



A copy of this lesson is posted in Adobe pdf format at <http://cranfordville.com> under [Bible Studies](#) in the Bible Study Aids section. A note about the [blue, underlined](#) material: These are hyperlinks that allow you to click them on and bring up the specified scripture passage automatically while working inside the pdf file connected to the internet. Just use your web browser's back arrow or the taskbar to return to the lesson material.

Quick Links to the Study

I. [Context](#)

- a. [Historical](#)
- b. [Literary](#)

II. [Message](#)

- a. [Walking in holiness, vv. 1-8](#)
- b. [Brotherly love, vv. 9-12](#)
- c. [Dying in Christ, vv. 13-18](#)

With the beginning of chapter four in First Thessalonians, a corner is turned in the orientation of the material of the letter Body. The first section of the Body, 2:1-3:13, focused mostly on autobiographical materials dealing with the initial ministry of Paul, Silas, and Timothy in establishing the believing community there and the subsequent events up to the writing of this first letter to the church. The second half of the letter Body, 4:1-5:22, stresses patterns of Christian behavior largely motivated by the expectation of the return of Christ to this earth. The first three of those exhortations on Christian living surface in chapter four of the letter, and are the subject of this study.

Additionally, as is true of the chapters two and three, the letter Proem, 1:2-10, anticipates this paraenetical material. In that prayer of thanksgiving, Paul noted the patterns of behavior typifying the Thessalonian believers: "And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it." (1:6-7); and "how you turned to God from idols, to serve a living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath that is coming." (1:9b-10). These broad themes that relate to Christian living, either directly or indirectly, will now be picked up for more detailed treatment in chapters four and five.

I Context

The background materials remain largely the same for this study, as they were for the previous studies. Thus the relevant materials will be repeated here from [the last study](#) in 2:17-3:13.

a. Historical

Regarding the **external history** of 1 Thessalonians, a summation of the previous study highlights the following. Paul spent several weeks establishing the Christian community in the Greek city of Thessalonica in the Roman province of Macedonia most likely sometime during AD 49 - 50. This ministry during the second missionary journey is described briefly in [Acts 17:1-9](#). The apostle was assisted by his associates Silas and Timothy; there may have been more individuals as a part of the traveling group of missionaries but these are the names we cannot be certain of. The so-called "we-section" of Acts,

which begins in [16:11](#), has traditionally been understood as suggesting that Luke joined the group at Philippi. When Paul left the city of Philippi for Thessalonica he left behind a Christian community largely comprised of women as its core leaders and meeting in the home of a prominent business woman named Lydia; and he left behind a ministry that had been characterized by chaotic turbulence with the Roman authorities including a period of time in jail ([Acts 16:11-40](#)).

The time spent in Thessalonica wasn't less chaotic, but the source of the opposition was different.

Because no Jewish synagogue existed in Philippi, he wasn't opposed by his fellow Jews. But in Thessalonica the leadership of the synagogue quickly became adamant in their opposition to these Christian missionaries, Paul in particular. This was evidently provoked by the conversion of numerous prominent Gentiles, including some women, who had been worshipping at the synagogue as God-fearers. They used "gunboat style" politically motivated distortion against Paul and the newly emerging Christian community in their charges against the missionaries before the Roman authorities. A Jason who had provided a home for the missionaries during their stay there, as well as a meeting place for the believing community, caught the brunt of the opposition when Paul and Silas couldn't be found for arrest.

Paul, Silas and Timothy were forced to hurriedly leave the town and were escorted by other believers several miles to the southwest to Berea. This place proved more receptive and a believing community quickly emerged with many prominent men and women being converted ([Acts 17:10-15](#)). But the opposition Jewish leadership in Thessalonica showed up to create a furor against Paul. This forced the apostle to hastily leave in order to save his life. Believers escorted Paul to Athens for his safety.

In this ancient Greek city Paul preached the gospel but without the success at Thessalonica and Berea ([Acts 17:16-34](#)). Paul spent time, in part, waiting for Timothy and Silas to arrive in Athens, since they had stayed behind at Berea when Paul had left there. How long Paul stayed in Athens is not clear. Luke's time marker to signal the apostle's move from Athens to Corinth is the simple "after this" (μετὰ ταῦτα) in Acts 18:1. Most likely Paul spent several months in the city before moving on to Corinth. But in Corinth he spent the next year and a half establishing the believing community there ([Acts 18:1-17](#)). The early phase of this ministry focused on preaching the gospel in the Jewish synagogue. But with the usual opposition by the synagogue leadership, Paul shifted his focus to the Gentiles and "set up shop" next door to the synagogue in the home of a God-fearer named Titius Justus who had converted to Christianity.

During this eighteen month ministry, Jewish op-

position led to charges being brought before the Roman authorities, in particular the proconsul Gallio (Jan. 25, 51 to Jan. 25, 52). Gallio not only dismissed the charges but had the synagogue spokesman Sosthenes publicly flogged for wasting his time with irrelevant legal charges. It's not clear from Luke's account at what point this incident happened during Paul's long stay in Corinth. The importance of the incident is that it allows for a precise dating link to our time calculation methods and thus provides a window into approximate dating of the events before and after.

When attempting to insert the material inside the letter about Timothy's travels, one has to assume a trip by Timothy from Macedonia to Athens where Paul was ([3:1-5](#)).

Then Paul's deep concern to learn how the Thessalonians were doing prompted Timothy to be sent back to Thessalonica. Timothy's stay in Athens must have covered enough time for Paul to have become concerned about the Thes-

salonians. Sometime after returning to Macedonia, he returned back to Paul who now was in Corinth. This time Silas accompanied him to Corinth according to Acts [18:5](#).

The variable in this perspective is Silas. Whether Silas stayed in Thessalonica / Berea while Timothy traveled to Athens, or he went with Timothy to Athens and then went back to Macedonia with him is unclear. The alternative is that Silas remained in Macedonia until both he and Timothy went south to Achaia after Paul had moved on from Athens to Corinth. The latter is more appealing to me personally, and would help explain the progress that the churches in Thessalonica and Berea were making during this time. All of this traveling back and forth took place over a period of several months, perhaps upwards of a year. Logistically, during such a period of time, these two trips by Timothy between Macedonia and Achaia would have been easy to make by ship during the first century.

Thus the good report that Timothy brought to Paul about the situation of the Thessalonians ([3:6-10](#)) prompts the writing of this first letter to the church. It also explains the very positive tone that permeates the entire letter.

Regarding **internal history** issues, the Thessalonians evidently were not struggling with major

Sequence of Events in 50-52 AD

1. **Paul goes from Berea to Athens.**
2. **Timothy goes to Athens, while Silas remains in Macedonia (Berea / Thessalonica)**
3. **Timothy returns to Macedonia from Athens**
4. **Timothy and Silas join Paul in Corinth**

moral and theological issues. Yet, some of the statements about holiness in living in 4:1-8 do suggest that they were having to make serious adjustments from their previous life-style as Gentiles -- those who came from this heritage rather than from the Jewish background -- in how to live properly and how to treat others properly. In the matter of the second coming of Christ, 4:13-18, there was confusion about the status of those who were not living when Christ returns. The source of this confusion is not clear, but someone had misinformed them about the nature of Christ's return and the situation of those who died in the Lord. Or else, they had not correctly understood Paul on this matter. Some of these background issues will be discussed more fully in the exegesis of the pericopes below.

b. Literary

The literary **genre** of 4:1-18 is [paraenesis](#) (παραίνεσις). That is, the material is comprised of admonition to specific patterns of moral and spiritual behavior. Three distinct pericopes are present: vv. 1-8, 9-12, 13-18. The first treats "walking through life" in holy living; the second, brotherly love; the third, grieving over those fellow believers who die before the Lord's return.

Admonitions to specified standards of conduct can be found in the ancient Greco-Roman culture. By the beginning of the Christian era, a major source was [Stoic philosophy](#). Paul's contemporary, [Seneca](#), was an influential moral philosopher in that world. Many of his ethical admonitions are very similar to those found in the [vice](#) and [virtue](#) lists contained in

Paul's writings. Yet, dramatic differences between Paul and Seneca are also present in both the parameters of and motivations for moral living.

