

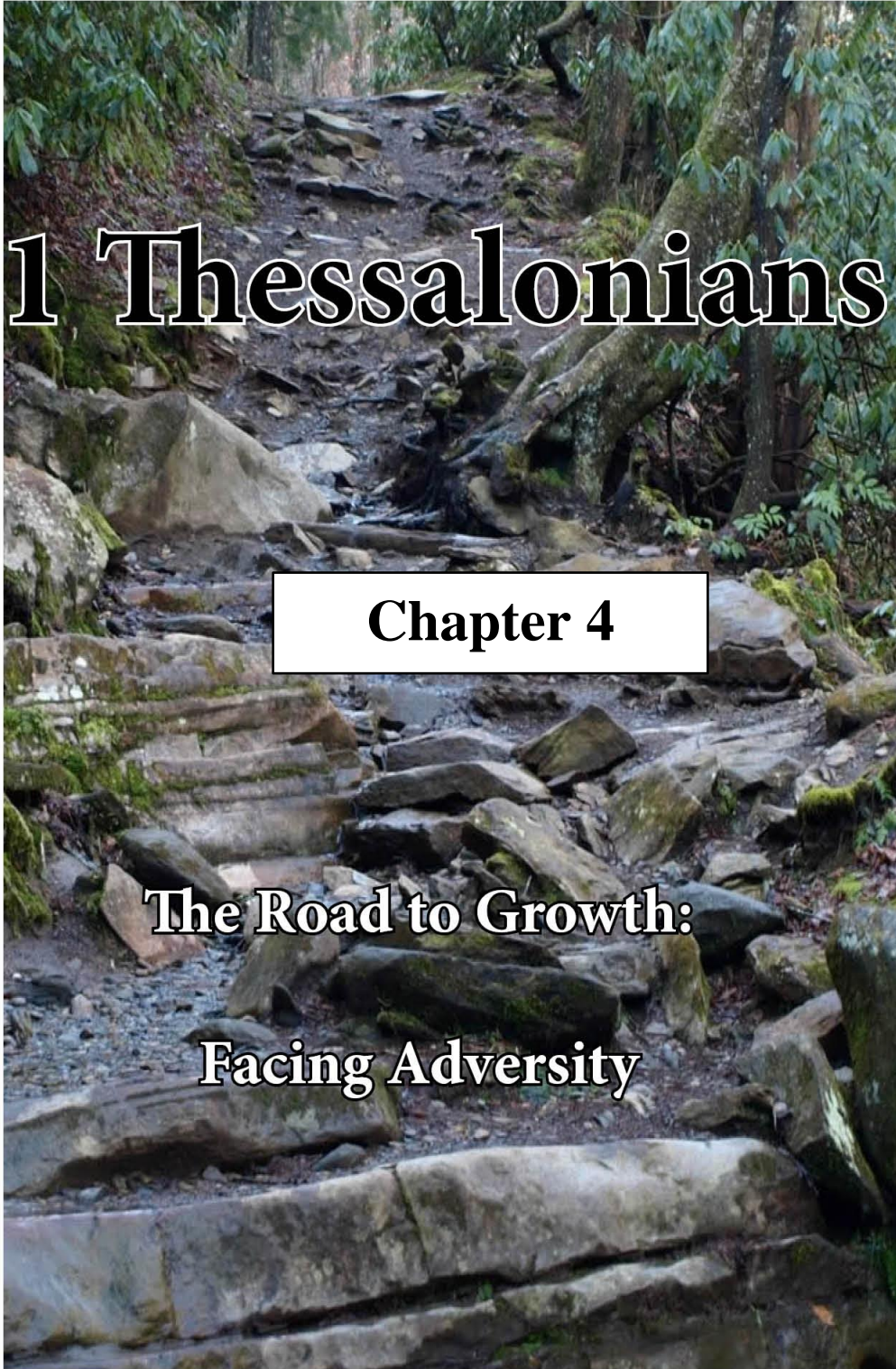
Journeys With God

1 Thessalonians

Chapter 4

The Road to Growth:

Facing Adversity



Chapter 4 Summary

1 Thessalonians 4:1 - Love Others!

As for the rest then, brothers, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you need to walk and to please God that you should abound more;

Truth to Learn

Being more loving is our responsibility.

Behind the Words

“As for the rest” is translated from the Greek word *loipon*, which refers to “something remaining.” In regard to time, it can be translated as “henceforth” In regard to other things, it can be translated “as to the rest” of “for the remainder.”

The word translated “request” is *erotaō*, which means “to ask, to inquire, or to urge.”

The word “exhort” is from *parakaleō*, which is made up of *para*, meaning “near, beside, or alongside” and *kaleō*, meaning “to call.” Thus *parakaleō* literally means “to call near” or “to call alongside.” Metaphorically, it means “to encourage, to challenge, or to coach.”

“You received” is from *paralambanō*. This word means “to take near” or “to receive to oneself.”

“Need” is translated from the Greek word *dei*, which means to have a necessity or a need.

The word “walk” is translated from *peripateō*, which literally means “to walk around.” Metaphorically, it refers to the manner in which one lives one’s life.

“Please” is from *areskō*, meaning “to soften one’s heart toward another” or “to please.”

Perisueuō is the word translated “should abound.” It means “to be in excess” or “to have more than enough.” It is expressed here in the subjunctive mood, indicating the possibility or probability of something happening. So, we see that it means “you may abound” or “you might abound.”

Meaning Explained

In the previous chapter Paul explained why he sent Timothy to the Thessalonian church: to strengthen and encourage them. His concern was that the afflictions and suffering that Paul and his companions were enduring, as well as what the Thessalonians themselves were enduring, might have caused their faith to grow weak. Having learned that their faith remained strong, Paul then offered up a prayer for them.

Paul now switches gears and goes into preaching mode in this chapter and most of the next. He has been expressing his love and concern for the Thessalonians, but now he needs to get down to some serious teaching. Therefore, he starts out his sermon with “As for the rest then, brothers, we request and exhort ...” His challenge is that the Christians there might abound even more. But what are they supposed to abound in? If we look back two verses, we see that Paul prayed that God would cause them to increase and abound in love for others. Now Paul is telling the Thessalonian Christians that they need to abound (in love) even more. On the surface, this may sound contradictory. Is it God who causes us to abound in love, or is it our responsibility to actively pursue being more loving of others? The answer is both. We can’t understand the Trinity (how God can be one and still be three persons.) We also can’t understand how we have the responsibility for being more loving toward others and yet God is the one who enables such love.

Application

God is all powerful, but Christians can't just sit back and let Him make us more loving of others. We have to put effort into demonstrating the love of God to everyone around us.

1 Thessalonians 4:2 - God, our Father

for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

Truth to Learn

Christians are God's children, not just His subjects.

