

I Thessalonians 4:1-8 The Consecration of the Believer

We are starting I Thessalonians chapter 4. Our focus will be on verses 1 through 8. I Thessalonians 4:1-8. The first three chapters of Thessalonians we have entitled The Inspiration of the Believers in Thessalonica. In these three chapters Paul spent reestablishing his history with the Christians in Thessalonica, how he came and evangelized them as it is recorded for us in Acts chapter 17.

In chapter 2 it was The Testimony of Paul, where he said that when we were in your midst we were like a nursing mother to you, we were like an instructing and correcting father to you.

Then in chapter 3 he tells us that he sent Timothy. Paul was alone in Athens, and he sent Timothy to find out what happened to them because they had received the truth of the Word of God and received Christ through much affliction, much hardship, much persecution. So Paul said he could not stand it. So he says, I sent Timothy to come back. And his encouragement to our hearts - he says you are still standing firm in the Lord so that was an encouragement to us.

At the end of chapter 3 that we left off with last week, Paul says, "All I care about is that one day when all of this is all over and we stand before the Lord," he says, "you are our joy and our crown." So that day when Jesus comes, between now and then, may our hearts be established in love for Jesus and love for one another.

And so now we start the second half of the book, I Thessalonians chapters 4 and 5 The Instruction to the Believers in Thessalonica. First the Inspiration and then the Instruction. After establishing his relationship with them in the first three chapters he now gives them the Instruction for which he wrote the letter. The main issue, and the main doctrine, and the main teaching of this section and this letter is the coming of Christ, what we call the *rapture*. Some people do not like to use that word, "Because it is not found in the Bible," according as they say. It comes from the Latin translation *raptus*; but in the Greek Text it is **ἁρπάζω** (*harpadzō*), *snatching away, a catching away*, or the rapture of the church.

Somebody had written a letter fraudulently using Paul's name and told the Christians in Thessalonica that the rapture had already happened and that they had been left behind. And those who are in the grave, dead in the grave, have missed it, they are still in the grave. And it was signed by Paul, but it was by somebody who was posing to be Paul and he is now correcting them as to the truth about the matter when the rapture is going to take place. We find that in verses 13 through 18 of this chapter where he talks about the doctrine of the rapture itself. We will get to that in two weeks.

But the first thing he wants to talk about before he talks about the rapture is how they are living. In other words, he wants his children to be ready for the coming of Christ. He is very concerned about their lifestyle and their life habits and so he is addressing that this week, and next week in verses 9 through 12.

Verse 1 reads, **The rest** (or *in summary*, or *therefore*) **brothers, we request you and we appeal in the Lord Jesus, according as you received from us how it is necessary for you to walk and to please God, in order that you might abound more.** So the first thing he does is establish for them is after you come to know Jesus Christ there are two things about the Christian walk.

1) Number one is the walk.

And that is literally the word *walk* in Greek. **We request and appeal to you in Jesus Christ to walk and to please God.** *To walk* means every step you take representing your lifestyle, to walk. Doing what the Lord would have us to do. James chapter 1 verse 22 says, **Be doers of the word and not hearers only deceiving your own selves.** So just listening is not enough. You are deceiving yourself if you are just listening. It is actually doing what God wants you to do.

2) Secondly, there is motive.

And to please God. *To please* means exactly what it says, to please or accommodate somebody. And so he is saying in your motive in life, your motive should be to please God, to do what is pleasing in His sight.

Verse 2 says, **For you know what instructions we have given to you through the Lord Jesus.** So now he is talking about instructions he has given. It is through Jesus Christ. So it is the testimony of Jesus, that is what this chapter heading is all about, the testimony of the Lord. These are commandments, and instructions, and testimonies from the Lord, not by man. In fact, he says in verse 8, "To resist them is not to resist man, but to resist God because this is the word of God."

Verse 3, **For this is the will of God, your sanctification.** It is interesting - do you know that you can know God's will for your life and know it for certainty? **Your sanctification**, that is God's will for your life. And what does *sanctification* mean? The word *sanctification*, **ἁγιασμός** (hagiasmos) in Greek comes from a word that is the base word for the family of words that are talking about *holiness* and *sanctification*. **ἅγιος** (hagios) is the root word. **ἅγιος** (hagios) means *to be set apart, to be consecrated*. So he says, **This is the will of God, your sanctification.** Your setting apart. So **ἅγιος** (hagios) means *to be set apart*. It is also translated *holy* in the Scriptures; it is also translated *saint*. The word for *saint* is the same word *holy*, **ἅγιος** (hagios).

And so **ἁγιασμός** (hagiasmos) the word for *sanctification* names the process by which a person is set apart. So when a person receives the Holy Spirit - and that word *holy* describes the set apart Spirit of God. When a person receives the Holy Spirit and is saved that person is set apart and is called *a saint*. When the Bible calls a person *a saint*, he is talking about people who are saved. People who have received Christ. It is not a matter of performance; it is a matter of position. I am not *holy*, that is another Greek word **ὅσιος** (hosios). Only God is holy. But a set apart Spirit coming into my life sets me apart to belong to Christ. Therefore, I am sanctified, He set me apart to follow Him.

