

1st Thessalonians Chapter 4- John Karmelich

1. Today's lesson focuses on two key words: Personal behavior.
  - a) Chapters 1 to 3 focus on our relationship with God the Father. It states the fundamentals of our belief in God and the Lord Jesus Christ.
  - b) The other aspect of the first three chapters has to do with our relationship with other people. There was a heavy emphasis on loving one another.
  - c) The "missing element" of the first three chapters is personal behavior. It would be like saying, "Here is what God has done for you. Here is how you are to treat others. Now, in Chapter 4, let me talk about you are to behave personally in order to please God."
  - d) The first word is "finally". The question is "Finally, after what?"
    - i) The answers come from the previous chapters.
      - a) Paul talked about his love and care for this church in Thessalonica.
      - b) Paul talked about how much he regularly prayed for the Thessalonians.
      - c) Paul tried to encourage this young church due to the threat of both persecution and temptation.
      - d) Paul talked about how happy he was when he found out the Thessalonians love for him was mutual. That fact encouraged Paul as a minister.
      - e) In summary, Paul just spent two chapters talking about the fundamentals of our relationship with God and with each other as believers.
      - f) That topic covers most of Chapters 1 to 3.
    - ii) The "finally" of this chapter focuses on the individual and our personal behavior.
    - iii) There is an old Christian acronym for J.O.Y. that applies here:
      - a) (J)esus, (O)thers, (Y)ourself.
      - b) That means our priority is to God first, other people second and ourselves last. That is how we have JOY in our life.
      - c) That is what Paul meant by "finally". We are talking about "yourself" and "ourself" and our behavior as Christians.
      - d) Paul recalled some of the fundamental principals of relationship with God the Father and our Lord Jesus, next Paul focuses on loving one another, and the next issue over this chapter has to do with "yourself".
  - e) The last part of this chapter has to do with the resurrection.
    - i) What is interesting to consider is what that has to do with "finally".
    - ii) When you read the last few sentences in this chapter, there are actually only two commands for believers. The first is to understand the fact of Jesus return and the second is to encourage other believers with those words.
    - iii) Again it is about personal behavior. It is almost as if God is saying, "Here are all the details about the Second Coming you need to know. Let me worry about the specifics. All I want you to do is to be aware this event is going to happen and to use that fact to encourage others that this will happen.
  - f) My point here is that Christianity is not just about saying Jesus is God. It is not just about being of service to others. It is about changing one's behavior based on the commands God gives us in our bible.
    - i) If we read our bible and say "Oh, that's interesting, how about that" and never change our lifestyle based on what the bible teaches, then we are not saved. Salvation is by faith in God, but the evidence of that faith is a changed lifestyle.
  - g) I better get past the first-word "finally" in this chapter or we'll never make it! ☺

2. Verse 1: Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.
- a) Let me expand and paraphrase Verse 1: Paul is saying, “When we were with you in Thessalonica, we taught you about God and His son Jesus. Then we taught by word and example how to love one another. Finally, we taught you how to behave personally. We taught how one ought to live in order to please God. Now we are urging you to continue in this behavior more and more.”
  - b) One never reaches a level of perfection as a Christian, at least not while we are living on this earth.
  - c) Does a parent ever say to a child, “I’ve taught you all there is to know in life, so you can retire now?” I don’t think so, and neither does God in this world.
  - d) God calls us into service for Him. I don’t believe there is a retirement plan on earth for Christians. The concept of retirement from service to God is not biblical. This has nothing to do with retirement from an occupation. That is a separate topic. Even if one is too weak to be of service to others, there is still prayer and leading by example. We are never “done” until God calls us home to heaven.
  - e) The important issue of Verse 1 has to do with the phrase, “Please God”.
    - i) How does one please God? Can one please God? If God is all-knowing and has no need for anything, how can we possibly please Him? Is it worth trying?
      - a) Great questions! I’m so glad you asked that today! ☺
    - ii) First of all, let’s go back to Verse 1. It says, “We instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living.”
    - iii) So whatever the Thessalonians are doing, they are doing it correctly.
    - iv) Whatever they are doing, they are “pleasing God”.
    - v) When you read through the Old Testament, there are references to “Pleasing God” or “Pleasing to God.” Here are some examples:
      - a) When the original tabernacle was built, the smell of incense is described as “pleasing to God”. (E.g., Exodus 29:18 NIV). The incense alter is a word-picture of prayer as the smoke rises up to heaven. The point is our prayer life can be “pleasing to God”.
      - b) In the New Testament, Moses’ childhood was described as “well pleasing to the Lord” (Acts 7:20 NIV). This is a reference to Moses’ parents obeying God and not turning the child over to be killed because of Pharaoh’s orders. The reference to “pleasing God” has to do with obedience.
      - c) Paul urges children to obey their parents as it is “well-pleasing to the Lord” (Colossians 1:10). Paul is implying that obedience to God’s commandments is “pleasing” to God.
      - d) John the Gospel writer teaches that our Christian conduct can be well pleasing to God: “And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.” (1<sup>st</sup> John 3:22-23, NIV)
    - vi) My point is that it is possible to please God. It is done by our prayer life, our obedience to God and keeping biblical commandments given to us throughout the bible. It is about changing our lifestyle.
  - f) Which gets back to the idea of “pleasing God” from God’s perspective:
    - i) First of all, the bible teaches that God does not change (Malachi 3:6).
    - ii) God does not have emotional highs and lows.
      - a) God is not an old man sitting on a throne going through different emotional states based on our behavior at any given moment. ☺