Behind the Words

"You know" is translated from the verb *eido*, which means "to see with perception." As in English, this verb can refer to visibly seeing something and perceiving what it is, or it can mean "to see with the mind," that is, "to know."

The word "commandments" is from the Greek noun *parangelia*. This word is made up of *para*, meaning "to the side of" and a form of *angellō*, meaning "to deliver a message." The picture is of a soldier passing on a message to the soldier beside him. In the strictest sense, *parangelia* refers to a command or an order given by a superior to those under him.

The words "we gave" are from the verb *didōmi*, meaning "to give of one's own accord." It is expressed here in the aorist tense, indicating an action completed sometime in the past..

Meaning Explained

In yesterday's verse, we noted that Paul has now switched from a message of comfort and encouragement to doctrinal teaching. Many Christians today bristle at the word "doctrine." They see doctrine as cold, dogmatic, restrictive rules that are hard to follow and, quite honestly, are no fun at all. If we approach Christianity from a legalistic viewpoint, that's what doctrine often becomes. Doctrine, however, simply means "teaching." The things that your church teaches you are the doctrine of the church.

The problem with most legalistic doctrine is that it teaches us "rules" instead of principles. It teaches us that our relationship with God is strictly one of Master/slave. "Now that you are a Christian, you must follow these rules!" Don't get me wrong, God is our Lord and Master, and a fulfilled Christian life must be based on our complete submission to His will. However, our relationship to God is much more than simply being His slave (although we are His slaves). He has extended that relationship because He has adopted us into His family and calls us His children. This is a significant distinction between Christianity and religion. In addition to being His servants, we are God's children and He is our loving Father.

The Apostle Paul frequently uses the metaphor of "walking the pathway of life" in depicting our life as a Christian. He often pictures God as our guide or coach, advising us in which pathways to take and which to avoid. He sometimes pictures God as our rescuer who saves us when we take a wrong path and get mired in the muck of sin. He also pictures God as our Commander in Chief, who prepares us for those times when our enemy attacks. But more than anything, Paul pictures God as our Father, who is all of these things and so much more.

Our Heavenly Father knows us more deeply than we know ourselves and, in spite of what we see in ourselves, He loves us with an everlasting love. His love is so great that he sacrificed His only begotten Son so that we can have a Father/child relationship with Him. But God did not send his Son only to die for our sins, He also sent Jesus to teach us about the Father/child relationship He wants to have with us. Paul is about to teach us this doctrine from our Master/Teacher Jesus.

Application

As you walk the pathway of this life, keep in mind that God wants you to walk with Him instead of wandering off on your own. He wants to demonstrate Himself as our loving Father and have us respond as His beloved children. He wants obedience from you, but He also wants a relationship with you, because He loves you!

1 Thessalonians 4:3 - It's Very Clear!

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;

Truth to Learn

Christians are to avoid all sexual impurity.

Behind the Words

“Will” is translated from the Greek noun *thelēma*, which is one of two Greek words translated “will.” The other word is *boulēma*. Both words indicate a desire or intent to do something, but *thelēma* also implies combining the desire with action. Thus, we often refer to *thelēma* as God’s determined will and to *boulēma* as God’s desirous will.

The word translated “sanctification” is *hagiasmos*, which is based on the verb *hagiadzō*, meaning “to sanctify.” To sanctify something means to set it apart *from* common usage *to* usage devoted to God. Thus, sanctification carries the meaning of being set apart or separated. Sanctification and holiness are often used interchangeably, both indicating separation from sin and dedication to God.

The word “abstain” is from the Greek verb *apechomai*, which is made up of *apo*, meaning “from” or “away from” and a form of *echo*, meaning “to have” or “to hold.” Thus, *apechomai* means “to hold off from.” It is expressed here in the middle voice indicating an action done by the subject (you) to the subject (yourself). Thus, this word means for you to hold yourself back from something.

“Sexual immorality” is translated from *porneia* (from which we get our English word pornography). This word is based on the verb *porneuō* meaning “to commit any sexual sin” or “sexual immorality.”

Meaning Explained

“What is God’s will for my life?” This is a question that many Christians ask early in their walk with God. While attending a Christian college years ago, I encountered many students asking that same question. I remember one student, not knowing which direction to turn, stating that he was going to just sit and “wait on the Lord,” not making any decision until he knew for sure what God wanted him to do. Fortunately, a wise professor said to him, “It is much easier to turn a ship that is moving than one that is sitting still.” In other words, “Step out on faith and God will guide you by His spirit.”

Sometimes our Father-Guide makes His will very clear, while at other times we have to seek His face in prayer, not knowing if we are going the right direction, but trusting that He will tell us if we are going the wrong way. In today’s verse we are told that God’s determined will is that we be sanctified (set-apart). God has determined that we will be set apart from sin and from the world system. Ultimately He will accomplish that determination when we are glorified in His presence. Until then, however, we are told that there are certain things He desires us to do as we walk the pathway of Christian life. We have a responsibility to be obedient and take the right path.

One of those paths is made very clear in today’s verse. We are to hold ourselves back (separate ourselves) from sexual impurity. The Christian walk is composed of many choices. When we

choose, we have to decide whether we will follow our own desires, or take the path He desires for us.

Application

God is very clear on this one. If you are unmarried, stay away from all sexual activity. If you are married, enjoy it, but only with your husband or wife. No ifs, ands, or buts!

1 Thessalonians 4:4 - Sacred and Honorable

that each of you should know how to acquire his own vessel in sanctification and honor,

Truth to Learn

Sex within a marriage is undefiled, sacred, and honorable.

Behind the Words

Eidō is the Greek word translated “know.” We have pointed out previously that this word literally means “to see with perception.” However, Paul may be using this word as a Hebrew expression meaning “to have regard for” or “to care for.” This is the apparent meaning in **1 Thessalonians 5:12** (know those who labor ...), and is probably Paul’s intent here.

The Greek verb translated “acquire” is *ptaomai*, which literally means “to get for oneself, to acquire, or to purchase.” When expressed in the perfect tense (past completed action with an ongoing effect) it can also mean “to have acquired” or “to possess.” Although it is expressed here as a present tense infinitive, many Biblical scholars believe that Paul’s meaning here is “to possess” or “to take care of.” However, that is not what Paul is teaching here. He clearly uses the word meaning “to acquire,” not “to possess.”

“Vessel” is translated from *skeuos*, meaning “a container, utensil, or implement.”

Meaning Explained

This is probably one of the most difficult verses to translate in this letter to the Thessalonians. The difficulty is due primarily to the three words we looked at above (*eidō*, *ptaomai*, and *skeuos*) along with the word *porneia*, which we saw in the previous verse.

Let’s start with *porneia*. This word originally referred to “prostitution.” If we look at the Septuagint (Greek translation of the Old Testament) we can see the meaning of the Hebrew words that were translated with *porneia*. These various words mean, “lying down like a prostitute, harlotry, prostitution, or unfaithfulness.” Thus, it does not refer to just any sexual sin, but specifically to “sex with another person that you are not married to.” The best translation of this word is “fornication.”

