

1 Thessalonians 4
A Continuation of the Study of the Formation
Of the Church

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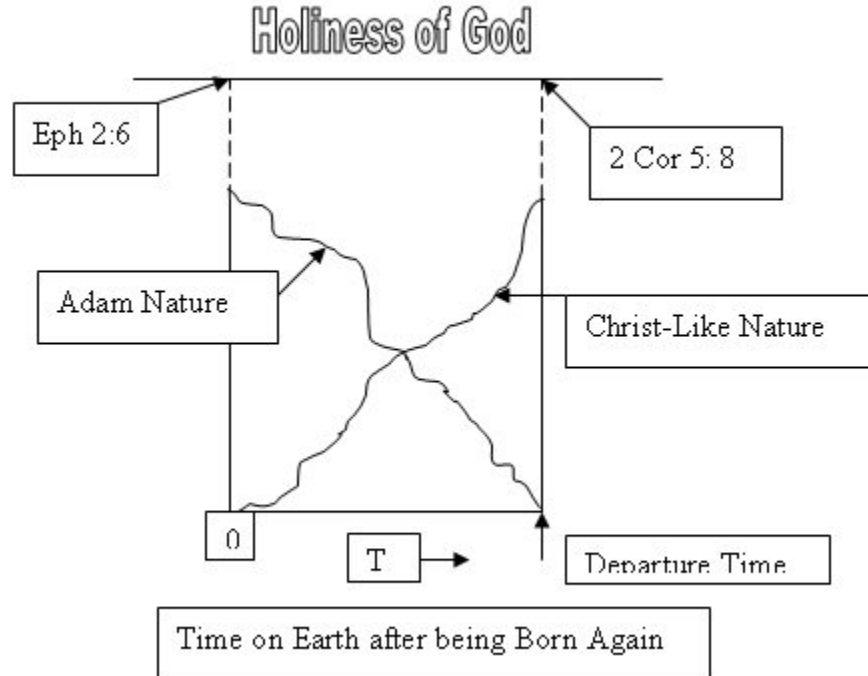
By

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1 Thes 4:1 “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 may excel still more.”

1 Thes 4:2 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

Paul does not give up or lighten up on these wonderful people and neither should we!! He uses the word “finally” to end the first half of the letter. His “finally” involves a lot for these people. He wants them to walk and please God in even more ways. They already are examples to the entire region! Paul is not just requesting that they grow more; he is exhorting them in the name of Jesus! It is important for all of us to understand that we never quit the sanctification stage of our existence until our physical death or the second coming of our Lord. Sometimes it is tempting to “rest on our laurels” but that is never an option for the child of God. I want to include here my drawing on the sanctification process in our life where the dotted lines indicate an infinite distance.



We see from the above that we will always be involved in the sanctification process as our Christ-Like nature increases and our Adam Nature decreases. We also see that the process is not smooth as we will continue to sin, the Holy Spirit convicts us of that sin, we then repent, and continue on our upward path. We will be exhorted by our teachers to

excel even more in our walk as we also continue to want to please God more every day. We also have no excuse as we know the commandments of Jesus that have been given to us by our pastors, teachers, and friends. We all also have the command to disciple others in our walk as they also will continue to excel.

**1 Thes 4:3 “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality;
1 Thes 4:4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,
1 Thes 4:5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God;
1 Thes 4:6 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.”**

The graph above represents sanctification and Paul then expands on some of the details of the sanctification process. These steps involve

1.) Abstaining from sexual immorality.

He particularly picks sexual immorality because such was rampant in his time as it is now also. We see ads for cars and other items on TV that involve people in a manner formally only seen in pornographic magazines! We are urged on TV to express our sexuality without regard for the morality of the 1950's. Our society is full of such evil. Individually we must each refuse to participate in any manner with the assault. We all know the destructive path of sin: we begin to listen and so walk to listen to immorality; we then stand still so we can participate better and finally we sit as total participators:

Psalms 1:1 “How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!”

2.) Knowing how to possess ourselves in sanctification and honor.

To possess ourselves is an interesting play on words! We are a new being and we need to make that new life our full life in all that we do, say, and think. As stated above in my diagram, we begin to better possess our new life when we totally participate with the Holy Spirit in our sanctification.

3.) Not continuing in any sort of lustful passion.

Yielding to our lust in any situation leads down a very dangerous path:

James 1:14 “But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust.

James 1:15 Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death.”

Romans 13:14 “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.”

4.) Not transgressing or defrauding our fellow Christians.

We should be honest with all people but we have a special obligation to our brothers and sisters in Christ. The judgment time discussed by our Lord (Matt 25: 21-46) defines the people involved as fellow Christians:

Matt 25:40 "And the King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, even the least of them, you did it to Me.'"

1 Thes 4:7 For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.

1 Thes 4:8 Consequently, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

Again Paul stresses the purpose of our calling as we are called to be holy.

