

SO WE WILL BE WITH THE LORD FOREVER

1Thessalonians 4:1-18

Key Verse: 4:17,18

“After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words.”

There is a saying that humans live by hope. When we have hope we have the strength to overcome any hardship. Hope makes our heart pump with excitement like a drum-beat. The person who has hope is beautiful. So the light purple color (violet) symbolizes the dream we keep in our heart. People call it the purple dream. The people or nation who do not have a dream will perish, but those who have a dream will prosper. Joseph is a good example. Joseph had a God-given dream. He faced unbearable hardship and suffering. But never gave up because he had God’s hope. He won the victory by faith because he kept God’s hope. Moses had God’s hope. He could lead a million Israelites to Canaan through the wilderness for 40 years. When he had God’s hope he could change a slave people into God’s army.

However, all hopes we have on earth are not eternal. All glories on earth disappear with death. I often read in the newspaper, “the former president died” or “the famous Nobel Laureate died” or “the famous actor died.” What then is eternal hope and living hope? That is God’s kingdom and Christ’s second coming. The Christians in Thessalonica were under severe suffering. Paul makes them aware of the eternal hope and teaches them how to live in this world. Through today’s passage we want to hold fast the eternal hope and to live the life that pleases God.

This passage also tells us about Love and Holiness. So I will talk about “love and holy.” I am unholy. I am actually like a murderer or adulterer based on Jesus’ standard. The good news is that I am free of guilt by the grace of Jesus. That’s only the beginning. God wants me to be holy and grow until I know God’s love. I repented a lot struggling with this passage and still am repenting of my dirty, impure and cold heart beating in my chest. Recently we said the word “Love” many times. When we know God’s holiness we know love. God gave His one and only Son to give His life for us. This is God’s holiness and love. Without knowing God’s holiness we are talking only about selfish love. May God bless you to have the eternal hope, God’s love, and God’s holiness!

I. Be sanctified (1-8)

Look at verses 1 and 2, “As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you **how to live in order to please God**, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this **more and more**. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.” When Paul pioneered Thessalonica he showed an example of how Christians should live and please God. It is “sanctification” in short. They accepted Paul’s teaching as if it was actually God’s word. They made all efforts to be sanctified through Christ Jesus. What was the atmosphere of Thessalonica at that time? Sexual immorality was prevailing. They worshiped idols. They practiced sexual impurity during idol worship. This was the general tendency of society. It was easy for Christians to be tempted. Paul urged them to live holy lives more and more. Paul says it is not his own thought but that he gives instruction by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

What is the goal of sanctification? Thessalonians 3:13 says, “May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.” In other words, sanctification is to become like Jesus. At the moment when we believe in Jesus we are called righteous by the grace of Jesus. However, sanctification is a life-long work. Therefore we have to live in order to please God more and more by becoming like Jesus Christ. This should be our lifetime commitment.

Look at verse 3a, “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified.” God’s will is that Christians become holy like Jesus. God is holy. Therefore we Christians should be holy. We become righteous by believing in Jesus. However, if we have no image of Jesus in us through continuous sanctification, we barely enter into the Kingdom of God. Some call this shameful salvation. But we hope for a glorious salvation. If we do not grow spiritually, not only do we have shameful salvation but also there is danger of shrinking back or being destroyed. Heb. 10:39 says, “But we do not belong to those who shrink back and are destroyed, but to those who have faith and are saved.” Therefore we have to grow until we become holy like Jesus.

How can we become holy? Most of all we have to desire holiness. We have to lament our sins, beating our hearts and repenting daily of our sins that we commit knowingly and unknowingly, and be washed with Jesus’ holy blood. We have to think of Jesus a lot. We have to pray. We have to offer ourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer every part of ourselves to him as an instrument of righteousness (Romans 6:12-14). We have to throw away lustful desire and immorality with all our strength.

Paul commands in Jesus’ name in verse 3b, “you should avoid sexual immorality.” This means that we have to avoid even looking at such things in the internet, magazines, or movies. Lustful desire and sexual immorality is the biggest hindrance to sanctification. I confess that I am also tempted. When I see an attractive woman, my eye wants to see with unclean heart. I am tempted to watch the Miss Korea competition. Then I immediately warn my eye and mind to keep them pure. So I am training my eye and mind to be pure.

Sanctification is the process of becoming holy. Earlier Paul says in 3:12-13, “May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.” Abounding in love means that our hearts are established in holiness. Paul relates love to holiness. Paul exhorts Christians to make progress in holiness or sanctification. When we grow in holiness, our love for each other also grows and becomes pure.

