

# CHAPTER 4

## INTRODUCTION TO 1 THESSALONIANS 4

In this chapter the apostle proceeds to exhort in general to the performance of good works, particularly to purity of life, to brotherly love, to quietness, diligence, and industry in the several callings of life, and not to mourn in an excessive and immoderate manner for deceased friends; which leads him to say some things concerning the second coming of Christ, and the resurrection of the dead. The general exhortation to holiness is in (~~SOOL~~ 1 Thessalonians 4:1-3) which is pressed in a way of entreaty for the sake of Christ; and the duties urged to were the commandments of Christ, and which the apostles had given them, and they had received, and were well acquainted with; and besides, a walk according to these commands was well pleasing to God, and sanctification in general was his will: and in particular the apostle exhorts to abstain from fornication, and all uncleanness; since it is a dishonouring the body of man; acting the part of the ignorant Gentiles that know not God; a defrauding another man, as is uncleanness with another man's wife; the vengeance of God will light on such; it is contrary to that calling with which the saints are called, that being to holiness, and not uncleanness; and to despise this exhortation, is casting contempt, not upon man, but God himself, (~~SOAH~~ 1 Thessalonians 4:4-8). Brotherly love is the next thing exhorted to, which seemed needless to write about, since, in regeneration, these saints were taught to exercise it, and had exercised it towards all the brethren throughout Macedonia, though it was necessary to exhort them to abound more and more in it, (~~SOAD~~ 1 Thessalonians 4:9,10) and to study peace and quietness, and be industrious in their business, that so they might live an honest life among their carnal neighbours, and not be in want of anything from them, (~~SOAH~~ 1 Thessalonians 4:11,12) and whereas some of them had lost some of their dear friends and relations by death, and were ready to exceed due bounds in their sorrow for them, he dehorts from such immoderate sorrow, as being like that of those that had no hope of a resurrection from the dead; whereas, seeing it was an article of their faith, that Christ was risen from the dead, they might assure themselves that those that sleep in him shall be brought along with him when he shall appear a second time, (~~SOHS~~ 1

Thessalonians 4:13,14) which will not be prevented by those that are alive when Christ comes; for as they will be changed, the dead in Christ will be raised at his coming; which coming of his will be in person, from heaven, with a shout, the voice of the archangel, and trump of God; and then both shall be caught up together to meet him in the air, and be for ever with him; and therefore they had no need to sorrow as others, since they should meet again, and never part more, and with which words they should comfort one another under their present loss, (~~1~~<sup>1</sup> Thessalonians 4:15-18).

**Ver. 1.** *Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren,* etc.] Or request of you in the most kind and tender manner, from real and hearty love and affection for you, and with a view to your good, and the glory of God:

*and exhort you:* or beseech and entreat you. The apostle does not lay his commands upon them as he might have done, and sometimes does, but endeavours to work upon them by way of entreaty, and which he doubtless thought the most effectual method to win upon them, and gain them; for some minds are more easily wrought upon by entreaty than by authority: and this he does in the most moving and powerful manner, even

*by the Lord Jesus;* or “in the Lord Jesus”; in his name and stead, as personating him, and as though he did beseech and entreat them by him, and his fellow ministers; or for his sake, intimating, that if they had any regard to him, any value for his name, if that had any weight with them, or they had any concern for his honour and interest, then he begs their attention to the following exhortation; or by the Lord Jesus, by all that is in him, or done for them by him; in whom they were chosen, by whom they were redeemed, in whom they were made new creatures, to whose image they were to be conformed, whose followers they professed to be, whose Gospel they embraced, and by whose name they were called.

*That as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk, and to please God.* The walk of believers is twofold, either internal or external. Their internal walk is by faith, which is the going out of the soul by faith to Christ for every supply of grace. Their external walk is not as it was before conversion, according to the course of this world, or as other Gentiles walk, but in a holy religious life and conversation; and this requires spiritual life, strength and direction from Christ; for neither dead men, nor, if alive, yet weak, can walk; nor is it in a spiritual man, that walketh to direct his steps; and such a walk also denotes continuance, in well doing, and a progression or going on in it, and supposes ways to walk in. Christ,

he is the chief and principal way, and there are other paths which regard him, or relate and lead unto him; as the way of truth, the path of ordinances, and of religious worship, both public and private, and the ways of righteousness, holiness, and good works: the manner in which saints are to walk is as Christ himself walked, after the Spirit, and not after the flesh, according to the rule of the word, which is the standard of faith and practice, with prudence, wisdom, circumspection, and worthy of God, and of that calling wherein they are called: and of such a walk there is a necessity; it “ought”, it must be both on the account of God, it being his will, and for his glory, and the contrary would show great ingratitude to him; and on the account of the saints themselves, to adorn them, and their profession, and preserve them from shame and disgrace, to show their faith, and demonstrate their calling and election to others; and likewise on account of others, partly for the winning of some, by recommending in this way the Gospel to them, and partly for the bringing of others to shame and silence, who falsely accuse their good conversation. Now when the apostle, and those that were with him, were at Thessalonica, they gave these saints directions and instructions about their walk and conversation, to order it in such a manner as might “please God”; which is not to be understood of rendering their persons acceptable to God hereby, for the saints' acceptance with God is only in Christ the beloved; nor of their gaining the love and favour of God by such means, for the love of God is from everlasting, and is free, and sovereign, and does not arise from, or depend upon the holiness and obedience of men; or of making peace with God by such a walk, for peace is only made by the blood of Christ; but of doing those things, and in such a way God approves of: unregenerate men cannot please God, nor anything they do, because they are destitute of the Spirit of God, and are without Christ, and his grace and have not faith in him, without which it is impossible to please God; but what a believer does in faith, from a principle of love, in the name and strength of Christ, and to the glory of God, is approved of by God, and is acceptable to him through Christ, and for his sake; and there are many things of this kind, as prayer, praise, acts of beneficence to the poor, and indeed every good work and holy action: and inasmuch as they had been thus taught and instructed how to behave and conduct in their outward walk and conversation, they are entreated and exhorted to go on and abound in the work of the Lord:

*so ye would abound more and more:* that is, be more and more in the exercise of every grace, and in the discharge of every duty, making

advances in holiness of life, and perfecting it in the fear of God. Beza's ancient copy, and another manuscript, as also the Alexandrian copy, and some others, add between the preceding, and this last clause, "as ye also walk"; and so the Vulgate Latin and Ethiopic versions seem to have read; commending them for their present and past walk and conversation, in order to persuade and encourage them to go forward.