- iii) Pleasing God is an emotional state from our perspective.
- iv) God describes our actions as pleasing to Him, because He wants us to know that if we are doing these things, we can have peace and assurance that we are “pleasing” Him.
- v) There is an inherent need in all people to want approval. It stems from the need to want to be loved. If we love someone, we want their approval. If we love someone, we want to know that our actions are pleasing to them. Therefore, the bible teaches, “If you do such-and-such, you are pleasing God. To put it another way, God is not this “unknowable being in which we don’t know how to make Him happy”. God sets out standards and rules for us and says, “Obey these, and from your ability to understand, it will be “pleasing” to me.
- g) One last thing and I promise we’ll actually make it to Verse 2. ☺ If God has this “set” of standards of how to please Him, why is Paul urging us to do it “more and more”? Isn’t God happy with us just the way we are? Doesn’t God love us unconditionally?
  - i) It is best to think of a loving parent. They love their children no matter what they do, but they want to see them grow into maturity. God desires that for us as well. The more we trust God, the more “pleasing” we are to him.
  - ii) We still have the sin nature within us. Further, the world-around us draws us away from God, just as it did for the Thessalonians. That is why Paul is encouraging that church in his absence to continue to grow and trust and God.
- h) Which finally leads us to verse 2, which is the practical aspect of our personal behavior.
- 3. Verse 2: For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.
  - a) It says, “you know”. The Thessalonians may “know”, but we don’t, unless we read on.
  - b) Whatever instructions were given by Paul and his companions were known to the Thessalonians, but it is not known to us unless we read further.
  - c) The point of us reading Verse 2 is to understand that this is not just Paul talking, but Paul talking under the authority of Jesus himself. This is the last part of Verse 2.
    - i) How Paul specifically got these revelations, we don’t know. But if we accept the bible as the truth, then we have to accept that Paul is speaking in Jesus’ name, especially in these passages.
- 4. Verse 3: It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; <sup>4</sup> that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, <sup>5</sup> not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God;
  - a) OK, Here comes the tough part. ☺
  - b) The first issue of personal behavior that Paul brings up is that of sexual immorality.
  - c) Whether we like it or not, the bible teaches that sexual behavior is intended for a heterosexual married couple, period.
    - i) Sexual activity when one is not married is called fornication. Sexual activity when one is married with someone other than your spouse is called adultery. Sexual activity with members of the same sex is called homosexuality.
    - ii) Now let’s read Paul: “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. (1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 6:9-11, NKJV).
      - a) Paul is saying that anyone who is currently engaging in this behavior and has not repented of those sins will not get into heaven.