As a literary form, paraenesis tends to be loosely structured and presented in random form rather than in carefully organized sequence. The structuring of the three areas of emphasis in chapter four represent a very different style of writing than is found in the previous two chapters. A comparison of the block diagrams for chapters two through [four](#) will dramatically illustrate that difference in visual format. In chapter four Paul's tendency is to set forth a basic admonition and follow it with a series of proofs which provide a justifying foundation for the admonition. A lot of emphasis is additionally given to the divine, rather than human, origin of this evidence.

The **literary setting** of 4:1-18 has been touched on earlier in this study. But further comments are needed. Chapter four begins the moral admonition section of chapters four and five of the letter Body. Chapter four contains the first three pericopes covering three separate and somewhat unrelated topics. Chapter five, verses 1-22, will continue a series of admonitions, again somewhat in random sequence. 5:1-11 is somewhat connected to 4:13-18, but from a very different angle. 5:12-22 is very randomly organized, following a traditional style in pulling such material together.

Paraenesis is admonition to certain ways of living. 4:1-5:22 is comprised of Christian paraenesis.

II. Message

As discussed above, the internal **literary structure** of 4:1-18 is very easy to determine. The opening discourse markers (Λοιπὸν οὖν, ἀδελφοί,) in 4:1 both signal a new direction, as well as link 4:1-5:22 back to 2:1-3:13 as a natural outgrowth of the previous discussion. Next, a classical Pauline discourse marker shifting the topic of discussion surfaces in 4:9 (Περὶ δὲ τῆς φιλαδελφίας). This is followed by another frequently used topic marker by Paul in 4:13 (Οὐ θέλομεν δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, περὶ τῶν κοιμωμένων). 5:1 will repeat the second discourse marker signalling another shift in topic (Περὶ δὲ τῶν χρόνων καὶ τῶν καιρῶν). These mark off three topics in chapter four: 1-8, 9-12, 13-18.

a. Walking in holiness, vv. 1-8

Greek NT

^{4.1} Λοιπὸν οὖν, ἀδελφοί, ἐρωτῶμεν ὑμᾶς καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ, ἵνα καθὼς παρελάβετε παρ' ἡμῶν τὸ πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς περιπατεῖν

NASB

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

NRSV

1 Finally, brothers and sisters, I urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please

NLT

1 Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to live in a way that pleases God, as we have taught you. You are

καὶ ἀρέσκειν θεῷ, καθὼς καὶ περιπατεῖτε, ἵνα περισσεύητε μᾶλλον.^{4.2} οἴδατε γὰρ τίνες παραγγελίας ἐδώκαμεν ὑμῖν διὰ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ.^{4.3} τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶν θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ ἁγιασμὸς ὑμῶν, ἀπέχεσθαι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς πορνείας,^{4.4} εἰδέναι ἕκαστον ὑμῶν τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σκεῦος κτᾶσθαι ἐν ἁγιασμῷ καὶ τιμῇ,^{4.5} μὴ ἐν πάθει ἐπιθυμίας καθάπερ καὶ τὰ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ εἰδότα τὸν θεόν,^{4.6} τὸ μὴ ὑπερβαίνειν καὶ πλεονεκτεῖν ἐν τῷ πράγματι τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ, διότι ἕκδικος κύριος περὶ πάντων τούτων, καθὼς καὶ προείπαμεν ὑμῖν καὶ διεμαρτυράμεθα.^{4.7} οὐ γὰρ ἐκάλεσεν ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς ἐπὶ ἀκαθαρσίᾳ ἀλλ' ἐν ἁγιασμῷ.^{4.8} τοιγαροῦν ὁ ἀθετῶν οὐκ ἄνθρωπον ἀθετεῖ ἀλλὰ τὸν θεὸν τὸν καὶ δίδόντα τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ τὸ ἅγιον εἰς ὑμᾶς.

Notes:

Verses 1-8 are structured around a couple of admonitions (v. 1) and a series of evidential proofs (v. 2-8) providing a foundation for the admonitions.

The two admonitions (*I ask you and exhort in the Lord Jesus...* [ἐρωτῶμεν ὑμᾶς καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ]) combine to provide one rather intense encouragement. Ancient Greek often used repetition as a way of intensifying one's expression. The first verb in Hellenistic Greek takes on the sense of "to urge someone to action", and will be repeated again in 5:12. The second verb has the sense of "to encourage" and will also be repeated in 4:10, 18; 5:11, 14. Thus this beginning part of the paraenetic section of 4:1-5:22 combines two of the major verbs used to exhort the Thessalonians to principles of Christian behavior. The tense of both these verbs, present tense in the Greek, underscore Paul's sense that these exhortations should be taken as ongoing re-

to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. 2 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 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. 7 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.

God (as, in fact, you are doing), you should do so more and more. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication; 4 that each one of you know how to control your own body in holiness and honor, 5 not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 that no one wrong or exploit a brother or sister in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, just as we have already told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. 7 For God did not call us to impurity but in holiness. 8 Therefore whoever rejects this rejects not human authority but God, who also gives his Holy Spirit to you.

doing this already, and we encourage you to do so more and more. 2 For you remember what we taught you in the name of the Lord Jesus. 3 God wants you to be holy, so you should keep clear of all sexual sin. 4 Then each of you will control your body and live in holiness and honor – 5 not in lustful passion as the pagans do, in their ignorance of God and his ways. 6 Never cheat a Christian brother in this matter by taking his wife, for the Lord avenges all such sins, as we have solemnly warned you before. 7 God has called us to be holy, not to live impure lives. 8 Anyone who refuses to live by these rules is not disobeying human rules but is rejecting God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

sponsibilities, not random occasional matters.

The addition of "in the Lord Jesus" gives the tone of divine authority to the admonitions. This is not one brother encouraging another brother. This is one brother speaking in behalf of the Lord Jesus to other brothers and sisters. Paul sees himself delivering Christ's instructions to the Thessalonians.

What is it that Paul wants them to do? The structure of the Greek text is very complex and no literal English translation of it is possible. Only a summarizing paraphrase can be made, which hopefully will capture the essence of what is being said in the original text. This is part of the reason the above three translations will differ significantly in their wording of this part of the text.

The instruction is couched in terms of an indirect command (the doublet ἵνα-clause in a substantival role). Thus a tone of something that really must



be done is given. The core demand is “that you should abound more and more” (ἵνα περισσεύητε μᾶλλον). The idea is one of moving forward into greater degrees of whatever is specified. The “more and more” (μᾶλλον) simply intensifies this. This had been a part of Paul’s prayer in 3:12 that the Thessalonians would “abound in love for one another...”

The content of what they needed to progress in is spelled out in a variety of ways in this verse. The heart of it is “how it is necessary for you to walk and to please God” (τὸ πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς περιπατεῖν καὶ ἀρέσκειν θεῷ). Walking is a metaphor for living life and puts emphasis on patterns of behavior. Thus Paul defines moral responsibility in broad categories at the beginning of this paraenetic section. A certain way of living and pleasing God are but flip side of the same coin for the believer.

Two qualifications of this core idea are defined in verse one. First, this is something that the missionaries Paul, Silas and Timothy had passed on to the Thessalonians as a part of the early Christian tradition. The verb “you received” (παρελάβετε) carries the formal tones of orally passing on a set of teachings from one group to another. Early Christians quickly developed a set of understandings about how to live the Christian life properly and pleasingly to God. These originated in the revelation given to the apostles, including Paul ([Gal. 1:15-17](#)), and were the heart of what new converts were taught. This instruction, Paul affirms here, had been communicated to the Thessalonians. During that initial ministry a large part of it had been passed on, and in the subsequent contacts with Timothy and Silas prior to the writing of this letter any missing gaps had been supplied by these two men. Plus this letter was intended to flesh out more implications of this teaching.

