**Lesson 5[[1]](#footnote-1)**

1 Thessalonians 4:1-11[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Verse 1**

Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more.

1. **Apparently, in his brief visit to Thessalonica, Paul had given them instructions as to how they should walk and please God. He states that they were currently walking as he’d instructed them, and now encourages them to excel.**

*What follows, therefore, will be exhortation, to be sure, but it is exhortation aimed at so few of them that he feels the need to ease his way into speaking to a decided minority in the context of the gathered people of God. Fee*

*In 1 Thessalonians 4:1–12 Paul has addressed himself to the two areas of sex/marriage and work. Both are creation gifts, having been instituted by God in Genesis 2. Both are still parts of everyday human experience. And Paul gives us here a Christian perspective from which to view them. [[3]](#footnote-3)*

* 1. ***How do we walk?*** *We walk in the same way we received Him.*

***Colossians 2:6-7***

*Therefore as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,****7****having been firmly rooted and now being built up in Him and established in your faith, just as you were instructed, and overflowing with gratitude.*

* + - **How did we receive Christ Jesus the Lord?** We received Him by grace through faith.

***Ephesians 2:8-9***

*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God;****9****not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

* 1. ***How do we please God?*** *We please God with our faith/belief in Jesus and our love for one another (a love that does good deeds).*

***Hebrews 11:6***

*And without* ***faith*** *it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.*

[***Hebrews 13:16***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Hebrews+13:16&version=NASB)

*And do not neglect* ***doing good and sharing****, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.*

**Verse 2**

For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

1. **What are His commandments?**

[***1 John 3:23***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1%20John+3:23&version=NASB)

*This is His commandment, that we****believe****in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, and****love one another****, just as He commanded us.*

**Verse 3**

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

1. **Scripture could not be clearer that it is God’s will for believers to abstain from sexual impurity. Paul refers to this as their “sanctification”.** 
   1. **It does not mean that by abstaining from sexual immorality one is MADE holy. We are holy, and it is the will of God that we live holy.**

*Passages like this should remind one that the motto sola fide (“by faith alone”), which has to do with how one is related to God, when it is not accompanied by “living” in keeping with that “faith,” becomes both non-Pauline and something of a mockery of the gospel he proclaimed. Fee*

*The first definition of “God’s will” is broadly stated as “holiness/sanctification.” This word group, with its decidedly moral overtones, belongs exclusively to Diaspora Judaism and early Christianity. Nowhere in known pagan literature is anyone concerned with holiness or holy living. Fee*

*One needs to be reminded that what the Jewish, and its offspring Christian, community regarded as immoral was generally not considered to be so among pagan Gentiles. Indeed, the seventh commandment would have been seen as absurd by “the pagans, who do not know God,” one of whose philosophers could say, as a matter of course, “Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children.” Fee*

* 1. **Sadly, some major theologians insist in their writings that believers are indeed still under the law in spite of truckloads of evidence to the contrary[[4]](#footnote-4). Below are some quotes which reveal their irrational rationale.**

*One of the main reasons for this is that our churches do not (on the whole) teach ethics. We are so busy preaching the gospel that we seldom teach the law.[[5]](#footnote-5) We are also afraid of being branded ‘legalists’. ‘We are not under the law’, we say piously, as if we were free to ignore and even disobey it[[6]](#footnote-6). Whereas what Paul meant is that our acceptance before God is not due to our observance of the law.[[7]](#footnote-7) But Christians are still under obligation to keep God’s moral law and commandments.[[8]](#footnote-8) [[9]](#footnote-9) Indeed, the purpose of Christ’s death was that ‘the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us’, and the purpose of the Holy Spirit’s dwelling in our heart is that he might write God’s law there.[[10]](#footnote-10) Stott*