Look at verses 4 through 6, “that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before.” Verse 4 is translated in RSV as, “Each one of you should know how to take a wife for himself. Sex is allowed only between husband and wife. Based on the RSV translation and other reference verses, Paul seems to be talking to husbands and wives. Paul commands Christians to have respect between husbands and

wives. In Noah's time people selected their spouses only by sexual and outward attraction. So their marriage was to satisfy only their sexual desire. People also may want to choose their partner based on human background or social status for success. This is to take advantage of others. The world these days is more corrupted than Noah's time. The popular culture stirs up sexual immorality. The marriage by sexual and outward attraction ends up with divorce and many families are broken these days in many countries. Husband and wife should love and respect each other in a holy and honorable way. We have to offer our family and ourselves to God positively and devote our family to please God all the more.

Look at verses 7 and 8. “For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.” Human beings lost God's holy image through Adam's fall. All were destined to eternal punishment. God sacrificed His only Son to die on the cross to save humans and to restore God's holy image in human beings. God sent the Holy Spirit to the world when Jesus ascended to heaven. Therefore, those who pursue sexual immorality and lustful desire in action or **in thought world**, are the ones who reject God and quench the Holy Spirit. Verse 6 says, “The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins.” And Hebrew 13:4 says, “Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immorality.” God punishes those who are sexually immoral. God's judgement by flood in Noah's time and by fire in Sodom and Gomorrah were because of sexual immorality. Sexual immorality ruined the Roman Empire. God punishes the person and the nation who commit sexual immorality. Paul commands “you should be sanctified: you should avoid sexual immorality.”

Jesus said, in Matthew 5:27 and 28, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” Matthew 5:21 and 22 say, “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgement.’ But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.” We Christians, should consider the sin in our thought world the same as in action. It is me who shall repent sincerely.

II. Love more and more (9, 10)

The second instruction Paul gave to the Christians is to love more and more. Look at verses 9 and 10a, “Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. And in fact, you do love all of God's family throughout Macedonia.” The Christians in Thessalonica obeyed God's word and loved each other. They loved not only the church in Thessalonica but also all of God's family throughout Macedonia. So Paul did not need to write to them about their love. Yet Paul urges them to do so more and more. There is no satisfying level in love. Love is unlimited in depth, length, and height. So Paul recommends loving more and more. Paul recommends praying for each other more and more. Paul recommends encouraging more and more the one who is in difficulty. As mentioned earlier, love is directly related to God's holiness. The love, Christians say, should be as holy as the love of Christ, who became a servant to dirty sinners and finally gave His life for sinners.

In 3:12 Paul prays that the Lord may make Christians' love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else. Here everyone else is the people we work with in our job, and meet on the campus and on the road. We have to extend Christ's love to our neighbor, society, and all who need our help.

III. Work with your hands (11, 12)

The third instruction Paul gives is to live a quiet life, mind one's own business, and work with one's hands. Look at verses 11 and 12, "and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody." What is living a quiet life? It means to have a spiritual fellowship with the LORD through prayer and the meditation of God's word while living in busy life. People are very busy. When we invite students, they say, "no time." But they spend much time for drinking, entertaining, or searching the internet without meaningful purpose. We have to check how we spend time so that we may have enough time for prayer and God's word.

Paul commands us, "mind your own business and work with your hands." Though we spend enough time for prayer and Bible study, we don't have to be idle. We have to work hard. At that time some people believed that Jesus would come again soon and sat down to pray only without working for their life. So they became burdens to others. Christians should work hard with our hands for life and also have a quiet life for mission and fellowship with God. So we can be respected in a society.

IV. Encourage one another with resurrection hope (13-18)

In verses 13 through 18, Paul teaches Christians about Jesus' glorious second coming, which is our final goal. Some in Thessalonians were sad about the Christians who died before Jesus' second coming. They probably were martyred or died while living faithfully for Jesus. So Paul wanted them to be informed about **those who sleep in death**.

All people die. Is death the end? Paul describes Christians' death as sleep. Those who sleep will wake up. There is a second death for unbelievers after physical death. Revelation 21:8 says, "But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death." However, there will be eternal life for Christians. Christians believe that God forgives our sins when we repent in the name of Jesus, believing the power of Jesus' holy blood. What will happen to the Christians who sleep in death after believing in Jesus in this world? Look at verses 14 and 15. "For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep." When Christians die, their souls enter the Kingdom of God immediately. They live there with Christ Jesus. And Jesus will take them with Him when He comes again.

How will Jesus come again? What magnificent and marvelous things will happen when Jesus comes again? Look at 16 and 17, “For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.” When Jesus comes again there will be a loud command. Then there will be the voice of the archangel. Then there will be the trumpet call of God by numerous angels.

