

# 1 Thessalonians

## Chapter 4

### The Big Picture

Having just revealed the true depth of his feelings for the Thessalonian believers, Paul now turns to the more practical issue of holy living. In the first twelve verses Paul hits upon several issues of Christian living that the Thessalonian believers would find most helpful in their present circumstances. He then turns to a pressing concern of the Thessalonian believers, and that is “what happens to those who die prior to the return of Christ.” Evidently a significant part of Paul’s teaching involved this issue of Christ’s return, and evidently it had left such an impression upon the Thessalonians that they were very bothered about the status of those who had died. In response, Paul instructs them of the believers hope in what is perhaps the single, most comprehensive, section of Scripture on the rapture.

**1** Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

Paul begins his exhortation to the Thessalonians regarding practical matters of the believer’s life by reminding them of the source of his exhortation. This source is twofold. First there was the teaching and lifestyle of the apostle himself. This is seen in his *statement “received of us how ye ought to walk.”* When Paul arrived in Thessalonica, he did not arrive as just another traveling philosopher, rather he brought the truth of the Gospel which changes lives. It was this truth that was taught to these new believers.

Paul also bases this exhortation in the Lord Jesus Christ. The preacher of the Gospel has great authority, but not his own authority. Rather his authority is derived from Jesus Christ himself. This authority is used, not to elevate the preacher, but to lend an aura of commandment to the teachings.

Also, we note here that the Gospel Paul preached did not stop at the proclamation of the word only, but rather extended to the results of true faith, works. In fact, Paul understood better than most today that the Gospel ALWAYS produces change in the life of the true believer. Where no change is present, there is a great possibility that no salvation is present either.

Evidently, the Thessalonian believers had already exhibited this change in lifestyle. The report from Timothy bore this out, and therefore Paul encourages them to “abound more and more.” They had made a great start, but now they need to continue in the upward process of becoming more and more Christlike. They had made a good start, but like every coach Paul encourages them to do better. This is something we need to keep in mind as well. No matter how well we think we are doing in the Christian life, we can always do better. We never arrive and never hit a point where we no longer need to expend effort in our own personal sanctification.

**2** For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.

Paul makes the source of his authority and message very clear. It is not a message derived from himself or from new philosophy, but rather a message from Jesus Christ himself. This made Paul merely a messenger of this truth. The preacher’s authority is not an authority innate to the preacher, or some authority delegated by other men, but an authority delegated by God

himself. A preacher that depends on his own authority, or takes an authority that is not his to take, is corrupting his calling.

**3** *For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:*

**4** *That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour;*

**5** *Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:*

**6** *That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.*

The first issue Paul confronts head-on is that of sexual purity. This would have been a very appropriate topic as the problems faced by the Thessalonians were little different than the problems faced by us today. In the culture of the Thessalonians sexual impurity was common. In fact, sexual purity was extremely rare, as the entire culture was centered around freedom of sexual expression.

For example, in the Roman culture men considered women little more than objects to satisfy their sexual drives. Wealthy Roman men had a wife to raise legitimate offspring and keep the home, but many mistresses for sexual gratification. Roman temples were little more than brothels as many of the major religions of the day centered many beliefs around ritual prostitution and deviant sexual expression. It was thought that those who engaged in intercourse with a temple prostitute were in fact communing with the gods. Hence, this form of worship was highly popular.

We have not really come very far from this. Although there is generally a higher standard in our culture, we are still faced with these very problems. The names have changed, but the underlying sin is still present. Think about the fact that in the days of Paul the only real way to express sexual desire was in the physical act. Today, we can turn on our televisions, rent a movie, or go to the theater and be exposed to blatant acts of immorality that would have been outlawed only a few years ago. What once required a trip to the temple can now be done in the comfort and privacy of one's own home. Pornography is a multi-billion dollar industry covering everything from soft-porn to the hard-core bestiality. One can hardly watch a television show today without being exposed to half-clothed models advertising everything from beer to cars. All of our modern technology has only enabled us to sin more often and in more different ways.

### How To Be Pure

- 1. Avoid television shows and all forms of entertainment that arouse sexual desires.**
- 2. Know your limitations and avoid temptation.**
- 3. Avoid situations where you would be exposed to sexual temptation.**
- 4. Avoid the magazine racks where pornography is present.**
- 5. Memorize Scripture relating to sexual purity and seek God's help to remain pure.**
- 6. Enjoy physical love with your spouse, and make sure that you do not use sex as a weapon to get your way in marriage.**
- 7. Make sure that you give due service to your spouse in order that they may not fall into sexual temptation.**
- 8. Know your turn-ons and avoid them.**

Paul gives God's view on sexual purity with the simple command, "*this is the will of God.*" Sexual purity to the believer is not an option. God's call to us is a call to holiness, and those who engage in illegitimate forms of sexual expression find themselves under the judgment of

God. The writer of Hebrews reminds us in Hebrews 13:4, “Marriage is honorable in all things, and the bed undefiled, but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” Solomon asks in Proverbs 6:27, “Can a man take fire into his bosom and be not burned?” The Scriptures are clear, the believer is to be sexually pure.