*There is an urgent need for us, as pluralism and relativism spread world-wide, to follow Paul’s example and give people plain, practical, ethical teaching. Christian parents must teach God’s moral law to their children at home. Sunday school and day school teachers must ensure that their pupils know at least the Ten Commandments. Pastors must not be afraid to expound biblical standards of behaviour from the pulpit, so that the congregation grasps the relationship between the gospel and the law. And right from the beginning converts must be told that the new life in Christ is a holy life, a life bent on pleasing God by obeying his commandments.- Stott*

* 1. ***While it was decided at the Jerusalem Council that believers are not under the Law of Moses (including the 10 Commandments), it is God’s will for us to be sexually pure.***

***Acts 15:28-39***

*“For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay upon you no greater burden than these essentials:****29****that you abstain from things sacrificed to idols and from blood and from things strangled* ***and from fornication****; if you keep yourselves free from such things, you will do well. Farewell.”*

* 1. ***We are joined to the Lord and are one spirit with Him. We are His temple. When we commit sexual immorality, we take the spirit of God with us. God forbid.***

***1 Corinthians 6:15-20 NKJV***

*Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! 16 Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For “the two,” He says, “shall become one flesh.” 17****But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him****. 18****Flee sexual immorality****. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. 19 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.*

**Verse 4**

That each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,

1. **Our bodies and body parts are holy and should be used for honorable reasons, not sexual impurity. Each of us need to keep our bodies and body parts holy. We are a royal priesthood. Let us live as we are.**

***Romans 6:15-19***

*What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! 16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? 17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. 19 I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness.*

*Honor: of the honour which one has by reason of rank and state of office which he holds. Thayer*

*1 Peter 2:9-12*

*But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy. 11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, 12 having your conduct* ***honorable*** *among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.*

**Verse 5**

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

1. **Paul is really pressing the point here. We know God. We are not sinners. Our behavior should reflect that relationship.**

***1 Corinthians 6:9-11***

*Do you not know that the unrighteous[[11]](#footnote-11) will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites,****10****nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.****11****And such* ***were*** *some of you. But you* ***were******washed****, but you* ***were******sanctified (made holy)****, but you* ***were******justified (made righteous)*** *in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*

*“Knowledge of God” from Paul’s biblical point of view assumes automatically knowledge of what it means to be created in the Creator’s own image, originally designed, and now redeemed, to bear God’s likeness in a world that does not know God. Fee*

***Jeremiah 31:31-34***

*“But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel after those days,” declares the Lord, “I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.****34****They will not teach again, each man his neighbor and each man his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’* ***for they will all know Me****, from the least of them to the greatest of them,” declares the Lord, “for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.”*

**Verse 6**

and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you.

1. **The fact that Paul is continuing on this topic has caused some commentators to think he was referring to an actual situation that needed correction, but perhaps not as extreme as the one in 1 Corinthians in which the “situation” of someone calling himself a brother in Christ, but who was sleeping with his step-mother, was discussed openly and required the response of the entire Christian community there. Here Paul is still discussing sexual impurity. How might someone “defraud his brother” in this area?**
   1. ***The most logical interpretation here is that of not coveting a brother’s wife (and, of course, of a woman not coveting a sister’s husband), and especially not to be sexually immoral with someone else’s wife.***

*The best answer overall is that at least one case of sexual sin has been an adulterous situation with another man’s wife, or perhaps with a household slave. Fee*

* 1. ***This is strong language. He speaks of the Lord being the avenger of such things. Paul had warned them about this before.***

*In the present text, unique to the New Testament, Paul’s use of “avenger” occurs in a context in which the Lord Jesus himself will take the side of the wronged person. Fee*

*Those who are truly born again have a covenant with God that ensures them that He will never hold their sins against them. Man’s sins–past, present, and future–were placed on Jesus (see note 11 at* [*Romans 4:8*](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ro+4%3A8)*). So, what if Christians defraud their brethren? Does God judge them for that sin? God is for justice and against dishonesty. He is not against those who act dishonestly, especially if they are His children, but He will take a stand against their actions. Therefore, if believers defraud their brothers, God will correct that wrong and bring justice to light. He is not against the thief, but is for the victim. AWMI*