1 Peter 1:16 "because it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy.""

My diagram above again speaks to this process of sanctification. God does not apply the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus to our account just so that we can be right before Him in heaven. We are called to apply the sanctification process to ourselves here and now so that we can bring glory to His name now. If anyone thinks that he can reject this process and just participate in the evil of the world because he now has "fire insurance", he is fooling himself and rejecting God who has given His Holy Spirit to those who are really His children. The person who rejects God has never been saved.

1 John 2:19 "They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us."

1 Thes 4:9 Now as to the love of the brethren, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another;

1 Thes 4:10 for indeed you do practice it toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, to excel still more,

1 Thes 4:11 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;

1 Thes 4:12 so that you may behave properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.

The above is such wonderful advice for everyone! God makes the importance of our love for each other very clear in the following and in other verses of His Word:

John 13:34 "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another.

John 13:35 By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 15:12 "This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you."

John 15:17 "This I command you, that you love one another.

Romans 12:10 "Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;"

People often put themselves in need by their wasteful behavior in running up large charge card bills, buying items that they do not really need, buying a larger house than their revenue affords just so that they can revel in their house location, and many other such items that I am sure you can add to this list without too much of a brain strain! When we become burdened by our bad decisions we can easily become prey to those outsiders who look for people to further enslave by onerous interest rates and other evil methods. Our ambitions can lead us into terrible distress:

2Cor 5:9 "Therefore also we have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him."

Phil 1:17 "the former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, rather than from pure motives, thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment."

James 3:14 "But if you have bitter jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth."

James 3:16 "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing."

People would avoid so much trouble in this world if they would all just obey 1Thess 4:11 and 2 Cor 5:9. As Paul does, I also urge everyone who reads this to please obey these simple commands and do not be carried away by selfish ambition and pride.

1 Thes 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve, as do the rest who have no hope.

1 Thes 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus.

1 Thes 4:15 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, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep.

Paul uses the word "asleep" to mean that those people are physically dead. In the non-Christian world death indeed is the great enemy for those people have no hope of any kind of life after death. However in the Christian world there is hope for the life after death. Here Paul assures the Christian audience that those who died after being born again will be physically raised again and their souls will return with Jesus for His second coming. He also assures the readers that if Jesus comes back before we die that first His children who died earlier will physically arise and then we who have been born again will be also joined with Jesus in our glorified body. The rest of the world has no hope for anything of such wonder to happen to them. Those who die without being born again into the kingdom of God will face an eternal life of continuous wrath from God as payment for their sins before Him.

John 3:36 “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

We will discuss the roles the soul and the body play in life after physical death later. We do need to be clear that when any Christian dies he is immediately with the Lord:

2Cor 5:8 “we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.”

We also need to be clear about what is meant by being with the Lord in regard to our physical body and our soul. As we all painfully know from experiencing many funerals, the body stays here when someone ceases to function biologically (physical death). But the above verse tells us that we are absent from the body when we are physically dead so our soul is immediately at home with the Lord. That indeed is wonderful news for the children of God!

1 Thes 4:16 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 shall rise first.

1 Thes 4:17 Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord.

Here Paul completes this section of his writing with a great assurance for all of us. Paul is talking about the Parousia or the second coming of our Lord. The Jewish tradition speaks of seven archangels. In 1 Enoch 20:1-7 their names are listed as Taphael, Raguel, Michael, Sariel, Gabriel and Remiel. The trumpet of God might refer back to Isa 27:13 where the sound of the great trumpet summons the Jewish exiles home from Assyria and Egypt. The raising of the bodies of the dead refers to those children of God who had died before the second coming of Jesus. These people would be honored first by raising their glorified bodies as a reward for their serving Jesus unto death. After the rising of the dead saints the people who are left alive would be transformed into their glorified bodies to meet all the saints and Jesus in the air. Then we would all be together with Him forever! Some people have made too much out of Paul saying “we who are alive” to make it seem that Paul thought that he would still be alive when this second coming begins. However the totality of his writings does not support this conjecture.

In the two thousand years since he wrote this many Christians have died. Many of us today still wait for that second coming and know that we will be with Jesus when He comes again whether we are still alive or if we die before He comes.

1 Thes 4:18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

What wonderful comfort this writing is to me and to you! The timing of God is perfect and we wait patiently for this wonderful time! Certainly I agree with Paul:

2Cor 5:8 “we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.”

But God has put us here for a purpose and His timing is perfect as to when Jesus will come again and when, or if, we physically die. Comfort each other!

References

- 1.) “1 & 2 Thessalonians”, John McArthur, Moody Press, 2002.
- 2.) “The Expositor’s Bible Commentary Volume 11”, Edited by Frank E. Gaebelin, 1978.
- 3.) “World Biblical Commentary, 45, 1 & 2 Thessalonians”, F. F. Bruce, Nelson Reference & Electronic, 1982.