

Greater Love & Possessing One's Vessel: 1 Thess 4:1–12

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INTRODUCTION

Author of 1 Thessalonians: Paul

Recipients of 1 Thessalonians: A new church in Thessalonica comprised of new believers

Paul's Ministry in Thessalonica: Acts 17:1–10: November 50–January 51 (cf. earlier messages)

Dates of First and Second Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians: Early summer 51 (only about 8 months since Paul arrived in Thessalonica)
2 Thessalonians: Summer 51

Occasion of First Thessalonians:

After Paul left Thessalonica, the church there came under strong persecution. Opponents charged that Paul had fleeced & abandoned them. Furthermore, some within the congregation died. They feared that the tribulation had begun and about whether they would be reunited with deceased believers.

Thematic Statement: 1:9–10

<i>How you turned to God from idols</i>	(2:1–3:13)	The relationship between Paul & them
<i>to serve the living and true God</i>	(4:1–12)	Continue serving the Lord
<i>and to wait for His Son from heaven</i>	(4:13–5:11)	Expect the pre-trib rapture

Review

(1:2–10) Paul prays thankfully because they apply the word in love, await the Lord's deliverance & are elect; specifically, his message had power & assurance by the Holy Spirit, which they perceived in Paul's demeanor among them; so they followed Paul & God, after receiving that message in affliction, so they became examples to believers in Greece & elsewhere, so others speak of their faith: specifically, of Paul's entrance to the Thessalonians who now serve God & patiently await the rapture

(2:1–12) Paul's entry to Thess was productive, despite sufferings because, God entrusted Him to share truth, so Paul pleases God (bels' judge); he did not flatter (for gain) nor seek \$ befitting an apostle, but was gentle as a nursing mother w/ own infant, seeking to impart word & his very life, because he loves them, evidenced by his laboring to avoid burdening them; they know his integrity among them as a father directing his own children to live worth of God who calls them to the kingdom

(2:13–16) Paul thanks God that they welcomed His word, in which they were like Judean churches in facing persecution by their own countrymen who opposed God & people, killing & hindering those God sent

(2:17–20) Paul unsuccessfully sought to return to Thess, but anticipates being with them in the kingdom, because he loves them

(3:1–13) After leaving Thessalonica, Paul sent Timothy to establish and encourage them, so their afflictions (to which—as Paul had said—bels are appointed) would not deter them (that Satan had not caused defection that would nullify Paul's sufferings & labor that they be rewardable); Timothy returned to Paul with good news which encouraged Paul, who rejoices that they stand firm and who prays that he may come to edify them and also prays that their mutual love increase, so the Lord will establish them in preparation to returning with Him at the second advent

NEW EXPOSITION:

(4:1–2) [Based upon their good initial response to Paul coming to them and their progress after he left, despite persecution] Paul urges them to abound still more in following his commands

(4:3) [Specifically, the area in which they need to abound still more in following Paul's commands is] to obey God's will (to be [sexually] holy) by abstaining from sexual immorality

This refers neither ~~positional sanctification~~ nor to ~~progressive sanctification as a whole~~.

(4:4) [More precisely than to just avoid sexual immorality] Believers are to learn how to gain (sexual) control of their own bodies in sanctification and honor

Three views have been popular. I reject the first two for contextual reasons. Each view depends on the definition of the word *vessel* (*skeuos*). Since this is the only use of the word in this epistle, we need some idea of the range of meaning for the word.

1. View 1a/1b: *vessel* as *wife*. View 1a = marry a wife, view 1b = possess the wife one has

Passages said to support the view: 1 Peter 3:7

Excursus: What does *weaker vessel* really mean?

Reasons for rejecting the view

2. View 2: *vessel* as *private parts*. View 2 = learn to control one's own private parts

Passages said to support the view: 1 Samuel 21:5

Reasons for rejecting the view

3. View 3: *vessel as body*. View 2 = learn to control one's own body (sexually)

Passages that support the view:

2 Corinthians 4:7

Romans 9:22–23

Acts 9:15

1 Peter 3:7

1 Samuel 21:5

Restatement and exposition of 4:4: [More precisely than to just avoid sexual immorality] Believers are to learn how to gain (sexual) control of their own bodies in sanctification and honor

(4:5) The bodies of believers are not to be controlled by passionate lust as w/ Gentile unbelievers

(4:6) [The purpose for gaining (sexual) control of their bodies in sanctification and honor is] so we will not defraud our brethren in this matter, because the Lord will discipline, as He warns

(4:7) The reason the Lord disciplines sexual immorality is because He called us to holiness, not to uncleanness

(4:8) The one who rejects this [command to sexual purity] does not merely reject the word of man, but (more importantly) rejects (the word of) God who gave us the Holy Spirit

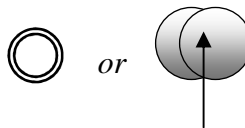
(4:9) Paul does not need to inform them of the command to love one another, because they are already God-taught to love the brethren

Note the use of *agapaō* and *phileō* in this verse:

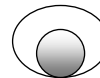
But concerning brotherly love (*philadelphia*) you have no need that I write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love (*agapaō*) one another.

Two possibilities exist:

1. The two terms refer to exactly the same idea.



2. *Agapaō* refers to an idea that includes (but exceeds) *phileō*.



However, *agapaō* does not refer to an idea that excludes *phileō*.



1 Thessalonians 1:3; 3:6 and 12 affect how we should understand this verse

1:3

3:6

3:12

4:9: How is it that their love for one another needs improvement?

(4:10) Their love abounds for believers throughout Macedonia, but it should abound still more

(4:11) [The result of increased love for each other & believers throughout Macedonia would be] that an aspiration for a quiet life would keep them occupied with their own business and would keep them occupied in productive work, as Paul commanded them

This verse (by the way) is one indication that 1 Thessalonians preceded 2 Thessalonians

Cf. 2 Thessalonians 3

Cf. 1 Thessalonians 2:5 and 9

(4:12) [The purpose of aspiring to a quiet life, occupied with their own life and in productive work] is that they would conduct themselves properly toward unbelievers & would not lack

CONCLUSION

(4:1–8) Paul urges them to abound in keeping his commands, in particular, that they would abstain from sexual immorality so they not defraud their brethren (incurring discipline from God who called us to holiness)

(4:9–12) They do not need to be told to love one another, because they are God-taught this truth; their love for believers near and far should abound still more that they would live quietly minding their own business & being productive so they would conduct themselves properly w/ unbelievers & not lack