



## 1 Thessalonians - Chapter Four

### Summary of Chapter Four

Paul gives earnest exhortations to abound in holiness, with a caution against uncleanness, enforced with several arguments (vv.1-8). He then mentions the great duties of brotherly love, and quietness with industry in a believer's calling (vv.9-12). Paul concludes by comforting those who mourned for their relations and friends that had died in the Lord (vv.13-18).

### III. 1 Thessalonians 4:1-5:28 - Instruction and Exhortation

In the main body of the letter Paul gives instructions on pleasing God (4:1-12), the Second Coming (4:13-5:11), community conduct (5:12-22), and prayer and assurance (5:23-24).

#### II.a 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 - A Life Pleasing to God

Paul calls on the Thessalonians to please God (vv.1-2). He then commands them to live in sexual holiness. Some converts may have found it a struggle to adjust to Christianity's demanding ethical code (vv.3-8). Finally, he calls them to demonstrate Christian love for each other (vv.9-12).

<sup>1</sup> Finally, brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God (as, in fact, you are doing), you should do so more and more.

#### 1 Thessalonians 4:1

**Finally** is Greek *loipon*. Paul is either indicating that he is approaching the end of his letter or simply that he is beginning a new section, as he does in: <<**Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord**>> (Philippians 3:1a); clearly, there is much still to come.

**To live and to please God** is to live a life that is pleasing to God: <<**I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called**>> (Ephesians 4:1), and: <<**So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him**>> (2 Corinthians 5:9). As noted in

Colossians 1:10, to live or to walk is a Jewish metaphor for proper conduct or behaving oneself in the eyes of God. It corresponds to the Hebrew term *halak*. Although there is nothing an individual can do to earn their salvation, they can and should respond to God's call on their lives by living in a way that is pleasing to him. In this case, Paul notes they are doing just that, i.e. as, in fact, you are doing.

You should do so more and more. Their process of growth in sanctification and in their ability to 'please God' has not yet been completed.

<sup>2</sup> For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

### 1 Thessalonians 4:2

Instructions, Greek *parangelia*, is originally a military term that usually denotes the issue of authoritative commands.

<sup>3</sup> For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication;

### 1 Thessalonians 4:3

For this is the will of God, your sanctification. Paul reflects on the qualities of holiness by using such terms three times in vv.3-7. For Paul, holiness draws its strength from the circle of ideas that belonged to the Temple in Jerusalem. To be in the Temple was to be in God's presence and this demanded holiness. To achieve such sanctification, special purification rites were to be undertaken. It was important for everyone who was to come before the ultimate holy one to be in a state of complete purity. And Paul knew of course that Jesus sacrificial death had purified those who believed in him: **<<he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption>>** (Hebrews 9:12).

That you abstain from fornication. For former pagans, the lure of sexual sins was strong, as Paul writes about in 1 Corinthians Chapters 5-6, and perhaps best sums up his thinking in the statement: **<<Shun fornication! Every sin that a person commits is outside the body; but the fornicator sins against the body itself>>** (1 Corinthians 6:18). By using the Greek term *porneia*, which referred to adultery, fornication, or other sexual immorality, Paul forbids any sexual activity outside the bounds of heterosexual marriage, as noted in: **<<But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints>>** (Ephesians 5:3). Another apostle also writes on this issue, refer to 1 Peter 1:15-22.

<sup>4</sup> that each one of you knows how to control your own body in holiness and honour, <sup>5</sup> not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God;

## 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5

That each one of you knows shows that each believer has the personal responsibility to understand how they should live a life that is pleasing to God.

Control your own body. The Greek could be rendered ‘take a wife for himself’. However, in view of vv.4-5 and 1 Corinthians Chapter 7, sexual self-control is more likely the intended meaning.

In holiness and honour refers to behaviour that is considered to be suitable before God and humans respectively. People have often regarded holiness as a negative quality, the absence of moral fault; however, it is actually a positive thing, the shining perfection that appears in the human character when believers finally come to realise what it means to live in God’s own image.

Not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God. Paul is concerned that some of the Thessalonian Christians may fall back into their former ways, and was the subject of Paul’s concern in the opening of his letter to Rome. See Romans 1:24-27 and the associated comments. One of Paul’s concerns here would have been the common practice of sacred prostitution in pagan temples, which was also accompanied by a lax moral code: <<*Now this I affirm and insist on in the Lord: you must no longer live as the Gentiles live, in the futility of their minds*>> (Ephesians 4:17), and: <<*Formerly, when you did not know God, you were enslaved to beings that by nature are not gods*>> (Galatians 4:8), not uncommon with modern society, particularly in the western world. Paul sees the solution to the problem as being the knowledge of God that the believer has and living a life that values what is revealed of God through his Son.