- b) The verse also says anyone who has turned from one of those activities is forgiven. That is why I underlined, "And such were some of you". None of these are unforgivable sins.
- c) I also believe when one has committed their life to Christ and see these activities as wrong, but still struggle with them and have their bad days, is not an unforgivable sin. God never says, "I forgive you this one time, but if you slip, that's it". In these cases, it comes down to attitude. If you see any of these activities as sinful and you are trusting in God to help you change your lifestyle, you are forgiven no matter how many times you fail as you trust in God to change you.
- d) OK, why this issue first? Why make sexual behavior a priority over any behavior?
  - i) First of all, it is not "first". The "first" issue of our faith in God and to love one another as discussed in Chapters 1 -3. "Next" is this issue of sexual immorality.
  - ii) God wants us to be separate from how nonbelievers live and act. God wants nonbelievers to look at Christians and say, "What's with those people? They don't do whatever feels good at any given moment? They don't go with the crowd, and yet, they are happy! What is their secret?"
  - iii) I should also add that being a Christian is not about being a martyr. It is not "I'm going to deprive myself of any joy so I can spend time with Jesus". That's what nonbelievers think. What they don't get is that we receive far greater joy and happiness than anything and everything the world has to offer. That is a secondary reason why we obey God's commandments. First we do it to please Him. Second, it is what is best for our lives.
- e) Let's get back to the issue of "Why discuss sexual behavior as a priority over any other issue? This goes back to Adam and Eve. The first commandment God gave to them as personal behavior has to do with sexual behavior in marriage.
  - i) In Genesis 2:22, God created woman.
  - ii) In Genesis 2:23 Adam named her "woman". (She wasn't called "Eve" until a chapter later.)
  - iii) In Genesis 2:24, the commandment is given that "A man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh." (NIV). This commandment has to do with sexual behavior in and only in the context of marriage. The word "united" is not just referring to the marriage ceremony. God desires an intimate relationship between a husband and wife and this includes sex.
  - iv) A big theme of this section is personal behavior. Paul is teaching how we may live a life pleasing to God.
    - (1) We are "pleasing God" in that He commanded us to live this way. It is the ideal for our lives.
  - b) A secondary purpose is for us to be witnesses to others around us.
  - c) To a person who hasn't committed their life to follow biblical commands, sexual behavior is a "non-issue". The world cries out, "If it feels good, do it". Yes God created those wonderful sexual feelings, but it was God's desire that it be in the context of a heterosexual marriage.
  - d) When we as Christians are to be models for what God desires for us. Others engage in adultery and fornication. There is pleasure in that. The problem is that like any thrill, there is no permanent sense of satisfaction, just a desire for "more".

- f) I would like to talk a little more about homosexuality versus God's ideal for us.
- i) In current times, as well as throughout history, homosexuality has existed. I am convinced that for many, some are born with a weakness toward this temptation. Each of us has "strong suits" and "weak suits" in our lives. What is not necessary is that we give in to our weaknesses just because we have those weaknesses.
  - ii) Paul was discussing the topic of homosexuality in Romans Chapter 1. He then gets to this specific point:
    - a) "Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done." (Romans 1:26 NIV).
    - b) I believe God physically changes people once they have "given in" to a homosexual lifestyle. A physical metamorphosis takes place. This is what is meant by the phrase "gave them over". For some to "change back", it becomes increasingly difficult.
  - iii) Which leads back to what Jesus said, "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." (Matthew (19:26 NIV). I have seen people permanently change from homosexuality to a heterosexual lifestyle. It requires the power of God working within you. Most have to "fight their old nature" just as all of us have to fight off our sinful nature. I also find that in most cases to permanently change one requires a good praying, support and accountability group.
- g) So if Paul only wants us to have sex within the context of marriage, what about those God has called to be single? What about widows and those who are divorced? What about those God has called to be single? Isn't sex a natural urge?
- i) First of all, being single or divorced is not a sin. When you read all the lists of condemned sins in the bible, being single or divorced is never on those lists. God "hates" divorce (Malachi 2:16), but it is never listed as a condemnation to hell. As to single people, God does call some to be single. (Ref. 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 7:9).
  - ii) To be sexually pure and have sexual pleasure only in the context of a heterosexual marriage only can come from the power of God. Again, Jesus said, "With God all things are possible." This requires your trust in the power of God to overcome such temptations. I don't believe this is possible based on one's own willpower.
- h) I want to close this discussion by stating Verse 8: "Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit."
- i) Remember the expression, "Where God leads, God provides". If God desires you obey any and all specific commandments, He is going to provide a way for you to have the ability to obey those commandments.
  - ii) That ability is a function of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit gives us the power to obey God's commandments. If you are a believer in Jesus, the power of the Holy Spirit is already within you.
  - iii) Let me give you a practical example of a prayer: "Lord, it says here in the bible that I am to do such-and-such. In the past I have struggled in this area. If you say I am to do this, than I am trusting in your power to make it possible for me to obey this commandment. Help me to rely upon your strength and do what is pleasing to you, Amen."
  - iv) Here is one more for married men: "Heavenly Father, the bible commands me that I am to love my wife as Christ loved the church (See Ephesians 5:25). Right now, I am struggling with that because I'm angry over what she did. Lord, it is not my job to fix her, but yours. Help me to love her as you desire and let You worry about her behavior. Just as I ask You to forgive me of all of my sins, help me to "wipe the slate clean" of how she offended me and simply love her as you commanded me, Amen".