Secondly, this “walk” is something the Thessalonians were already doing: “just as you also are walking” (καθὼς καὶ περιπατεῖτε). Paul is not dealing with a group of religious “dead heads” who have little inclination to obey God. To the contrary, these are new believers who are anxious to do God’s bidding. Paul’s encouragement is simply for them to intensify this both in their commitment and in their day to day living.

This foundational set of admonitions is then fol-

lowed by a series of justifying statements (vv. 2-8) that provide a basis for the admonitions (causal γάρ sentences).

The first of these is in verse two: “For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.” This somewhat repeats a phrase in verse one, but serves mainly to set up the second lengthy causal sentence in verses 3-6. Here it is characterized as “what we commanded” (τίνας παραγγελίας). This teaching was authoritative and not optional for believers. Thus, Paul reemphasizes that this material had come to the Thessalonians from these missionaries in their previous contacts with the believing community there. More importantly, however, what they had given to the Thessalonians had come “through the Lord Jesus” (διὰ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ). It was not mere human perspective!

Additionally, the core declaration of the second causal sentence affirms that this teaching is “the will of God, your sanctification” (θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ ἁγιασμός ὑμῶν). Thus the instruction constituted God’s desire for His people to follow. Again, this somewhat repeats the “pleasing God” (ἀρέσκειν θεῷ) expression earlier. The qualifier “your sanctification” is the distinctively new thought. The idea of *hagiasmos* (ἁγιασμός) means the working out of the holiness established in conversion. By becoming a child of God in faith commitment to Christ a process of becoming holy in our living was begun. That process of “sanctification”, i.e., becoming holy, is defined by those patterns of behavior that God has chosen for his children to live by.

The heart of the intended behavior in this passage is described with three infinitives: **1) “to abstain from sexual immorality”** (ἀπέχεσθαι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς πορνείας); εἰδέναι ἕκαστον ὑμῶν τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σκευός κτᾶσθαι ἐν ἁγιασμῷ καὶ τιμῇ, ^{4.5} μὴ ἐν πάθει ἐπιθυμίας καθάπερ καὶ τὰ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ εἰδότα τὸν θεόν); **2) “to know how to control your own body in holiness and honor, not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God”** (εἰδέναι ἕκαστον ὑμῶν τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σκευός κτᾶσθαι ἐν ἁγιασμῷ καὶ τιμῇ, ^{4.5} μὴ ἐν πάθει ἐπιθυμίας καθάπερ καὶ τὰ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ εἰδότα τὸν θεόν); and **3) “to know not to wrong or exploit a brother or sister in this matter”** (τὸ μὴ ὑπερβαίνειν καὶ πλεονεκτεῖν ἐν τῷ πράγματι τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ). The second and third emphasis both stress knowing the right thing to do, while the first one emphasizes avoiding improper action.

To be sure, this doesn’t cover the entire field of Christian behavior. Rather, Paul zeroed in on these three aspects because he deemed them most ap-

plicable to the situation at Thessalonica.

In the ancient Greco-Roman world, sexual activity between men and women existed at a level that even Hugh Hefner of Playboy fame would characterize as subhuman. Prostitution was accepted and most married men regularly frequented the brothels. Homosexuality was universal and for the Greek culture was what defined male prowess much more than one's exploits with women. A high percentage of males in that world were bisexual in their sexual behavior.

Thessalonica as a major Greek city would have been steeped in that centuries old pattern of behavior just as Corinth was where Paul was when he wrote these words. To become a Christian absolutely meant an abandonment of this kind of lifestyle. Paul's heavy emphasis on this abandonment

as a direct command of God probably signals the importance of the Thessalonians realizing how critical this was in their new Christian commitment. G.L. Green in the *Pillar New Testament* commentary provides helpful documentation of this background:

The apostle joins together their relationship with God, inaugurated at their conversion (1.9–10; cf. 4.5b, “the heathen, who do not know God”), with morality in a way that was unknown in the religions that dominated the landscape in Thessalonica, except in the Jewish synagogue. Far from prohibiting sexual immorality, the cults of Dionysus, Aphrodite, Osiris and Isis, the Cabirus, and Priapas promoted sexual license.¹² The Gentile members of the Thessalonian church would have found it difficult to understand how their conversion to the living God necessitated abandoning those pleasures that their previous religious alliances had approved or ignored. Moreover, the social norms of the day permitted those practices that the Christian ethic prohibited. For example, it was socially acceptable for young men to have sexual relationships before marriage. Cicero, who spent some time in Thessalonica during the mid-first century B.C., argued in favor of this freedom for youths. He commented, “Let not pleasures always be forbidden.... let desire and pleasure triumph sometimes over reason,” but only if these pleasures do not do damage to oneself or others. He went on to argue that after hearing the voice of pleasure and concupiscence, the empty desires of youth, the young person could give himself to the interests of both domestic and public life.¹³

In Greek society, a man who owned female slaves could use his “human property” to satisfy his sexual

desires, while prostitutes were at the service of any man. Antipater of Thessalonica commented on the price of love with prostitutes, saying, “Homer said all things well, but best of all that Aphrodite is golden. For if you bring the cash, my friend, there is neither porter in your path nor dog chained at the door. But if you come otherwise, Cerberus himself is there.”¹⁴ Not only the single person but also the married man could avail himself of her services. A number of centuries earlier, Demosthenes expressed the social opinion regarding male sexuality that continued to prevail: “For this is what living with a woman as one's wife means—to have children by her and to introduce the sons to the members of the clan and of the deme, and to

betroth the daughters to husbands as one's own. Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful guardians of our households.”¹⁵ At times

a voice arose against sexual relationships outside of marriage, but in such cases the concern was only that illegitimate children might be sired in such liaisons who would then be the cause of shame.¹⁶ Plutarch's advice was that a wife should not be angry if her husband sought sexual pleasure with another woman.¹⁷

The practice that was roundly and universally condemned was having sexual relations with the wife of another man. However, violations of even this social norm were well known.

The second infinitive phrase, “to know...” has four objects, with the first set linked together as positive / negative (τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σκεῦος κτᾶσθαι ἐν ἀγιασμῶ καὶ τιμῇ,^{4,5} μὴ ἐν πάθει ἐπιθυμίας...) and the second set linked together as doubly stressed negative action toward a fellow Christian (τὸ μὴ ὑπερβαίνειν καὶ πλεονεκτεῖν ἐν τῷ πράγματι τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ).

Down through the centuries different understandings of the word *skeuos* have surfaced. This is reflected in the three translations; the NASB renders it “vessel” while the NRSV and NLT translate it as “body.” Frequently the idea of “vessel” has been understood as a reference to one's wife. Literally, the Greek word is very close to the English word “thing” in its meaning, and thus can take on any number of meanings in different contexts. The contextual signals in 4:4 point toward the idea of body more than anything else. The NRSV captures the sense of the expression very accurately with its translation: “each one of you know how to control your own body in holiness

Ancient Greco-Roman culture was far more immoral than contemporary American society. Yet, Christian standards of behavior were not lessened one inch to accommodate that immorality. Neither should they be in our world.

and honor.” At the center of proper sexual behavior is gaining mastery over the physical passions of the body. Gaining this control is the demand for the Christian. It is to be done in holiness and honor. Holy living (ἐν ἁγιασμῷ) is the outworking of God’s redemptive action in conversion. Honor (καὶ τιμῆ) demands respect for the sacredness of one’s own body as the temple of God.

Failure to gain such self-disciplined control and thus being ruled by raw passion reflects a lack of knowledge of God since it is to live as the pagans live.

The second set of infinitives narrow the focus down to improper sexual behavior with a married woman. Sexual activity with such a woman is defined as “transgressing and defrauding one’s brother” (τὸ μὴ ὑπερβαίνειν καὶ πλεονεκτεῖν ἐν τῷ πράγματι τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ). The breakdown of the family was generally viewed in negative terms in the ancient world, but in Jewish society it was high on the list of severe violations of God’s law. Christianity adopted that Jewish heritage and in some ways intensified it.