**Ver. 2.** *For ye know what commandments we gave you*, etc.] When among them; such as those of faith and love, the ordinances of the Gospel, baptism, and the Lord's supper, and all such as relate to the worship and service of God, to the discipline of Christ's house, to their behaviour one towards another, and their conduct in the world: and which were delivered to them, not as from themselves, and by their own authority, but

*by the Lord Jesus*; in his name, and by his authority, and as ordered by him; for their commission ran to teach men all things, whatsoever Christ commanded: now since they knew what these commandments were, and whose they were, and the obligation they lay under to regard them, the apostle makes use of it as a reason or argument to engage them to obedience to them; for he that knows his Lord's will, and does it not, shall be beaten with many stripes, (~~and~~ Luke 12:47).

**Ver. 3.** *For this is the will of God, even your sanctification*, etc.] Which is another reason to enforce the above exhortation. "Sanctification" is internal or external. Internal sanctification is the work of the Spirit of God, and is a principle of spiritual life in the soul, a divine and spiritual light in the understanding, a flexion of the will to the will of God, and a settlement of the affections on divine things, and is an implantation of every grace in the heart. External sanctification arises from this, and lies in holiness of life and conversation; and is what is chiefly designed, as appears both by what goes before, and follows after: and this is "the will of God"; the will of his purpose and decree; for in the same decree that he wills the salvation of any by Jesus Christ, he also wills their sanctification in heart and life, and here and hereafter: and this is his approving will, or what is well pleasing in his sight, being agreeable to his nature, and divine perfections, particularly his holiness, in which he is glorious; and it is his will of command, and what he requires in his law, which is holy, just, and good, and perfectly agrees with the sound doctrine of the Gospel, and the revelation of his will in both.

*That ye should abstain from fornication*: which is particularly mentioned, abstinence from it being a branch of external holiness; and because that this sin was common among the Gentiles, and not esteemed a sin by them; as also to observe to these Christians, that as simple fornication was not to be allowed of, much less other acts of uncleanness, as adultery, incest, sodomy, and the like, which were iniquities that greatly prevailed among the Heathens. The Syriac version renders it, “from all fornication”; on this subject the apostle enlarges in some following verses.

**Ver. 4.** *That everyone of you should know how to possess his vessel*, etc.] By which may be meant, either a man's wife, or his body, and it is not very easy to determine which, for the Jews call both by this name. Sometimes they call <sup>f15</sup> a woman  $\mu\iota\ \text{wg}$ , which the gloss says is a “vessel” unfinished. It is reported <sup>f16</sup>, that when R. Eleazar died, Rabbenu Hakkadosh would have married his widow, and she would not, because she was  $\text{h}\check{\text{c}}\text{w}\text{d}\text{q}\ \text{l}\ \check{\text{c}}\ \text{y}\text{l}\ \text{k}$ , “a vessel of holiness”, greater than he. Moreover, it is said <sup>f17</sup>, that

“he that forces (a young woman) must drink  $\text{wxyx}\ [\text{b}$ , “in his own vessel” how drink in his own vessel? though she be lame, though she be blind, and though she is stricken with ulcers.”

The commentators <sup>f18</sup> on the passage add,

“in the vessel which he has chosen; that is to say, whether he will or not, he must marry her;”

(see <sup><105></sup>Proverbs 5:15). And again, they sometimes call a man's wife his tent: hence that saying <sup>f19</sup>,

“ $\text{wt}\check{\text{c}}\text{a}\ \text{al}\ \text{a}\ \text{wl}\ \text{ha}\ \text{`ya}$  “there is no tent but his wife”, as it is said, (<sup><100></sup>Deuteronomy 5:30), go, say to them, get you into your tents again.”

And certain it is, that the woman is called the “weaker vessel” in (<sup><100></sup>1 Peter 3:7), between which passage and this there seems to be some agreement. The same metaphor of a “vessel” is made use of in both; and as there, honour to be given to the weaker vessel, so here, a man's vessel is to be possessed in honour; and as there, husbands are to dwell with their wives according to knowledge so here, knowledge is required to a man's possessing his vessel aright. Now for a man to possess his vessel in this sense, is to enjoy his wife, and to use that power he has over her in a

becoming manner; (see <sup><4004></sup>1 Corinthians 7:4), and which is here directed to “in sanctification and honour”; that is, in a chaste and honourable way; for marriage is honourable when the bed is kept undefiled; and which may be defiled, not only by taking another into it, and which is not possessing the wife in sanctification and honour, it is the reverse, for it is a breaking through the rules of chastity and honour; but it may even be defiled with a man's own wife, by using her in an unnatural way, or by any unlawful copulation with her; for so to do is to use her in an unholy, unchaste, wicked, and dishonourable manner; whereas possessing of her according to the order and course of nature, is by the Jews, in agreement with the apostle, called <sup>f20</sup>, **wmx [ çdqm**, “a man's sanctifying himself”, and is chaste, and honourable. And it may be observed, that the Jews use the same phrase concerning conjugal embraces as the apostle does here. One of their canons runs thus <sup>f21</sup>:

“though a man's wife is free for him at all times, it is fit and proper for a disciple of a wise man to use himself **hçwdqb**, “in”, or “to sanctification”.”