**Verses 7-8**

For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. 8 So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

1. **It hardly seems necessary to state. We haven’t been called for the purpose of impurity. We’ve been called for the purpose of holiness.**
2. **Paul makes it perfectly clear. Someone who rejects what he is saying is not rejecting him, Paul, but He is rejecting God who gives us the Holy Spirit.**

*With a very strong inferential conjunction, used only here in his letters, Paul concludes this “reminder/warning” by indicating what refusal to conform amounts to: rejection of the very God who “gives you” the Holy Spirit so as to enable obedience at this point. Fee*

*Thus the sequence is: to reject Paul’s teaching is to reject God himself, the very God whose ongoing gift of the Spirit is what enables obedience at this point. Fee*

**Verse 9**

Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;

1. **The love that the Thessalonians showed to the brothers was well-known. Paul didn’t need to write to them about this. God personally taught them and teaches us to love each other.**

***2 Corinthians 5:14***

*For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died;****15****and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.*

**Verse 10**

for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more,

1. **Paul is not talking about only the emotion of loving someone, but something that we “practice”. This certainly refers to helping other believers who are in need. He urges them to excel in love.**

*Thus in the end the emphasis on their loving “each other” lies not so much on their need to do so, but on the way they should do so. Fee*

**Verses 11-12**

and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, 12 so that you will behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.

1. **Strive to lead a quiet (non-meddlesome) life. Mind your own business. Work to support yourself. Paul and the others with him had commanded them to do this. He wasn’t referring to people who were unwillingly unemployed, but to those who refused to work and instead spent their time meddling in the affairs of others.**

*At issue is not an admonition to the whole community to do more of what they are already doing, but to some within the community who are not doing so at all. Indeed, they are doing the exact opposite, and in so doing they are taking advantage of the love of the rest. Fee*

*As their second ambition they were to mind their own business (11b). As Paul was to write in his second letter, because they were ‘not busy’ with their own business, they had become ‘busybodies’ (2 Thes. 3:11), meddling in other people’s matters. Thirdly, they were to work with their own hands, just as Paul had told them when he was with them (11c). It was the Greeks who despised manual work as degrading to free men and fit only for slaves.[[12]](#footnote-12)*

*Since the adjective “quiet” usually carries the connotation either of “not speaking” or of “being restful.” But Paul’s present concern is with their relationship to others, in the sense of not intruding on their lives by becoming something of a burden to them. Thus “quiet” in this case has to do with some of them not being disruptive regarding the lives of others, which is made clear by the two elaborations that follow. Fee*

*His intent is that they “busy themselves with their own work” so that they will not need to be dependent on others for sustenance. Fee*

*Work should never be despised by Christians. God ordained it as a part of life before the Fall - “And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (*[*Genesis 2:15*](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Ge+2%3A15)*). It is a responsibility given to man - “Six days shall work be done: but the seventh day is the sabbath of rest” (*[*Leviticus 23:3*](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Lev+23%3A3)*). It causes one to prosper - “Wealth gotten by vanity shall be diminished: but he that gathereth by labour shall increase” (*[*Proverbs 13:11*](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Pr+13%3A11)*) and “In all labour there is profit: but the talk of the lips tendeth only to penury [i.e., poverty]” (*[*Proverbs 14:23*](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Pr+14%3A23)*, brackets mine). It is a deterrent to crime - “Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth” (*[*Ephesians 4:28*](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=Eph+4%3A28)*). It is a command of the Lord Jesus - “Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread” (*[*2 Thessalonians 3:12*](http://www.crossbooks.com/verse.asp?ref=2Th+3%3A12)*). AWMI*

