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*God, through His Son Jesus, provides eternal grace for our failures and human limitations.*

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## 1 Thessalonians 4.

(2013)

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The Bible not only reveals God's eternal plans purposes and promises

But also shows how you can know God for yourself.

***Teach it, don't demand it.***

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## 1 Thessalonians 4.

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### Topics.

- The will of God for the Thessalonians.
- You have been taught by God to love one another.
- The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Sleeping in Christ.
- Caught up to meet the Lord in the air.
- The Judgement of the Lord.
- The hope of the Christian faith.

### The Previous Chapter.

In the previous chapter Paul talked of Timothy being sent to establish and exhort the Thessalonian brothers and sisters and of his desire to supply what was lacking in their faith. The chapter ended with Paul praying that the Lord Jesus Christ would establish their hearts blameless in holiness before God.

**NOTE:** for information concerning people, places and the meaning of words see Map Locations and People of the Bible, and Bible Dictionary on Website Menu.

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### The will of God for the Thessalonians.

1 Thess. 4:1-8 ----- <sup>1</sup>Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. <sup>2</sup>For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. <sup>3</sup>For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; <sup>4</sup>that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honour, <sup>5</sup>not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; <sup>6</sup>that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. <sup>7</sup>For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. <sup>8</sup>Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

**Sanctification:** means purification it refers to the state of purity and holiness (ceremonially or mentally) but also means respect, esteem, reverence, adore, honour and worship.

The will of God in this context is that the Thessalonians and by extension all who are in Christ would be sanctified, meaning they would control their own passions in such a manner that they do not allow the lusts of the flesh to control them, but instead they abstain from sexual immorality (adultery, orgies, child abuse, paedophilia and such like things) and do not transgress the law or do wrong to others especially their brothers and sisters in Christ.

Paul is teaching the Thessalonians the lifestyle those in the Kingdom of God should live for the following three reasons: -

1. So that they give those outside God's Kingdom no occasion to mock their faith.
2. So that their life honours God and the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.
3. Because it is the right and loving way to live

When a brother or sister in Christ aims to live their life in this manner they are not only a good testimony to the Christian faith, but are also a good reflection of the Lord Jesus Christ to those outside the Kingdom of God.

### **You yourselves have Been Taught by God to Love One Another**

1 Thess. 4:9-12 ----- <sup>9</sup>Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, <sup>10</sup>for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, <sup>11</sup>and to aspire to live quietly and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, <sup>12</sup>so that you may live properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

The Macedonian brothers and sisters in Christ are an absolute beautiful picture of how everyone in Christ should live their life. Paul says they showed love not only to their local church, but to all the faithful in the region meaning they showed compassion, mercy, kindness forgiveness and grace to all who belonged to the family of the Lord.

Paul encourages them to continue to increase in love even more by minding their own affairs (don't gossip) and working to support themselves (don't be lazy and bludge off others) and to live quietly, meaning calmly, gently and confidently in peace contrasted to causing contention, strife, quarrels and divisions. Brothers and sisters who love one another and live in this manner are not only a good testimony to Christ before the unsaved world, but bring honour to God.

**NOTE:** though God hates laziness to such an extent that the apostle Paul wrote, "We give you this command if anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat" (2 Thess. 3:10) it should be mentioned that this does not apply to a person who is out of work, but desire to work, they are deserving of support. Laziness is about attitude and only applies to those who are able to work, but choose not to.

**You have been taught by God to love one another** (v9) these words of Paul's can apply to everyone who is devoted to Christ, since he was the perfect mirror image of God's love on earth. All any of us have to do to be taught by God is look at the life Jesus lived and how he treated others and then imitate him it is in this sense that we are taught by God because God's Spirit of love dwelt in Christ without limitation. Jesus perfectly manifested God's compassion, mercy, kindness and forgiveness to all mankind not only in his life, but also in his death. God in his eternal understanding knows how easy it is for us to forget rules and regulations so in His eternal wisdom He not only predestined that salvation would be in His Son the Lord Jesus Christ, but also that he would also be the perfect example for us to follow.

