sin is of such a heinous nature, so it follows that God will be the avenger of it. *Whoremongers and adulterers God will judge,* <sup><384B></sup>Hebrews 13:4. This the apostle had forewarned and testified by his gospel, which, as it contained exceedingly great and precious promises, so also it *revealed from heaven the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness among men,* <sup><418B></sup>Romans 1:18.

(5.) The sin of uncleanness is contrary to the nature and design of our Christian calling: *For God hath called us not unto uncleanness, but unto holiness,* v. 7. The law of God forbids all impurity, and the gospel requires the greatest purity; it calls us from uncleanness unto holiness.

(6.) The contempt therefore of God's law and gospel is the contempt of God himself: *He that despises despises God, not man only.* Some might possibly make light of the precepts of purity and holiness, because they heard them from men like themselves; but the apostle lets them know that they were God's commands, and to violate them was no less than to

despise God. He adds, *God hath given Christians his Spirit*, intimating that all sorts of uncleanness do in an especial manner grieve the Holy Spirit, and will provoke him to withdraw from us; and also the Holy Spirit is given unto us to arm us against these sins, and to help us to mortify these deeds of the body, that we may live, <sup><504></sup> Romans 8:13.

## <sup><504></sup> 1 THESSALONIANS 4:9-12

### BROTHERLY LOVE

In these words the apostle mentions the great duties,

**I.** Of brotherly love. This he exhorts them to increase in yet more and more. The exhortation is introduced, not with a compliment, but with a commendation, because they were remarkable in the exercise of it, which made it less needful that he should write to them about it, v. 9. Thus by his good opinion of them he insinuated himself into their affections, and so made way for his exhortation to them. Note, We should take notice of that in others which is good, to their praise, that by so doing we may lay engagements upon them to abound therein more and more. Observe,

**1.** What it is that the apostle commends in them. It was not so much their own virtue as God's grace; yet he takes notice of the evidence they gave of the grace of God in them.

**(1.)** It was God's grace that he took special notice of: that God had taught them this good lesson: *You yourselves are taught of God to love one another*, v. 9. Whoever does that which is good is taught of God to do it, and God must have the glory. All who are savingly taught of God are taught this lesson, to love one another. This is the livery of Christ's family. Note also, The teaching of the Spirit exceeds the teaching of men; and, as no man should teach contrary to what God teaches, so none can teach so effectually as he teaches; and men's teaching is fain and useless unless God teach also.

**(2.)** The Thessalonians gave good evidence of their being taught of God by *their love to the brethren in all Macedonia*, v. 10. They not only loved those of their own city and society, or such as were near them and just of their own sentiments, but their love was extensive. And a true Christian's

is so to all the saints, though distant from him in place, and differing from him in some opinions or practices of less moment.

**2.** The exhortation itself is to increase more and more in this great grace and duty of brotherly love, v. 10. Though these Thessalonians had in some sense no need of an exhortation to brotherly love, as if it were wholly wanting, yet they must be exhorted to pray for more, and labour for more. There are none on this side heaven who love in perfection. Those who are eminent in this or any other grace have need of increase therein as well as of perseverance unto the end.

## **II.** Of quietness and industry in their callings. Observe,

**1.** The apostle exhorts to these duties: that they should *study to be quiet*, v. 11. It is the most desirable thing to have a calm and quiet temper, and to be of a peaceable and quiet behaviour. This tends much to our own and others' happiness; and Christians should study how to be quiet. We should be ambitious and industrious how to be calm and quiet in our minds, in patience to possess our own souls, and to be quiet towards others; or of a meek and mild, a gentle and peaceable disposition, not given to strife, contention, or division. Satan is very busy to disquiet us; and we have that in our own hearts that disposes us to be disquiet; therefore let us study to be quiet. It follows, *Do your own business*. When we go beyond this, we expose ourselves to a great deal of inquietude. Those who are busy-bodies, meddling in other men's matters, generally have but little quiet in their own minds and cause great disturbances among their neighbours; at least they seldom mind the other exhortation, to be diligent in their own calling, *to work with their own hands*; and yet this was what the apostle commanded them, and what is required of us also. Christianity does not discharge us from the work and duty of our particular callings, but teaches us to be diligent therein.

**2.** The exhortation is enforced with a double argument; namely,

**(1.)** So we shall live creditably. Thus we shall walk honestly, or decently and creditably, towards those that are without, v. 12. This will be to act as becomes the gospel, and will gain a good report from those that are strangers, yea, enemies to it. Note, It is a great ornament to religion when the professors of it are of meek and quiet spirits, diligent to do their own business, and not busy-bodies in other men's matters.

(2.) We shall live comfortably, and have lack of nothing, v. 12. People often by their slothfulness bring themselves into narrow circumstances, and reduce themselves to great straits, and are liable to many wants, when such as are diligent in their own business live comfortably and have lack of nothing. They are not burdensome to their friends, nor scandalous to strangers. They earn their own bread, and have the greatest pleasure in so doing.

## 1 THESSALONIANS 4:13-18

### STATE OF DEPARTED SAINTS

In these words the apostle comforts the Thessalonians who mourned for the death of their relations and friends that died in the Lord. His design is to dissuade them from excessive grief, or inordinate sorrow, on that account. *All grief* for the death of friends is far from being unlawful; we may weep at least for ourselves if we do not weep for them, weep for own loss, though it may be their gain. Yet we must not be immoderate in our sorrows, because,

**I.** This looks as if we had no hope, v. 13. It is to act too much like the Gentiles, who had no hope of a better life after this; whereas we Christians, who have a most sure hope, the hope of eternal life after this, *which God who cannot lie hath promised us*, should moderate all our joys and our sorrows on account of any worldly thing. This hope is more than enough to balance all our griefs upon account of any of the crosses of the present time.