When these things are observed, this sense of the words will not appear so despicable as it is thought by some. The body is indeed called a “vessel”; (see <sup><4042></sup>2 Corinthians 4:7), because in it the soul is contained, and the soul makes use of it, and its members, as instruments, for the performance of various actions; and, with Jewish writers, we read of **wpwg yl k**, “the vessel of his body” <sup>f22</sup>; so then, for a man to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour, is to keep under his body and bring it into subjection, and preserve it in purity and chastity; as the eyes from unchaste looks, the tongue from unchaste words, and the other members from unchaste actions; and to use it in an honourable way, not in fornication, adultery, and sodomy; for, by fornication, a man sins against his own body; and by adultery he gets a wound, and a dishonour, and a reproach that will not be wiped away; and by sodomy, and such like unnatural lusts, men dishonour their own bodies between themselves: particularly by “his vessel”, as Gataker thinks, may be meant the “membrum virile”, or the genital parts, which, by an euphemism, may be so called; (see <sup><4215></sup>1 Samuel 21:5)

**Ver. 5.** *Not in the lust of concupiscence*, etc.] Or “passion of lust”; for the mere gratifying and indulging of that; for a man so to possess his vessel, is to cherish the sin of concupiscence, the first motions of sin in the heart, by

which a man is drawn away, and enticed; to blow up the flame of lust, and to make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof:

*even as the Gentiles which know not God*; for, though they knew him, or might know him with a natural knowledge, by the light and works of nature, yet they knew him not savingly and spiritually, as he is revealed in the word, of which they were destitute; or as the God of all grace, and the God and Father of Christ, or as he is in Christ: and though by the light of nature they might know there was a God, yet they knew not who that God was; nor did they act up to that light and knowledge they had; they did not glorify him as God, by ascribing to him what was his due; nor were they thankful for the mercies they received from him; nor did they fear, love, worship, and serve him; nor did they like to retain him in their knowledge, and therefore were given up to judicial blindness and hardness, to a reprobate mind, and to vile affections, and so did things very inconvenient, unnatural, and dishonourable. Wherefore, for a man to use either his wife or his body in any unchaste and dishonourable manner, for the gratifying of his lusts, is to act an Heathenish part; a like argument, dissuading from things unlawful, is used in (<sup><4162></sup>Matthew 6:32 20:25,26 <sup><4048></sup>Galatians 4:8,9).

**Ver. 6.** *That no man go beyond, and defraud his brother in any matter*, etc.] Or “in this matter”, as the Syriac version. This is commonly understood of transgressing the bounds of justice and equity between men and men; and of cheating and defrauding in trade and business, by increasing or lessening the value and prices of goods by the buyer and seller, by not keeping to the bargain, contract, covenant, or sample, by false weights and measures, and by taking the advantage of the weakness and ignorance of men; all which is aggravated by dealing thus with a brother; (see <sup><4168></sup>1 Corinthians 6:8) and this hint is thought the rather necessary, since Thessalonica was a place of great trade and business. But the matter, or business referred to, is not trade, but the subject of chastity or uncleanness the apostle is speaking of, both before and after; and the phrases used either design the act of adultery, coveting a brother's wife, and lying with her, and so a defrauding and wronging of him by defiling his bed; or rather sodomitical practices, an unnatural lust and desire in men after men, and copulation with them; for **υπερβαινειν**, rendered, “go beyond”, answers to **l [ ab**, “to go upon”, or “lie with”, so often used in Jewish writings for lying with women, men, and beasts, in an unlawful way. Thus, for instance <sup>f23</sup>,

“these are to be burned, **hça I [ abh**, “he that lies with a woman”, and her daughter, etc.”

And again <sup>f24</sup>,

“these are to be beaten, **I [ abh**, “he that lies with” his sister, or his father's sister, etc.”

And the word **πλεονεκτειν**, translated “defraud”, signifies a greedy, insatiable, and unnatural lust and desire after a man, a brother, or the committing of sodomitical practices with greediness: (see ~~4049~~ Ephesians 4:19) which abominable iniquities are dissuaded from by the following reasons,

*because that the Lord is the avenger of all such*; or “with respect to all these things”, as the Vulgate Latin and Syriac versions render it; or “for all these things”, as the Arabic and Ethiopic versions; as fornication, adultery, lasciviousness, and all sorts of abominable uncleanness. The person that commits these things the Lord avenges, either in this life, by the hand of the civil magistrate, who is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath on him that does evil; or by a violent death, as in the case of Zimri and Cozbi, and twenty four thousand more at the same time; or by some awful judgment from heaven, as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah; or in the world to come; for the law of God is made and lies against such persons; these living and dying in such sins God will judge, to whom vengeance belongs; these shall not inherit the kingdom of God, but have their part and portion in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone.

*As we have also forewarned you and testified*; not by a former epistle, as if this was the second to them, and what follows the first, as Grotius thought; but they did this when they were in person with them, knowing that these abominable vices greatly prevailed in their city; therefore they bore their testimony against them, and exposed the evil of them, and warned them of the danger by them, so that they could not now plead ignorance. The Ethiopic version reads in the first person singular, “as I have before said unto you, and testified to you”.

**Ver. 7.** *For God hath not called us*, etc.] The Syriac version reads “you”. This is another reason to enforce the above exhortations, and to caution them against the above unclean practices, taken from the end of the effectual calling by the efficacious grace of God, which is not



*unto uncleanness* of any sort, as before specified. This they had lived in before their calling, and were now called from it into communion with Christ, who loves righteousness, and hates iniquity; and by the Gospel, which teaches to deny ungodliness, and worldly lusts, and to forsake all impurity, both of flesh and spirit:

*but* this call is

*unto holiness* of life and conversation in general, and to chastity in thought, look, word, and actions in particular; for God that calls is holy, and therefore those who are called ought to be so; the calling with which they are called is an holy calling, principles of grace and holiness are wrought in their souls, when they are called; and the end of their calling is to live soberly, righteously, and godly; and then, and then only, do they walk worthy of that calling wherewith they are called, and of God who has, by his grace, called them to his kingdom and glory.

