



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Principles of Conduct (1 Thess 3:1—4:12) 8 NOVEMBER

RON J. BIGALKE, PASTOR/MISSIONARY, CAPITOL COMMISSION

Ron J. Bigalke, PhD / PO Box 244, Rincon, GA 31326-0244 / www.capitolcom.org / ron.bigalke@capitolcom.org

BIBLE STUDY

Location:
123 CAP

Times:
2ND TUESDAYS
MONTHLY @ NOON

Tuesday, 8 November 2011 (*Election Day*)
First Thessalonians 3:1—4:12 – “Principles of Conduct”

Introduction

Living in anticipation of the Lord’s return is the theme of 1 Thessalonians. Following the typical salutation for a first century letter to a group of individuals (1 Thess 1:1), the message of this inerrant and inspired letter begins with verse 2. The current Bible study will conclude the first major division of the Thessalonian letter. First Thessalonians 1:2—4:12 were given to encourage spiritual maturity and godly living.

LONGING FOR THE LORD’S RETURN HAS A MATURING AND PURIFYING EFFECT UPON THE LIVES OF GOD’S PEOPLE.

The letter began with a reminder of how radical a change the gospel message has upon those who believe (trust) the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel message includes essential facts with regard to the person, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Verse 10 of chapter 1, however, indicates an additional component that was proclaimed with this message. Believers are instructed “to wait for [God’s] Son from heaven, who [God] raised from the dead, *that is* Jesus, who rescues us from the wrath to come.” The reason for a believer to have this anticipation is because it encourages us to seek spiritual maturity and godly living. Longing for the Lord’s return has a maturing and purifying effect upon the lives of God’s people.

Living in anticipation of the Lord’s return promotes spiritual maturity among believers (1:2-10). Specifically, this maturity is evident in one’s work, labor, and endurance (1:2-3), and an increasing reputation of faith toward God (1:4-10). Such anticipation also motivates servant leadership, which is evident in one’s motives (2:1-6), concerns (2:7-12), and affections (2:13-20). Verses 19-20 of chapter 2 make this motivation unmistakable: “For who is our hope or joy or

crown or exultation? Is it not even you, in the presence of our Lord Jesus at His coming? For you are our glory and joy.”

First Thessalonians 3:1—4:12 communicates how living in anticipation of the Lord’s return affects the lives of believers. Chapter 3 closes with similar words to 2:19-20. God’s people are exhorted to persevere toward the time when their spiritual maturity will be threatened no longer, that is, “before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints” (3:13). The reality of God’s holiness and justice toward sin (4:6) should motivate His people to live in such a manner as pleases their Lord (4:1).

EMPATHETIC CONDUCT (3:1-13)

According to 2:17, the Apostle Paul was taken from the Thessalonian church “for a short while.” Acts 17:5-9 reveals the reason why Paul departed in spite of his desire to stay longer. When Paul and his company “could endure *it* no longer” (1 Thess 3:1), they sent a “fellow worker” (Timothy) instead so that he could “strengthen and encourage” the church (3:2). “Fear that the tempter might have tempted” the church was the reason why Timothy was sent (3:5). The servant leadership exhibited here is the result of empathy for the wellbeing of others (cf. 2:19-20).

A servant leader will be entirely honest with others (3:3-4). In the Thessalonian epistle, such honesty meant warning the church that the difficulties they were enduring was predestined. The difficulties were not a probability; rather, they were a certainty. Jesus stated similarly, “In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33). Second Timothy 3:12 instructs, “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” All true believers whose desire is “to live godly” will experience challenges, and the positive response to those afflictions will be evidence of the reality of faith (trust) in the Lord.

[OUR] POSITIVE RESPONSE TO . . . AFFLICTIONS WILL BE EVIDENCE OF THE REALITY OF FAITH (TRUST) IN THE LORD.

Servant leaders are delighted to know that those they lead are doing well. In the Thessalonian epistle, the Apostle Paul received “good news” from Timothy, which “comforted” him (1 Thess 3:7) and caused him to “*really* live” (3:8). Whatever kind of service to which God has called us, we are wise to acknowledge the Lord’s grace and “not to think more highly of [ourselves] than [we] ought to think” (Rom 12:3; cf. Eccl 7:16). Servant leaders must be emphatic toward others and to consider their welfare of utmost importance.

One manner in which we can demonstrate empathetic conduct for others is to pray for one another (1 Thess 3:9-13).