### **The coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.**

1 Thess. 4:13-18 ----- <sup>13</sup>But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep that you may not grieve as others (non-believers) do who have no hope. <sup>14</sup>For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. <sup>15</sup>For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup>For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup>Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. <sup>18</sup>Therefore encourage one another with these words.

**Asleep:** from Strong's Concordance means to put to sleep, to slumber or to lie outstretched, figuratively it means to de cease and to be dead.

The words, "Those who have fallen asleep" (v13) refer to those who have died with faith in Christ. Scripture refers to them as being asleep in Christ because for them death is only temporary. From God's perspective they are simply taking a long nap until the Angel of the Lord sounds his trumpet and wakes them up.

**Sleeping in Christ:** when a person who belongs to Christ dies the Bible says that they have no knowledge and know nothing they are not only totally unaware of it but are also in a perfect state of peace. This state is called sleeping in Christ because they have no consciousness, so there is no time. It is very similar to someone in a deep sleep there is no awareness of time, when the person wakes they have no idea of whether four, seven or twelve hours or even if days have passed. Since there is no time in death the moment a Christian dies is the moment they are in the Kingdom of God and with the LORD, for them it is instant, even though many years may have passed in our mortal world bound by time.

David died thousands of years ago, but the moment he is resurrected will be like the moment he breathed his last breath, because for him there is no awareness of time, so it is for every Christian from death to Christ is instant.

**Death to the Christian is similar to a person in a coma:** a person in a coma has no consciousness of time, time does not exist to them, when they wake, they often think only a day or so has gone by, when in actual fact several years may have passed yet they think they are waking up, the same day, or the next day after they went to sleep. The person in the coma or in death is totally unaware of any time that they have spent in the coma or being dead

Death to those who belong to Christ is much the same as the person in the coma, the dead or those who are sleeping in Christ have absolutely no consciousness of time so for them, the moment they die, is the moment they are instantly with the Lord, even though many years may have passed during the time they have been dead (i.e., sleeping in Christ).

**It is the same principal as a person who goes into hospital for an operation:** the patient is given an anaesthetic and put to sleep, surgeons cut them up and do whatever they need to over the next few hours, yet the patient is totally unaware of it they wake up and have absolutely no idea of the time that has passed, therefore when Paul says, absent from the body, present with the Lord it is a true statement, even though a brother or sister in Christ may have spent years sleeping in Christ.

#### **NOTE.**

A second reason a Christians death is called sleeping in Christ is because their death is only temporary. Being asleep in Christ means everyone who dies in Christ is kept in the eternal mind and memory of God.

Jesus said: -

- Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them falls to the ground without the father knowing it and even the hairs of our head are all numbered therefore we should not fear death because we are of more value than many sparrows (Matthew 10:29-31).

The entire person (i.e., body, spirit, mind and consciousness) remains sleeping in Christ until the first resurrection (Rev. 20:5). Then, like those who were raised to mortal life after Jesus crucifixion and went to the holy city of God to testify (Matt. 27:50-53) all who are asleep in the Lord are woken up at the blast of the angels trumpet and raised from the dead to immortal life and everlasting glory.

**For further information see the title: -**

- Sleeping in the Grave and Sleeping in Christ.
- Death (What happens when we Die).

Both titles are in, Death (ON WEBSITE MENU).

Paul tells those who have faith in Christ "Not to grieve over their dead as non-believers do" (v13). Paul is teaching the Thessalonians and by extension every brother and sister in Christ to live in the mindset that their loved ones who have died are in fact only sleeping until the Lord returns in contrast to unbelievers who have no hope of being resurrected to eternal life and everlasting glory.

## **Caught up to meet the Lord in the Air.**

Notice the following statement "The living and the dead will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (v17) does not actually say that they will be caught up to heaven. Air; from Strong's Concordance comes from the Greek word 'aer' and means to breathe or blow (i.e., air as surrounding) there is no implication that it means heaven. Throughout the history of Christianity there has always been the following two main theories regarding the Lord Jesus Christ return.