- v) I hate to stop when I'm on a roll, but it's time to hit Verse 6. ☺
5. Verse 5-7: not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; <sup>6</sup> and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. <sup>7</sup> For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.
- a) Verse 6 is the middle of the sentence, so it must be read in context of other verses. The context is we are still on the same topic of sexual behavior.
- b) Notice in Verse 6 the word "brother". This refers to other Christian believers.
- i) Paul is emphasizing sexual immorality within the church.
- ii) The underlying issue is, "If we as a church don't act any differently from nonbelievers, how are people supposed to know we are Christians? Why would anyone want to get involved with Christianity if we act like "everyone else?"
- c) In the middle of Verse 6 begins a new sentence: It says, "The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you".
- i) We must understand that people are not sent to hell for rejecting Jesus. They are sent to hell because God says, "Remember the 10 commandments? Those are a summary of my standards for right and wrong. I, as God am perfect, and if you want to spend eternity with me, you must be perfect too". Getting into heaven is saying, "Yes God, I am guilty of disobeying your commandments, but I ask that you accept Jesus as a substitute payment for my sins."
- ii) (Standard disclaimer: For those who never heard of Jesus, God does judge people fairly based on what information they do have about God. This is what most of Romans Chapter 1 is all about.)
- iii) Among the 10 commandments are: "You shall not commit adultery" (Exodus 20:14 NIV) and "You shall not covet (desire) your neighbor's wife" (Exodus 20:17b NIV)
- a) That is what Paul meant by "God will punish men for all sins". In the same way God is perfect in love, God is also perfect in judgment. God doesn't let us get away with anything. The only ways to get into heaven is to never sin ever once in your life or to accept Jesus as a perfect substitute for your sins.
- d) Which leads us to Verse 7: "For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life."
- i) With Jesus paying the price for our sins, that does not mean we may now live however we please. We are free from sin, but we are now to turn away from it.
- ii) If we are grateful to God for our eternal salvation, we now obey God's commandments out of gratitude for that salvation.
- iii) Remember that salvation is about changing your lifestyle based on your faith in Jesus. If we have "faith" that say, an elevator holds our weight, we test that faith by getting in the elevator. The same with Jesus. We are saved only by our faith in Jesus, (Eph. 2:8) but we also put that faith into action by how we live and behave.
- iv) A "holy life" is one that is dedicated to pleasing God. If we are grateful for God saving us, we show that gratitude by living our life to please God and not ourselves. That is what a "holy life" is all about.
- a) Unfortunately, a stereotype has developed that to live a holy life means to walk around all day with a 3-foot cross around your neck and a giant study bible in your arms at all times. ☺
- v) To live a "holy life" is about making Jesus part of every aspect of your life. We spend regular time in prayer, God's Word and with other Christians so we have the knowledge, power and wisdom as how to live every other part of our life. To use a practical cliché, "Going shopping? Take Jesus with you!" Let God be your guide (through his Word, prayer, etc.) as how to live out every aspect of your life. That is being "holy", and not "holier than thou".

6. Verse 8: Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.
- a) Paul is emphasizing the fact that these commandments are not his idea, but God's.
  - b) If you are saying, "I believe in Jesus, but I still want to have sexual relations outside of the context of marriage", you are rejecting what God requires of you.
  - c) I stated earlier that Paul emphasizes the Holy Spirit in this verse because that is how God gives us the power to obey this commandment.
  - d) The primary function of the Holy Spirit is to bring glory to God.
    - i) He does that by convicting nonbelievers of the truth about Jesus.
    - ii) He does that by convicting people that God commandments are truth and they should be obeyed.
    - iii) For believers, a function of the Holy Spirit is to draw us closer to God. When we sin at any given moment, we are turning "from" the power of the Holy Spirit.
    - iv) Remember that God allows "free-will". God does not pin us to the ground like a wrestler and say, "obey my commandments or else". God out of His love for us, allows us to freely choose at any given moment whether or not to obey Him.
    - v) Further, sometimes the best way to learn is to make mistakes. When we see the misery caused by any particular sin, it leads us back to God.
    - vi) Getting back to the topic of adultery, I once heard a comment that "God sometimes punishes adulterers by sentencing them to a life with their new partner." ☺ The type of person who would have sex with a married man or women is not likely to be a God-fearing person. The momentary thrill of that adulterous relationship is usually followed by a long period of misery with that person.
7. Verse 9: Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. <sup>10</sup> And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.
- a) Paul now switches topics and discusses "brotherly love" again.
  - b) This topic was already discussed in the previous chapters. What is important here is to read these verses in context of the surrounding verses:
    - i) Paul just spent a number of verses talking about sexual purity.
    - ii) The next two verses after these talk about "minding your own business".
    - iii) Chapters 2 and 3 spent a lot of time on the topic of "loving one another". I believe Paul's point here is that one does not focus on loving one another unless one first focuses on living a "holy life".
    - iv) If we as Christians go around serving one another in love, but our own behavior is not pleasing to God, then we are "wasting our time" serving others in love.
    - v) I'm not saying one has to be perfect in order to serve others. Dealing with our sin is simply a matter of acknowledging it, confessing it and moving on.
    - vi) If we as Christians are to love and serve one another, and that "another" sees that we are hypocrites in our personal life to God, then those people won't care about what we have to say about Jesus. People judge our behavior far more than anything we say. That is why personal behavior is a priority over serving another.
  - c) In Verse 9, Paul states the Thessalonians are "taught by God" to love each other.
    - i) This does not mean God audibly spoke to the Thessalonians and said, "Now that you believe in my son, go around and love each other." ☺
    - ii) I believe it means that once you have the Holy Spirit inside of you, God physically changes you. You become a different person.
      - a) You just "want" to praise God out of gratitude for Jesus.
      - b) You just "want" to be of service to other believers.
      - c) You just "want" to live a life that is pleasing to God.