<sup>6</sup> that no one wrongs or exploits a brother or sister in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, just as we have already told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.

## 1 Thessalonians 4:6

Wrongs, Greek *pleonekteō*, means to defraud, exploit or cheat, something that was contrary to God’s moral law: <<*You shall not cheat one another, but you shall fear your God; for I am the Lord your God*>> (Leviticus 25:17), and: <<*Neither shall you commit adultery*>> (Deuteronomy 5:18); here it refers to defrauding a fellow Christian, i.e. a brother or sister, through sexual sin, since such behaviour in the church devalues all of its members. A particular issue that Paul may have had in mind would be the unacceptable practice of a church member having a sexual relationship with another member’s spouse. This continues to be a concern in the modern day church and is just as unacceptable as it always was.

The Lord is an avenger. Those who ignore the Christian sexual ethic will face the wrath of Jesus when he returns, and perhaps even before: <<*Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; because the day of their calamity is at hand, their doom comes swiftly*>> (Deuteronomy 32:35), <<*O Lord, you God of vengeance, you God of vengeance, shine forth!*>> (Psalm 94:1), <<*O Lord our God, you answered them; you were a forgiving God to*

*them, but an avenger of their wrongdoings*>> (Psalm 99:8), <<*For he will repay according to each one's deeds*>> (Romans 2:6), and: <<*For we know the one who said, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay.'* And again, *'The Lord will judge his people'*>> (Hebrews 10:30).

We have already told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. Paul is simply reminding them of what they have already been taught and is not telling them something new. Paul viewed repetition in teaching to be a safeguard: <<*To write the same things to you is not troublesome to me, and for you it is a safeguard*>> (Philippians 3:1b).

<sup>7</sup> For God did not call us to impurity but in holiness.

### 1 Thessalonians 4:7

When the Thessalonians embraced Paul's Gospel, they were responding to God's effectual call, which is commented on more fully in Romans 8:30 and 1 Thessalonians 1:4. That call did not have as its goal impurity but rather a life of holiness in the sight of God: <<*For I am the Lord your God; sanctify yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I am holy. You shall not defile yourselves with any swarming creature that moves on the earth*>> (Leviticus 11:44), and: <<*Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct*>> (1 Peter 1:15).

<sup>8</sup> Therefore whoever rejects this rejects not human authority but God, who also gives his Holy Spirit to you.

### 1 Thessalonians 4:8

Therefore. In view of v.7, to reject Paul's teaching on sexual conduct is to reject not merely Paul's apostolic authority but God himself, who is the source of Paul's sexual ethics.

Who also gives his Holy Spirit to you. In the OT, such as: <<*The days are surely coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt — a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people*>> (Jeremiah 31:31-33), and: <<*A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will remove from your body the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. I will put my spirit within you, and make you follow my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances*>> (Ezekiel 36:26-27), God promised that he would establish a new covenant in which the Holy Spirit would write the law on people's hearts and cause them to obey. This new covenant reality, which has been inaugurated by Christ, makes sexual sin inexcusable. To reject the giver of the Holy Spirit is to cut oneself off from the sanctifying power that enables the Christian to be 'blameless in holiness' at the Second Coming, as noted in 3:13.

<sup>9</sup> Now concerning love of the brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anyone write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another; <sup>10</sup> and indeed you do love all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, beloved, to do so more and more, <sup>11</sup> to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you, <sup>12</sup> so that you may behave properly towards outsiders and be dependent on no one.

### 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12

Now concerning love. Paul urges the Thessalonians to continue showing brotherly love and to be financially self-supporting. Some in the church have abandoned gainful employment and are living off the charity of wealthier Christians, as Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15. It is unclear whether or not this problem was related to the Thessalonians' confusion about the end times.

Love is more than just an emotion and is intended, within the Christian community and the wider world, to have a practical application. God's own expression of his love resulted in his total self-giving in the person of his Son, who paid the ultimate price in love. Christian expression of that same love must have that same self-giving quality and money is an inescapable part of such giving. Christianity is about family, and family is about sharing everything.