Now let’s look at *ptaomai*. It literally means “to acquire.” Again, looking at the Septuagint, we see in **Ruth 4:10** that *ptaomai* is used to translate a word that means “to acquire.”

... I have acquired as my wife ... (**Ruth 4:10**)

There is a similar word in Greek, *kektesthai*, which means “to possess.” But that is not the word Paul uses here. He uses *ptaomai*, “to acquire.” Thus, I believe the proper translation in this verse is “to acquire.”

Skeuos, as noted above, refers to “a container, utensil, or implement.” In **1 Peter 3:7**, it refers specifically to the physical body of a man’s wife. But in **2 Corinthians 4:7** and **2 Timothy 2:21** it refers to a person’s own body, so it isn’t necessarily a reference to a wife, though it most likely is here.

Therefore, a reasonable translation of this verse would be “each of you should know how to acquire his own vessel in sanctification and honor.” But Paul is talking about abstaining from fornication. Why would the *knowledge of acquiring* a wife prevent fornication? In our current

society, it is acceptable to many to engage in sexual activity before being married. Many people believe that keeping oneself a virgin until being married is an outdated, archaic notion. However, I believe that this is exactly what Paul is teaching here. Knowing how to acquire one's own vessel (referring to a wife) in sanctification (set apart to God) and honor (respecting the honor of the one you desire to marry) is what Paul is teaching. This can only be done by abstaining from sexual immorality as Paul noted in yesterday's verse. We will talk a little more about this in tomorrow's verse.

Application

Sexual gratification should never be the reason for getting married and it should never be a precursor to marriage. Marriage is an intimate relationship between a man and a woman, and the pleasure of sexual intercourse is only a **part** of that relationship. According to Paul, there is no justification for sex outside of marriage. Marriage (and sex within a marriage) is intended to be undefiled, sacred, and honorable before God. It is of critical importance for a man to respect his wife to be and not expect any sexual activity until after the marriage ceremony is completed.

1 Thessalonians 4:5 - Uncontrolled Desires?

not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God;

Truth to Learn

Uncontrolled passion is bad for a marriage and Christian faith.

Behind the Words

The word translated “*passion*” is *pathos*, which is derived from the verb *paschō*, meaning “to suffer.” In general usage it refers to strong emotion, either as suffering or as passionate emotion. In the New Testament it is used twice with *epithumia* (strong desire), and once with *atimia* (dishonorable).

“*Lust*” is from the Greek word *epithumia*, which is made up of *epi*, meaning “on” or “over,” used as an intensifier, and *thumos*, meaning “an violent action of the mind” such as anger or strong desire. Thus *epithumos* refers to overly strong desire or lust.

Ethnos is the Greek word translated “*Gentiles*.” It refers to “a nation” or “a race of people.” In Hebrew writing it generally refers to all non-Jews. When Paul used the term he often means all peoples who are neither Christian nor Jewish. In the current verse he makes it clear that he is talking about non-Christians.

Meaning Explained

In the first three chapters of this letter to the Christians in Thessalonica, Paul put considerable time and energy into addressing the concerns of the church there. They were under considerable persecution and some believed that Paul had deserted them, fleeing from the same persecution they were suffering. In response, he expressed in very tender terms how much he loved them and was concerned about their welfare. He also informed them that he had tried to return to them but was hindered. Therefore, he had sent Timothy to them to help them grow in their faith. Upon Timothy’s return, Paul learned that the Thessalonians had a strong faith and had as much fondness for Paul as he did for them.

Paul then began the doctrinal teaching portion of this letter. The first subject that he addressed head-on was that of sexual promiscuity, which seems to have crept into the church. This is not surprising, since Macedonia and Achaia (all of modern day Greece) were dominated by paganism. The practices of these pagan religions frequently involved acts of sexuality. In fact, many of these religions employed temple prostitutes as part of their “religious” observances.

One of the difficulties for recent converts to Christianity was, and is, separating themselves from the pleasurable (though sinful) practices that they had previously thought to be normal and acceptable. One of the major differences between religion and Christianity, however, is the fact that God does not want religious observance from us, He wants a relationship. He wants more than a casual relationship, He wants an intimate relationship, and promiscuity destroys intimacy, whether it occurs before marriage or within a marriage. He tells them here that the way to avoid the desire for extra-marital affairs is for a man to nurture and care for his wife (or wife-to-be), developing an intimate relationship with her, not based on passionate lust.

Marriage is a picture of our relationship with God. It is one of submissive fellowship and genuine love. Clinging to and putting your faith in anything other than God is like infidelity in a marriage, it damages the relationship and fellowship.

Application

You may not have a problem with uncontrolled passion and lust in your marriage, but do you have a problem with selfish desires and unfaithfulness in your relationship with God?

1 Thessalonians 4:6 - Avoid The Avenger

that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in the matter, because the Lord *is* the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified.

Truth to Learn

Don't deceive, either in business or in marriage.

Behind the Words

The word translated “take advantage” is *huperbainō*, which is made up of *huper*, meaning “over” or “beyond” and *bainō*, meaning “to go.” Thus it means “to go beyond (what is right)” or “to go too far.”

“Defraud” is translated from *pleonekteō*. This word is made up of *pleiōn*, which means “more in quantity or quality” and a form of *echō*, meaning “to have.” As used in the New Testament, *pleonekteō* properly means “to have more than someone else.” Through usage it has come to mean “to have an advantage over someone else,” then, to mean “to take advantage of someone else” or “to take something by means of fraud.”

The word “matter” is from *pragma*, which means “a business matter” or “a deed.”

Ekdikos is the Greek word translated “avenger.” It is made up of *ek*, meaning “out” or “out of” and *dikē*, meaning “justice.” *Ekdikos* refers to “one who executes justice,” that is, “one who gets revenge” or “one who punishes.”

Meaning Explained

There are two main interpretations of this verse. Some claim that Paul is now talking about business matters in general. Others say that it is a continuation of Paul's teaching about fornication (sex with someone other than one's marriage partner.)

Those who hold to the former interpretation explain that Paul is teaching the wrong of transgressing the bounds of justice and cheating, or taking unfair advantage, of someone in a business transaction. This could be in the form of tricking someone into purchasing something for more than it is really worth or intentionally violating a contract in order to gain at the expense of the other party in the contract. Clearly, this is not the behavior that God expects from His children, and Paul warns that God will execute revenge against any Christian who conducts business in this manner.

