



# *Demonstrated*

The gospel makes a difference in the way believers love and live.

## 1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-12

The often-used statement of “do as I say and not as I do” is a weak excuse for poor behavior. The person making this statement knows what is wrong with his or her behavior and what changes are needed. Paul was confident this attitude would not be true of the believers in Thessalonica. Instead, they consistently demonstrated love to one another as they daily sought to obey God’s Word.

**How does the way a person lives impact your willingness to listen to that person?**

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# UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

## 1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-12

Chapter 4 marks a change in Paul's first Letter to the Thessalonians. He had been focused on encouraging the church as they faced persecution. He had also sought to affirm them in their continued gospel witness to those within their community and beyond.

Paul then began to write about their continual growth in Christ. He affirmed them for the behaviors they were demonstrating. He also mentioned behaviors that needed to be avoided. Paul's teaching on continued growth in Christ is set in the context of his teaching about the second coming of Christ. Apparently, either the Thessalonians simply had not understood the teachings concerning the resurrection and the timing of the second coming that Paul had given them, or some were teaching false doctrine regarding the second coming.

It is likely that false teachers had come into the city and created a disturbance by saying Christ had already returned and that the Thessalonian believers had not experienced the rapture. This was obviously not true, and Paul wanted to correct what was being taught. This is important to the context, because if Christ had already returned, then some within the congregation might not deem it necessary to continue in their sanctification.

Believers today do not need to be anxious when false teachers proclaim Christ has already returned. Logical evidence simply would not support this teaching. Today's church, however, might be all too quick to embrace the opposite extreme. Some might believe that it is going to be a long time before Christ returns; therefore, there is no need to concern ourselves with living in a state of readiness. We need to look at this passage in light of the reality that Christ could return at any moment, and we need to be demonstrating Christ in our daily lives.

**Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12. Circle the commands given by Paul. What would be the benefit to the church if they chose to live out these commands?**

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# EXPLORE THE TEXT

## PLEASING (1 THESS. 4:1-2)

<sup>1</sup> **Additionally then, brothers and sisters, we ask and encourage you in the Lord Jesus, that as you have received instruction from us on how you should live and please God — as you are doing — do this even more.** <sup>2</sup> **For you know what commands we gave you through the Lord Jesus.**

### VERSE 1

Paul was writing to his **brothers and sisters** in Christ. If we know Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior, then the commands laid out by Paul are directed at us as well.

Paul expressed a sense of urgency and passion in his appeal to the Thessalonians. He felt the need to **ask and encourage** the Thessalonians to heed his words. The Thessalonians had **received instruction** about the gospel from Paul and his coworkers during their stay in Thessalonica. Timothy had shared even more during his stay with them. But learning was not enough. They needed to apply this information if they wanted to **live and please God**. The Greek word translated **and** can also mean “in order to.” In other words, pleasing God becomes the proof of right living.

Head knowledge is never a substitute for action in the Christian life. Pleasing God should be our primary goal. Paul already knew about the Thessalonians’ faithfulness; he wanted them to apply **even more** of what Christ had for them. The Greek term translated *even more* emphasizes abundance. As young believers, they were only scratching the surface of their spiritual potential. By rejecting complacency, the Thessalonians could become even more like Jesus.

### VERSE 2

In this verse Paul again provided encouragement. He told them that they knew the **commands** he had given them. The word *commands* reminds us there is a difference between what the Bible says and personal opinions. The word **know** means more than having a head knowledge about something; it means to have an intimate and personal knowledge.

The believers knew what to do and had determined to live out the commands, no matter how difficult the circumstances might have been. Paul saw this in them and affirmed them to continue on that path.

Today's church would be wise to study the actions of the Thessalonica believers. We, too, have a great deal of knowledge concerning God's commands. Our knowledge needs to be at the heart level and not just the head level, so that it becomes a natural part of who we are.

**What are the biggest challenges believers face when it comes to living out their faith?**

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**HOLY** (1 THESS. 4:3-8)

<sup>3</sup> **For this is God's will, your sanctification: that you keep away from sexual immorality,** <sup>4</sup> **that each of you knows how to control his own body in holiness and honor,** <sup>5</sup> **not with lustful passions, like the Gentiles, who don't know God.** <sup>6</sup> **This means one must not transgress against and take advantage of a brother or sister in this manner, because the Lord is an avenger of all these offenses, as we also previously told and warned you.** <sup>7</sup> **For God has not called us to impurity but to live in holiness.** <sup>8</sup> **Consequently, anyone who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.**

**VERSES 3-5**

Many followers of Jesus struggle with discerning *God's will*. However verse 3 could not be clearer in stating His will for our lives: God desires our *sanctification*.

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**KEY DOCTRINE: Sanctification**

Sanctification is the experience, beginning in regeneration, by which the believer is set apart to God's purposes and is enabled to progress toward moral and spiritual maturity through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit dwelling in him. (See Gal. 2:20; Col. 3:12-14.)

God’s will includes more than the “big” decisions of life. While those are important, His will also involves the daily questions we face. The apostle implied that God’s will is not as difficult to discern as we might think. In most cases, living out God’s will simply involves embracing what honors Him—and rejecting what does not—each and every day.

**BIBLE SKILL:** *Use a Bible dictionary to learn more about sanctification.*

Use a Bible dictionary to dig deeper into sanctification. Find out how God sets His people apart and how sanctification fits into the progressive narrative of salvation and glorification. What makes sanctification so important to the Christian life? What is the relationship between regeneration and sanctification?