Taught by God to love one another. As already noted in Jeremiah 31:33, it was prophesied that God would write his law on the hearts of his people and directly teach them as part of the new covenant. Christians already know this reality: *<<As for you, the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and so you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things, and is true and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, abide in him>>* (1 John 2:27); for by love they fulfil the law: *<<You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord>>* (Leviticus 19:18), *<<I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another>>* (John 15:17), and: *<<Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet'; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law>>* (Romans 13:8-10).

Indeed you do love all the brothers and sisters throughout Macedonia. This passage demonstrates how love should permeate throughout the global church, disregarding any denominational differences, as in Christ there is only one church: *<<There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus>>* (Galatians 3:28).

To aspire to live quietly is a call to live peaceably with others: *<<For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their*

***work quietly and to earn their own living***>> (2 Thessalonians 3:11-12), and not to meddle in their affairs. It is also a call to be at peace with oneself, not feeling the necessity to always be someone better in worldly terms, but to be content with the person that God has called one to be and the life situation that accompanies that calling.

**Work with your hands**. Paul calls on Thessalonian believers to earn their own living rather than to depend on wealthier Christians, i.e. **be dependent on no one**, as Paul had instructed them when he was at Thessalonica. This is an instruction that he would repeat, as recently noted: <<***For even when we were with you, we gave you this command: Anyone unwilling to work should not eat. For we hear that some of you are living in idleness, mere busybodies, not doing any work. Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living***>> (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12).

**Behave properly towards outsiders**. For some Christians to be shamelessly exploiting the charity of wealthier Christians would have been disgraceful in a 1<sup>st</sup> Century Greco-Roman environment and would have brought disrepute on the church in the eyes of non-believers, i.e. those referred to as **outsiders**: <<***And he said to them, 'To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside, everything comes in parables***>> (Mark 4:11).

### III.b 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11 - The Coming of the Lord

Paul first deals with the issue of whether and how deceased Christians will participate in the Second Coming (vv.13-18), and then reassures the Thessalonians that they are destined for salvation rather than wrath (5:1-11).

#### Introduction to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

Paul responds to the main problem facing the young church. They lacked detailed knowledge about what happens to Christians who die, because Paul did not have the opportunity to complete his teaching there (3:10) on account of being forced to leave (2:15-17), which is recorded in more detail by Luke in Acts 17:5-10.

Consequently, the Thessalonians did not have the understanding to cope with the recent deaths of some community members, and so they responded with bewildered hopelessness.

<sup>13</sup> But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers and sisters, about those who have died, so that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

#### 1 Thessalonians 4:13

**We do not want you to be uninformed**. The Thessalonians had either misinterpreted or were unaware of the things Paul will explain in vv.14-17. Paul was always careful to explain the true meaning of the Gospel and its impact on the world, such as: <<***So that you may not claim to be wiser than you are, brothers and sisters, I want you to understand this mystery: a hardening has come upon***

*part of Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in*>> (Romans 11:25).

Those who have died. Paul uses terms for the Christians who have died that are often translated as being asleep, as it was in the case of Jairus' daughter: <<*When Jesus came to the leader's house and saw the flute-players and the crowd making a commotion, he said, 'Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping.' And they laughed at him*>> (Matthew 9:23-24), which reinforces his main point that they will awake from the grave at the Second Coming. The metaphor is not intended to deny that the dead are in conscious fellowship with God in the intermediate state. Referring to death with the metaphor of sleep is simply suggested by the physical condition of those who sleep. It gains appropriateness from the fact that all who have died in Christ will rise at his return.

Not grieve as others do who have no hope. Grieving per se is not wrong: <<*When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep*>> (John 11:33-35), and: <<*Devout men buried Stephen and made loud lamentation over him*>> (Acts 8:2), but it is wrong to grieve in a hopeless manner like unbelievers. The Thessalonians apparently did not understand that deceased Christians would rise from the dead and thus would not miss out on the blessings brought by the Second Coming. Epitaphs from the 1<sup>st</sup> Century indicate that most 1<sup>st</sup> Century Greeks had a strongly pessimistic view of death.

<sup>14</sup> For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have died.

#### 1 Thessalonians 4:14

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again. The resurrection of Christ is the centre of God's plan for history and is the basis for hope in the future resurrection of the body, as confirmed in 1 Corinthians 15:42-57 and Revelation 21:4. The clear promise is that those who have died by being united with Christ will rise again to new life: <<*Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?'*>> (John 11:24-26).