Others point out, however, that Paul refers to such action in “the matter,” not in “a matter.” Therefore, they say that it is clear that he is referring to the matter currently being spoken of (fornication). He says that no one should “go beyond what is right” regarding sexual relations. It is right that a married man and woman should enjoy the sexual act which God approves of, and it is wrong to go beyond the bounds of marriage and engage in sexual relations with anyone else. He also says that it is wrong to take advantage of someone else, that is, taking advantage of someone else's wife.

If this second interpretation is the correct explanation of what Paul is teaching here, why does he talk about taking advantage of his “brother” and not of his “sister?” The only way this could be interpreted is if the sexual immorality is committed between a man and his (spiritual) brother's wife. But the fornication that Paul is talking about refers to sexual activity between a married

person and another person to whom he or she is not married (whether the other person is married or not).

Whichever interpretation you accept (I believe the first interpretation is correct), Paul makes it clear that the one committing the fraud should expect that God will stand on the side of the one being wronged and will take vengeance on the one committing the wrong.

Application

Whether in the sanctity of the marriage bed or business transactions, God will take vengeance against the evil doer. I don't know about you, but I would rather have God as my defense attorney, not as the prosecuting attorney, because He always wins his case and He is the ultimate avenger.

1 Thessalonians 4:7 - Uncleanness or Holiness

For God did not call us for uncleanness, but in holiness.

Truth to Learn

We are to avoid uncleanness and separate ourselves to God.

Behind the Words

The word translated “call” is *kaleō*. This word primarily means “to call out to someone, inviting him or her to come or to go somewhere.”

“For” is translated from *epi*, which can mean “on, upon, or over,” but it can also be used as a preposition of purpose and can be translated as “for.” Used in this way it means “on the basis of.”

“Uncleanness” is from the Greek word *akatharsia*, which is made up of the privative *a*, meaning “not” or “without” and a form of the verb *kathairō*, meaning “to cleanse.” Thus, *akatharsia* refers to “the state or condition of not being cleansed; in other words, unclean.”

The word “in” is translated from the preposition *en*, which refers to a position at rest within something (not movement into or movement out of, but in).

Hagiasmos is the Greek word translated “holiness.” We saw this word back in verse three. *Hagiasmos* indicates “separation from sin and dedication to God.”

Meaning Explained

In this portion of Paul’s letter to the Christians at Thessalonica, he has been giving doctrinal instruction regarding fornication (sexual activity with anyone other than one’s husband or wife). He started off by saying that we should keep ourselves away from such activity and, instead, care for and nurture the person to whom we are married. Our relationship with our husband or wife should not be based on lust, and we should not go beyond the proper bounds of marriage in this matter.

Now Paul tells us why this particular teaching is consistent with what God wants for us. He says that this (sinful sexual activity) is not the purpose for which God called us. Through His holy Word (the Bible), God calls each one of us to follow Him, but there are two aspects of this calling. The first is the “general call.” In **Matthew 22:14**, as part of His parable of the wedding feast, Jesus said:

"For many are called, but few are chosen."

The second aspect of God’s calling is sometimes referred to as the “effectual call.” This refers to the calling in which those who hear His call respond to it by submitting to His will and following Him. This aspect of God’s calling is referred to numerous times in the New Testament (see **Romans 1:6, 7; Romans 8:28-30; 1 Corinthians 1:2, 9, 26, Galatians 1:15, 5:13; Ephesians 4:1, 4**, etc.)

Paul tells the Thessalonians that we were not called on the basis of uncleanness, but in holiness. The contrast between these two conditions (uncleanness and holiness) is further emphasized by Paul’s use of different prepositions (*epi* and *en*). God expects us to live our lives in a holy

manner. He expects us to live our lives separated from the sinful practices of the world and to remain dedicated and devoted to Him.

Application

Living a life separated from the sinfulness of the world and remaining dedicated to following God is not easy! It is a constant struggle for all Christians, but it is the life that He has called us to. It can only be accomplished by constant prayer and the power of the Holy Spirit. Are you committed to that?

1 Thessalonians 4:8 - Spirit-filled Living

Consequently he who rejects *this* does not reject man, but God, who gives us His Holy Spirit.

Truth to Learn

We live godly lives through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Behind the Words

“Consequently” is translated from *toigaroun*, an old double compound word which is made up of three separate Greek words. The first is *toi*, which indicates a contrast to what was just said. The second word is *gar*, a particle which assigns a reason, often translated “for.” The third word is *oun*, meaning “then” or “therefore.” The full impact of this word is best understood by the English word “consequently.” This word is used only here and in Hebrews 12:1.

The word translated “rejects” is *atheteō*, which is made up of the negative particle *a* and *thetos*, referring to something that has been put in place. *Atheteō* refers to removing something from its rightful place, that is, “to cast off or to reject.”

The word “gives” is from the Greek verb *didōmi*, which means “to give of one’s own accord and with good will.” This word does not indicate the act of giving out of obligation or as a result of something done, it indicates giving strictly out of the goodness of one’s heart. In some translations it is expressed in the aorist tense (has given). Most of the better manuscripts, however, have this verb as a participle in the present tense, indicating current, ongoing action.

Meaning Explained

Having spoken very firmly about the evils of fornication (sex outside the bounds of marriage), Paul now concludes this particular teaching with a stern warning. This warning is to those who would reject his teaching on this subject, who would instead cling to following their own lusts. He says, “Anyone who rejects this teaching is not rejecting human wisdom and instruction, he is rejecting God’s teaching.”

The second half of this verse has differing readings depending on which manuscripts are being translated. The better manuscripts would be translated as “**who is giving you His Holy Spirit.**” Paul is not trying to justify his statement that this is God’s teaching by claiming to be a channel of the Holy Spirit (which certainly is true of all the writers of Scripture). He is, rather, emphasizing the statement that he made in the previous verse (... **but in holiness**). All Christians have been called to live a life of holiness (separation from the world and dedicated to God), and God is continually supplying us with His Holy Spirit in order to enable us to live a holy life.

This should not be interpreted as God giving us His Spirit at times and taking it away at others because we have been sealed with the Spirit, and He has been permanently given to us as a guarantee of our salvation (**Ephesians 1:13, 14**) which cannot be taken away. Nonetheless, we are exhorted to be filled with the Spirit (**Ephesians 5:18**), and there are many examples of believers being filled with the Spirit at times (**Acts 2:4, Acts 4:8, 31; Acts 13:9, 52**). Paul’s teaching here is that in order for us to resist the lustful temptations of fornication and to live a sanctified life, we must do so by the power of His Spirit. God knows our weaknesses and provides us with the Holy Spirit’s power to resist temptation if we are willing to accept His help.

Application

Living a life separated from worldliness and dedicated to Godliness can only be accomplished through the power of God's Holy Spirit. Lord God, fill us with Your Spirit!

1 Thessalonians 4:9 - The Christian Birthmark

But concerning brotherly love you have no need for *anyone* to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;

Truth to Learn

Brotherly love is the birthmark of a true Christian.

