

**YOU: Connect. Grow. Serve. Go!**  
**Summer 2019 Leader Commentary**



**Unit 2: The “Right” Stuff**  
**Session 3: Am I Right About It? (see pp. 132-135)**

**The Question:** What motivates me to live right?

**The Point:** God’s love motivates me to live right.

**Background Passage:** Romans 6:1-14; 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

**Focal Passage:** 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

This commentary is designed to help you think about the question, “What motivates me to live right?” and drive home this one truth: God’s love motivates me to live right.

**Focus on These Points**

***To Keep It Pleasing to God***  
***(1 Thess. 4:1-2)***

The phrase “additionally then” in verse 1 has also been translated “finally,” but it does not signal an end to Paul’s teaching in this letter. Instead, it indicates that Paul was making a connection between what he had said previously with new material. Paul had ended his previous thought (what we know as 1 Thess. 3:11-13) with a benediction on behalf of his readers. He had prayed that God would lead him back to the fellowship in Thessalonica and, until that happened, they would continue to grow in their faith. He prayed that they would learn to love each other more fully and that they would remain blameless until the day Jesus returned.

The first verses of chapter 4 are another urgent plea for spiritual growth and godliness. In a sense, Paul was moving from building a theological foundation to explaining how that foundation is lived out every day. Paul was about to teach the Thessalonians about the practical nature of their faith. In doing so, he addressed his readers as “brothers and sisters,” indicating a deep affection for them as members of God’s family.

His request that they continue to move forward in their faith is rooted in Jesus Himself. Paul understood that Christ wanted the Thessalonians to mature as believers, so that was his prayer and desire for them as well.

Paul used two particular verbs to emphasize his desires in verse 1. The first has been translated *ask*, but it is much stronger in the Greek than the English conveys. The second verb is *encourage*, which can also be translated “exhort.” In addition, pairing the two verbs creates a repetition that would have let the Thessalonians know that this was more a command to righteous living than a helpful suggestion or plea.

In addition, Paul wasn’t challenging them to learn a new way of thinking or acting. Instead, he simply asked them to live out the instructions they had already received from him. And Paul had

spent some time in Thessalonica before escaping a mob and moving on to Berea (Acts 17:1-10). In that short amount of time, he had led several Jews and God-fearing Greeks to faith in Jesus and to disciple them in the faith. The Thessalonians had seen Paul's example, along with the examples of Timothy and other stronger Christians. Now Paul was challenging them to live out their faith each day.

### ***To Keep It Clean Before God (1 Thess. 4:3-8)***

The moral life Paul was encouraging his readers to pursue included some practical elements. The umbrella for all these issues was personal sanctification. Paul noted that sanctification—purity and holiness—was God's will for his readers. That's because sanctification ultimately leads one to become more like Christ. The first topic had to do with sexual immorality. This was a broad term that would have included any sexual relationship outside marriage such as adultery, premarital sex, and homosexuality. Like many Christians living in pagan first-century cultures, the Thessalonians were surrounded by sexual temptations. Even the worship of the idols in the temples used sexual activity as a form of worship. Outside the temples, sexual permissive behavior was accepted as the norm in society. For example, extramarital affairs were accepted as long as no children were conceived. It is possible that some of the believers in Thessalonica had strayed from Paul's teaching on the subject.

Paul emphasized that believers need to know how to control their bodies. In the previous lesson Peter told his readers that self-control was part of the divine nature and a quality they as Christians needed to develop. Here Paul made a similar argument. While self-control is not natural, it can be developed with discipline and the help of the Holy Spirit. For Paul, it was the key to living a holy and honorable life.

In addition to damaging one's relationship with God, Paul shared that sexual sin devastates our relationships with others. And God does not take these offenses lightly. Paul called Him an "avenger" (v. 6) of those who have been abused and mistreated.

In the end Paul's warning against sexual immorality comes down to God's demand for holiness. He had called the believers in Thessalonica, and His authority over their lives should have motivated them to live according to His desires, not the cravings of their old way of life. This also means that anyone who ignores these commands is guilty of snubbing their nose at God. Purity and holiness were not Paul's ideas. They originated with God, and rejecting these instructions means rejecting the God who gave them. But Paul reminded the believers that they had a special weapon in their battle against immorality. Not only has God demanded holiness from His people, but He also provided His Holy Spirit to empower them toward that goal.

### ***To Keep It Together with the Saints of God (1 Thess. 4:9-12)***

After challenging his readers to avoid abusing others through sexual immorality, Paul encouraged them to love one another. And, as with sanctification and sexuality, they mainly needed to return to what he had already shared.

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Paul said that God had taught the Thessalonians how to love one another, and he knew the Thessalonian believers were already making strides in this area. Yet some Thessalonians also needed to grow in their work ethic.

Paul gave them three instructions moving forward. First, he told them to live a quiet life. Second, they could mind their own business. Instead of spreading gossip or meddling in the affairs of others, they should focus on nurturing their own households in the faith. Finally, they could work with their hands. In general, Greeks looked down on those who earned a living through manual labor. But Paul himself worked hard as a tentmaker to support his own ministry.