

**Commentary on 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12**  
**By L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.**

The **International Bible Lesson** (*Uniform Series*) for **June 27, 2010**, is from **1 Thessalonians 4:1-12**. Five **Questions for Discussion** follow the Bible Lesson Commentary. These are my preliminary verse by verse study notes before writing my Bible Lesson for *The Oklahoman* newspaper. They may help you in your class preparation and discussion. I do encourage you to write your own verse by verse notes and questions before reading the notes and questions below.

**1 Finally, brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God (as, in fact, you are doing), you should do so more and more.**

Jesus Christ is always the standard of measurement. The standard is what He taught and what He demonstrated by the way He led His life; therefore, Paul wrote, “in the Lord Jesus.” Jesus is the Lord to be obeyed by all, and someday (after He returns) He will be obeyed by all. Jesus gave commandments, new commandments about loving one another. By His moral example, He showed us what we should try to do daily. We need to urge others to do the same, as Paul did. Paul also demonstrated how to live morally and spiritually as a Christian to please God, and we should pursue pleasing God more and more. Paul wrote, “live...to please God.” In fact, are we doing this as the Thessalonians did?

**2 For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.**

Paul knew how Christians should behave from the life and teachings of and about Jesus Christ as he learned these truths from those who knew Jesus during His public ministry. Jesus’ teaching was the instruction that Paul wanted to pass on to others – not as a set of laws or rules separate from a relationship with Jesus, but a moral code and covenant that Jesus writes upon the hearts of those who love Him, a code that He empowers believers to obey as they rely on Him through faith and prayer. Christian faith and behavior is more than a code of ethics for people to follow.

**3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication;**

God's will is that we choose to set ourselves apart from sin and evil, apart from sexual impurity of mind and heart as well as body, apart from the world's ways. God's will is that we set ourselves into a holy relationship with God through Jesus Christ so He can use us to bless, love, and serve others His way and in His name and in His time, without our misrepresenting Him.

**4 that each one of you know how to control your own body in holiness and honor,**

The world, the flesh, and the devil will tempt us to use our body immorally for pleasure (or the false promise of lasting pleasure). The practice of immorality may give temporary pleasure, but that pleasure ultimately ends in heartache. If we have not hardened our conscience, when we sin, our conscience will accuse us, condemn us, and rob us of all pleasure from immorality. Our conscience can help us, with God's help, to control our minds and bodies so we use them in good and holy ways acceptable to God, and in ways that bring honor to God and to us.

**5 not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God;**

The Gentiles who did not know God worshipped idols. The temples and priests of these idols often led worshippers to practice sexual immorality as part of their worship. Some who deny the true God and the Scriptures have become enslaved to lustful passions that lead to the unhappiness of others and themselves.

**6 that no one wrong or exploit a brother or sister in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, just as we have already told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.**

If a Christian, or a wolf in sheep's clothing, harms a Christian directly or seeks to exploit a relationship with a Christian to unfair advantage, God will punish the person who tries to take advantage of or do evil to the Christian. Paul warns those in the church not to do evil against a believer, that includes sexual abuse or leading others into temptation.

**7 For God did not call us to impurity but in holiness.**

Some of the pagan priests and temples did call those who worshipped their idols to impurity and even the sacrifice of their children to appease their false gods. On the other hand, God calls us to the opposite way of keeping ourselves pure so He can use us to bless others in ways that honor Him.

**8 Therefore whoever rejects this rejects not human authority but God, who also gives his Holy Spirit to you.**

In the world, we have human authorities and human governments; such as the religious and political governments that arrested, tried, and crucified Jesus because they were not following God. These types of governments, which issue immoral rules, can be disobeyed and rejected, as was the case with the American Revolution of 1776, when Americans rejected the British government's rule over the colonies. Of course, there are consequences that human governments enforce when their laws are rejected even on moral grounds (many Christians were thrown to the lion's den by the Roman government, and the British sent troops to subdue the rebellious Americans). However, God's authority and government should never be rejected, and believers have the Holy Spirit to help them live responsibly and rightly under God's authority and government.

**9 Now concerning love of the brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another;**

The followers of Christ truly loved one another because God taught them to and enabled them to love one another by filling them with His love. God the Father truly loved them first, and they followed the example of the Father and the Son and of the Apostle Paul in loving one another.

**10 and indeed you do love all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more,**

The Thessalonians loved all their fellow believers throughout Macedonia, and they demonstrated this love in fellowship and other practical ways; therefore, Paul could write that the Macedonians had reported to him that the Thessalonians had a wonderful faith in Jesus.

**11 to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you,**

These are worthy goals for all people. These are goals we should aspire to, and these should lead to peace of mind and heart: live quietly, take care of your own business, and do not interfere in the lives of others. Work – work with your hands or work in practical ways – do not be lazy.

**12 so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and be dependent on no one.**

By following this advice of Paul, they will be good examples to nonbelievers, those outside the faith or their own congregation. Paul wanted them to depend on God and their hard work, rather than depend on human beings for their support. He did not encourage begging or borrowing, but work – which sets a good example for all.

### **Five Questions for Discussion**

1. How do we know whether or not we ourselves (and others) are living to please God?

2. What characteristics would a congregation demonstrate if the congregation was living (and committed to living) in order to please God? In what ways (and

for what reasons) can a congregation be tempted to live to please people instead of God? What are some of the consequences of a congregation living to please people instead of God?

3. In what ways today are Christians tempted to live as nonbelievers (as “Gentiles,” in Paul’s letter)? In our day, why must Christians be encouraged to actually live according to the Bible’s teachings? What are some ways the church can help those in the church who are living openly as unbelievers live (living immorally)?

4. Why should true faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior lead to obeying Jesus’ commandments? What would you say to any believers who think they do not need to obey Jesus, because they think they are going to go to heaven when they die anyway?

5. What does the Bible teach about work? How can we apply the Bible’s teaching about work in ways that will help those who come to our churches asking for a handout or financial help?

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