

Handout: 1 Thessalonians Lesson 3

Chapters 4-5 of the letter divide into two parts:

1. Specific exhortations for the community (4:1-5:22)
2. Prayer and final greeting/conclusion (5:23-28)

Paul's exhortations to the community in 4:1-5:22 include:

1. Preserving individual holiness by refraining from sexual immorality (4:3-8).
2. Abiding in love for God and love for one another in the Christian family (4:9-12).
3. Assurance of hope for the resurrection of the dead (4:13-18).
4. The call for continued vigilance in preparation for the Parousia of the Christ (5:1-11).
5. How they must conduct themselves while waiting for the return of the Christ (5:12-22).

In 4:1-2, Paul makes two requests of the community:

1. They should conduct themselves in a manner that pleases God as Paul and his missionaries taught them.
2. They must continue to conduct themselves in this manner and even increase in obedience to the instruction they received through the Lord.

4:3-8 forms a unit focusing on the necessity of sexual morality for the sanctification of the body through chastity. One cannot live in sexual immorality and at the same time please God or have a hope of attaining Heaven. Sexual purity is the necessary step on the path to the complete sanctification of the person. Sexual immorality is an outrage against God whose divine Spirit dwells in the temples of our bodies, sanctified at Baptism. On the same subject, Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth: *Avoid immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the immoral person sins against his own body. Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been purchased at a price. Therefore glorify God in your body* (1 Cor 6:18-20; also see CCC 2351-56). Holiness is not optional for a Christian but is a condition of salvation: *Strive for peace with everyone, and for that holiness without which no one will see the Lord* (Heb 12:14).

The literal Greek of 4:4 is: *that each of you know how to possess his vessel in holiness and honor...* Ancient and modern scholars are not in agreement over Paul's precise meaning in using the word "vessel."

1. The word could refer to one's body as Paul used the word in his second letter to the Corinthians: *But we hold this treasure in earthen vessels, that the surpassing power may be of God and not from us* (2 Cor 4:7).
2. Or the word could refer to one's wife, as St. Peter wrote: *Likewise, you husbands should love with your wives in understanding, showing honor to the weaker female [weaker vessel], since we are joint heirs of the gift of life...* (1 Pt 3:7).

The Church teaches: "All the baptized are called to chastity. The Christian has 'put on Christ,' the model for all chastity. All Christ's faithful are called to lead a chaste life in keeping with their particular states of life. At the moment of Baptism, the Christian is pledged to lead his affective life in chastity" (CCC 2348; also see CCC 2349-50).

Paul's advice in 4:9-12:

1. Demonstrate the Christian obligation to love.
2. Tend to their affairs to live a life without conflict.
3. Work for their own support without having to rely on others.
4. Strive for a lifestyle that gives a good Christian witness to outsiders.

In 4:15-17, Paul gives us the sequence of events at the Parousia of the Christ:

1. The Lord's coming will be announced by the voice or shout of an archangel.
2. There will be the sound of the trumpet of God.
3. Christ will come down from Heaven.
4. The dead will arise first.
5. Then, those who are still alive will be "caught up" to meet Jesus in the air.

Trumpets could be used in civic, military, and liturgical occasions and were either made of metal or ram's horns. Most significant, trumpets signaled the anticipated interventions of God in human history. They signaled the coming judgment of God (Zeph 1:26), the gathering of the elect (Mt 24:31), the resurrection of the dead (1 Thess 4:16), and the ultimate coming of the Kingdom of God (Rev 8:1-9:21; 11:16-18). In the history of Israel, the announcement of the trumpet signal in 4:16 at Christ's Parousia recalls:

1. The Theophany at Mt. Sinai (Ex 19:16).
2. The trumpets that announced the Feast of Trumpets ten days before the feast of national repentance, Yom Kippur/Feast of Atonement (Lev 23:23-32).
3. The trumpets of judgment that sounded at the Battle of Jericho (6:20).
4. The coronation of Davidic kings (i.e., 1 Kng 1:34).

Jesus' description of His Parousia: "*And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming upon the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he will send out his angels with a trumpet blast, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other*" (Mt 24:30-31; also see 24:27, 37, and 39).

5:12-22 ~ How members of the Church must conduct themselves:

1. Respect and love your pastors, and show appreciation for their labors.
2. Promote peace within the community.
3. In brotherly love, admonish the idle.
4. Encourage the timid and fainthearted.
5. Give aid to the weak (spiritually and materially).
6. Be patient and forbearing with all; avoid being quick to judge.
7. Do not tolerate evil/sinful practices within the community.
8. Always seek to do good for those within and outside the community.
9. Always be joyful in the Lord.
10. Pray without ceasing.
11. In all circumstances, give thanks to God, seeking His will.
12. Do not quench the work of the Holy Spirit in the community or in their lives.
13. Do not reject prophetic teaching.
14. Test everything: retaining what is good and true and rejecting what is evil.