An example of ἅγιος (hagios) for *set apart* would be in the Old Testament. The word ἅγιος (hagios) is used for the furniture, and the pots and pans, and the various utensils of the Tabernacle and Temple. Those pieces of furniture and pots and pans were set apart for the use in the Temple only - not common use, not to be used for things other than the activities of the Temple. So positionally I am a saint in that I have been set apart for the Lord. The word *holy* and the word *saint* are exactly the same Greek word.

And this third word ἁγιασμός (hagiasmos), it is the process of being set apart, that is, sanctification. The very process of the Holy Spirit coming into a person's heart is what is called sanctification.

Paul tells us in I Corinthians chapter 6 verses 19 and 20. At verse 19 he says, **Do you not know your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price: therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.** So not only did Jesus die for our sins but He died to purchase us. **Do not you know you were bought with a price?** He put His Spirit in us, He purchased us, He owns us. By His Spirit coming into my heart, I no longer belong to myself. So this is the sanctification process. He is encouraging - this whole section here is Paul encouraging believers to walk in their sanctification. God has already set you apart, walk in it. You have been set apart for Him.

Now there are three things that he mentions for what he means by *your sanctification*.

1) At the end of verse 3, the first thing he says, **For you to abstain from fornication.** To abstain or keep from fornication. The term *fornication* means *sexual immorality*. The term *sexual immorality* is the Greek word πορνεία (porneia) where we get our term *pornography* from. It is the word for *prostitution* in the Bible. He is talking about walking in your sanctification, not practicing or being involved in sexual immorality. Sexual immorality, πορνεία (porneia), is a word used for all sex outside of marriage. Fornication. And he says know how to possess your own vessel.

This is Paul speaking back in I Corinthians chapter 6 again. I Corinthians chapter 6 verses 15 through 20, when he said, **Do not you know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit? Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of a harlot or prostitute? Certainly not. Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For the two, he says, shall become one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit with Him. Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body; but he that commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?** Again, repeating what we read earlier. **For you are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.** So the first thing he says, "Do not get drawn into the cultural society ritual and functions of being involved in sexual immorality.

2) **Walk**, as he says in verse 4, **each of you**. Second thing is, **Each of you to know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor**. So it is a learning process, *learn to possess* his own vessel. The body is now called a *vessel*. **Possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor**. So learn how to walk in it. Learn how to honor God with your physical body, with your lifestyle, with your life and deed.

Verse 5, **Not in passion of lust**. The old King James uses the term *concupiscence*, that is passion of lust. **Not in passion of lust according as indeed the Gentiles the ones not having known God**. So the Gentiles, the people who do not know the Lord function on passion of lust. He says a believer should not function that way. A believer should be concerned about functioning in sanctification and honor, not the ones not knowing God.

3) The third thing. We have had verse 3, **Abstain from fornication**. Secondly verse 4, **Each of you are to know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor**. And thirdly, verse 6, **Not to go beyond (or take advantage) in this matter of his brother: on account of that the Lord is the avenger concerning all of these, according as also we spoke to you before and thoroughly testified**. So thirdly, to know and take advantage of them or defraud his brother in this matter. Do not take advantage or defraud a brother physically, materially. We should not take advantage of or defraud one another.

A couple of word meanings. The word that we have translated *beyond* is the word *trespass*. Do not trespass somebody else's territory. Do not trespass somebody else's things. And *do not take advantage*. That is the term for *wanting more*, wanting more than what I have. So do not go beyond, do not go beyond your boundaries as a human being. Do not trespass other people's boundaries materially or physically and do not be covetous. Do not want more than what you have because what you have is what the Lord wants you to have.

And the reason being, **On account of this the Lord is the avenger concerning all of these things**. The Lord will take vengeance, bring judgment upon all those who are not walking in their sanctification in honor. **According as also we spoke you before and thoroughly testified**. So we have already told you all of these things.

Verse 7, **For God did not call us upon the basis of impurity but He called us on the basis of sanctification**. So *impurity, immorality*, is not in God's calling. But His calling is in sanctification. We are to learn how to walk in that sanctification. Verse 8, **Consequently the one rejecting is not rejecting man, but God, the One having given His Holy Spirit unto us**. So in the end the person who rejects what Paul has to say is not rejecting man, he is rejecting God. This is from God. This is the testimony of the Lord as we saw in verse 2.

Some might say that this is Paul's opinion but Paul says, "No, you do not understand. [If] you reject this, you are not rejecting man's opinion, you are rejecting God because this is the Word of God." It is a great debate, philosophical debate in our culture and society today about the legitimacy of these things, but this is the Word of God.

So in conclusion the Lord is coming for His saints. But what am I to be doing in the meantime? To learn how to possess the vessel of my body in sanctification and honor of Jesus Christ, because I have already been sanctified. He sanctified me. I am to walk in my sanctification and honor to Him. He wants me to be faithful to walk in a way that is pleasing to Him, in service to Him every day, all day. He would take care of the details, we do not have to worry about it. We walk in our sanctification, we leave the details up to the Lord. He works things out according to His will.

Let's close with prayer.