Behind the Words

The words “**brotherly love**” are from the Greek word *philadelphia*, which is made up of *philos*, meaning “a friend” and *adelphos*, meaning “a brother.” This word refers to the kind of personal fondness that good friends have for one another.

The words “**you have**” is from the verb *echo*, meaning “to have” or “to hold.” In some translations this is written as “we have”; however, the best Greek manuscripts have it written in the second person plural form, meaning “you (plural) have.”

“**Need**” is translated from *cheira*, which properly means “employment.” By implication, however, it refers to “an occasion, a requirement, or a necessity.”

“*Theodidactos*” is the Greek adjective translated “**taught by God.**” This word is made up of *theos*, meaning “God, or some deity” and a form of the verb *didaskō*, meaning “to teach.” Thus *theodidactos* literally means “taught by God.”

The words “**to love**” are from the infinitive form of *agapē*, which refers to “a self-sacrificing God-love.”

“**One another**” is from the Greek plural reciprocal pronoun *allēlous*, meaning “each other” or “one another.”

Meaning Explained

The Apostle Paul spent the first three chapters of this letter to the Thessalonians assuring them of his love and concern for them. In this fourth chapter he began his doctrinal teaching for the church. Through the first eight verses of this chapter, he taught about avoiding sexual immorality, specifically fornication and, instead, living a life of holiness.

Now he switches his teaching to how we should live our lives both within and outside the church. Within the church we should all exhibit a genuine fondness for our brothers and sisters in the faith. He starts off with “you have no need that anyone should write to you concerning brotherly love.” In other words, the Christians in Thessalonica had already learned and were demonstrating that they had a genuine love for the brothers.

It is also interesting that Paul tells them that they learned this love for each other, not from some preacher or other people in the church, but they learned it from God. So how does God teach us to love one another? God the Father taught us how to love each other when He gave His only begotten Son to die for us. God the Son taught us to love one another when he said, “**A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another**” (**John 13:34**). And the Holy Spirit taught us to love one another when He poured out the love of God in our hearts (**Romans 5:5**)

when we trusted in Christ as our personal Savior. This love for one another is the defining characteristic of a Christian, a mark of the new birth of true Christians (**1 John 4:7**).

Application

The best way we can demonstrate the genuineness of our new birth is to exhibit the love we have for others in the Church. Can people see how real your faith is in the way you treat other Christians?

1 Thessalonians 4:10 - Increase Your Love

and indeed you do so toward all the brothers who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, that you increase even more;

Truth to Learn

We need to greatly increase our love for all Christians.

Behind the Words

The words “you do” are translated from the Greek verb *poieō*, meaning “to make” or “to do.”

The word translated “urge” is *parakaleō*, which we have looked at several times before. It is made up of *para*, meaning “near, in the vicinity of, or alongside” and *kaleō*, meaning “to call.” Thus *parakaleō* literally means “to call near” or “to call alongside.” It is a picture of a coach being called alongside an athlete to encourage, comfort, and challenge him or her.

“Increase” is translated from *perisseuō*, which is the verb form of *perissos*, meaning “abundant” or “excessive.” *Perisseuō* means “to be in excess” or “to be full to the point of overflowing.”

Mallon is the Greek word translated “even more.” It means “much more.” When combined with *perisseuō* it indicates a huge increase which is what Paul is urging the Thessalonians to accomplish in loving each other.

Meaning Explained

In the previous verse Paul began his teaching regarding how we are to conduct our lives, both with regard to our brothers and sisters in Christ and to those outside the church. He told the Thessalonians that they already knew about loving their Christian brothers, having learned this love from God Himself.

Now he gives them a few words of affirmation, demonstrating that he is aware that they do indeed practice love for all Christians in their part of the world. Back in the first chapter of this letter, Paul remembered how hard they worked (labored) at loving others (**1 Thessalonians 1:3**) and noted that they were good examples to Christians throughout Macedonia (the northern part of modern day Greece) and Achaia (the southern part of modern day Greece).

But – when it comes to demonstrating love in our lives, we can’t simply rely on our reputation, and we can never assume that the amount of love we are currently showing is good enough. Even though Paul tells them that they are “doing” love toward all Christians, he now challenges them to do it even more. And, he doesn’t simply tell them (and us) to increase their (our) love a little bit. He coaches them, he urges them, he challenges them, like an athlete in a race, to increase their love exceedingly.

Take note that Paul does not simply bark out commands to those under his ministry and expect them to perform without any help, he spends time in prayer asking God to give them the ability to follow his advice (**1 Thessalonians 3:12**).

Application

We need to put more effort into loving others. Even though we may think we’re doing all we can, we need to do more – much more. Remember that our Lord told us that this is how others

will know that we are His disciples (**John 13:35**). How is your love for your brothers? Is it strong, is it openly demonstrated? Good! Now, increase that love – a lot!

1 Thessalonians 4:11 - Love, Don't Meddle

that you also Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your hands, as we commanded you,

Truth to Learn

Loving others is right. Meddling in their affairs is wrong.

Behind the Words

“Ambition” is translated from the Greek word *philotimeomai*. This big word is composed of *philos*, meaning “a friend” along with a form of *timē*, meaning “honor.” So, literally it means “to be fond of honor.” In general usage it means “to be ambitious of something honorable” or “to be eager to do something honorable.” This word is never used of ambition to do something dishonorable or bad.

The words “to lead a quiet life” are from the Greek verb *hēsuchadzō*, a form of *hēsuchos*, meaning “quiet or still.” *Hēsuchadzō* means “to live quietly” or “to be quiet.”

The words “to mind your own business” are from *prassein ta idia*. *Prassein* is a form of *prassō*, meaning “to make a practice of.” The Greek word *ta* means “things.” And *idia* means “pertaining to yourself.” Thus, this expression means “to practice your own things” or “to mind your own affairs.”

“To work with your hands” is a very literal translation of *ergadzesthai tais chersin*. Paul recognizes the value of hard work and he saw no dishonor in manual labor. He himself worked as a tent maker to provide for himself while he was also performing the ministry that God had given him to do.

Meaning Explained

As we have noted previously, the Christians in Thessalonica had a reputation for being very loving toward others. Paul commended them for this, but challenged them to add abundantly to this practice. In order to show love to others, however, it is often necessary to know what is going on in the lives of others. But this presents a dilemma and a fine line that should not be crossed.

Some people are natural care givers while others have to work at it. The problem is that care givers sometimes get carried away, meddling in the private affairs of others, wanting to know more details than is necessary and giving advice on matters that they should leave alone. These people sometimes get so wrapped up in the lives of others that they become quick to give advice and slow to do their own things.

These are the people (and problems) that Paul is addressing in today's verse. Yes, it's important to show love to our brothers and sisters in the Lord. It's just as important, however, to be a silent witness of the love of Christ. Yes, it's important to assist others who are going through difficult times. It's just as important to mind your own affairs and get your own work done.