The reason for avoiding such activity is given in stern warning: “because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, just as we have already told you beforehand and solemnly warned you” (διότι ἔκδικος κύριος περὶ πάντων τούτων, καθὼς καὶ προείπαμεν ὑμῖν καὶ διεμαρτυράμεθα). With stern warning Paul marshals his “big guns” at this point, as C.A. Wanamaker (NIGTC) calls attention to:

The actual sanction that Paul employs is the most powerful one available to him. He threatens his readers with the fact that the Lord is an avenger or punisher (ἔκδικος κύριος) in all the matters just mentioned by him. The language is drawn from the OT (see esp. Ps. 94:1, which Paul may be quoting). But he probably has in mind here an apocalyptic image of the Lord Jesus as the coming avenger or agent of God’s wrath who will inflict severe punishment on wrongdoers who violate the demands of the gospel. This understanding fits with the sense of imminent expectation and the apocalyptic imagery found in 1 and 2 Thessalonians (cf. 1:10; 5:1–11; 2 Thes. 1:7–10; cf. Rom. 12:19; Col. 3:23–25).

This second causal sentence (vv. 2-6) leads naturally to the next two sets in verses 7-8. Each set is framed around a negative / positive structure.

First, “for God did not call us to impurity but in holiness” (οὐ γὰρ ἐκάλεσεν ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς ἐπὶ ἀκαθαρσίᾳ ἀλλ’ ἐν ἁγιασμῷ). Christian conversion is a divine calling -- this is the overwhelming use of the Greek verb καλέω (*kaleo*) for calling in the New Testament. Mt. 9:13 captures the essence of it: “For I have come

to call not the righteous but sinners.” God calls sinners to come live by His standards, which are dramatically different than those of the surrounding world. Paul was reminding the Thessalonians of this. Our calling is not to continue living in the impurity of sinfulness. Rather it is a calling to live in holiness (ἐν ἁγιασμῷ).

The second set of negative / positive causal statements come as a climax to this section (τοιγαροῦν): “whoever rejects this rejects not human authority but God, who also gives his Holy Spirit to you” (ὁ ἀθετῶν οὐκ ἄνθρωπον ἀθετεῖ ἀλλὰ τὸν θεὸν τὸν καὶ διδόντα τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ τὸ ἅγιον εἰς ὑμᾶς). Once more the divine authority of these instructions is stressed in terms of acceptance or rejection. To reject them is to reject the God who gave them through his apostles, not just to reject these human messengers. But even more significant is that to reject God is to reject the provision of the Holy Spirit whom God has provided to enable us to follow these instructions. The absolutely critical role of the Holy Spirit in leading and empowering the Christian in his/her walk through life was a major theme of the apostle Paul. It is most clearly and detailedly expressed in Gal. 5:16-26 with verse 16 as foundational: “So I advise you to live according to your new life in the Holy Spirit. Then you won’t be doing what your sinful nature craves” (NLT).

What is the connection of all this to us today? The distance between the “then” and “now” meanings of scripture are not very great in paraenetic material such as this. The same God who demanded holy living, especially at the point of sexual purity, to the

Ancient paraenesis typically has less distance between the “then” and “now” meanings than most other literary forms in the New Testament.

Thessalonians still expects and demands that same level of behavior today. To plead that we live in a more immoral world than they did and thus the level of the demands are less is sheer nonsense. And such reasoning reflects high level ignorance of that culture. A strong argument could be persuasively made that it was a far worse culture morally than contemporary American culture. To claim to be Christian and to continue living in sexual immorality after conversion is to live a lie that will be exposed on the day of judgment as eternal damnation for such an individual. That was Paul’s point to the Thessalonians; and it still holds true today.

b. Brotherly love, vv. 9-12

Greek NT

4.9 Περὶ δὲ τῆς φιλαδελφίας οὐ χρειαν ἔχετε γράφειν ὑμῖν, αὐτοὶ γὰρ ὑμεῖς θεοδίδακτοὶ ἐστε εἰς τὸ ἀγαπᾶν ἀλλήλους, 4.10 καὶ γὰρ ποιεῖτε αὐτὸ εἰς πάντα τοὺς ἀδελφούς· τοὺς ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ. παρακαλοῦμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, περισσεύειν μᾶλλον 4.11 καὶ φιλοτιμεῖσθαι ἡσυχάζειν καὶ πράσσειν τὰ ἴδια καὶ ἐργάζεσθαι ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσὶν ὑμῶν, καθὼς ὑμῖν παρηγγείλαμεν, 4.12 ἵνα περιπατῆτε εὐσχημόνως πρὸς τοὺς ἔξω καὶ μηδενὸς χρειαν ἔχητε.

NASB

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; 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, 11 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.

NRSV

9 Now concerning love of the brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another; 10 and indeed you do love all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more, 11 to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you, 12 so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and be dependent on no one.

NLT

9 But I don't need to write to you about the Christian love that should be shown among God's people. For God himself has taught you to love one another. 10 Indeed, your love is already strong toward all the Christians in all of Macedonia. Even so, dear brothers and sisters, we beg you to love them more and more. 11 This should be your ambition: to live a quiet life, minding your own business and working with your hands, just as we commanded you before. 12 As a result, people who are not Christians will respect the way you live, and you will not need to depend on others to meet your financial needs.

another inside the community of faith to the exclusion of love for humanity in general. Love for people (φιλανθρωπία [*philanthropia*], φιλάνθρωπος, -ον [*philanthropos*]) is stressed in the New Testament as well and grows off God's love for the world as expressed in John 3:16. But the love that one possesses for a fellow believer is distinct and transcends cultural, racial, linguistic and ethnic barriers.

The Thessalonians began showing such love for fellow Christians from

Notes:

The introduction of a new topic is clearly seen by the discourse marker, “concerning brotherly love” (Περὶ τῆς φιλαδελφίας) in the sentence pre-field. The transition role of the liturgical prayer in 3:11-13 is seen again with verses 9-12. In chiasmic inverse sequence (AB/B'A') the second petition in the prayer began with a petition to God to cause the Thessalonians to abound in love for one another (v. 12) (the A section). It was followed by a petition to God to establish the Thessalonians' hearts “blameless in holiness” (the B section). 4:1-8 picked up the B section as B' in elaboration. Now 4:9-12 completes the circle as A' with the theme on brotherly love.

The internal literary structure of these verses is somewhat like that of the preceding pericope in vv. 1-8, but with some variation. Two basic themes are found. First, Paul declares little need to talk about brotherly love (φιλαδελφίας; *philadelphia*) to the Thessalonians (vv. 9-10a). Then he admonishes them to “abound more and more” in it, and, secondly, to aspire to a Christian lifestyle that contributes to the community (vv. 11-12).

Philadelphia, i.e., “brotherly love,” stands as an important community trait, as is defined in the *Louwe-Nida Greek Lexicon*: “In the NT the terms φιλαδελφία and φιλάδελφος (25.35) have acquired highly specialized meanings which restrict the range of reference to fellow believers. In nonbiblical contexts these terms would refer to affection or love for persons belonging to a so-called ‘in-group,’ but in the NT this in-group is defined in terms of Christian faith.” The two words defining love for fellow Christians shows up several times in the New Testament: Rom. 12:10; 1 Thess. 4:9; Heb. 13:1; 2 Pet. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:22. This, besides numerous instances of the verb/pronoun combination, “to love one another.” The heart of the principle was first expressed by Jesus (Jhn. 13:35): “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

This should not be understood as exclusivity in the sense that we love one

the beginning. They gave the missionaries a gracious welcome (1:9a) and this kind heartedness toward other believers most likely played an important role in Paul's sense of closeness and endearment toward them (2:17-3:10). Thus Paul felt little need to admonish them on this subject.

The stated basis for this is found in the two causal sentences in vv. 9b-10a: "for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another; and indeed you do love all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia" (αὐτοὶ γὰρ ὑμεῖς θεοδίδακτοὶ ἐστε εἰς τὸ ἀγαπᾶν ἀλλήλους, καὶ γὰρ ποιεῖτε αὐτὸ εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἀδελφούς· τοὺς ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ).

Loving one another inside the community of faith and behaving in a way that adds credibility to the gospel to those on the outside of the believing community go hand in hand.