- d) It becomes part of your new nature.
  - e) “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:17 NIV)
  - f) This is what is meant by “taught by God”. It is the idea that God changes you from within and gives us the power to love one another.
- d) In Verse 10, Paul is saying that the love of this church has spread throughout the region surrounding Thessalonica (i.e., Macedonia) and Paul is urging them to continue to grow in their love for one another.
- i) Remember that this church was trying to survive during a time of persecution.
  - ii) I doubt your average Thessalonian-Christian thought very much about people outside of their own church. They were busy trying to help each other and survive. The point is we don’t know how our behavior is affecting others. Their reputation not only helped their own church grow, but others in the region.
  - iii) My point is people are watching your behavior. You may not realize it, but that is how God works. God works through us. The Holy Spirit is convicting new people by having them watch believers.
  - iv) This is why “loving each other” is so essential. Our natural instinct is to put our needs first. Christianity teaches “put others’ needs above your own to glorify God and help the church grow and mature”.
8. Verse 11: Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, <sup>12</sup> so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.
- a) One has to be careful not use the excuse of “loving one another” as to poke into other people’s business.
    - i) It is one thing to ask someone if they need help. It is another to try to fix someone’s problems who doesn’t ask for your help.
  - b) Remember that God works on the principal of “free-will”. He doesn’t come into anyone’s life that doesn’t ask Him. He doesn’t help believers in prayer unless we ask Him.
    - i) That same attitude should to Christians and others. We are not to “force” help on people who don’t want it. Yes we can pray for them, but we are not to fix them.
  - c) This is what Paul meant by “mind your own business”. If you are going to discuss the topic of “loving one another”, you have to discuss the danger of being nosy.
    - i) The problem is we see people hurting and we want to help them. Therefore, there is a strong urge to want to “fix” the problem.
    - ii) This is a danger of pride. We want the credit for fixing the problem and not turning it over to God. We want to work on our timing and not God’s.
  - d) The other aspect of this verse is for Christians, as much as possible to be self-reliant and not be dependant upon nonbelievers.
    - i) God calls us to work for a living and not be beggars. If we have the capacity to earn an income, then we should. I’m not arguing against full-time ministry. This is about being a beggar because “I’m too busy being a Christian to work”.
      - a) This is not about putting kids to work or that housewives have to get a job. The topic is mainly addressed to the family breadwinners not to be lazy.
    - ii) This is about being a good witness for God. If we are constantly begging for stuff from nonbelievers, we become a nuisance to them. They are not going to care what we have to say about God because they consider us a pest.
    - iii) That is what Paul meant by “your daily life may win the respect of outsiders”.