**Ver. 8.** *He therefore that despiseth*, etc.] The Vulgate Latin adds, “these things”; these exhortations now delivered, the commandments given by the Lord Jesus Christ, and the will of God above declared; he that rejects these things with contempt, takes no notice of them, and acts not according to them,

*despiseth not man*; not men only, the apostles of Christ, and ministers of the Gospel; for, by despising these exhortations, they themselves were despised, though not alone: but God; Father, Son, and Spirit; God the Father, whose will was their sanctification, even to abstain from fornication, and every act of uncleanness, which, if not attended to, was a despising of him; and the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom, and for whose sake they were entreated and exhorted, and in whose name, and by whose authority the apostle gave them these commandments; wherefore to slight them, was to slight Jesus Christ himself; and, by the way, this is a proof of the true and proper deity of Christ. Moreover, such despisers also, in some sense, do despise unto the spirit of grace, by whom the apostles spake, or who spoke in them these things, as follows,

*who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit*; as he did to the prophets of the Old Testament, and therefore what they said was equally by divine inspiration of God; and hence despising them, was despising the Spirit of God that spake by them. The Syriac and Arabic versions read, “who hath given unto you his Holy Spirit”; and so all Stephens's copies; which

furnishes out a fresh reason or argument, dissuading from uncleanness, since God had given them his “Spirit” to convince them of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, so that they were not ignorant of the things warned against; and he had given them his Spirit as an “holy” Spirit, as a Spirit of sanctification, to begin and carry on that work in them, to which uncleanness was very opposite; and he had given his Spirit unto, or “into” them, to dwell in them, as in his temple, and therefore should be careful not to defile it; and to cause them to walk in his statutes, and to assist them to keep his judgments, and do them, and as an earnest of their inheritance, and a sealer of them up unto the day of redemption; wherefore it became them not to grieve him by an impure life; and they were laid under obligations to live in the Spirit, and to walk after him, and not after the flesh.

**Ver. 9.** *But as touching brotherly love*, etc.] Another branch of sanctification; which is distinct from love to God and Christ, though it always accompanies it, and from love to all mankind; and is what is peculiar to brethren in a spiritual relation, and ought to be universal, fervent, and sincere, and as Christ has loved them: concerning which the following things are said,

*ye need not that I write unto you.* The Vulgate Latin version reads, “we have no need to write unto you”; and so some copies. It seems that it was needful to write unto them about other things, as to refresh their memories with the instructions they had given them, when with them, how they should walk and please God; and to put them in mind of the commandments given them by Christ, and that their sanctification was the will of God; and particularly it was necessary to write unto them about chastity, and purity of life, whether in or out of the conjugal state; but as for brotherly love, there was no immediate absolute necessity to write about that, either about the nature of it, or to describe the objects of it, or point out instances of it, or to exhort to it in a pressing manner: the reason is,

*for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another*; not merely by the light of nature, which teaches men to be kind, courteous, affable, and beneficent; nor by the law of Moses, which obliges men to love their neighbours as themselves; nor only doctrinally by the ministry of the Gospel, which frequently inculcates the exercise of this grace as a matter of great importance and consequence; nor only by the new commandment,

and example of Christ; but by the Spirit of God internally in regeneration, who, according to the tenor of the new covenant, writes this law of love, and of Christ, upon the heart; and this being written upon the hearts of the Thessalonians, by the finger of the Spirit of God, whereby they were dearly directed, and powerfully taught to exercise this grace, and discharge this duty, and under the influence of the same spirit did exercise it, it was unnecessary for the apostle to write about it, and press them to it.

**Ver. 10.** *And indeed ye do it towards all the brethren*, etc.] Whether high or low, rich or poor, bond or free, greater or lesser believers, and whether related in the bonds of nature or not; they exercised this grace of love without respect of persons, to all, and not only to all the brethren in the particular community at Thessalonica, but

*which are in all Macedonia*; throughout the whole country, particularly at Philippi and Berea, and other places:

*but we beseech you, brethren.* The Alexandrian copy reads, “beloved brethren”; and the Syriac version, “I beseech you, my brethren: that ye increase more and more”; in showing love to the brethren; which may be done both by administering to them in things temporal, by assisting them in distress, by sympathizing with them, and by giving them counsel and advice; and in things spiritual, by bearing their burdens, forbearing with them, and forgiving them; by admonishing them in love, by stirring them up to love and good works, by praying with them and for them, and by instructing and building them up in their most holy faith; and this increase, and abounding in the exercise of this grace, may respect not only the more frequent and fervent use of it, but also the larger extent of it to other objects; as not only to all the brethren in their own church, and to all that were in Macedonia, to which it did extend, but likewise to all the brethren in other parts of the world, and which are more distant and remote; and even to the poor saints at Jerusalem in particular; and accordingly we find that their love did abound unto them; (see <sup>4155</sup>Romans 15:25-27 <sup>4001</sup>2 Corinthians 8:1,2), this shows, that though brotherly love was much practised by these saints, yet it was not perfect; nor is any grace perfect as to degrees; nor is any saint perfect in the discharge of duty in this life.

