

Paul's First Letter to Thessalonica
Living in God's Will
Lesson 2

1 *Thes.* 4:1-6 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as you received from us *instruction* as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you may excel still more. 2 For you know what commandments we gave you by *the authority of* the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 *and* that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is *the avenger* in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you.

The Will of God

We all want to know how to be in the will of God. It seems that we are most worried about this when we are facing the big things in life, like the purchase of a house, the person we are to marry, the job we are going to take, or even an investment we want to make. Yet, we need to be in the will of God in the everyday little things in our lives. The Thessalonians already knew the commandments of God for they were living and witnessing well in their own surroundings. But Paul now sees that they need to grow more in the Lord. To this he instructs them on how to be in God's will! We might view this as a checklist to see if we are really where God wants us to be in the little things of everyday life.

Sanctification is the Will of God

Paul begins with the topic with sanctification. Sanctification is one of those Bible words that we do not use much in life today, yet it has a profound meaning and should be a part of every believer's life. It means to be set apart and different from the rest of the world. Paul directs his instruction in sanctification in two areas.

1. Abstain from sexual immorality ... know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion

A sanctified Christian is not to be torn away from the Lord by lustful burning passions for sexual immorality. A sexual relationship in marriage is wonderful but outside of marriage is condemned. If you want to be in God's will, you must control your sexual urges, making sure they are expressed in a proper, God honoring way, place, and time.

2. That no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is *the avenger* in all these things

In addition, a sanctified Christian must be in a right relationship with all the people who are around him. Things go wrong in relationships, but it is a Christian's duty to honor God and do his/her best to make the relationships honor God. This is not always possible but it is not the Christian's place to put another in their place, God is the one who will do that at the proper time and in the proper setting. To be in God's will, we must not act like the lost people who are living without God, but we must present ourselves as a people who belong to a living God. To be in God's will we are to live with the highest standards, above reproach, carefully

guarding our steps to represent God well. You cannot be in God's will if you are not living as a sanctified person!

[1 Thessalonians 4:7](#) For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. ⁸Consequently, he who rejects *this* is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

Continuing on, Paul addresses that Christians are not to live impure lives but lives that are different from the rest of the world. In Paul's day, sexual relationships were rampant. Today, media programs blame Paul for putting a heavy burden on fellow Christians by deeming their sexuality as sinful. This is not the case at all. Paul is stating that there is a proper place to express your sexuality and there is an improper place to express your sexuality. Christians are not to express it in the manner of the non-Christians, outside the bounds of marriage. The problem of the naysayers was answered by Paul! You are not rejecting Paul in this but you are rejecting God! It is God's desire!

[1 Thessalonians 4:9-12](#) Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for *anyone* to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; ¹⁰for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more, ¹¹and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you; ¹²so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.

Love

The Thessalonians are already doing well but Paul wants them to do better still. It is God's will that 1) you abstain from sexual immorality and 2) that no man transgresses and defrauds his brother. Paul now addresses the idea of love of the brethren and non-Christians and adds to the list.

- 3) Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life
- 4) Attend to your own business
- 5) Work with your hands

All of these things were commanded so the Christians would have a good and proper witness with those who were not Christians. The list is fairly self explanatory, lead a quiet life, mind your own business, and earn a living! It seems to be a formula for a peaceful life.

[1 Thessalonians 4:13](#) But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope.

Theological Belief

In addressing God's will for the lives of Christians, Paul speaks about sanctification of your body in verse 4:3-8 and love in verses 4:9- 12. Here Paul instructions the Thessalonians in their theological belief about things to come. He wants them to know the truth. He wants them to have comfort and peace, not grief and hopelessness.

[1 Thessalonians 4:14-18](#) For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. ¹⁵For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For 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 shall rise first. ¹⁷Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸Therefore comfort one another with these words.

6) The Snatching away of believers

Paul addresses the theological belief about the coming of the Lord, when He will snatch the living Christians and the dead bodies of Christians who have gone to be with the Lord from this world and taken them back to heaven with Him. Just as it is a fact that Jesus died and rose from the grave, so too the fact is that Jesus will one day return to snatch His believers away. Since this is one of those things that Paul states about being in God's will, if you believe anything else but this, you are not in God's will in your theological belief!