First, Paul declares that they were "God-taught" to love one another. This word, only used here in the entire NT, makes the point that the Thessalonians were so close to God that this teaching on brotherly love had come directly from

God himself, which probably picks up on a prophecy in [Isa. 54:13](#), "All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the prosperity of your children."

But not only were the Thessalonians understanding the nature and importance of brotherly love, they were practicing it to fellow believers in the Roman province of Macedonia. Being the capital city of the province at that point in time gave them opportunity to contact fellow believers throughout the rest of the province, which would have included at least Philippi and Berea, and probably other towns as well where Christian churches were springing up rapidly.

So what Paul did feel the need of doing was to repeat the foundational admonition in 4:2 that the Thessalonians "abound more and more" in brotherly love (παρακαλοῦμεν ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, περισσεύειν μᾶλλον).

But he also added another aspect to his admonition in verses 11-12: "to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you, so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and be dependent on no one" (καὶ φιλοτιμεῖσθαι ἡσυχάζειν καὶ πράσσειν τὰ ἴδια καὶ ἐργάζεσθαι ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσὶν ὑμῶν, καθὼς ὑμῖν παρηγγείλαμεν, ἵνα περιπατῆτε εὐσχημόνως πρὸς τοὺς ἔξω καὶ μηδενὸς χρείαν ἔχητε). The nature of this admonition is set

by the beginning infinitive, "to aspire to," "to make it your aim" etc. (φιλοτιμεῖσθαι). Used but three times in the NT (Rom. 15:20; 2 Cor. 5:9; 1 Thess. 4:11), the verb fits nicely here with its prefix *philo-* that plays off the same prefix for brotherly love (*philo-*adelpchia). In that instance we are to love brothers. Here we are to love placing high honor and value (τιμέομαι) on certain things.

Three items are to be highly valued: 1) to live quietly [ἡσυχάζειν], 2) to mind our own business [πράσσειν τὰ ἴδια]; 3) to work with our own hands [ἐργάζεσθαι ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσὶν ὑμῶν]. P. Blingworth and Eugene Nida (*Translator's Handbook*) provide a helpful summation from a Bible translator's view:

To live a quiet life translates a verb which Paul uses only in this text. A related noun is used in 2 Thess. 3.12. In other parts of the New Testament, it can mean "to be quiet," either in the sense of "to rest" (for example, by not working on the Sabbath, Luke 23.56), or in the sense of "not to speak" (e.g. Luke 14.4). The first meaning is explicitly excluded by the context, and the second does not seem appropriate here; therefore a third meaning must be looked for. *GeCL* translates "lead an orderly life," and this suits the context very well, though close parallels for this meaning are difficult to find. If one asks, "How would the Thessalonians have behaved if they had *not* followed Paul's instructions on this point?", the phrases immediately following (and later 2 Thess. 3.6-12) seem to suggest the answer, "They would have behaved in such a way as to make themselves justifiably unpopular within the community at large. The ideas of maintaining peace within the Christian community (or even within the individual life) are not excluded, but they are not in the foreground."

In many languages it is easier to describe a boisterous life than a quiet one. Therefore *to live a quiet life* may be best expressed in a negative manner, for example, "don't go around always making a lot of noise," in which "noise" would imply more than loud sound. It may be appropriate in some instances to translate this advice as "don't go around all the time arguing loudly."

To mind your own business is an idiom with a wide meaning, not being limited to financial or commercial activities. Paul means "go on fulfilling your normal responsibilities." In some languages *mind your own business* is translated quite idiomatically, for example, "sit in your own shade." Once again, in some languages this concept may be expressed in a negative form; for example, "do not meddle in other people's affairs," or "do not always tell other people how they should do things."

All the infinitives in this verse, *make*, *mind*, and *earn*, like *do* in verse 10, imply activity over a period of

time.

To earn your own living is literally “work with your hands,” as in most of the older translations and also in *NEB* and *TNT* (cf. *TOB SpCL*). *JB* and *FrCL* agree closely with *TEV*: *Brc* has “do an honest day’s work”; *Phps*, “do your work yourselves.” *DuCL* combines the specific reference to manual labor with the wider meaning: “by handwork provide for your own (life-) support.” Most of the Thessalonian Christians were no doubt manual workers, but the words “your hands” are not emphasized, and the phrase is defined more closely in the next verse by *you will not have to depend on anyone for what you need*. *TEV* is therefore not guilty of transculturating for a society in which manual workers are in a minority.

In some languages *to earn your own living* can be most effectively translated in a negative manner, for example, “don’t expect others to take care of you,” “don’t make others give you food,” or, idiomatically, “don’t rest on other people’s shoulders,” or “don’t lie in your hammock all day.”

This is not new information to the Thessalonians, since Paul qualified it as “just as we commanded you” which looks back to instruction given in the founding of the church earlier.

The objective of this pattern of living is twofold: (1) “so that you may ‘walk’ properly to the non-believing world around them” [ἵνα περιπατῆτε εὐσχημόνως πρὸς

τοὺς ἕξω]; and (2) “so that you may have need of nothing” [καὶ μηδενὸς χρείαν ἔχητε]. The credibility of the gospel was at stake by the way the Thessalonian believers lived. This was especially the case with the opposition from the Jewish synagogue which would jump on any indiscretion by the Christian community as evidence of the falseness of the Christian religion.

What’s the connection to us in our world? In Baptist life these days, this passage drives home a critical point: How much do we really love fellow Christians, and especially, fellow Baptists? The so-called Southern Baptist controversy over the past three decades has seriously eroded the credibility of our message to the outside world. I seriously doubt that Paul would be able to say to us what he said to the Thessalonians: “I have no need to write to you about brotherly love.” What a tragedy!

This problem is further compounded by the ungodly way we often tend to live our lives as boisterous, loudmouth church groups in defiance of Paul’s admonition in vv. 11-12. Paul isn’t forbidding Christians to take strong stands on important social issues. But he unequivocally demands that we do so as Christians following certain behavioral tones.

c. Dying in Christ, vv. 13-18

Greek NT

^{4.13} Οὐ θέλομεν δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, περὶ τῶν κοιμωμένων, ἵνα μὴ λυπῆσθε καθὼς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα. ^{4.14} εἰ γὰρ πιστεύομεν ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἀνέστη, οὕτως καὶ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς κοιμηθέντας διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἄξει σὺν αὐτῷ. ^{4.15} Τοῦτο γὰρ ὑμῖν λέγομεν ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου, ὅτι ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μὴ φθάσωμεν τοὺς κοιμηθέντας· ^{4.16} ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος ἐν κελεύσματι, ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου καὶ ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ,

NASB

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel

NRSV

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. 15 For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. 16 For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with

NLT

13 And now, brothers and sisters, I want you to know what will happen to the Christians who have died so you will not be full of sorrow like people who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus comes, God will bring back with Jesus all the Christians who have died. 15 I can tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not rise to meet him ahead of those who are in their graves. 16 For the Lord himself will come

καταβήσεται ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ
καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ
ἀναστήσονται πρῶτον,
^{4.17} ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες
οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα
σὺν αὐτοῖς
ἀρπαγησόμεθα ἐν
νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν
τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἀέρα· καὶ
οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ
ἔσόμεθα. ^{4.18} Ὡστε
παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους
ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις.

Notes:

This third segment of the moral admonition takes a different turn in its emphasis. Again, we encounter a typical Pauline discourse marker noting a shift in topic: “I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers...” Some commentators take this particular marker to suggest that Paul is here answering a question that had been posed to him from the Thessalonian Christians. Some likelihood of this is so.

The introductory sentence defines the topic in terms of grieving over the death of fellow believers before the second coming of Christ. This grieving is compared to “others do who have no hope.” That is, unbelievers grieving over the death of loved ones.

The background for this subject is not clear, but evidently involves some kind of teaching that asserted that only believers who were still alive at the return of Christ would share in the immediate blessings connected to Christ’s coming again. Other believers who had died prior to this would somehow either be left out of these blessings, or else would share in them only in a very limited manner. This idea was causing grief inside the Christian community. Thus Paul wrote these words in order to correct this erroneous understanding of the second coming of Christ.