**Ver. 11.** *And that ye study to be quiet*, etc.] To live peaceably in their own families, and to give no disturbance to other families, by talebearing, whispering, and backbiting; to behave with quietness in the neighbourhood, town, or city, they dwell in, and to seek the peace thereof; and to lead a

quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty, in the commonwealth, and under the government to which they belong; and not to create and encourage factions, divisions, animosities, and contentions, in their own church, or in any of the churches of Christ; and it becomes saints to make this their study, to be very solicitous for it, to strive for it, and pursue after it: the word used signifies to be ambitious of it, as what is a man's glory and honour, to emulate and strive to outdo each other, as who shall have the honour of being the quietest person, and the most peaceable member in the community:

*and to do your own business*: or private business, or what is proper and peculiar to a man's self; to abide every man in his own calling wherein he is called, and attend the business of it, and not thrust himself into other families, and officiously take upon him, under a pretence of zeal, affection, and friendship, to inspect, direct, or manage the business of others: in short, he should not meddle with other people's business, but mind his own: and this is what the Jews call *ba Erd*, "the way of the earth", or the business of life:

“there are four things, (they say <sup>f25</sup>) in which a man should employ himself continually, with all his might, and these are they, the law, and good works, and prayer, and the business of life;”

upon which the gloss has this note by way of explanation,

“if a man is an artificer (let him attend) to his art; if a merchant to his merchandise, and if he is a soldier to war;”

and which may serve to illustrate the apostle's sense:

*and to work with your own hands*; the reason of this is, because there were some among them, who would not work at all; (see ~~<471>~~ 2 Thessalonians 3:11) and by this instruction it appears, that the members of this church, in common, were such as were brought up to handicraft trades and businesses, and were poor and mean; and this was the general case of the primitive churches: it pleased God to choose and call the poor of this world, to whom the Gospel was preached, and they received it; few of the rulers among the Jews believed in Christ, and not many mighty, rich, or noble among the Gentiles were called; some there were, and in this church there were some of the chief women of the city, (~~<470>~~ Acts 17:4), and though these and others of the better sort, as well as ministers of the

Gospel among them, who laboured in the word and doctrine, were not obliged by this to perform manual work and labour, yet were not exempted from all concern in the exhortation; it being proper and necessary, that all sorts of persons be employed in one sort of business or another, and to use diligence and application in it: the apostle's view being chiefly to inveigh against sloth and idleness, and to exhort to labour and industry as the most effectual method to preserve peace and quietness, and to keep persons from being troublesome and hurtful, in families, churches, and commonwealths: the reasons enforcing this follow in this and the next verse,

*as we commanded you*; and the command of an apostle carries weight and authority with it, and ought to be obeyed; yea, they not only strictly enjoined a diligent application to business, but set them an example themselves, (see <sup><310></sup>1 Thessalonians 2:9 <sup><311></sup>2 Thessalonians 3:7,8).

**Ver. 12.** *That ye may walk honestly*, etc.] Decently, in good credit and reputation, providing things honest in the sight of all men, for themselves and families, and honestly paying every man his own; on which account it became them to mind their own business, and work at their trades; otherwise their walk and conversation would be scandalous, and not honest and honourable:

*toward them that are without*: the men of the world, who were without the church; (see <sup><462></sup>1 Corinthians 5:12) profane sinners, unconverted Gentiles, that were without Christ and hope, and God in the world, and were aliens and strangers; and yet care should be taken that no occasion be given to such to reproach the name of God, the ways of Christ, and the doctrines of the Gospel:

*and that ye may have lack of nothing*; but have wherewith to supply the necessaries of life, and give to them also that stand in need, which is more blessed and honourable than to receive; or might not need any such instruction and exhortation, or any reproof for sloth and idleness; or not stand in need of “any man”, as the Syriac version renders it; of the help and assistance of any, of any of those that are without, which would be dishonourable; or of them that are within, of the church, which might be burdensome. The Vulgate Latin version renders it, “that ye may not desire anything of anyone”; as the slothful man covets greedily all the day long what is another's, and this desire kills him, (<sup><312></sup>Proverbs 21:25,26) he covets an evil covetousness, and craves in a scandalous way the bread of

others; when it would be more honourable for him to work with quietness, and eat his own bread got by honest labour, and not be beholden to another.

**Ver. 13.** *But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren,* etc.] As they seem to have been, about the state of the pious dead, the rule and measure of mourning for them, the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, the second coming of Christ, and the future happiness of the saints; wherefore the apostle judged it necessary to write to them upon these subjects: the Alexandrian copy and others, the Complutensian edition, the Vulgate Latin, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions read, “we would not have you to be ignorant”, etc.

*concerning them which are asleep;* that is, dead: it was in common use among the Eastern nations, when they spoke of their dead, to say they were asleep. This way of speaking is used frequently both in the Old and the New Testament; (see <sup><100></sup>1 Kings 2:10 11:43 <sup><212></sup>Daniel 12:2 <sup><311></sup>John 11:11) (<sup><453></sup>1 Corinthians 15:20) and very often with the Targumists; so the Targum on (<sup><2004></sup>Ecclesiastes 3:4) “a time to weep”, paraphrases it,

“a time to weep **abykç I** [ , “over them that are asleep”:]”

and in (<sup><2102></sup>Ecclesiastes 4:2).

“I praised **abykç ty**, “those that are asleep”,”

the dead: the reason of this way of speaking was, because there is a likeness between sleep and death; in both there is no exercise of the senses, and persons are at rest, and both rise again; and they are common to all men, and proper and peculiar to the body only. The apostle designs such persons among the Thessalonians, who either died a natural death, or were removed by violence, through the rage and fury of their persecutors, for whom their surviving friends were pressed with overmuch sorrow, which is here cautioned against:

*that ye sorrow not, even as others that have no hope;* the apostle's view is not to encourage and establish a stoical apathy, a stupid indolence, and a brutal insensibility, which are contrary to the make of human nature, to the practice of the saints, and even of Christ and his apostles, and our apostle himself; but to forbid excessive and immoderate sorrow, and all the extravagant forms of it the Gentiles ran into; who having no notion of the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead, had no hope of ever seeing their

friends more, but looked upon them as entirely lost, as no longer in being, and never more to be met with, seen, and enjoyed; this drove them to extravagant actions, furious transports, and downright madness; as to throw off their clothes, pluck off their hair, tear their flesh, cut themselves, and make baldness between their eyes for the dead; (see <sup>f26</sup>Deuteronomy 14:1) practices forbidden the Jews, and which very ill become Christians, that believe the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead: the words are to be understood not of other Christians, who have no hope of the eternal welfare of their deceased friends; not but that the sorrow of those who have a good hope of the future Well being of their dear relatives, must and ought to be greatly different from that of others, who have no hope at all: it is observed by the Jews <sup>f26</sup> on those words in (<sup>f27</sup>Genesis 23:2) and “Abraham came to mourn for Sarah”, etc. that