1. That the dead and those who are alive will be caught up to heaven and forever be with the Lord in heaven. Most who believe this do not think they are going to be sitting on clouds playing harps with the angels, but rather that they will be in an eternal world of glory full of joy and peace and free of suffering and sorrow a place that by far supersedes any beauty and bliss our finite mortal and corrupted minds can comprehend.
- 2 The Lord will return in spectacular and awesome power and glory as, King of kings and Lord of lords (Rev. 19:11-16) to rule and reign from God's Holy city Jerusalem (on Mount Zion God's Holy Mountain) to establish God's Kingdom on earth during his glorious millennial reign. In the first resurrection (Rev. 20:4-5) the dead in Christ and the faithful, who are alive, will be gathered together to rule and reign as kings and priests with the Lord over those nations who are left outside the Holy City of God. Christ the King united with his people will not only bring peace to the Middle East, but establish God's Kingdom of steadfast love, faithfulness, righteousness, joy and peace throughout the world and the glory of God will cover the earth.

Jesus will do justice to the poor and oppressed, he will be a faithful and compassionate King forever. He will not allow anyone to strike terror in the earth or use lies and deception to enlarge their own wealth and power. The land will abundantly produce and even the deserts will flourish. The animals will not feed on each other and even the lamb will be able to lie down with the wolf and everyone will eat of their own hands because all that they plant will produce. All nations the LORD has made will come and worship before the Lord Jesus Christ. They will glorify God's Name, proclaiming the LORD is great and does wondrous things and that He alone is God.

The book of Revelation states: -

- Jesus Christ, the faithful witness who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood has made us kings and priests unto God and his Father is coming in glory and every eye shall see him, and they also who pierced him and all kindreds of the earth (Revelation 1:5-7).

And in Revelation chapter five we are told that: -

- Christ was slain, and by his blood he redeemed a people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation and made them a kingdom and priests to God and they shall reign on the earth (Revelation 5:9-10).

At the end of this glorious Kingdom age God descends to earth on a Great White Throne the sea, death and hades (the grave) give up the dead. They stand before God and are judged according to what is written in certain heavenly books according to what they have done. Death and those counted unworthy are cast into the Lake of Fire a symbol of eternal destruction (i.e., total extinction) (also called the, Second Death) (Rev. 20:11-15). Christ hands the Kingdom over to his heavenly Father and God is ALL in ALL and ETERNITY begins in all its fullness and majestic royal glory.

**For further information see titles: -**

- Kingdom of God (ON WEBSITE MENU).
- The Second or Great White Throne Judgment.

In, Resurrection (ON WEBSITE MENU).

**NOTE:** it should be mentioned that if the theory any faithful brother or sister holds regarding Christ return proves to be wrong they will not be cast away from the Lord when he returns. This is because the focus, joy and excitement of both groups, is the return of the Lord himself.

It is also interesting to notice that prior to Christ's death and resurrection the focus is the Kingdom of God whereas after his resurrection the focus of the New Testament writers is upon the truth that all who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ will be resurrected to eternal glory. They don't go into detail of where that glory will be other than saying we will have an immortal body, be full of joy and happiness and never again suffer or experience sorrow added this awe-inspiring wonder we will be with the Lord and for those who know his love this is enough.

Those who live with this promised and eternal hope of Christ's return as the anchor of their heart and mind will never be emotionally or mentally crushed and the hidden glory of this belief will radiate streams of calm and deep joy throughout their nervous system which will result in a feeling of happiness which will continue to increase as they grow in the love of the Lord. This no-doubt is one of the reasons Paul says, "Encourage one another with this hope" (v18) in contrast to trusting in success, prosperity, riches, material possessions or fame which are all temporary and will eventually fail.

### **The Judgement of the Lord.**

When we stand before the Lord no-one will be told to sit down and do a doctrinal exam to see if we are deserving of eternal life, rather we will be judged by God's two greatest commandments in the entire Bible which are: -

Jesus said: -

1. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment (Matt 22:37-38).
2. You shall love your neighbour as yourself (Matt 22:39).