For those of us who are alive at the time of the coming of the Lord, we will be caught up with the Lord at that time. But Paul wants us to understand something else. He wants us to be comforted in the fact that the bodies of those who have died will not lie in the grave and miss the event. Their bodies will be transformed into a glorified, resurrected body, just like Jesus' and that body will rise to meet the Lord in the air. Those of us who are alive on earth will see this happen and then we will follow them to meet the Lord in the air. We too will experience a transformed resurrected body at the same time. Therefore, we are not to worry about the place of our loved ones who have died for they will experience the same wonderful coming of the Lord as those who are alive at the coming. If you do not believe this will happen, then you are out of God's will.

[1 Thessalonians 5:1-6](#) Now as to the times and the epochs, brethren, you have no need of anything to be written to you. ²For you yourselves know full well that the day of the Lord will come just like a thief in the night. ³While they are saying, "Peace and safety!" then destruction will come upon them suddenly like birth pangs upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. ⁴But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that the day should overtake you like a thief; ⁵for you are all sons of light and sons of day. We are not of night nor of darkness; ⁶so then let us not sleep as others do, but let us be alert and sober.

7) The day of the Lord has not happened yet!

From sanctification of your body to love and to theological belief, Paul turns to the future and the day of the Lord. The day of the Lord centers on the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ to the earth. This is commonly called the second coming.

Evidently, some in the church at Thessalonica had begun to believe that the Lord Jesus had already returned to earth and the day of the Lord had already come to pass. This was not the case and Paul was correcting the false understanding. No one knows the particular time of Christ's coming. This was not even revealed to the New Testament writers. The coming of Christ will be a great surprise to everyone, when it happens. Christ's coming will be absolutely terrible for the ungodly living on earth who are gathered in the Valley of Megiddo to try to make an end of the Lord. Christ's destruction will consume them while they dream. While that day will be dreadful for the wicked, it will be a happy day for the righteous. The righteous are not in darkness because they are the children of the light. Destructions will come on that day to those who are speaking peace and safety to themselves. We must be in God's will and guard ourselves from this day by trusting in the Lord, but the day has not occurred yet!

[1 Thessalonians 5:7-11](#) For those who sleep do their sleeping at night, and those who get drunk get drunk at night. ⁸But since we are of *the* day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. ⁹For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰who died for us, that whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with Him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another, and build up one another, just as you also are doing.

8) Be in God's will in your daily walk!

When I was young my mother and I use to always argue over the time that I was to come home for the night. She always wanted me in by 10:00 PM. I never wanted a time limit. She always said that anything that needed to be done could be done by 10:00 PM and nothing good ever happens after that time. It wasn't long before I realized she was right! All the trouble I ever got in was always after 10:00 PM. In addition to that, as a saved person I was not ready for the lifestyle of the people who came alive after that time. Everything they did was on the edge of evil and I knew it. This is the same thing Paul is speaking about in this passage, but in a broader light. As Christians we are to operate under the calendar of God's divine plan. We have to sleep and rest and that was created by God to be done restfully at night. It is true that those who do not belong to Christ seem to sleep the days away and party at night. What they call partying is what the Bible calls debauchery. We are Christians and we are to live our lives in faith, love, and hope, and not always fearful of the evil and wrath that is to come in the judgment of man. That is not for us, but it is for the people of the darkness who have not seen the light of Jesus. Because of this we are to walk as who we are ... children of the light of Jesus. Therefore to be in God's will we are also, as children of the light, to:

- 9) Encourage one another
- 10) Build up one another

How do we do this? By guarding those who are younger in the faith and encouraging them to stay in the light as He is in the light.

[1 Thessalonians 5:12-18](#) But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, ¹³and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work.

Live in peace with one another. ¹⁴And we urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men. ¹⁵See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men. ¹⁶Rejoice always; ¹⁷pray without ceasing; ¹⁸in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

Conduct

Now Paul turns to the topic of being in God's will with our conduct of life. Here Paul presents a lengthy list because our daily conduct is most important to God.

- 11) Appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work

This has to do with your conduct toward the ministers and Bible teachers. If they are doing their job in a true and righteous way, they are to be thought of in the highest regard and love because of their labors for you.

- 12) Live in peace with one another.

This includes your family life, your work life, and your social life. We are to be a people of peace. This is different than the world!

- 13) Admonish the unruly

These are those people who are constantly breaking the rules of law.