Many people ask, “How many people will see Jesus when He returns?” Christ’s second coming will be bright, loud and glorious. This event cannot be hidden. Every human on planet earth will see Jesus. Revelation 1:7 says, “Look, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and all peoples on earth will mourn because of him. So shall it be! Amen.” There will not be a person on earth who is unaware of Jesus’ return. Jesus Himself describes the manner of His coming in Matthew 24:27, “For as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.” Verses 30 and 31 of the same chapter describe Jesus coming with power and great glory and with the sound of a great trumpet, which awakens the righteous dead who are then gathered from the ends of the earth.

Our Lord, Jesus Christ, will come in the clouds with power and glory. The Souls of Christians, who have fallen asleep in Christ, will be clothed with resurrection bodies. Then those who are still alive and are left will also be clothed with resurrection bodies. At the moment of Jesus’ second coming, at the last trump, the mortal bodies of the saved will be transformed and they will receive immortal bodies. 1 Corinthians 15:52-53 says, “in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.” We are called righteous by believing Jesus in this present time. However, at that time we will be completely righteous like Jesus. Our status will rise up dramatically. This cannot be compared to the best status change in the world. **All faithful Christians, will be caught up in the clouds to meet Jesus in the air.** We will see Abraham and David. I will see my mom there. We will see all saints who died in Jesus. We will see our friends, shepherds, and missionaries who died in Jesus.

What is next? Look at 17b, “And so we will be with the Lord forever.” We will live with Jesus in heaven forever. God himself will be with us and be our God. He will wipe every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things will have passed away (Revelation. 21:3-4).

Our resurrection body is divine body that has no sinful nature at all. The resurrection body is like an angel. There is no more marrying or being given in marriage. There is no struggle or suffering like we have in this world. There is no death, sickness, and no pain, but always youth. It is so marvelous even to think about the resurrection life.

What is our ultimate hope? Isn’t it Jesus’ second coming, our resurrection body, and our eternal life with God in God’s kingdom? This is our ultimate and living hope. Jesus can come again even tonight or several years later or in the next generation. We don’t know the time and date. It is clear that Jesus will come again. Many Bible scholars say that the time Jesus comes again is near, based on the signs in our time. What do we do? Look at verse 18. “Therefore encourage one another with

these words.” We have to encourage each other with resurrection hope, eternal life in God’s kingdom, and so holy life in this world. Only the promise of our eternal and living hope can encourage us. Jesus is patiently waiting to come back because God wants as many people as possible to repent and return to heaven with Him. 2 Peter 3:8-9 says, “But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

We are saved but living in the world of paradise lost. So we are often discouraged and tempted by sin. In Muslim countries and North Korea, believing Jesus means death and severe persecution. We have the cross to take for the mission from our Lord Jesus Christ. We are sometimes disheartened and have struggles even in the church. But when we have the living hope of Jesus’ second coming, our own resurrections, and eternal life in God’s kingdom, we can love suffering to live by faith and to follow Jesus. We can love our brothers and sisters, denying ourselves. We can throw away sinful life or earthly value.

Pastor Kilchul Joo was martyred. Many pastors yielded to bow down to idols under Japanese control. But Pastor Joo did not yield to the end, and so he suffered all kinds of tortures and finally was martyred. By hoping in Jesus’ second coming he won the victory against severe tortures, sufferings, and persecutions. When he died keeping his purity, his wife praised, saying, “Dear Pastor, you won the victory!” We all have to get strength and encouragement to live the life to please God by this hope of Jesus’ second coming. Let’s encourage each other with the hope of Jesus’ second coming.

When Jesus said, “What is more important than life?” the life he meant is eternal life. I repent that I have taken God’s holiness lightly. I thought I am fine in comparison to the world’s trend. But I committed sin in my mind. My wife told me to repent for neglecting God’s mission. But I am repenting more for ignoring God’s command, “Be holy.” I repent now with such pain as if I cut my hand off or took out my eye, since I held hatred in my mind and watched women lustfully. And then I want to take my mission with the hope of glorious resurrection when Jesus comes again. I ask God to give me strength as God gave the strength to Samson at the last moment when he repented.

Conclusion:

Christians are God’s children whom Christ bought by His holy blood. As God is holy, we have to struggle more and more to be sanctified. As Christ gave His life to love us, so we love our brothers and sisters and all people. In this busy society we have to make all our efforts to live a quiet life and to work with our hands faithfully. Most of all we have to hope in Jesus’ second coming. We have to have the hope of resurrection and eternal life in God’s kingdom. With this hope we have to run the race of faith. Revelation 2:10b says, “Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you life as your victor’s crown.”