9. Verse 13: Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.
- a) OK, now we get into the tough stuff. ☺ Paul gets back to the topic of Jesus' Second Coming. Specifically, we are going to spend the rest of the lesson discussing the topic of the resurrection of the dead and the rapture of church. No controversy here. ☺
  - b) Before we do, it is important to bridge the last set of verses with these verses.
    - i) Why does Paul go from the topics of sexual conduct, loving one another and personal responsibility to that of the resurrection?
    - ii) It is not simply Paul saying, "OK done with that stuff. Let me change topics."
    - iii) These topics are meant to be bridged together.
  - c) This gets back to the main theme of personal behavior.
    - i) There is a day of judgment coming for believers and nonbelievers.
    - ii) Our behavior affects not only our own judgment, but also the judgment of those around us. Thus, Paul talked about our reputation to those around us.
    - iii) This leads to the idea of "judgment time" itself. In heaven there is not an infinite number of people, but finite. Since it is finite, there has to be a "last one". Therefore, there has to be day when God says, "OK, folks, that's a wrap. Jesus, go back to earth and get the last group still living on the earth."
      - a) This leads to questions about "how" and "why" this will happen. Paul is addressing these issues.
      - b) The "how" issue of the resurrection of believers is interesting and fun to discuss, the more important issue is why.
        - (1) The "why" is because if we are called to live holy lives and God will judge nonbelievers, then a day of judgment has to come.
      - c) Remember that this church was under death threats. They were surviving despite persecution. We as Christians may not be under a death threat, but we do suffer in our lifetime. We have to remember every now and then that all of this is worth it. We bear with the rough times because we understand our bible to be truth. Because it is truth, we live in obedience to the commands it teaches.
  - d) When you read through Verses 13-17, there are only two commands for us:
    - i) The first is in Verse 13. It says to "not be ignorant" about these things.
      - a) "These things" are what is discussed in these 4 verses. We'll get to that. ☺
      - b) Notice it is a command for us to be aware of them.
      - c) Some of the details are left to speculation. I have my pet theories on the details and they are fun to think about. The important thing to remember is that it will happen. Paul is saying, "don't be ignorant about the return of Jesus. It is a future event, and it will happen.
    - ii) The second command given in these 4 verses is in Verse 17. It says, "Therefore encourage (or comfort) each other with these words". The "words" are Verses 13-17. This is the discussion of Jesus' Second Coming.
      - a) We as Christians need to remind each other that Jesus is coming back.
      - b) We do it for motivation, for encouragement and comfort. This is especially true during those rough moments when it seems like the world is falling apart. We need to constantly remind ourselves of the "big picture" that God is in charge, Jesus is coming back for us and this lifetime is but a "eye blink of time" in compared to eternity.
    - iii) Before we get into specific details about these 4 verses, the important part is to know for certain this is going to happen and to encourage and comfort other Christians with this fact. The "specifics" are less important than the commands.

- a) I say this because too many Christians get hung up on the details. Yes I have my personal theories on the details, as do many Christians. My point here is the details are less important than the fact that it will happen and we need to constantly remind ourselves and other Christians of these facts.
- e) Which leads us back to Verse 13. It says, “Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.” First, let’s talk about the phrase “to be ignorant about those who fall asleep”.
- i) Christians who die are described throughout the New Testament as “falling asleep”. (In fact, the word “cemetery” means “sleeping places”.)
  - ii) This term “sleep” is used to separate those who die who are not believers are sent to hell. This way, “dead” really means “dead”. People who reject Jesus’ free provision of salvation will spend eternity in suffering for their rejection of God. They are truly “dead”.
  - iii) Therefore, the Gospel writers want to use another term for believers who died and thus, they use the term “sleep”. We use “sleep” because sleep is a word picture of comfort. We are no longer struggling with our sinful nature and are at rest.
  - iv) This does not mean that when we die, we go to sleep, for say, 2,300 years until Jesus comes back and wakes us up. Some people have this idea that our souls lay in the cemetery for some unnamed period of time and then some “eternal alarm clock” goes off and we get to go to heaven. ☺
  - v) This is the false-idea of “soul sleep”.
  - vi) Paul said, “We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.” (2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 5:8 NKJV)
  - vii) The New Testament never states there is some “in-between” between this life and the next life. Our souls are always alive. After we die, they will immediately be alive with Jesus or eternally tormented in hell.
  - viii) On a side note, there is no “purgatory” as Catholics teach. There is no biblical reference to any purgatory. To those who believe in a purgatory, ask yourself, “If there is a purgatory, does that mean Jesus’ payment for my sins was not sufficient? If Jesus died for all of your sins, why is any further punishment necessary?”
- f) Look at the last part of Verse 13: “...grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope”.
- i) For those of you familiar with the classical piece of literature “The Divine Comedy (a.k.a., “Dante’s Inferno”) mentioned a sign at the entrance to hell. It reads, “All hope abandon, ye who enter here!” Whether or not the rest of his poem about hell is technically correct, that expression is truth.
  - ii) What is important for us to realize is to look at people who don’t know Jesus and see them as one having no hope. Before you get angry with the person who cuts you off in traffic or commits some crime against you, remember that most likely, they have no hope. You may be hurt for a moment in time, but they will suffer for all of eternity. I guarantee the pain of how we are “wronged” will not compare to the pain of eternal hell. Yes, there is a literal hell. Jesus spent more time talking about hell than he did about heaven. There is a judgment for the nonbeliever.
  - iii) Paul was saying this because Christians in Thessalonica were being killed for their faith. Paul is saying, “Don’t feel sorry for those who have been killed for their faith. Feel sorry for those who kill them. They are the ones who will suffer for eternity. Pray for their salvation. Those believers who died are now resting with Jesus. Comfort each other with these thoughts. We are sad because we will miss them, but don’t feel sorry for Christians who died, have pity for their accusers, because they are the ones who will suffer.”