Through Jesus, God will bring with him. Jesus is shown to be God's mediator of salvation who will bring deceased Christians with him, i.e. those who have died, that is, the souls of those who have been in heaven with Christ, or wherever it may be that God has been caring for them up to this point. The direction of movement, whether upward or downward, is debated, although the allusion to Zechariah 14:5 suggests a picture of Christ coming down from heaven, bringing with him the souls of those who have already died. Paul's point is that all the Christians who have died will be with Christ in his Second Coming, as Christ descends to earth. Paul then explains in more detail in vv.16-17 how the dead are able to be present with Christ; that is, because their bodies will, at that moment, be resurrected and

reunited with their souls, as they are ‘caught up to meet the Lord in the air’ (v.17).

<sup>15</sup> For this we declare to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will by no means precede those who have died.

#### 1 Thessalonians 4:15

The word of the Lord probably refers to something the Lord revealed personally to Paul, which he then states in vv.15b-17.

We who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord does not imply that Paul was convinced that he himself would be alive at the Second Coming, but rather that all Christians should be prepared for Christ to return during their lifetime. Paul clearly lived his life expectant of Christ’s return at any moment but was also realistic about his own mortality as revealed in a number of his letters, especially his last: <<*As for me, I am already being poured out as a libation, and the time of my departure has come*>> (2 Timothy 4:6). The apostle John too did not take such statements to preclude mortal death: <<*Peter turned and saw the disciple whom Jesus loved following them; he was the one who had reclined next to Jesus at the supper and had said, ‘Lord, who is it that is going to betray you?’ When Peter saw him, he said to Jesus, ‘Lord, what about him?’ Jesus said to him, ‘If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!’ So the rumour spread in the community that this disciple would not die. Yet Jesus did not say to him that he would not die, but, ‘If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?’>> (John 21:20-23).*

Will by no means precede those who have died shows that those who are left alive when Christ does return receive no preferential treatment over the believers who have departed this life. It is unclear whether the Thessalonians were assuming that the dead would rise only after the Second Coming, or whether they thought that the dead had no hope of salvation at all.

<sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel’s call and with the sound of God’s trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord for ever.

#### 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

For the Lord himself indicates that Jesus will be returning in person to redeem his inheritance, those who have chosen to follow him. This is in line with what the angels told the disciples when Jesus ascended into heaven: <<*They said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven’>> (Acts 1:11).*

With a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet. These three great sounds summon the dead to wake from their slumber. The only archangel identified in the Bible is Michael: <<*But when the archangel Michael contended with the devil and disputed about the body of Moses, he did not dare to bring a condemnation of slander against him, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'*>> (Jude 9).

There are many Jewish and Christian commentators who believe that Gabriel too was an archangel because of his role in foretelling the birth of John the Baptist: <<*The angel replied, 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news'*>> (Luke 1:19), his instructions to Mary about the birth of Jesus recorded in Luke 1:26-38, and his interpretation of Daniel's end-times visions: <<*When I, Daniel, had seen the vision, I tried to understand it. Then someone appeared standing before me, having the appearance of a man, and I heard a human voice by the Ulai, calling, 'Gabriel, help this man understand the vision.'* So he came near where I stood; and when he came, I became frightened and fell prostrate. But he said to me, 'Understand, O mortal, that the vision is for the time of the end'>> (Daniel 8:15-17).

Trumpets in the OT proclaimed the Lord's presence, such as: <<*On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, as well as a thick cloud on the mountain, and a blast of a trumpet so loud that all the people who were in the camp trembled'*>> (Exodus 19:16), <<*and the priests Benaiah and Jahaziel were to blow trumpets regularly, before the ark of the covenant of God'*>> (1 Chronicles 16:6), <<*God has gone up with a shout, the Lord with the sound of a trumpet'*>> (Psalm 47:5), <<*Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy mountain! Let all the inhabitants of the land tremble, for the day of the Lord is coming, it is near'*>> (Joel 2:1), and: <<*Then the Lord will appear over them, and his arrow go forth like lightning; the Lord God will sound the trumpet and march forth in the whirlwinds of the south'*>> (Zechariah 9:14); in Jewish tradition, the trumpet was associated with battle, the Day of the Lord, and the resurrection: <<*Listen, I will tell you a mystery! We will not all die, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed'*>> (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

Will descend from heaven. People have always looked upwards to heaven but this does not mean that Jesus is physically located above the world, simply that he is in another dimension and will be revealed in some way so that the whole world will see him immediately at his coming, without the physical barrier of the earth's horizon to block the view. How this will be is impossible to determine for it lies outside the realm of human comprehension or scientific knowledge. Elsewhere, Paul simply alludes to Christ appearing: <<*so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ'*>> (1 Corinthians 1:7), and: <<*When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory'*>> (Colossians 3:4).