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Sanctification involves avoiding the desires of the flesh and pursuing personal holiness. Paul told the Thessalonians to keep away from **sexual immorality** and **lustful passions**. *Sexual immorality* is first and foremost a heart issue. Jesus said that “everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her *in his heart*” (Matt. 5:28, italics added). *Lustful passions* is a more broadly inclusive term as it includes things like greed, jealousy, and vengeance. We are to keep away from these things and actively pursue holiness.

Paul told the Thessalonian believers why they were to pursue sanctification. He said that in doing so they would not behave like those **who don’t know God**. We should not be shocked when lost people act like lost people. Those of us who do know Jesus are to be different. We are to walk with Christ.

## How do sexual sins bring dishonor to Christians and the cause of Christ?

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### VERSES 6-8

Growing in sanctification has a direct impact on how we love people. Paul told the Thessalonian believers that they must not **transgress** or hurt one another. The Greek word translated *transgress* is used only here in the New Testament and implies crossing a boundary that defines proper action. To **take advantage** involves cheating others and violating their trust. The presence of the words **must not** in verse 6 also showed that Paul was not leaving any doubt to what he said. Christians must never demean, manipulate, or exploit another person.

While this passage connects to sexual immorality, this is not the only possible meaning. Paul probably used immorality as one part of a broader spectrum of sin that threatened sanctification. When passions take control, concern for others often goes out the window, and selfishness overrides security. But Christians have a responsibility to protect others from mistreatment or abuse in every context.

Paul went on to tell why it was important to not do these things: **the Lord is an avenger of all these offenses**. It is important to remind ourselves that Paul was talking to those who knew Jesus personally. The writer of Hebrews wrote that “the Lord disciplines the one he loves” (12:6). If we choose to go against God’s commands and hurt our brothers and sisters in Christ, we may experience God’s discipline. He has clearly outlined the path of sanctification for us and will do what helps us walk this path. When we stray from it, He will allow us to experience undesirable results so that we can learn from our failures and not repeat our sinful actions. He does all of this because He is a loving Father who wants what is best for us.

It is important to note that Paul wasn’t addressing an occasional lapse. He was focusing on people who were determined to ignore God and do their own thing. Such a lifestyle stands in complete contradiction of God’s expectations and instructions.

**What are some ways God might lovingly discipline a believer who has stepped away from God's desired path?**

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## **DAILY** (1 THESS. 4:9-12)

<sup>9</sup> **About brotherly love: You don't need me to write you because you yourselves are taught by God to love one another.** <sup>10</sup> **In fact, you are doing this toward all the brothers and sisters in the entire region of Macedonia. But we encourage you, brothers and sisters, to do this even more,** <sup>11</sup> **to seek to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you,** <sup>12</sup> **so that you may behave properly in the presence of outsiders and not be dependent on anyone.**

### **VERSES 9-10a**

The process of sanctification changes believers from the inside out, and the way they love others is directly impacted. Paul's encouragement to this body of believers in Thessalonica once again serves as a model for us to follow.

The text reveals that the Thessalonians were expressing sacrificial love to ***all the brothers and sisters in the entire region of Macedonia***. Sacrificial love defined this church, so much so that their reputation for loving others had gone beyond the local community.

What would it look like if our churches today embraced this same mentality? How would the communities in which we reside change if our churches sacrificially loved those around us? We know from Paul's letter that the *entire region* was different. The same gospel that made a difference in that community can make a difference in our communities too.

### **VERSES 10b-12**

Paul concluded this section by encouraging the Thessalonian congregation to continue living out the gospel in their daily lives because those who did not know Jesus were watching. The apostle exhorted them to ***seek to lead a quiet life*** and ***to mind your***



**own business.** Seeking a quiet life does not mean that believers should pull back from society or from proclaiming the gospel. Instead, Paul encouraged a calm and balanced existence while maintaining a “loud” witness for Christ. He also exhorted the Thessalonians to avoid becoming busybodies (see 2 Thess. 3:11), sticking their noses into irrelevant issues. Instead, Paul urged the church members to focus on things that really matter.

***Paul encouraged a calm and balanced existence while maintaining a “loud” witness for Christ.***

The apostle exhorted the Thessalonians to pursue hard work as a part of their Christian witness, living a quiet life, and minding their own business. Paul told the church at Colossae, “whatever you do, do it from the heart, as something done for the Lord and not for people” (Col. 3:23).

Following these commands is vital because it is a Christian’s calling to ***behave properly in the presence of outsiders***. An outsider is one who does not know Jesus personally. Outsiders should be able to look at the life of a Christian and see a marked difference. Christians are to be different in how we love one another and live out our daily lives. This difference should be seen in that we are ***not dependent on anyone*** outside of Christ. This difference includes paying our bills and living within our means.

**How does a person’s work ethic and the way he or she conducts business serve as testimony for Christ?**

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# APPLY THE TEXT

- Salvation is lived out through seeking to please God.
- Sanctification includes striving toward holiness in our sexual lives.
- Non-believers are impacted by the faithful lives of believers.

**Discuss as a group ways your group has demonstrated self-sacrificing love. What self-sacrificing actions can your group take this week to show God’s love in your church and community?**

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**Reflect upon your growth in Christ. What habits does God want you to embrace and discard as you pursue Him daily?**

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**Look for people who may be watching your life. Ask God to give you the faith needed to live out this calling and the courage needed to share Jesus with those who may be watching your life.**

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## PRAYER NEEDS

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