### What Is The Will of God?

1. It is God’s will that you be saved - James 1:18.
2. It is God’s will that you be sanctified - 1 Thessalonians 4:2.
3. It is God’s will that you give thanks in all things - 1 Thessalonians 5:18.
4. It is God’s will that you suffer for your faith - 1 Peter 3:17.
5. It is God’s will that you walk in the Spirit - Ephesians 5:17-18.
6. It is God’s will that you live a living sacrifice - Romans 12:1-2.
7. It is God’s will that you be submissive to those over you - 1 Peter 2:13-15.
8. It is God’s will that you pray - 1 John 5:14-15.

Paul defines this purity with the simple expression, “abstain from fornication.” The word for fornication is *porneia*, and refers to any expression of sexuality apart from the marriage bond. It is a general term, encompassing all deviant forms of sexual expression including adultery, pre-marital sex, homosexuality, masturbation, and bestiality.

### Greek Terms for Impure Sexual Behavior

<b>Porneia</b>	This term literally meant “the purchaseable one”, the prostitute. This was the most general term for sexual activity and is used often in the NT to refer to all forms of sexual impurity.
<b>Porneuain</b>	A form of porneia which refers to the entire sexual industry.
<b>Polakai</b>	The word for concubine. This was one who was purchased for sexual pleasure.
<b>Eteirai</b>	This term referred to mistresses. This was a person of either sex used for intellectual stimulation and sex.
<b>Moikos</b>	This referred to the adulterer or adulteress. This refers to having sex with someone else’s spouse.
<b>Arsenokoitai</b>	This word is derived from <i>arsen</i> , man, and <i>coitai</i> , intercourse. This is the male homosexual.
<b>Malakos</b>	This is derived from the word “soft” or “soft to the touch.” This came to be used of the homosexual who took the place of the female in homosexual relationships.

Rather than engage in sexual impurity, Paul commands us to “possess our vessel in sanctification and honor.” Some have taken this to refer to one’s wife and hence interpret the verse as calling men to sexual purity by engaging in sex only with their wife. However, this is probably a bad interpretation as one has to ask, “What about the wife possessing her husband in sexual purity.” It is better, I think, to see this as a command to both sexes, and the picture of a vessel as referring to one’s self and not to one’s spouse. Thus, Paul would be commanding the Thessalonians to keep themselves pure by possessing themselves in holiness and honor. The idea of holiness is that of separation, and the idea of honor is that of using one’s sexual drives within the boundaries God has given. We are not to be like everyone else. We are not to be like the world having no self-control and no purity. We are different.

The opposite of “sanctification and honor” is “lust and concupiscence.” Concupiscence is the general term *epithumea*, and refers to the urges of the flesh. It is used most often in the New Testament to refer to sexual lust and desire. Lust is *pathos*, and refers to the passions of the

flesh. The believer is not to be controlled by passions and lust, but by the Holy Spirit. Why is this? It is because the believer is to be unlike everyone else. The world thinks nothing of immorality since to them there is nothing evil about it. Rather, to the world sexuality is nothing more than a sexual drive to be satisfied just like hunger and thirst.

### **The Damage of Immorality**

- **Sodom was given over to homosexuality and as a result God wiped them off the face of the earth.**
- **Ham ridiculed his father's nakedness and was cursed as a result.**
- **David committed adultery and murder and suffered tremendous consequences as a result.**
- **Solomon had many wives and concubines which drew his heart away from God.**
- **Sexual impurity disqualifies a man from the office of elder.**
- **Jacob's daughter Dinah was raped by Shechem and as a result all the men of a city were killed.**
- **God called for the utter destruction of the Caananite culture because of their sexual impurity.**
- **Israel was judged for intermarrying with the culture around them.**

Not only are we to be sexually pure since we are not like the nations, but God is an avenger of those who lead others into impurity. Paul uses the term, *defraud*, to describe the taking advantage of others in this area. Sexual sin is a most damaging sin as it affects not only the perpetrator, but the partner as well. When one takes advantage of a situation and leads another brother or sister into sexual sin, God will be the avenger for that act. He will not allow it to go unpunished. One cannot sin and get away with it.