“it is not said to weep for Sarah, but to mourn for her; “for such a woman as this, it is not fit to weep”, after her soul is joined in the bundle of life, but to mourn for her, and do her great honour at her funeral; though because it is not possible that a man should not weep for his dead, it is said at the end, “and to weep for her”.”

but here the words are to be understood of the other Gentiles that were in a state of nature and unregeneracy, who had no knowledge of the resurrection of the dead, or and hope of a future state, and of enjoying their friends in it: they are called *οι λοιποι*, “the rest”; and the Syriac version renders it, “other men”.

**Ver. 14.** *For if we believe that Jesus died, and rose again*, etc.] As every Christian does, for both the death and resurrection of Christ are fundamental articles of faith; nothing is more certain or more comfortable, and more firmly to be believed, than that Christ died for the sins of his people, and rose again for their justification; on these depend the present peace, joy, and comfort of the saints, and their everlasting salvation and happiness: and no less certain and comfortable, and as surely to be believed, is what follows,

*even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.* The saints that are dead are not only represented as asleep, as before, but as “asleep in Jesus”; to distinguish them from the other dead, the wicked; for the phrase of sleeping in death is promiscuously used of good and bad, though most commonly applied to good men: and so say the Jews <sup>f27</sup>,

“we used to speak of just men, not as dead, but as sleeping; saying, afterwards such an one fell asleep, signifying that the death of the righteous is nothing else than a sleep.”

To represent death as a sleep makes it very easy and familiar; but it is more so, when it is considered as sleeping in Jesus, in the arms of Jesus; and such as are asleep in him must needs be at rest, and in safety: some join the phrase “in”, or “by Jesus”, with the word bring, and read the passage thus, “them that are asleep, by Jesus will God bring with him”; intimating, that God will raise up the dead bodies of the saints by Christ, as God-man and Mediator; and through him will bring them to eternal glory, and save them by him, as he has determined: others render the words, “them which sleep through”, or “by Jesus”; or die for his sake, and so restrain them to the martyrs; who they suppose only will have part in the first resurrection, and whom God will bring with Jesus at his second coming; but the coming of Christ will be “with all his saints”; (see <sup>1</sup> Thessalonians 3:13) wherefore they are best rendered, “them that sleep in Jesus”; that is, “in the faith of Jesus”, as the Arabic version renders it: not in the lively exercise of faith on Christ, for this is not the case of all the saints at death; some of them are in the dark, and go from hence under a cloud, and yet go safe, and may be said to die, or sleep, in Jesus, and will be brought with him; but who have the principle, and hold the doctrine of faith, are, and live and die, true believers; who die interested in Christ, in union with him, being chosen and blessed, and preserved in him from everlasting, and effectually called by his grace in time, and brought to believe in him; these, both their souls and bodies, are united to Christ, and are his care and charge; and which union remains in death, and by virtue of it the bodies of the saints will be raised at the last day: so that there may be the strongest assurance, that such will God bring with him; either God the Father will bring them with his Son, or Jehovah the Son will bring them with himself; he will raise them from the dead, and unite them to their souls, or spirits, he will bring with him; the consideration of which may serve greatly to mitigate and abate sorrow for deceased friends.

**Ver. 15.** *For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord*, etc.] The apostle having something new and extraordinary to deliver, concerning the coming of Christ, the first resurrection, or the resurrection of the saints, the change of the living saints, and the rapture both of the raised and living in the clouds to meet Christ in the air, expresses himself in this manner; either in allusion to the prophets of old, to whom the word of the Lord is said to



come, and who usually introduced their prophecies with a “Thus saith the Lord”; or in distinction from his own private sense, sentiment, and opinion of things; signifying, that what he was about to say, was not a fancy and conjecture of his own, the fruit and produce of his own brain, but what he could assert upon a sure foundation, upon the best and greatest authority, even the word of the Lord; and has respect either to some particular word of Christ, as some think, such as (~~418D~~ Matthew 24:30,31 ~~418E~~ John 5:28,29) or rather to a particular and peculiar revelation, and special instruction in these things, he had immediately from Christ; and it may be when he was caught up into the third heaven himself, and had an experience in himself of somewhat of that which both the living and raised saints shall feel, when they are caught up together in the clouds; since the change of the living saints, at the time of the resurrection of the dead, is a mystery which seems to have been first made known unto, and discovered by the Apostle Paul; (see ~~415D~~ 1 Corinthians 15:51,52).

*That we which are alive, and remain unto the coming of the Lord:* not that the apostle thought that he and the saints then in the flesh should live and continue till the second coming of Christ; for he did not imagine that the coming of Christ was so near, as is manifest from (~~310D~~ 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3) though the Thessalonians might take him in this sense, which he there corrects; but he speaks of himself and others in the first person plural, by way of instance and example, for illustration sake; that supposing he and others should be then in being, the following would be the case: and moreover, he might use such a way of speaking with great propriety of other saints, and even of those unborn, and that will be on the spot when Christ shall come a second time; since all the saints make up one body, one family, one church and general assembly; so that the apostle might truly and justly say, “we which are alive”; that is, as many of our body, of our family, of our church or society, that shall be living at the coming of Christ; and he might choose the rather to speak in this form, person, and tense, to awaken the care, circumspection, diligence, and watchfulness of the saints, since it could not be known how soon the Lord would come: however, from hence it appears, that there will be saints alive at Christ's second coming; he will have a seed to serve him till he comes again; he always had in the worst of times, and will have, and that even in the last days, in the days of the son of man, which are said to be like those of Noah and of Lot: and these are said to “remain”, or to be “left”, these will be a remnant, the residue and remainder of the election of grace, and will be such as have

escaped the fury of antichrist and his followers, or of the persecutors of the saints: now these