- 14) Encourage the fainthearted

Local conditions often cause some to lose heart and wish to drop out, be quitters. These must be held in line.

- 15) Help the weak

The weak are those tempted to sin.

- 16) Be patient with all men

These disorderly elements try the patience of the leaders. Hold out with them. What a wonderful ideal Paul here holds up for church leaders!

- 17) See that no one repays another with evil for evil

Retaliation is condemned by Jesus (Matthew 5:38-42) and by Paul in Romans 12:17, usually takes the form of "evil for evil," rather than "good for good."

- 18) Always seek after that which is good for one another and for all men

Keep up the chase after the good and always take the high road.

19) Rejoice always;

Keep the joy in your life!

20) Pray without ceasing;

Never hang up the communication lines with God. Keep them open at all times!

21) In everything give thanks;

There is a silver lining to every cloud. God is with us whatever befalls us. It is God's will that we find joy in prayer in Christ Jesus in every condition of life.

For this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

There you have a list of 22 things that you must do to be in God's will. These are things that you must do or believe every day! Failure in any one of these things places you out of God's will. God want to be God of the everyday things as well as the big things in life! The list started with "for this is God's will" and has now ended with "this is God's will." Everything in-between must be God's will!

[1 Thessalonians 5:19-22](#) Do not quench the Spirit; [20](#)do not despise prophetic utterances. [21](#)But examine everything *carefully*; hold fast to that which is good; [22](#)abstain from every form of evil.

The Scripture Says

Evidently some were trying to put out the fire of the Holy Spirit and most likely the special gifts of the Holy Spirit. However, the exercise of these gifts were to be done decently, in order, and only for true edification. We must be careful not to be cold and indifferent to the spiritual gifts as they were, quenching the Spirit as the text indicates. On the other hand, we must not be wild in excess.

The prophetic utterances means the forth-telling of the things of the Lord. Forth-telling means to "tell the people the story and message that the Lord has already told." It is not a new message; it is the same old story of Jesus and His love. Prophecy is the greatest of the spiritual gifts according to 1 Corinthians 14.

[1 Cor. 14:1](#) Pursue love, yet desire earnestly spiritual *gifts*, but especially that you may prophesy.

However, in all of this Paul states that we must examine everything, test everything, to avoid error. This is to show balance. In doing this we are to hold fast to the things that are good – morally and spiritually beautiful. Abstaining from every form of evil deals with evil that shows itself even in the area of spiritual gifts! This can even come in prophecy – the telling of the old story of our Lord. We must be careful.

[1 Thessalonians 5:23-25](#) Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the

coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass. ²⁵Brethren, pray for us.

As Paul begins the close of this wonderful letter to the Thessalonians, he prays that they will be totally sanctified. That means that his desire is for them to 1) belong totally to the Lord, 2) be totally different than those in the world without the Lord, and 3) be living proof of the gospel of the Lord to the lost world.

It is Paul's desire that their total person here on earth will be preserved for all eternity. According to Ecclesiastes 12:5-7, the spirit of everything that a lives is the life force that only comes from the life giver Himself, God. When a person dies, this gift of life will return to God, who gave it, for it belongs only to Him. The body will go to the grave while mourners are still in the street. Paul longs for that body to one day be resurrected to meet the Lord in the air. Paul also desires that soul go to be immediately with the Lord at death. And because of the faithfulness of the Lord, this will all happen, for those who have put their trust in Him.

¹ [Thessalonians 5:26-28](#) Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss. ²⁷I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren. ²⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

The holy kiss! What is the holy kiss? The holy kiss was a token of friendship and brotherly love.

¹ [Cor. 16:20](#) All the brethren greet you. Greet one another with a holy kiss.

² [Cor. 13:12](#) Greet one another with a holy kiss.

[Romans 16:16](#) Greet one another with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ greet you.

In ¹ [Peter 5:14](#) it is "with a kiss of love." This was the customary salutation for rabbis.

¹ [Peter 5:14](#) Greet one another with a kiss of love. Peace be to you all who are in Christ.

The letter ends with Paul's signature "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." Paul uses the word "grace" instead of the customary closings of the day which included "farewell" or "be strong." Paul wanted God's grace to be with all who heard his voice or read his letter.

[Ephes. 2:8](#) For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God;

More important to Paul than a farewell is the salvation of all who were in contact with him. That's the reason Paul said to read this letter to all who belong, all the brethren.