The dead in Christ will rise first. Dead Christians rise from their graves to the realm of the living, and then the living and the dead together are caught up from the earth into the air to meet Christ. The Greek for caught up, *harpazō*, which

also means ‘to grab or seize suddenly’, ‘to snatch or take away’, gives a sense of being forcibly and suddenly lifted upward, such as was the intention of the crowd in: <<*When Jesus realised that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, he withdrew again to the mountain by himself*>> (John 6:15), and in the miraculous transportation of Philip from one location to another: <<*When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord snatched Philip away; the eunuch saw him no more, and went on his way rejoicing*>> (Acts 8:39).

Together with. The dead Christians would suffer no disadvantage, i.e. <<*We who are alive - will by no means precede those who have died*>> (v.15).

Clouds are almost certainly not earthly rain clouds but the clouds of glory that surround the presence of God: <<*For the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, before the eyes of all the house of Israel at each stage of their journey*>> (Exodus 40:38), <<*Then the Lord came down in a pillar of cloud, and stood at the entrance of the tent, and called Aaron and Miriam; and they both came forward*>> (Numbers 12:5), <<*And when the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the Lord, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the Lord filled the house of the Lord*>> (1 Kings 8:10-11), <<*Clouds and thick darkness are all around him; righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne*>> (Psalm 97:2), <<*As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him*>> (Daniel 7:13), <<*While he was still speaking, suddenly a bright cloud overshadowed them, and from the cloud a voice said, ‘This is my Son, the Beloved; with him I am well pleased; listen to him!’*>> (Matthew 17:5), <<*Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in clouds” with great power and glory*>> (Mark 13:26), <<*When he had said this, as they were watching, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight*>> (Acts 1:9), and: <<*Then I looked, and there was a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like the Son of Man, with a golden crown on his head, and a sharp sickle in his hand!*>> (Revelation 14:14). In Hebrew this is referred to as the *Shekinah*.

To meet is the Greek term *apantēsis* that is often used in relation to an important dignitary’s reception by the inhabitants of a city, who have come out to greet and welcome their honoured guest with fanfare and celebration, then accompany him into the city, as seen in: <<*But at midnight there was a shout, “Look! Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him”*>> (Matthew 25:6), and: <<*The believers from there, when they heard of us, came as far as the Forum of Appius and Three Taverns to meet us. On seeing them, Paul thanked God and took courage*>> (Acts 28:15); a related term *hypantēsis* is used in: <<*Then the kingdom of heaven will be like this. Ten bridesmaids took their lamps and went to meet the bridegroom*>> (Matthew 25:1), and: <<*So they took branches of palm trees and went out to meet him, shouting, ‘Hosanna! Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord – the King of Israel!’*>> (John 12:13). It may indicate that the subsequent movement of the saints after meeting Christ in the air conforms to Christ’s direction, thus in a downward motion toward the earth. However, some interpreters caution that the vivid symbolism of apocalyptic

language must be kept in mind to avoid over-interpretation of the apocalyptic details.

And so we will be with the Lord for ever is the promise God gives to all those who have entered his service faithfully during this life and are rewarded with the opportunity to serve him in his very presence for all eternity: <<**Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honour**>> (John 12:26).

<sup>18</sup> Therefore encourage one another with these words.

### 1 Thessalonians 4:18

Clear teaching about the Lord's return should result in comfort and encouragement, which is Paul's goal, rather than fear and divisiveness. These words is a reference to all that Paul has written in vv.13-17. He will repeat the call with regard to what he has to say further in 5:1-10 <<**Therefore encourage one another and build up each other, as indeed you are doing**>> (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

The concluding verses of this chapter have had huge influence on some with regard to the rapture being the key Christian hope where believers will be snatched away from their ordinary lives leaving the rest of humanity behind, bereft of all hope. The key, however, is to realise what resurrection itself means. It does not mean disembodied life in some mid-air heaven, but the re-embodiment of God's people to live with and for God in the new, redeemed world that God will make.