He draws upon a reasonably well-defined early Christian understanding of the return of Christ, as F.F. Bruce (WBC) explains:

The writers’ reply to the question about the lot of the faithful departed seems to draw on a primitive Christian tradition of eschatological teaching which can be discerned also in the Olivet discourse of the synoptic Gospels, especially in its Matthaean form. This tradition speaks of the coming of the Lord as his Parousia (cf. Matt 24:3, 27, 37, 39; 1 Thess 2:19; 3:13; 5:23; 2 Thess 2:1, 8) and represents it as taking place from or in heaven (cf. 1:10; 2 Thess 1:7; Matt 24:30 par.), with clouds (cf. Matt 24:30 par.; Rev 1:7), accompanied by angels (cf. 3:13; 2 Thess 1:7; Matt 24:31 par.) and

and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the call of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, all the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. 17 Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and remain with him forever. 18 So comfort and encourage each other with these words.

announced by a trumpet blast (cf. Matt 24:31; 1 Cor 15:52). For other features, such as the manifestation of power and glory and the execution of judgment on the ungodly, see 5:3; 2 Thess 1:7–10; 2:8. The Thessalonian Christians had presumably been taught much of this tradition, but were not sure how their departed friends figured in the program.

The heart of Paul’s explanation again shows up in a couple of causal sentences in verses 14-17. These provide a basis for his concern that the believers cease grieving over dead fellow believers.

First, (v. 14) comes a conditional sentence (1st class structure in the Greek text) which asserts that God will bring back with Him those who have died in the Lord. This rests on the certainty of Jesus’ death and resurrection. Since Jesus died and rose again, believers will die and rise again. Because we believe this about Jesus, we can believe this about fellow believers who have died before Christ’s return.

Second, (vv. 15-17) comes a declaration straight from the Lord himself through his messenger Paul. The core assertion is simply that “we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died” (ὅτι ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μὴ φθάσωμεν τοὺς κοιμηθέντας). The key here is the meaning of the verb *phthasomen* (φθάσωμεν). G.L. Green (*Pillar NT commentaries*) explains it as:

The verb Paul uses (*phthasoen*) appears in other texts with the meaning of “to arrive” or “to come” (Matt. 12.28; Luke 11.20; Rom. 9.31; 2 Cor. 10.14; Phil. 3.16; 1 Thess. 2.16), while only here in the NT does it carry the sense of “precede.” However, this second sense is quite common in Greek literature,¹³⁸ while the meaning “to have advantage over” is not attested in

the sources. The point Paul makes is simply that the dead in Christ will be raised first (v. 16b), and then the living and the dead will be taken up to meet the Lord (v. 17).

The central point of their concern seemed to be the sequence of events in regard to believers meeting the Lord at his return. Paul's basic affirmation is that believers who are alive at that time will not meet the Lord ahead of those who have died before this event. Thus the dead in Christ will not be disadvantaged in some way.

This is grounded (causal ὅτι-clause) on a threefold depiction of events surrounding the Lord's return: 1) the Lord will descend from Heaven with the proper signaling; 2) then, the dead in Christ will be resurrected; 3) next, believers living at the time will be snatched up with the resurrected believers to meet the Lord in the air. The result: all believers will then be with the Lord forever.

The threefold signals of this event (cry of command [ἐν κελεύσματι]; voice of archangel [ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου]; trumpet of God [ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ]) are typical OT and subsequent Jewish indicators of divine action. The Lord descends from Heaven [αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος ... καταβήσεται ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ] to the space between Heaven and earth in the clouds [ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἀέρα]. The dead are resurrected out of the grave [οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστήσονται πρῶτον] and then rise up together with living Christians to this meeting place with the Lord [ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἀέρα]. Then the Lord takes both groups of believers back into Heaven to be with Him forever [καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ ἐσόμεθα]. Some will argue that this meeting simply continues down to earth with believers as a part of the royal entourage. But the more likely sense is that this entourage returns back into Heaven.

The picture painted by Paul here is quite simple, given the understanding of the world (Weltanschauung) of his time. The background for this picture provided graphic imagery for the initial readers to use in making sense of Paul's words. In Roman custom certain privileged citizens would be sent out to welcome a visiting dignitary, but instead of coming into the city, he takes them back to the royal palace

with him. The coming of the Son of Man beginning with [Daniel 7:13](#) in Jewish messianic expectation provides much of the background terminology as well.

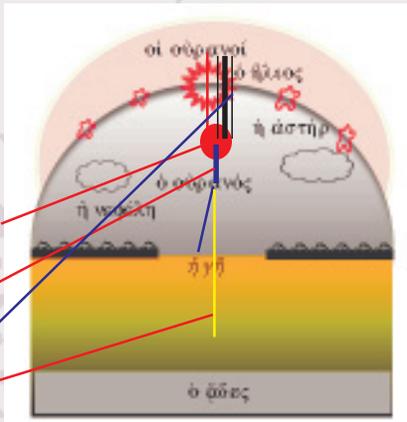
Thus Paul provides a basis (vv. 14-17) for his desire that the Thessalonians cease grieving over fellow believers who died before Christ's return.

The passage is brought to its conclusion, defined as result (ὥστε). What is the consequence of this understanding? The final admonition in verse 18 is that the Thessalonians use these words to comfort, encourage, and exhort one another. The verb *parakaleo* (παρακαλέω) used here contains all three of the English word elements. What Paul conveys to the Thessalonians is critical. The second coming of Christ should be a motivating excitement to believers, not a source of sorrow or grieving. Knowing what we do should encourage and motivate us to look forward to that event and to be prepared for its arrival.

To be sure, the subject of end times has occasioned high levels of controversy, anger and broken fellowship in modern Christianity. But, such misses the mark of what it was intended to accomplish in the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. Paul used the term "hope" to characterize the anticipation of Christ's return. Indeed, His coming is a source of enormous hope to His people. When that day arrives, we

who are genuine believers will be transformed into an existence that transcends the sinfulness and depravity of this corrupt world. We will be together as the family of God, and will enjoy God's presence directly without interruption for all eternity.

Such is indeed real hope and expectation. And it becomes an encouragement, yes, an exhortation, to live in readiness for it to take place. Then, we can shout with the Corinthian believers ([1 Cor. 16:22](#)), as Paul taught them years afterward with the Aramaic phrase, *Μαρانا θα (marana tha)*, "COME LORD COME!"



Greek NT

^{4.1} Λοιπὸν οὖν, ἀδελφοί, ἐρωτῶμεν ὑμᾶς καὶ παρακαλοῦμεν ἐν κυρίῳ Ἰησοῦ, ἵνα καθὼς παρελάβετε παρ' ἡμῶν τὸ πῶς δεῖ ὑμᾶς περιπατεῖν καὶ ἀρέσκειν θεῷ, καθὼς καὶ περιπατεῖτε, ἵνα περισσεύητε μᾶλλον. ^{4.2} οἴδατε γὰρ τίνας παραγγελίας ἐδώκαμεν ὑμῖν διὰ τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦ. ^{4.3} τοῦτο γὰρ ἐστὶν θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ, ὁ ἁγιασμὸς ὑμῶν, ἀπέχεσθαι ὑμᾶς ἀπὸ τῆς πορνείας, ^{4.4} εἰδέναι ἕκαστον ὑμῶν τὸ ἑαυτοῦ σκεῦος κτᾶσθαι ἐν ἁγιασμῷ καὶ τιμῇ, ^{4.5} μὴ ἐν πάθει ἐπιθυμίας καθάπερ καὶ τὰ ἔθνη τὰ μὴ εἰδόντα τὸν θεόν, ^{4.6} τὸ μὴ ὑπερβαίνειν καὶ πλεονεκτεῖν ἐν τῷ πράγματι τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ, διότι ἕκδικος κύριος περὶ πάντων τούτων, καθὼς καὶ προείπαμεν ὑμῖν καὶ διεμαρτυράμεθα. ^{4.7} οὐ γὰρ ἐκάλεσεν ἡμᾶς ὁ θεὸς ἐπὶ ἀκαθαρσία ἀλλ' ἐν ἁγιασμῷ. ^{4.8} τοιγαροῦν ὁ ἀθετῶν οὐκ ἄνθρωπον ἀθετεῖ ἀλλὰ τὸν θεὸν τὸν καὶ διδόντα τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ τὸ ἅγιον εἰς ὑμᾶς.