10. Verse 14: We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. <sup>15</sup> According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.
- a) The concern of the Thessalonians was: "Hey, those believers who died, are they going to miss the great event of Jesus' Second Coming? We Thessalonians know that those who died believing in Jesus are now in heaven. Is Jesus just going to leave them up in heaven when He comes back? Are they going to not see the greatest event in human history?"
  - b) Paul is saying in effect, "No they won't. When Jesus comes back, H is bringing with Him all of those believers who previously died.
    - i) Let's get back to the false- concept of "soul sleep". If Jesus is bringing with him all of those who previously died, then they must have been in heaven in the first place. Jesus can't bring resurrected believers with him, unless they were with him in the first place! The time frame is 1) We die and go to heaven and 2) we come back with Jesus to get those still living on earth when Jesus comes back.
  - c) Remember Verse 13 says, "know this". It is a command for us to be aware of this fact.
    - i) The details are fuzzy, but the details, are just that, details! The important thing to remember is that this is an event that will happen.
11. Verse 16: For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.
- a) OK John, I'm confused. You just stated that people don't soul sleep. Now here in Verse 16 it states that the dead in Christ will rise first and then we are still alive will be caught up with Jesus later (Verse 17). Verse 16, read out of context of the remainder of the bible can be read like people's souls lie in the ground until this "eternal alarm clock goes off" and then they go up into heaven to meet Jesus and we come later."
  - b) Remember that Verse 15 states that Jesus comes back with us with those who have died.
    - i) It's not a "quick trip to heaven and right back down again". One can read this verse like we're going on some elevator ride where we immediately go up to heaven and then Jesus says, "Wait a minute, I forget those who are still alive on earth, let's all go back down again". ☺
    - ii) God created all things. If He created all things, He created time. In heaven there is no time. God exists outside of time. That is why 30% of the bible is predictions about the future. The predictions validate the bible as God inspired, but it also shows that God exists outside of time and knows all things.
      - a) If we are going to be with God, then in heaven, time has no existence.
      - b) The best illustration I know would be like watching a parade from a helicopter. When you watch a parade from the ground, you only see things one moment at a time. From the sky, you can see the whole event go by. That is "history" from God's perspective. All of human history from God's perspective is like a big parade where one can watch the beginning, middle and the end all at one time.
      - c) Remember that if God is perfect, then God knows all things and cannot learn. Therefore He knows all of history before it ever happens.
      - d) When we die, we are no longer bound by time. We enter an "eternal now". This is how all believers who have died, past, present and future can be in heaven "at the same time" from our perspective and return at a specific moment in time (again from our perspective) to get those alive on earth.
  - c) Another common question people have is "How can all people "fit" in the sky?
    - i) This question really comes down to what are our new bodies like in heaven. Our clues come from what Jesus was like when he came back.

- ii) When you read through all four gospels, and read the accounts of the resurrected Jesus being with the disciples, you may notice a few things:
    - a) First of all, Jesus always ate food when he came back. He was “solid” in the sense Jesus could eat food. (That makes me wonder if there is a waste disposal system in heaven. ☺) At the same time, Jesus could walk through walls. Jesus appeared in a locked room with the disciples (John 20:26). That tells me Jesus exists in more than 3 dimensions. Somehow, believers can occupy the same space at the same time if we existed in more than 3 dimensions. (If this is too much for you, remember the fundamentals: Jesus is coming back and we are to comfort each other with these words!”)
  - d) Let’s get back to Verse 16. Paul says we are not to be ignorant of some of the specific’s that are written in the text, so we should discuss them. The first specific of this verse is: “with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God.”
    - i) When Jesus does come back, it won’t be a secret event. Jesus will not secretly come back and take up residence in a condo in Chicago. ☺
    - ii) When he comes back, it will be with a loud command. Does that mean the world will hear an audible voice of God giving the command? Possibly. Even if we can’t grasp exactly what these details mean, we do get the idea, that this won’t be in secret. This will be a loud, powerful event. I personally believe the whole world, somehow will see this event happen.
    - iii) The second phrase is the “voice of an archangel”. The term “archangel” is only used of two entitles named Michael and Gabriel. There may be others, but those are the only two named in the bible. We learn in Daniel that angels are in ranks, the same way we have generals, colonels, lieutenants, etc. Apparently, archangels are the top guys.
      - a) Personally, I believe the archangel in view here is Gabriel. Whenever you read about Gabriel, he is always making some sort of announcement about Jesus’ coming. That would fit into his role. (Whenever you read about Michael, he is always fighting on behalf of the nation of Israel.)
  - e) The last phrase is the “trumpet call of God”.
    - i) There are commentators who tie this trumpet to some of the trumpet sounds described in Revelation, but there is no proof they go together. The purpose of this phrase is again to remind us that whenever and however this event happens, it will be loud, it will be public. I’ve never heard God’s trumpet blast, but I suspect it is not subtle. ☺ When people describe things as being of “biblical proportions”, they usually mean it is of a huge worldwide scale.
12. Verse 17: After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.
- a) The first words are “after that”. The “that” refers to the loud public event that tells the whole world that Jesus is coming back.
  - b) When people make movies about the “rapture” event, they tend to have this silent moment when people disappear. Personally, I believe it will be louder than that.
  - c) It’s time to talk about the rapture itself. That word “rapture” is not in the bible. That word comes from the Latin translation of the bible. The translation above uses the term “caught up”, which is not bad, but not complete. A more complete term would be like an eagle swooping down “out of nowhere” and clutching a mouse and lifting it off the ground. The mouse is powerless to get out of that grip. The rapture is God reaching down in a moment of time and pulling us up. We have no power to get out of that grip.

