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1 Thessalonians 4
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By Dan Maines

1 Thessalonians 4

1 Thessalonians 4:1-2

Finally then, brothers and sisters, we request and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received instruction from us as to how you ought to walk and please God, just as you actually do walk, that you excel even more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

† Paul encourages them to continue growing in obedience and holiness.

† Pleasing God is not static, it calls for continual progress.

† Clement of Rome (1 Clement 35) exhorted believers to excel in good works, paralleling Paul's command.

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5

For this is the will of God, your sanctification, that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality, that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God.

† Sanctification means holiness in both conduct and body.

† Sexual immorality was rampant in pagan culture, but Christians were called to purity.

† Philo (On the Special Laws 3.7) condemned Gentile excess and lust, reflecting the same moral divide.

1 Thessalonians 4:6-8

And that no one violate the rights and take advantage of his brother or sister in the matter, because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you previously and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in sanctification. Therefore, the one who rejects this is not rejecting man, but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

† Exploiting others, especially in matters of sexual sin, is a grave offense.

† God Himself is the avenger of such wrongs.

† Josephus (Against Apion 2.199) contrasted the strict moral discipline of the Jews with Gentile immorality, showing the seriousness of Paul's command.

1 Thessalonians 4:9-10

Now as to the love of the brothers and sisters, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another, for indeed you practice it toward all the brothers and sisters who are in all Macedonia. But we urge

you, brothers and sisters, to excel even more.

† Their brotherly love was already evident and widespread.

† Yet Paul still urged them to grow even more in love.

† Ignatius (Letter to the Smyrnaeans 6) also commended churches for excelling in love as proof of discipleship.

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12

And to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we instructed you, so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.

† The Christian life values humble diligence and self-sufficiency.

† Hard work was a testimony to outsiders, preventing reproach.

† The Didache (ch. 12) warned against idleness, confirming Paul's teaching.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14

But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as indeed the rest of mankind do, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose from the dead, so also God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus.

† Believers grieve differently, with hope rooted in Christ's resurrection.

† The resurrection of Jesus guarantees the resurrection of His people.

† Justin Martyr (Dialogue with Trypho 80) affirmed resurrection hope against pagan despair.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-17

For we say this to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and

with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who remain, 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.

† Paul assures them that the dead will not be left behind.

† The living and the dead in Christ share in the same victory.

† The imagery reflects covenantal language of God coming in judgment, echoing Matthew 24:30-31.

† Josephus (Wars 6.5.3) described heavenly armies seen in the clouds before Jerusalem's fall, aligning with Paul's imagery of Christ's coming.

1 Thessalonians 4:18

Therefore, comfort one another with these words.

† The teaching of resurrection and Christ's presence was for encouragement, not fear.

† True hope brings comfort to the community of believers.

How it applies to us today

† 1 Thessalonians 4 reminds us that holiness, love, and diligence are marks of true discipleship.

† The resurrection hope was fulfilled in Christ's coming, assuring us of life in Him.

† Today, in the fulfilled kingdom, we live in holiness, work diligently, and comfort one another in the eternal presence of Christ.

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

Source Index

† Clement of Rome, 1 Clement 35 - excelling in good works

† Philo, On the Special Laws 3.7 - condemnation of Gentile lusts

† Josephus, Against Apion 2.199 - contrast of Jewish morality

and Gentile immorality

† Ignatius, Letter to the Smyrnaeans 6 - excelling in love

† The Didache 12 - warning against idleness

† Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho 80 - resurrection hope

† Josephus, Wars 6.5.3 - heavenly armies in the clouds

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