In fact, the Thessalonians had such a difficult time in showing love without crossing the line into being meddlesome that in his second letter to them he had to tell them:

For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. (**2 Thessalonians 3:11**)

Application

We all need to work hard at showing love for others, for those inside the church as well as those outside the church. But, we need to work just as hard at not becoming meddlesome, rather minding our own business. Our testimony to others depends on us being Christ-like in everything we say and do. Does your love of others look like Jesus in action?

1 Thessalonians 4:12 - Lacking In Nothing

that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and *that* you may have need of nothing.

Truth to Learn

There is a key to receiving everything that we need in life.

Behind the Words

The word “**that**” is from the Greek conjunction *hina*, which means “so that” or “in order that.”

“**You may walk**” is translated from the verb *peripateō*. This word is composed of *peri*, meaning “around” and *pateō*, meaning “to walk.” Paul uses this word frequently to express “the manner in which we live our lives.” It is expressed here in the present tense, subjunctive mood indicating the possibility of such action as an ongoing event.

The word “**properly**” is from the Greek adverb *euschēmonōs*. This word is made up of *eu*, meaning “good” or “well” and a form of *schema*, which refers to “the external form or appearance of something.” Thus, *euschēmonōs* means “in good form” or “in the proper manner.”

Exō is the word translated “**outside**.” It is derived from the preposition *ek*, meaning “out” or “out of.” It is a reference here to those who are outside the church, that is, non-Christians.

The words “**have need of**” are translated from the Greek word *chreian*, which specifically refers to “a debt.” As used here, it refers to a lack of something or to have need of something.

“**Nothing**” is from the Greek word *mēdeis*. This is a double compound word made up of *mē*, meaning “not,” *de*, meaning “and, but, or even,” and *eis*, meaning “one.” When we put these all together we find that *mēdeis* means “not even one (thing)” or “nothing.”

Meaning Explained

Today’s verse begins with a conjunction (*hina*) meaning “so that.” Whenever a verse begins with a conjunction, we have to look back to see what it is joining the current verse to. In this case, we have to look back to the end of verse ten, “**But we urge you, brothers, that you increase more and more;**” and, in order to know what it is that has to be increased, we have to look back at verse nine. It says, “...**concerning brotherly love** ...” In other words, one of the reasons that we have to greatly increase our love for others more and more is “**so that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and *that* you may lack nothing.**”

In yesterday’s verse we learned the first reason that we need to increase our brotherly love. It is so that we can keep from crossing the line to meddling and instead lead a quiet life, mind our own business, and work hard at whatever task we have been given to do. Now Paul teaches us that another reason for increasing our love more and more is so that it will guide our footsteps in life. If we continue to focus on being more loving, showing genuine brotherly love to others, it will continue to instill a habit in us regarding the proper way to live. Notice that this is not just to our brothers and sisters in Christ; by developing the habit of brotherly love, we will act the way God wants us to toward those who are outside the church as well.

Paul also tells us that if we develop the habit of showing genuine brotherly love to all people, we will have all our needs met; we will be lacking in not even one thing.

Application

God never promises us that we will have everything we want, but He does promise us that we will have everything we need if we learn to show genuine brotherly love to all people.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 - Dead, But Still Alive

But we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who have fallen asleep, that you not grieve as others who have no hope.

Truth to Learn

For Christians, physical death is not the end of existence.

Behind the Words

“I ... want” is translated from the Greek verb *thelō*, which means “to want” or “to desire.” But it carries more weight than simply a wish, because it involves volition and purpose, seeing one’s desire to its completion. It could be translated as “I am determined.” In some manuscripts it is expressed in the first person singular (I), but the best manuscripts have it as first person plural (we).

The word translated “ignorant” is *agnoeō*, which is made up of *a*, meaning “not” and *noeō*, meaning “to know, to recognize, or to understand.” Thus, *agnoeō* means “to not know.”

The words “have fallen asleep” is from a form of *koimaō*, which literally means “to cause to lie down to sleep.” It is used metaphorically as a reference to those who have died physically. It is expressed in the perfect tense indicating past action completed at a point in time with an ongoing effect, the emphasis being on the ongoing effect.

“Grieve” is translated from the verb *lupeō*, which means “to grieve” or “to be sorrowful.” It is expressed as a present tense, subjunctive verb, indicating the possibility of something happening.

The word translated “others” is *loipoi*. This noun is derived from the verb *leipō*, meaning “to leave behind, to lack, or something remaining.” Thus, *loipoi* literally means “the remaining ones.”

This word “hope” is from a Greek word that we have looked at before. It is the word *elpida*, which is a form of *elpis*, meaning “the desire of obtaining something good with the full expectation of obtaining it.” It is the type of hope that Christians have of being resurrected to eternal life. We certainly desire it and we have full expectation that it will happen because God has promised it to us.

Meaning Explained

In this fourth chapter of his letter to the Thessalonians, Paul has switched from comforting and encouraging the saints, to teaching doctrine to them (us). He started by teaching that we are to avoid fornication (sexual activity outside of marriage). Then he taught the importance of increasing our demonstration of brotherly love.

For the remainder of this chapter and the first half of the next chapter, Paul is teaching about events that will occur at the end times. First he will teach us about the rapture of the church. Then he will teach about the day (time period) of the Lord, when God will judge the world and its ungodly inhabitants. He makes it very clear that the rapture, which is referred to as “the day of Christ” or “the day of Jesus Christ” (**1 Corinthians 1:8; Philippians 1:6, 10; Philippians 2:16; and 2 Thessalonians 2:2**) and “the day of the Lord” are not the same.

He says that he is determined that the Christians in Thessalonica not be ignorant. That’s Paul’s polite way of saying “you are ignorant about something and I want to inform you.” He tells them, and us, something interesting about Christians who have died physically (**those who have**

fallen asleep). He says, “Don’t be overly filled with sorrow like unbelievers who have no hope.” The reason we are not to grieve too much is because we have a hope that the unsaved don’t have. He will explain this hope in the next few verses.

Application

When loved ones pass through the door of physical death, it is natural for us to grieve. We grieve because they are no longer in our presence physically and we will greatly miss them. But, if they were believers in Jesus Christ, they are not gone from existence, they have simply moved from the physical world to paradise, where they are in the presence of God. We who are Christians will see them again someday and together we will be in God’s presence, eternally.

1 Thessalonians 4:14 - Returning With Him

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

Truth to Learn

Christians who have died will come with Jesus at the rapture.

Behind the Words

There are three classes of conditional clauses (*if* statements) contained in New Testament Greek based on their grammatical construction. The clause that begins today's verse is a first-class conditional statement; it assumes that the "*if* statement" is true. Therefore, in some cases we can substitute the word "since" for "if," and we could start this verse off with "For *since* we believe that Jesus died and rose again ..."