**II.** This is an effect of ignorance concerning those who are dead, v. 13. There are some things which we cannot be ignorant of concerning those that are asleep; for the land they are removed to is a land of darkness, which we know but little of and have no correspondence with. To go among the dead is to go among we know not whom, and to live we know not how. Death is an unknown thing, and the state of the dead, or the state after death, we are much in the dark about; yet there are some things concerning those especially who die in the Lord that we need not, and ought not, to be ignorant of; and, if these things be really understood and

duly considered, they will be sufficient to allay our sorrow concerning them.

**1.** They sleep in Jesus. They are asleep, v. 13. They have *fallen asleep in Christ*, ~~468~~1 Corinthians 15:18. Death does not annihilate them. It is but a sleep to them. It is their rest, and undisturbed rest. They have retired out of this troublesome world, to rest from all their labours and sorrows, and they sleep in Jesus, v. 14. Being still in union with him, they sleep in his arms and are under his special care and protection. Their souls are in his presence, and their dust is under his care and power; so that they are not lost, nor are they losers, but great gainers by death, and their removal out of this world is into a better.

**2.** They shall be raised up from the dead, and awakened out of their sleep, for *God will bring them with him*, v. 14. They then are with God, and are better where they are than when they were here; and when God comes he will bring them with him. The doctrine of the resurrection and the second coming of Christ is a great antidote against the fear of death and inordinate sorrow for the death of our Christian friends; and this doctrine we have a full assurance of, because we *believe that Jesus died and rose again*, v. 14. It is taken for granted that as Christians they knew and believed this. The death and resurrection of Christ are fundamental articles of the Christian religion, and give us hope of a joyful resurrection; for *Christ, having risen from the dead, has become the first fruits of those that slept*; and therefore *those who have fallen asleep in him have not perished nor are lost*, ~~468~~1 Corinthians 15:18, 20. His resurrection is a full confirmation of all that is said in the gospel, or by the word of the Lord, which has *brought life and immortality to light*.

**3.** Their state and condition shall be glorious and happy at the second coming of Christ. This the apostle informs the Thessalonians of *by the word of the Lord* (v. 15), by divine revelation from the Lord Jesus; for though the resurrection of the dead, and a future state of blessedness, were part of the creed of the Old-Testament saints, yet they are much more clearly revealed in and by the gospel. By this word of the Lord we know,

**(1.)** That the Lord Jesus will come down from heaven in all the pomp and power of the upper world (v. 16): *The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout*. He ascended into heaven after his resurrection, and passed through these material heavens into the third heaven, which must retain him till the restitution of all things; and then he will come again, and



appear in his glory. He will descend from heaven into this our air, v. 17. The appearance will be with pomp and power, *with a shout* — the shout of a king, and the power and authority of a mighty king and conqueror, with *the voice of the archangel*; an innumerable company of angels will attend him. Perhaps *one*, as general of those hosts of the Lord, will give notice of his approach, and the glorious appearance of this great Redeemer and Judge will be proclaimed and ushered in by the *trump of God*. *For the trumpet shall sound*, and this will awaken those that sleep in the dust of the earth, and will summon all the world to appear. For,

(2.) The dead shall be raised: *The dead in Christ shall rise first* (v. 16), before those who are *found alive at Christ's coming shall be changed*; and so it appears that those who shall then *be found alive shall not prevent those that are asleep*, v. 15. The first care of the Redeemer in that day will be about his dead saints; he will raise them before the great change passes on those that shall be found alive: so that those who did not sleep in death will have no greater privilege or joy at that day than those who fell asleep in Jesus.

(3.) Those that shall be found alive will then be changed. They shall *be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air*, v. 17. At, or immediately before, this rapture into the clouds, those who are alive will undergo a mighty change, which will be equivalent to dying. This change is so mysterious that we cannot comprehend it: we know little or nothing of it, ~~455~~ 1 Corinthians 15:51. Only, in the general, *this mortal must put on immortality*, and these bodies will be made fit to inherit the kingdom of God, which flesh and blood in its present state are not capable of. This change will be *in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye* (~~456~~ 1 Corinthians 15:52), in the very instant, or not long after the raising up of those that sleep in Jesus. And those who are raised, and thus changed, shall meet together in the clouds, and there meet with their Lord, to congratulate him on his coming, to receive the crown of glory he will then bestow upon them, and to be assessors with him in judgment, approving and applauding the sentence he will then pass upon the prince of the power of the air, and all the wicked, who shall be doomed to destruction with the devil and his angels.

(4.) Here is the bliss of the saints at that day: they shall *be ever with the Lord*, v. 17. It will be some part of their felicity that all the saints shall meet together, and remain together for ever; but the principal happiness of

heaven is this, *to be with the Lord*, to see him, live with him, and enjoy him, for ever. This should comfort the saints upon the death of their friends, that, although death has made a separation, yet their souls and bodies will meet again; we and they shall meet together again: we and they shall meet together again: we and they with all the saints shall meet our Lord, and be with him for ever, no more to be separated wither from him or from one another for ever. And the apostle would have us *comfort one another with these words*, v. 18. We should endeavour to support one another in times of sorrow, not deaden one another's spirits, nor weaken one another's hands, but should comfort one another; and this may be done by serious consideration and discourse on the many good lessons to be learned from the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, the second coming of Christ, and the glory of the saints in that day.