*They are identified in 5:14 as the ataktoi, and Paul says they are to be ‘warned’ rather than ‘helped’. In classical Greek the word ataktos was applied to an army in disarray, and to undisciplined soldiers who either broke rank instead of marching properly or were insubordinate. [[13]](#footnote-13)*

*The RSV and NIV therefore translate ataktos ‘idle’, although TDNT draws attention to its ‘attested breadth of meaning’ and states that outside Christianity, in relation to work, its emphasis is ‘not in the first instance … on sloth but rather on an irresponsible attitude to the obligation to work’.[[14]](#footnote-14)*

*Paul frames his appeal to them in terms of brotherly love. His argument is that to work for one’s own living is a mark of love, because then we do not need to depend on the support of fellow Christians, while deliberately to give up work is a breach of love because then we become parasites on the body of Christ.[[15]](#footnote-15)*

* 1. ***In fact, in other letters, Paul encourages the believers to work so that they will be able, not only to support themselves, but other believers.***

[***Ephesians 4:28***](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+4:28&version=NKJV)

*Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need.*

*The word for this brotherly love is philadelphia. In secular Greek and lxx it was used in relation to blood brothers and sisters, but in the New Testament it is applied to the fraternity of faith not blood.36[[16]](#footnote-16)*

*Becoming followers of Christ does not mean they can live in a way that is utterly inappropriate as far as “outsiders” are concerned. Fee*

*At issue is not the “needs” of the slackers themselves, but their quite unnecessary imposition on the generosity of others. Fee*

*The apostle had two particular reasons for this threefold appeal to the Thessalonians to be quiet, non-interfering and hard-working. The first was that their daily life might win the respect of outsiders (12a), and the second that they might not be dependent on anybody (12b; cf. 2:9), but rather enjoy ‘an honourable independence’ (jbp). [[17]](#footnote-17)*

*What Paul is condemning here is not unemployment as such (when people want work but cannot find it) but idleness (when work is available but people do not want it). [[18]](#footnote-18)*

*It is no mistake that Paul exhorted the Thessalonian believers to be holy in the context of speaking of Christ’s second coming. It’s a great motivation toward holiness to think about the return of Jesus. Everything physical that we become so occupied with will one day be dissolved, and only what was done for Christ will remain. AWMI*

1. Notes by C. D. and David Hildebrand [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Unless otherwise stated, all scripture is taken from The New American Standard Bible, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by [The Lockman Foundation](http://www.lockman.org/) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (p. 91). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See “Do You Know How Free from Law You Are?”, <http://graceandfaithministries.org/do-you-know-how-series-2/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This is hardly the case. MOST churches do preach law unfortunately. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This is a straw man argument. No one teaching grace teaches immorality. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Paul not only taught that our acceptance with God is NOT based on the law, but that we are clearly not under the law (Rom. 6:14). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Not so, again, please see “Do You Know How Free from Law You Are?” [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (p. 76). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. This is a pure misunderstanding. Christ fulfilled the law in us so that we could be free from the law. God nailed the requirements of the law, which were against us, to the tree with Jesus.  
    ***Colossians 2:13-14***

    *And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, 14having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.*

    *Furthermore, Stott assumes that the “law” God writes on our hearts is the Law of Moses, the Ten Commandments. Yet in 2 Corinthians 3:7-11) , Paul calls the ten commandments the ministry of death and of condemnation. Why would God write the ministry of death and condemnation on our hearts. Again, the law which God write on our hearts is love. God is love, and His commandment is to love (1 Jn. 3:23).* [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Sinners are “the unrighteous” as he goes on to explain. We believers are “the righteous”. The righteous live righteously. Sinners sin. It is wholly unacceptable that the righteous live like sinners. It is illogical. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (p. 90). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (p. 87). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (pp. 87–88). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (p. 88). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (pp. 88–89). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (p. 90). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Stott, J. R. W. (1994). *The message of Thessalonians: the gospel & the end of time* (p. 90). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)