MORAL CONDUCT (4:1-8)

Scripture is explicit that an intimate relationship exists between a Christian's conduct and his/her affirmation of biblical doctrine. Biblical doctrine (orthodoxy) and biblical practice (orthopraxis) are inseparable. Unbiblical doctrine will lead to unbiblical conduct, and a lack of biblical ethics will result in unbiblical (and even damnable) belief (cf. 2 Pet 2:1). For this reason, it is essential that you and I receive the instruction of God's Word with regard to how we ought to live in order to please Him (1 Thess 4:1).

... AVOIDANCE OF SIN NECESSITATES CONTINUAL REMINDERS AND EXHORTATIONS TO PLEASE GOD IN ONE'S MORAL CONDUCT.

It is worth noting that no correction was given in verse 1; rather, the words are an exhortation to continue "just as you actually do walk." The reason for the exhortation is that we are prone to wander from the will of God (Heb 2:1). Our sin natures do not allow for once-for-all instruction with regard to our moral conduct. We need continual reminders to live in a manner pleasing to God. "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall" (1 Cor 10:12). According to verse 1 of chapter 4, avoidance of sin necessitates continual reminders and exhortations to please God in one's moral conduct.

The basis for moral conduct is the commandments given by "the authority of the Lord Jesus" (1 Thess 4:2). The basis for moral behavior is not personal opinion; rather, it is based upon divine authority. God's authority is the only adequate incentive for living in a manner that is often contrary to one's fleshly and temporal desires. Of course, the gospel precedes all moral conduct because obedience to the principles of Scripture is impossible for those who refuse the Author of Scripture (Eph 2:1-10).

Moral conduct is what Scripture terms "sanctification" (4:3). Sanctification is the work of God within the believer by which He produces the conduct that is pleasing to Him. God is sovereign to complete the good work He began in the believer's life because it is his intent to conform every believer to the image of His Son, Jesus Christ. The believer is also responsible to work diligently as evidence of God's work (Phil 2:12-13). The work of sanctification is an ongoing work that begins with regeneration, continues with conformity to Jesus in His sufferings and resurrection (3:10), and concludes with the transformation of "the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory" (3:21).

The exhortation to "abstain from sexual immorality" demands self-control (1 Thess 4:4). To commit "lustful passion" is to "transgress and defraud" one another. God created sex for both enjoyment and procreation, yet within the confines of marriage. Therefore, premarital or extramarital sex transgresses and defrauds

one from the fullness of God's intention, and therefore cannot provide ultimate satisfaction, and therefore, it damages one's relationship with God. Sexual immorality occurs because one rejects the God who gives the Holy Spirit to believers (4:8). The indwelling of the Holy Spirit provides the believer with all the resources necessary to remain pure in conduct.

SOCIAL CONDUCT (4:9-12)

Continual reminders and exhortations are necessary not only for moral conduct, but also for social conduct, even though one may be already practicing love toward God and one another (1 Thess 4:9-10). God is the one who teaches His people to love one another (4:9). The love described in verses 9-10 is not natural; rather, it is supernatural, that is, produced by God through faith.

Exemplary conduct is leading "a quiet life" and attending to one's "own business" and working with one's own gifts and abilities (4:11). Such manner of social conduct will result in having respect from "outsiders," and one will not be dependent upon anyone (4:12). To "not be in any need" means being an example of productiveness and self-sufficiency, that is, not being characterized as lazy or being a "freeloader."

... EXEMPLARY CONDUCT IS LEADING "A QUIET LIFE" AND ATTENDING TO ONE'S "OWN BUSINESS" AND WORKING WITH ONE'S OWN GIFTS AND ABILITIES (4:11).

"To lead a quiet life" (4:11; cf. 1 Tim 2:1-2) means a life of tranquility. To be tranquil is not to be inactive; rather, it is a life of orderliness and peacefulness. The quiet life is one of self-discipline, hence the instruction "to make it your ambition" (4:11). Exemplary conduct is evangelistic because most people observe Christians to see if our faith in God makes a difference in our lives. Living in anticipation of the Lord's return does not relieve one from practical responsibilities. Praise the Lord that His divine commands are always fulfilled with His divine provisions. May each of us submit ourselves to the Holy Spirit who is given by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Thank you for allowing me the honor to provide ongoing Bible studies to you. If you have any questions, please feel free to talk with me, or contact me by email or phone. I am praying for you personally throughout the day and week (1 Tim 2:1-4).

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