^{4.9} Περὶ δὲ τῆς φιλαδελφίας οὐ χρεῖαν ἔχετε γράφειν ὑμῖν, αὐτοὶ γὰρ ὑμεῖς θεοδίδακτοὶ ἐστε εἰς τὸ ἀγαπᾶν ἀλλήλους, ^{4.10} καὶ γὰρ ποιεῖτε αὐτὸ εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἀδελφοὺς τούτους ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ. παρακαλοῦμεν δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, περισσεύειν μᾶλλον ^{4.11} καὶ φιλοτιμεῖσθαι ἡσυχάζειν

NASB

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. 2 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 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. 7 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.

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; 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, 11 and to make it

NRSV

1 Finally, brothers and sisters, F12 we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God (as, in fact, you are doing), you should do so more and more. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication; 4 that each one of you know how to control your own body in holiness and honor, 5 not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 that no one wrong or exploit a brother or sister in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, just as we have already told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. 7 For God did not call us to impurity but in holiness. 8 Therefore whoever rejects this rejects not human authority but God, who also gives his Holy Spirit to you.

9 Now concerning love of the brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another; 10 and indeed you do love all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more, 11 to aspire to

NLT

1 Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to live in a way that pleases God, as we have taught you. You are doing this already, and we encourage you to do so more and more. 2 For you remember what we taught you in the name of the Lord Jesus. 3 God wants you to be holy, so you should keep clear of all sexual sin. 4 Then each of you will control your body and live in holiness and honor – 5 not in lustful passion as the pagans do, in their ignorance of God and his ways. 6 Never cheat a Christian brother in this matter by taking his wife, for the Lord avenges all such sins, as we have solemnly warned you before. 7 God has called us to be holy, not to live impure lives. 8 Anyone who refuses to live by these rules is not disobeying human rules but is rejecting God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

9 But I don't need to write to you about the Christian love that should be shown among God's people. For God himself has taught you to love one another. 10 Indeed, your love is already strong toward all the Christians in all of Macedonia. Even so, dear brothers and sisters, we beg you to love them more and more. 11 This

καὶ πράσσειν τὰ ἴδια καὶ ἐργάζεσθαι ταῖς ἰδίαις χερσὶν ὑμῶν, καθὼς ὑμῖν παρηγγείλαμεν, ^{4.12} ἵνα περιπατῆτε εὐσχημόνως πρὸς τοὺς ἔξω καὶ μηδενὸς χρεῖαν ἔχητε.

^{4.13} Οὐ θέλομεν δὲ ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν, ἀδελφοί, περὶ τῶν κοιμωμένων, ἵνα μὴ λυπησθε καθὼς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα. ^{4.14} εἰ γὰρ πιστεύομεν ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἀπέθανεν καὶ ἀνέστη, οὕτως καὶ ὁ θεὸς τοὺς κοιμηθέντας διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἄξει σὺν αὐτῷ.

^{4.15} Τοῦτο γὰρ ὑμῖν λέγομεν ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου, ὅτι ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ κυρίου οὐ μὴ φθάσωμεν τοὺς κοιμηθέντας. ^{4.16} ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος ἐν κελεύσματι, ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου καὶ ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ, καταβήσεται ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ καὶ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν Χριστῷ ἀναστήσονται πρῶτον, ^{4.17} ἔπειτα ἡμεῖς οἱ ζῶντες οἱ περιλειπόμενοι ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀρπαγησόμεθα ἐν νεφέλαις εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου εἰς ἀέρα· καὶ οὕτως πάντοτε σὺν κυρίῳ ἐσόμεθα. ^{4.18} Ὡστε παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις.

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.

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

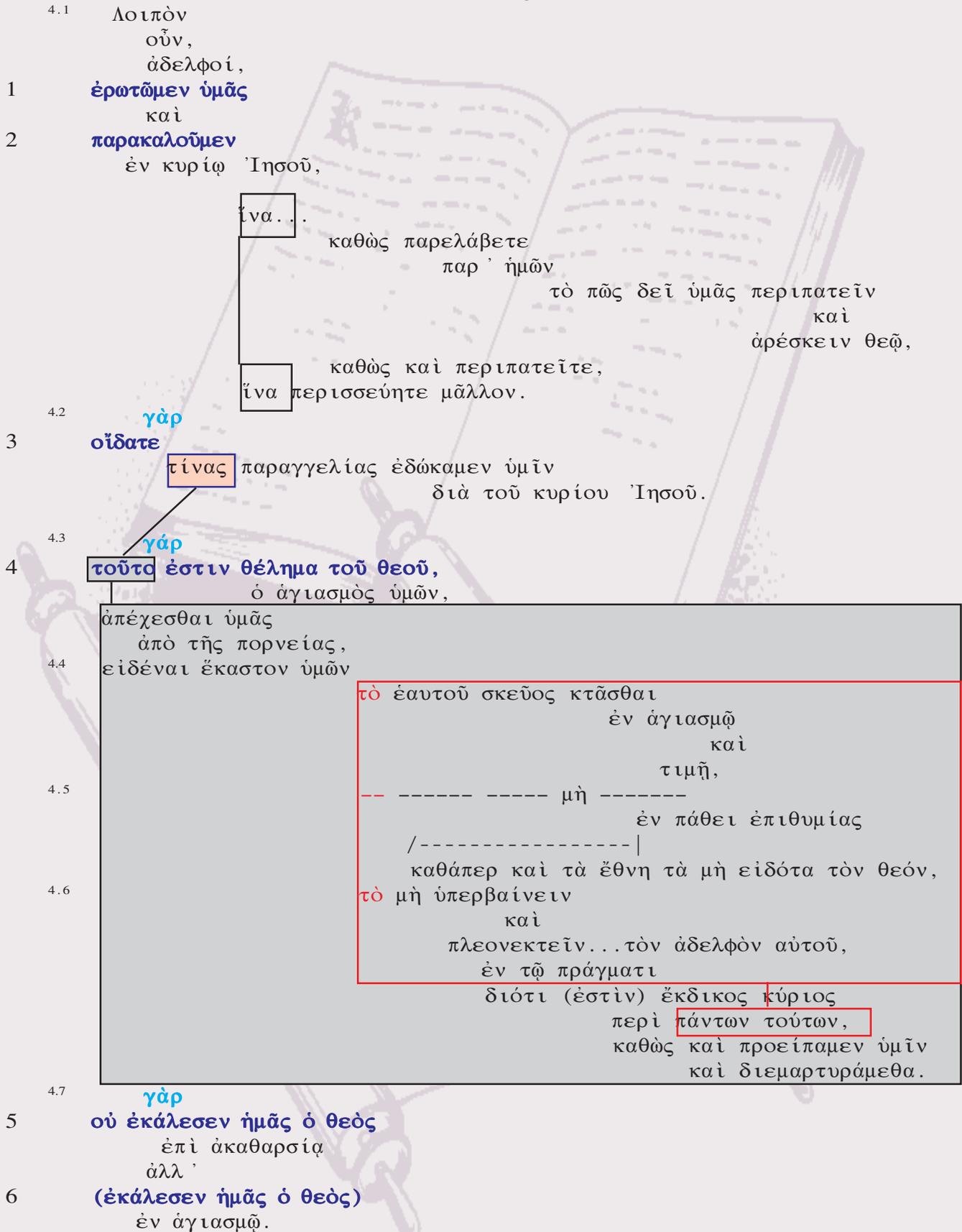
live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you, 12 so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and be dependent on no one.