"**Believe**" is translated from the Greek verb *pisteuō*, meaning "to believe in," "to have faith in," or "to trust in." It is expressed as a present tense, active voice, indicative mood verb, indicating present, possibly continuous, action.

The verb "**died**" is from *apothnēskō*, which is made up of *apo*, meaning "from," used as an intensifier and *thnēskō*, meaning "to die." Thus, it literally means "to die off."

"**Rose again**" is from the Greek verb *anistēmi*, composed of *ana*, meaning "up" and *histēmi*, which means "to stand." Hence, it literally means "to stand up" or "to rise up."

The words "**will bring**" are translated from the verb *agō*, meaning "to lead" or "to bring." It is expressed here in the future tense, thus we translate it as "will bring."

Koimaō is the Greek word translated "**sleep**." It means "to cause to lie down to sleep." In the New Testament it is often used in reference to the sleep of death. That is the manner in which Paul uses it here.

Meaning Explained

Beginning in the previous verse, Paul is teaching the Thessalonians (and us) about end-time events. This particular event is what we commonly refer to as "the rapture." We will talk more about this word in verse seventeen. The first thing to learn from today's verse is who is involved in this event. We are told here that it involves those who "**believe that Jesus died and rose up**." In other words, this event involves born-again Christians. As we noted in **Behind the Words**, the word "believe" likely indicates current, continuous belief, that is, a belief that was not simply a one-time event, but something that has become an integral part of a person's life.

One of my biggest concerns is that when the rapture takes place, many church members won't notice, because the church will still be filled with "members." I fear too many so-called Christians have said the "sinner's prayer" without ever really believing to the point of a total commitment to Jesus. They may have knowledge of salvation but not truly be saved.

The other thing we learn here is that Christians who "sleep in Jesus," those who have died physically, will return with Him. Since this event involves our Lord coming from the heavenly realms to the earth's atmosphere (see **1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17**), those who "sleep in Jesus" will also be coming from the heavenly realms, from Paradise. In **Luke 23:43** our Lord told the thief

that on that very day he would be with Jesus in Paradise. From **Matthew 12:40** we know that Jesus went into the “heart of the earth” when He died. But from **2 Corinthians 12:2-4** we know that Paradise is now up with the third heaven. In other words, Paradise has been moved! I think that’s what Paul is talking about in **Ephesians 4:8** where he said that Jesus “led captivity captive.” In today’s verse Paul tells us that He will bring those who sleep in Jesus (who are now with Him in Paradise) will come with Him.

Application

The fact that you are following these daily Bible studies probably indicates that you are genuinely saved. I wonder how many people will miss the rapture because they simply see salvation as a free ticket into heaven rather than a life-changing commitment. They see Jesus simply as their Savior and not as their Lord. However, as Peter points out in **2Peter 3:18**, He is both our Savior and our Lord.

1 Thessalonians 4:15 - Any Day Now

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive *and* remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.

Truth to Learn

The rapture could happen any day now!

Behind the Words

The word “alive” is from the verb *dzaō*, which means “to be alive” or “to have life.” It is expressed here as a present participle, so it could be translated as “the living.”

“Remain” is translated from *perileipō*. This word is made up of *peri*, meaning “around” and *leipō*, meaning “to leave” or “to have a lack of something.” Hence, *perileipō* means “to leave around” or “to leave behind.” This verb is also expressed as a present participle, so it could be translated as “the ones left behind” (when the others died).

Parousia is the Greek word translated “coming.” This word is derived from *pareimi*, meaning “to be present.” It can refer either to the presence of something or it can refer to the coming of someone into our presence.

“By no means” is the translation of the two Greek words *ou mē*. *Ou* represents the absolute negative and *mē* represents the relative negative. When the two words are used together it indicates the strongest form of a negative, meaning “absolutely not” or “no way.”

The word translated “precede” is *phthanō*, which means “to be beforehand” or “to precede.” When the King James Version of the Bible was by far the most frequently read translation, many people became confused about this verse. The reason is that the word *phthanō* was translated as “prevent.” At the time the KJV was translated, the word “prevent” meant “to come before,” not “to keep from happening” as it does today. Nearly all modern translations use the word “precede,” meaning “to happen before something else.”

Meaning Explained

Paul is currently teaching about the rapture, indicating in verse thirteen that it is a future hope that belongs to all Christians. In yesterday’s verse we learned that when Jesus Christ comes back at the rapture, He will bring with him everyone who has died having a saving faith in his work on the cross.

He now makes a statement about why we should believe what he is telling us. He says, “**For this we say to you by the word of the Lord.**” In other words, this is not just some hair brained idea that Paul came up with. This is teaching directly from the mouth of God, His Word.

Some Christians believe that this is a description of the “second coming of our Lord” which takes place at the end of the tribulation as described in **Revelation 19:11-14**. However, in that passage (verse 14) those who come with Him are clothed in fine linen, shite and clean. This is an indication that those who come with Him have already been presented before the Father, which must occur after the Bema Seat Judgment, which happens after the Rapture. Therefore, this must be a description of the Rapture and not the Second Coming.

Paul's message here is that Christians who are alive at the time of the rapture will not receive their heavenly bodies before those who are asleep in Jesus (Christians who have died). Finally, notice that Paul said "we who remain." He fully expected the rapture to occur within his lifetime!

Application

The rapture hasn't happened yet, but we (like Paul) believe it could occur any day now. Christians should be serving God faithfully now, looking forward to Christ's return when "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." (1 John 3:2)

1 Thessalonians 4:16 - A Joyful Sound

For the Lord Himself will come down from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

Truth to Learn

The rapture is a loud event and a time of celebration.

Behind the Words

The word “**Himself**” is translated from *autos*, meaning “self.” It is used as an intensifier which sets apart the person from everyone and anything else.

“**Come down**” is from *katabainō*, composed of *kata*, meaning “down” and *bainō*, meaning “to come” or “to go.”

Ouranos is the Greek word translated “**heaven**.” It is perhaps based on the obsolete word *oros*, referring to an elevated spot. Jewish tradition holds that there are three heavens, the atmosphere of the earth (the first heaven), the physical universe (the second heaven), and God’s dwelling place or God’s throne room (the third heaven.)

“**Shout**” is from *keleusma*, which refers to a loud cry or a shout. In Classical Greek, writers used this word in reference to the loud war cry of soldiers rushing into battle, both to excite their fellow soldiers into action and to frighten the enemies.

“**Archangel**” is from *archangelos*, which is composed of *archon*, meaning “chief” and *angelos*, meaning “a messenger.”

Salpinx is the Greek word translated “**trumpet**.” It can refer to the instrument specifically, or to the sound the trumpet makes.

The word translated “**rise**” is *anastēmi*, which we saw in verse fourteen in reference to our Lord’s resurrection. It means “to stand up” or “to rise up.”