*shall not prevent them that are asleep*; that is, that are dead, so the Ethiopic version; the reason why the dead are so called, see in the note on the preceding verses: the sense is, either they “shall not come up to them that are asleep, or dead”, as the Syriac, Arabic, and Ethiopic versions render the words; they shall not come into the state of the dead, they shall undergo a change equivalent to death, but not death itself; (see ~~1~~1 Corinthians 15:51,52) or rather they “shall not go before” them; they shall not get the start of them, and be in the arms of Jesus, and enjoy his presence when he comes, before the dead in Christ, which might be thought, but this will not be the case; for the dead saints will rise before the living ones are changed, and both will be caught up together to meet the Lord, as is said in the following verses; so that the one shall not come or go before the other, or come at, or into the enjoyment of Christ first, but both together.

**Ver. 16.** *For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven*, etc.] Not by proxy, or by representatives; not by the ministry of angels, as on Mount Sinai; nor by the ministers of the word, as under the Gospel dispensation; nor by his spirit, and the discovery of his love and grace, in which sense he descends in a spiritual manner, and visits his people; but in person, in his human nature, in soul and body; in like manner as he went up to heaven will he descend from thence, so as to be visible, to be seen and heard of all: he will come down from the third heaven, whither he was carried up, into which he was received, and where he is retained until the time of the restitution of all things, and from whence the saints expect him: and this descent will be

*with a shout*; the word here used is observed by many to signify such a noise or shout as is made either by mariners, when they pull and row together; and shout to direct and encourage one another; or to an army with the general at the head of it, when about to undertake some considerable action, to enter on a battle, and make the onset; Christ will now appear as the King of kings, and Lord of lords, as the Judge of the whole earth, attended with the host, or armies of heaven, and the shout of a king will be among them: perhaps the same is intended, as by the voice of a great multitude, as the voice of many waters, and of mighty thunderings upon the coming of Christ, the destruction of antichrist, and the marriage

of the Lamb, in (<sup><6600></sup>Revelation 19:1,6,7,14,15). The Vulgate Latin, Syriac, and Ethiopic versions render it, “in”, or “with command”; and the Arabic version, “with his own government”, or “authority”; that is, he shall descend, either by the command of his Father, as man and Mediator, having authority from him, as the son of man, to execute judgment; or with his commanding power and authority over the mighty angels, that shall descend with him: it follows,

*with the voice of the archangel*; so Michael is called, in (<sup><6600></sup>Jude 1:9) with which compare (<sup><6607></sup>Revelation 12:7) and who perhaps is no other than Christ himself, who is the head of all principality and power; and the sense be, that Christ shall descend from heaven with a voice, or shall then utter such a voice, as will show him to be the archangel; or as the Syriac version renders it, “the head”, or “prince of angels”; and which whether, it will be an articulate voice, such as was expressed at the grave of Lazarus; or a violent clap of thunder, which is the voice of God; or the exertion of the power of Christ, is not certain: it is added,

*and with the trump of God*; called “the last trump”, (<sup><4652></sup>1 Corinthians 15:52) because none will be blown after it, and may be the same with the seventh trumpet, (<sup><6615></sup>Revelation 11:15) and here the trump of God, because blown by his order; or by Christ himself, who is God, and so be the same with the voice of the archangel; and these figurative expressions are used, to set forth the grandeur and magnificence in which Christ will come; not in that low, mean, and humble form in which he first came, but with great glory, and marks of honour and respect; with angels shouting, trumpets blowing, and saints rejoicing. This is said in allusion to the trumpet which was heard on Mount Sinai at the giving of the law, and of which the Jews say <sup>f28</sup>, that it *aytym aj am*, “quicken the dead”; for they have a notion, that, when the Israelites first heard the voice of the Lord, they died; but upon hearing it the second time, they returned to life <sup>f29</sup>: and they suppose also in the time, to come, at the resurrection of the dead, a trumpet will be blown, which will quicken the dead <sup>f30</sup>, and the day of judgment <sup>f31</sup>; and this is reckoned by them as one of the signs of the Messiah's coming <sup>f32</sup>:

“Michael shall shout with a great shout, and the graves of the dead shall be opened at Jerusalem, and the holy blessed God will restore the dead to life, and Messiah the son of David shall come,” etc.

*And the dead in Christ shall rise first*; the same with those that are asleep in Jesus, (~~3044~~ 1 Thessalonians 4:14) not only the martyrs that died for the sake of Christ, and his Gospel; nor merely those who die in the lively exercise of faith in Christ; but all that die interested in him, and in union with him: and these shall “rise”, in consequence of their being his; being given to him, made his care and charge, and engaged for by him, and in virtue of their union to him; and shall rise to an entire conformity to his glorious body, and in order to enjoy eternal life and glory with him: and these will rise “first”, before the wicked, which is the first resurrection, (~~6115~~ Revelation 20:5,6) even a thousand years before them; the righteous will rise in the morning of the resurrection, and so will have the dominion in the morning, (~~1994~~ Psalm 49:14) even at the beginning of the thousand years, as soon as Christ will come; but the wicked will not rise till the evening of that day, or till the close of the thousand years: and this agrees with the notions of the Jews, who thought that some will rise before others;

“Wheresoever thou findest the dead, take them and bury them, and I will give thee the first place in my resurrection.” (2 Esdras 2:23)

Having mentioned those words in (~~1380~~ Psalm 116:9) “I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living”, it is asked <sup>f33</sup>,