- d) Another illustration is like a parent gripping a child from behind who is about to walk out in the street. The child has no idea he or she is about to be grabbed. The child has no idea he or she is saved from danger. The child is now in the protective hands of the parent and they are powerless to do anything about it.
  - e) Notice there is no discussion about when this takes place. There is no discussion of if and when this happens before or after the horrible events as described in the Book of Revelation. This is why good bible believing Christians debate over this stuff, and hopefully, in a friendly and respectful way. The important idea is that it can happen at any time and we are to live as if it could happen at any time.
  - f) Here is the important stuff. (Yes, time to pay attention ☺). The last sentence says, “And so we will be with the Lord forever.”
    - i) A good test for any person is, “Do you desire to be with Jesus forever?” Forget for a moment your views on the rapture, spiritual gifts and things that Christians debate over. Do you desire to be with Jesus forever? That is what heaven is all about. That is why Jesus bothered to die for us, so that we can be with him forever!
    - ii) Paul said “and (God) raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (Ephesians 2:6-7, NKJV)
      - a) Those two verses in Ephesians summarize the purpose of all history. It is so God can spend eternity showing us how much He loves us. He wants to spend eternity with us.
    - iii) Along the same time, hell is a place for those who do not want to be with God forever. Sin is simply the “natural output” of those who freely choose to reject God and his commandments for our life. In a sense, hell is God “giving people what they want”. Whether we like it or not, our souls live forever. God is saying to them, “OK, you don’t want to be with me forever, fine. I cast you into utter darkness so you won’t want to be with me forever.”
13. Verse 18: Therefore encourage each other with these words.
- a) When I think of encouraging someone, I think of saying something like, “It’s ok. You’ll feel better in the morning.” Let’s face it, we don’t encourage those in pain, or those grieving the loss of a loved one by saying, “It’s ok, Jesus is coming back for us!”
  - b) The point is we should be encouraging (or “comforting”) people with these words.
  - c) First of all, Paul is commanding us to do so. If you believe the bible is God inspired, then we should be doing what it command us to do.
  - d) If that is not enough motivation, then the other reason is that whatever pain we are going through, having the eternal perspective helps us to deal with that pain.
    - i) Whatever we are going through is temporary. It may last the length of our lifetime, it may hurt tremendously, but it is still not forever.
    - ii) Life has a beginning and life has an ending. The world was created and therefore, there is a “wrap up”. There was a literal Adam and Eve, and therefore, there is a last human. It does not go on forever. That applies to whatever difficult situation we are in as well as life on earth.
    - iii) I’ve always taught that, “If you can handle the first verse of the bible, you can handle the rest”. If you believe God created the heaven and the earth, than you can handle the fact that Jesus is real. Jesus was resurrected. We as believers will be resurrected as well. Those who have died will come back so they will not miss the greatest event in human history since the creation itself, which is Jesus return. That is good news. That is comforting.

- iv) If you have committed your life to Jesus, then you want to be with Him forever. That is our hope. This is why one of the last sentences of the bible is “Even so, come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20). It is the cry to “Come on Jesus, let’s get the show on the road. Not so I can skip my next mortgage payment ☺, it is to remind me that Your world is eternal and my world is temporary. We live to do your will in heaven and on earth.
- 14. I’m running real long here. I’m not sure I can add any prayer that is any better than that last paragraph. So I’ll just end this one with, “May the God of all Comfort encourage you with the fact that He is coming back. May we understand that fact and encourage others with the Good News of His eternal plan and salvation of our lives. Amen!