Meaning Explained

This verse, along with the next one, gives a very succinct description of the rapture of the church. The first thing we learn here is that the Lord (Jesus Christ) will descend from heaven. In verse fourteen we learned that He will be bringing those who “**sleep in Jesus**” with him when He comes. The next thing that we learn is that He will come with a loud shout, a shout of celebration and enticement, to stir up His saints. This loud cry will be “**with the voice of an archangel**.” This can be interpreted one of two ways: either a chief among the angels will be the one shouting, or our Lord will shout with a voice *like* an archangel. Since Jesus is referred to as The Angel of God throughout the Old Testament, He Himself could be the archangel spoken of. And, this loud cry is accompanied by the trumpet of God.

In **1 Corinthians 15:51, 52** there is another description of the rapture. In that verse we are told that it will occur at “**the last trumpet**.” Because of this, some Christians believe that this is the same as the last of the seven trumpet judgments spoken of in **Revelation 11:15**. They believe that this seventh trumpet occurs near the middle of the tribulation period; therefore, the rapture will occur “mid-trib.” However, the trumpet sound in today’s verse is “a call to action and celebration” whereas the trumpet sound in **Revelation 11:15** is a pronouncement of judgment

and woe. Also, a close study of Revelation shows that the seven trumpets occur toward the end of the tribulation, not in the middle. Remember, just because two things are described in a similar manner does not mean they are the same thing.

Once this shout is made and the trumpet blast is sounded, those who are “asleep in Jesus” will be raised up. That is, their bodies will be raised up as perfect, undefiled, eternal bodies and those who have come with Christ will be united with their new perfect bodies.

Application

When we hear the trumpet call at the time of the rapture, we will be filled with joy and we will be changed. Rejoice my friends, for the time of celebration is very near.

1 Thessalonians 4:17 - Glorious Meeting

Afterwards we who are alive *and* remain shall be caught up together with them in clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Truth to Learn

Living Christians will join the “dead in Christ” at the rapture.

Behind the Words

“**Afterwards**” is from the Greek word *epeita*, which is made up of *epi* meaning “upon” or “at” and *eita*, a particle of succession. Hence, *epeita* means “then,” “afterwards,” or “next.”

The words “**who are alive**” are translated from *dzaō*, meaning “to live.” It is preceded by the plural definite article *oi*, thus it could be translated “the living ones.”

“**Remain**” is from the Greek word *perileipō*, which we saw a couple verses back, meaning “the ones left behind” or “the remaining ones.” When we combine this with *oi dzaō*, which we just talked about, it means “the remaining living ones.”

“**Shall be caught up**” is the translation of the Greek verb *harpadzō*. This verb means “to seize by force” or “to snatch away.” In the Latin translation of the Bible it is translated as a form of *rapare*, from which we get the English word rapture.

The words “**together with**” are from two Greek words. They are *hama*, meaning “at the same time” and *sun*, meaning “with.”

Nephelē is the word translated “**clouds**.” This is the diminutive form of *nephos*, meaning “clouds.” Thus, *nephelē* literally means “little clouds” or “cloudiness.” The Greek text does not contain the definite article (the), so a more accurate translation would be “in clouds,” not “in *the* clouds.”

“**Meet**” is from *apantēsis*, a form of *apantaō*, meaning “to meet, coming from different directions.” The form of *apantēsis* used here literally means “a meeting.”

“**In the air**” is from *eis aera*, meaning “into air” or “into the atmosphere.”

Meaning Explained

In the previous verse we learned that those “who sleep in Jesus,” Christians who have died physically, will be raised from the dead first. Now we learn that right afterwards, Christians who have not yet died will be snatched away from the earth. These two groups of Christians will be joined together in clouds. This could be a description of the weather conditions at the time (cloudiness) or, more likely, it means that there will be clouds of people being raised up off the earth for a meeting with the Lord Jesus Christ.

This glorious meeting will take place “in the air” or “in the earth’s atmosphere.” This is a significant statement because it indicates that our Lord will not come to the surface of the earth, just into the atmosphere. In other words, this is not “the second coming of the Lord,” which occurs on the “Day of the Lord.” According to the prophet Zechariah, on the day of the Lord, the Messiah will come to the surface of the earth and stand on the Mount of Olives (**Zechariah 14:1-4**). Remember, the day of Christ (the rapture) is a time of celebration and joy, whereas the Day of the Lord is a day of judgment and woe.

From the moment of the rapture, for the rest of eternity, we will be with our Lord. Also, note again that Paul says “**we who are alive.**” Paul expected to be alive for the rapture.

Application

If you have committed yourself to the Lordship of Jesus Christ through belief of His death and resurrection, you will be part of the rapture. Are you looking forward to this event which could happen any day now? I sure am!

1 Thessalonians 4:18 - Words of Comfort

Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Truth to Learn

Knowledge of the rapture should be a comfort to us all.

Behind the Words

Hōste is the Greek word translated “therefore.” It is composed of *hōs*, meaning “in this manner” and *te*, an article of connection, which serves to closely connect that which has been said to that which follows. We could translate *hōste* as “so then.”

The verb translated “comfort” is one that Paul uses frequently and one that we have seen several times in this chapter. It is the word *parakaleō*, meaning “to encourage, comfort, or challenge.”

“One another” is from *allēlous*, meaning “each other” or “one another.” It indicates reciprocal action on the part of each member of a group.

“Words” is translated from the Greek noun *logos*. This word is derived from *legō*, meaning “to speak intelligently.” *Logos*, therefore, represents the words that are used to express thoughts.

Meaning Explained

In the previous five verses Paul has been teaching about the rapture. At the time of the rapture, Jesus Christ will descend from heaven to the atmosphere of the earth, bringing with Him every Christian who has died physically. He will make a loud proclamation, accompanied by a blast on a trumpet. For a few more details, let’s look at what Paul said in his first letter to the Corinthians:

Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. (1 Corinthians 15:51-53)

From this we see that at the rapture every Christian will have his or her decaying, mortal body changed into an incorruptible body. This is the eternal, heavenly body like that which Jesus has right now. This new body will not be subject to disease or decay. From Paul’s teaching here in 1 Thessalonians we learned that the dead in Christ will have their decaying (or completely decayed) body changed first, then we who are alive and remain will receive our new bodies as we are snatched away from the earth.

Remember at the beginning of this teaching (verse thirteen) Paul did not want us to be overly sad about Christians who have already died physically? That’s because we will be reunited with them again at the rapture, we will all receive our new bodies, and we will eternally be in the physical presence of our Lord. There will be no more pain, no more suffering, no more sadness, only glorious celebration and joy. Because of this new knowledge we can comfort and encourage each other.

Application

No matter what kind of pain or suffering you are experiencing right now, it will all be over soon. Be encouraged, my Christian friends, it could be any day now!