“is there no land of the living but Tyre and its neighbours, and Caesarea, and its neighbours, where is cheapness and fulness? says R. Simeon ben Lekish, in the name of Bar Kaphra, the land in which the dead live, **hl yj t**, “first”, in the days of the Messiah:”

and on the same place elsewhere <sup>f34</sup> they observe, that

“our Rabbins say two things, or give two reasons, why the fathers loved to be buried in the land of Israel, because the dead in the land of Israel **hl yj t μyyj**, “live”, or “rise first”, in the days of the Messiah, and shall enjoy the years of the Messiah:”

and in another place <sup>f35</sup> they take notice of what is written in (~~2369~~ Isaiah 26:19) “and the earth shall cast out the dead”: says R. Jochanan,

“the dead which are in the land (i.e. of Israel), they shall “live first”; as it is said, “thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise”: these are they that are without the land; “awake

and sing ye that dwell in the dust”, these are they that die in the wilderness:”

and again <sup>f36</sup>,

“as it is said, <sup><2406></sup>*Isaiah 40:26* “that bringeth out their host by numbers”, come see, it is said, all that die in the land of Israel [atymdq̄b ˆwmwqy](#), “shall rise first”, because the holy blessed God shall awake them, and raise them, according to (<sup><2369></sup>*Isaiah 26:19*).”

Once more they say <sup>f37</sup>,

“they that study in the law as they ought, these are they that shall “rise first” to everlasting life, as it is said (<sup><2712></sup>*Daniel 12:2*), “and many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life”, etc. and these are for everlasting life, because they study in everlasting life, which is the law:”

to which may be added the following passage <sup>f38</sup>,

“they that are worthy to be buried in the land of Israel, shall “be raised first” — and they shall be raised and quickened before the rest of the children of the world, who draw the waters of the law; and they draw, because they study to draw out of the waters of the law; and they are strengthened by the tree of life, and they shall go out “first”, because the tree of life is the cause why they shall “rise first”.”

they sometimes endeavour to fix the time, how long they will rise before the rest <sup>f39</sup>;

““many of those that sleep”, etc. these are the righteous that shall “go before” others in life, and how many years shall they go before them? R. Judah says, two hundred and ten years; R. Isaac says, two hundred and fourteen; according to others, the righteous shall go (or be raised) a year before the rest of men; says R. Nachman, it will be according to the computation (of time) that the carcass has been in the dust; R. Jose replies, if so, there will be many resurrections.”

These instances may suffice to show, that the Jews had a notion of some persons rising before others, to which the apostle may have some reference; though his sense is not only this, but also that the dead in Christ

shall rise before the living saints are changed, and taken up to be with Christ, and so shall not go before to him; which illustrates and proves what he had before asserted.

**Ver. 17.** *Then we which are alive and remain*, etc.] (see Gill on “~~1~~ Thessalonians 4:15”).

*shall be caught up*; suddenly, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, and with force and power; by the power of Christ, and by the ministry and means of the holy angels; and to which rapture will contribute, the agility which the bodies both of the raised and changed saints will have: and this rapture of the living saints will be

*together with them*; with the dead in Christ, that will then be raised; so that the one will not come before the other, or the one be sooner with Christ than the other; but the one being raised and the other changed, they will be joined in one company and general assembly, and be caught up together:

*in the clouds*; the same clouds perhaps in which Christ will come, will be let down to take them up; these will be the chariots, in which they will be carried up to him; and thus, as at our Lord's ascension a cloud received him, and in it he was carried up out of the sight of men, so at this time will all the saints ride up in the clouds of heaven:

*to meet the Lord in the air*; whither he will descend, and will then clear the regions of the air of Satan, and his posse of devils, which now rove about there, watching all opportunities, and taking all advantages to do mischief on earth; these shall then fall like lightning from heaven, and be bound and shut up in the bottomless pit, till the thousand years are ended: here Christ will stop, and will be visible to all, and as easily discerned by all, good and bad, as the body of the sun at noonday; as yet he will not descend on earth, because it is not fit to receive him; but when that and its works are burnt up, and it is purged and purified by fire, and become a new earth, he will descend upon it, and dwell with his saints in it: and this suggests another reason why he will stay in the air, and his saints shall meet him there, and whom he will take up with him into the third heaven, till the general conflagration and burning of the world is over, and to preserve them from it; and then shall all the elect of God descend from heaven as a bride adorned for her husband, and he with them, and the tabernacle of God shall be with men; (see ~~6200~~ Revelation 21:1-3). The resurrection by the

Mahometans is called **hl l a aql** <sup>f40</sup>, “a meeting of God”, or a going to meet God:

*and so shall we ever be with the Lord*; now the saints are with him at times, and have communion with him, but not always; but then they shall be ever with him; wherever he is; first in the air, where they shall meet him; then in the third heaven, where they shall go up with him; then on earth, where they shall descend and reign with him a thousand years; and then in the ultimate glory to all eternity: and this will be the issue and accomplishment of the counsel and covenant of grace, of the sufferings and death of Christ, and of his preparations and prayers.

**Ver. 18.** *Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*] Or doctrines; as that the saints, when they die, do not cease to be, but are asleep, and asleep in Jesus; that their souls are with him, and their bodies sleep in his arms, and are his care; that these will be as soon with Christ, as the saints that will be alive when he comes; that the coming of Christ will be with great power and glory; that the righteous will rise first in the morning of the resurrection, and before the living saints are changed, and are with Christ; that they will both be taken up together to meet him; and that they shall all be with him, and that for ever, and never part more; than which nothing can yield more true and solid comfort, under all the trials and troubles of this life, under all diseases and distempers of body, under all afflictions and persecutions for Christ's sake, under the loss of near and dear relations, and in a view of death and eternity: some copies read, “with these words of the spirit”; and so the Arabic version, “with these spiritual words”: for such they are, being the word of God, as in (<sup><SM5></sup>1 Thessalonians 4:15).