13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died. 15 For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died. 16 For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever. 18 Therefore encourage one another with these words.

should be your ambition: to live a quiet life, minding your own business and working with your hands, just as we commanded you before. 12 As a result, people who are not Christians will respect the way you live, and you will not need to depend on others to meet your financial needs.

13 And now, brothers and sisters, I want you to know what will happen to the Christians who have died so you will not be full of sorrow like people who have no hope. 14 For since we believe that Jesus died and was raised to life again, we also believe that when Jesus comes, God will bring back with Jesus all the Christians who have died. 15 I can tell you this directly from the Lord: We who are still living when the Lord returns will not rise to meet him ahead of those who are in their graves. 16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the call of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, all the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. 17 Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and remain with him forever. 18 So comfort and encourage each other with these words.

Greek NT Diagram



4.8 τοιγαροῦν
7 **ὁ ἀθετῶν οὐκ ἄνθρωπον ἀθετεῖ**
ἀλλὰ
8 **(ἀθετεῖ) τὸν θεόν**
τὸν καὶ διδόντα τὸ πνεῦμα αὐτοῦ τὸ ἅγιον
εἰς ὑμᾶς.

4.9 δὲ
9 **οὐ χρεῖαν ἔχετε** **Περὶ** τῆς φιλαδελφίας
γράφειν ὑμῖν,
γὰρ
10 **αὐτοὶ ὑμεῖς θεοδίδακτοὶ ἐστε**
εἰς τὸ ἀγαπᾶν ἀλλήλους,
4.10 γὰρ
καὶ
11 **ποιεῖτε αὐτὸ**
εἰς πάντας τοὺς ἀδελφούς·
τοὺς ἐν ὅλῃ τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ.

δὲ
12 **παρακαλοῦμεν ὑμᾶς,**
ἀδελφοί,
περισσεύειν
μᾶλλον
4.11 καὶ
φιλοτιμεῖσθαι
ἡσυχάζειν
καὶ
πράσσειν τὰ ἴδια
καὶ
ἐργάζεσθαι ταῖς ἰδίαῖς χερσὶν ὑμῶν,
καθὼς ὑμῖν παρηγγείλαμεν,
4.12 ἵνα περιπατῆτε
εὐσχημόνως
πρὸς τοὺς ἔξω
καὶ
--- μηδενὸς χρεῖαν ἔχητε.

4.13 δὲ
13 **οὐ θέλομεν ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν,**
ἀδελφοί,
περὶ τῶν κοιμωμένων,
ἵνα μὴ λυπῆσθε
καθὼς καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ
οἱ μὴ ἔχοντες ἐλπίδα.

4.14

γάρ

εἰ πιστεύομεν

ὅτι Ἰησοῦς ἀπέθανεν
καὶ
ἀνέστη,

14

ὁ θεὸς τοὺς κοιμηθέντας... ἄξει

οὕτως
καὶ
διὰ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ
σὺν αὐτῷ.

4.15

γάρ

15

Τοῦτο ὑμῖν λέγομεν

ἐν λόγῳ κυρίου,
ὅτι ἡμεῖς... οὐ μὴ φθάσωμεν τοὺς κοιμηθέντας·
οἱ ζῶντες
οἱ περιλειπόμενοι
εἰς τὴν παρουσίαν τοῦ κυρίου

4.16

ἐν κελεύσματι,
ἐν φωνῇ ἀρχαγγέλου
καὶ
ἐν σάλπιγγι θεοῦ,
ὅτι αὐτὸς ὁ κύριος... καταβήσεται
ἀπ' οὐρανοῦ

καὶ

ἐν Χριστῷ
οἱ νεκροὶ... ἀναστήσονται
πρῶτον,

4.17

ἔπειτα

ἡμεῖς... ἅμα σὺν αὐτοῖς
ἀρπαγησόμεθα
οἱ ζῶντες
οἱ περιλειπόμενοι
ἐν νεφέλαις
εἰς ἀπάντησιν τοῦ κυρίου
εἰς ἀέρα·

καὶ
οὕτως
πάντοτε
σὺν κυρίῳ

16

ἔσόμεθα.

4.18

17

Ὡστε
παρακαλεῖτε ἀλλήλους

ἐν τοῖς λόγοις τούτοις.

Antecedent is 4:13-17

Semantic Diagram

		οὖν, ἀδελφοί 4:1						
I	A	1	1	Pres	Act	Ind	1 P (ἡμεῖς)	
		2	2	Pres	Act	Ind	1 P (ἡμεῖς)	
	B	1	3	Perf	Act	Ind	2 P (ὑμεῖς)	
		2	4	Pres	---	Ind	3 S τοῦτο	
	II	B	a	5	1 Aor	Act	Ind	3 S ὁ θεός
			i	6	(1 Aor	Act	Ind	3 S ὁ θεός)
		3	b	7	Pres	Act	Ind	3 S ὁ ἀθετῶν...
			ii	8	(Pres	Act	Ind	3 S ὁ ἀθετῶν...)
		δὲ 4:9 (Περὶ τῆς φιλαδελφίας)						
II	A	1	9	Pres	Act	Ind	2 P (ὑμεῖς)	
	B	a	10	Pres	---	Ind	2 P αὐτοὶ ὑμεῖς)	
		2	11	Pres	Act	Ind	2 P (ὑμεῖς)	
	B	12	Pres	Act	Ind	1 P (ἡμεῖς)		
		δὲ 4:13 (οὐ θέλομεν ὑμᾶς ἀγνοεῖν)						
III	A	1	13	Pres	Act	Ind	1 P (ἡμεῖς)	
		a	14	Fut	Act	Ind	3 S ὁ θεός	
	B	2	15	Pres	Act	Ind	1 P (ἡμεῖς)	
		i	16	Fut	---	Ind	1 P (ἡμεῖς)	
	B	17	Pres	Act	Imp	2 P (ὑμεῖς)		

Exegetical Outline

- I. (1-8) The Thessalonians were encouraged to continue living a life of holiness.
 - A. (1-2) Paul exhorted the Thessalonians
 - 1. (1) Paul urged the Thessalonians to abounding growth in their walk
 - 2. (2) Paul admonished in the Lord the Thessalonians to abounding growth in their walk.
 - B. (3-8) These teachings on holy living have a divine rather than human basis.
 - 1. (3) Paul reminded the Thessalonians of how they had received certain traditions
 - 2. (4) God's will includes certain holy behavior patterns
 - 3. (5-8) Two sets of reasons underscore the divine origin of these teachings
 - a. (5-6) God's calling comes for a life of holiness
 - i. (5) God did not call the Thessalonians in an atmosphere of uncleanness.
 - ii. (6) Rather, God called them in holiness.
 - b. (7-8) These teachings come from God rather than man.
 - i. (7) Anyone rejecting these teaching doesn't reject mere human teachings
 - ii. (8) Rather he rejects the God who gave his Holy Spirit to the Thessalonians
- II. (9-12) Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to flourish in a distinctively Christian way of living.
 - A. (9-11) Paul felt no need to admonish the Thessalonians about brotherly love.
 - 1. (9) Paul expressed confidence in the Thessalonians understanding of brotherly love.
 - 2. (10-11) His confidence was grounded on two solid foundations.
 - a. (10) He believed they were "God taught" on this subject.
 - b. (11) They were practicing brotherly love toward believers in all of Macedonia.
 - B. (12) He admonished them to live a distinctively Christian lifestyle in the midst of a pagan world.
- III. (13-17) Paul affirmed to the Thessalonians how believers should approach the Second Coming.
 - A. (13-16) Paul explained how the Second Coming should remove any concern over fellow believers who have died in the Lord.
 - 1. (13) Paul informed the Thessalonians that no grieving about dead loved ones was necessary
 - 2. (14-16) No grieving is based on the nature of the Second Coming of Christ.
 - a. (14) God will bring dead believers with Him at the Second Coming of Christ.
 - b. (15-16) The Second Coming of Christ means all believers will share in God's blessings.
 - i. (15) God's certain word is that living believers will not have precedence over those who have died before the Second Coming.
 - ii. (16) We will all be with the Lord always.
 - B. (17) Paul encouraged the Thessalonians to use these words to comfort one another.