It is not doctrine that we will be judged by, but these two commandments. The command, "Love your neighbour as yourself," means do not deliberately do harm to other humans. No sane person deliberately does things to inflict pain on themselves, loving others as you love yourself is not about feeling some warm and fuzzy emotion towards others, it is about not hurting others as you would not hurt yourself. The thing God hates the most is when we do harm to another person, physically, financially, sexually, verbally, mentally, emotionally or spiritually and the thing God loves the most is when we do good to others. It is interesting to notice that the major crime that God points out in Noah's time and one of the main reasons for the flood was because of all the violence in the land.

Leviticus chapter nineteen makes it clear that our neighbour is every other person, showing that the law requires justice to all people. The six commandments regarding mankind should be applied to everyone and we must abide by them ourselves. To love in the biblical sense is not an emotional attitude, but the keeping of these laws in relation to our neighbour. This is the general law of justice, beyond that; our conduct is to be regulated by relationship. We must render honour and justice to all people wherever due, but we have a particular responsibility to care for our families and those who belong to Christ.

- Micah wrote: "What the LORD requires of mankind is to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with their God" (Micah 6:5-10).
- Isaiah says: "The LORD loves justice, hates robbery and wrong doing" (Isaiah 61:8).
- Jeremiah said: "Those who know God practise steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth, because it is in these things that God delights" (Jer. 9:24).

The great prophets Micah, Isaiah and Jeremiah clearly show us that the people the LORD loves are not only those who acknowledge God, but who also uphold justice, do not lie, deceive or make promises they do not intend to keep, but speak the

truth, do what is right, show respect and give help to others when able and make choices that lead to peace. These are the things the LORD delights in and that bring His favour. The constant theme throughout Jesus famous Sermon on the Mount is doing what is right before God by seeking the way of peace in all situations. Jesus in this sermon calls Christians to treat people fairly and with respect, dignity, decency grace compassion, kindness, mercy and to be quick to forgive. Biblically a wicked person is primarily one who deliberately and consciously denies the existence of God and does harm to other humans, in contrast to this a good person is one who worships God and the Lord Jesus Christ and do all they can, to do what is right, and what is just (i.e., fair for all).

To love in the biblical sense is not an emotional attitude, but the keeping of these laws in relation to our neighbour. This is the general law of justice, beyond that; our conduct is to be regulated by relationship. We must render honour and justice to all people wherever due, but we have a particular responsibility to care for our families and those who belong to Christ.

**For further information on Jesus Famous Sermon see: -**

- Matthew 5 in Commentary New Testament (ON WEBSITE MENU).

It is not how correct or perfect our doctrines are (outside of the message of the cross and the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ) that we will be judged by, but our actions and behaviour toward others especially our brothers and sisters in Christ these are the things that will determine whether we will suffer loss or gain at the judgment seat of Christ.

Paul said: -

- No one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done and if their work survives they will receive a reward, but if anyone's work is burned up they will suffer loss, though they themselves will be saved, but only as through fire (1 Corinthians 3:11-15).

### **The Hope of the Christian Faith.**

The return of the Lord Jesus Christ is the hope and encouragement of all Christians. It should be noted that it is not called hope because it might or might not happen, but because it is unseen and yet future, but the hope itself is guaranteed because it is based on God's promise and He cannot lie.

Paul wrote: -

- In hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began (Titus 1:2).

Is there any other religion or faith that promises such an awe-inspiring and glorious eternal hope (this author has not found one).

**FINALLY:** concerning heaven and the Kingdom of God on earth it should be pointed out that at the end of Christ millennial reign God Himself descends to earth and is ALL in ALL. after this breathe taking event the Bible says very little so to make the question of heaven or the Kingdom of God on earth a matter of salvation is most likely being far too dogmatic since none of us can fully understand what eternal life will look like at the end of Christ's millennial reign as King of kings and Lord of lords or when God descends to earth and is ALL in ALL and eternity begins in all its majestic and royal fullness.

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End