Consider the consequences of immorality on a culture and society. Society's that are given over to deviant sexual behavior self-destruct. Romans chapter one defines this as God's punitive judgment against a culture. Instead of restraining sin, God removes the brakes and men are free to sin without restraint. This eventually causes the society to self destruct as they make their way from idolatry, to immorality, to homosexuality.

### **Consequences of Immorality**

1. **Teen-age pregnancy and unwed mothers are everywhere.**
2. **Children are raised in single-parent homes leading to many social problems.**
3. **Venereal disease is epidemic.**
4. **AIDS is claiming entire generations in the nation of Africa.**
5. **Women, and men, are raped and murdered for a few moments of sexual pleasure.**
6. **The family, the foundational building block of society, is crumbling under the onslaught of immorality, single-parent homes, and perversion.**

**7** *For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.*

Another reason for sexual purity is that God did not call us to uncleanness, but holiness. The word for uncleanness is *akatharsia* and refers to all expressions of uncleanness, whether sexual, moral, or ethical. Paul's point is very simple, God did not save us so that we could live our lives any way we wanted. His grace covers all of our sins, but it does not give us the freedom to sin all we want since God will forgive us anyways. God saved us to redeem us from our sin, not only in its punitive dimension, but also in its presence dimension. He did not take us out of the mudpit of our sin, wash us up, put new cloths on us, and then told us to go back to the mud. Rather, God saved us to be holy. Living in immorality goes against the very purposes of God in salvation.

It is true that God will forgive all of our sin. But that does not mean that we can sin without consequence. God has called us to live holy, separated lives, and when we do not we bring shame on his name and judgment on ourselves. Why would God go to all the trouble of sending Christ to die on the cross for our sins only to turn around and tell us that it does not matter if we sin or not?

**8** *He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.*

The word for despise, *atheta*, means "to reject, to disregard, to set aside." Those in the Thessalonian congregation that decide to ignore Paul's instructions on this topic of sexual and moral purity are not rejecting Paul, but rejecting God. We can extend this notion to refer to any commandment given to us by God. Our response to the word is an important one, as it shows our true nature. Those who ignore God's commandments do so at their own peril.

There is an additional reason Paul gives here for not despising God's commandment, and that is that God has given us his Holy Spirit. How can we turn a deaf ear to one who has not only redeemed us from our sin, but given us the gift of his very self in the person of the Holy Spirit. How is it that we are able to obey God at all? It is because of the indwelling Spirit who gives us that ability to obey.

### Wrapping It Up

**In wrapping up our comments on sexual purity from this passage, Paul gives us the following reasons to live godly in this area of our lives:**

- 1. It is the will of God.**
- 2. We are commanded to take care of our body and possess it in purity.**
- 3. We are not to live in lustful passions like the pagans.**
- 4. We are not to live as the pagans who know not God.**
- 5. We should not defraud one another as God will avenge those who do.**
- 6. God did not call us to uncleanness, but to holiness.**
- 7. When we live in immorality, we despise God's commandments.**
- 8. We have been given the Holy Spirit as an inducement to holy living.**

**9** *But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you: for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.*

**10** *And indeed ye do it toward all the brethren which are in all Macedonia: but we beseech you, brethren, that ye increase more and more;*

If one thing characterized the Thessalonian church, it was their love for one another. This love was manifested among themselves in the way they helped and encouraged one another in the midst of their persecutions. If anything should characterize the believer, it is love for one another. Christ told his disciples in John 13:34-35, "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." Love is the distinguishing mark of the believer.

In fact, the love that was evident in the Thessalonian church was so great and so evident, that Paul says he did not have to write them to encourage them to love one another. Their love for one another spilled over so that it even made itself evident in all of Macedonia. This was a church known for their love for one another. Paul's only encouragement to them is that they would increase more and more in this area. They were doing great, but they needed to continue to strive to do better.

### How Is Love Manifested?

1. In showing deference to the weaker brother by abstaining from those things that would cause him to stumble - Romans 14:15; 1 Corinthians 8:1.
2. Love is longsuffering by putting up with the weaknesses of others - 1 Corinthians 13:4.
3. Love is kind to all men - 1 Corinthians 13:4.
4. Love does not envy others when something good happens to them - 1 Corinthians 13:4.
5. Love does not call attention to itself - 1 Corinthians 13:4.
6. Love never fails - 1 Corinthians 13:4.
7. Love is not rude - 1 Corinthians 13:5.
8. Love does not seek its own desires but the desires of others - 1 Corinthians 13:5.
9. Love is not easily provoked to anger - 1 Corinthians 13:5.
10. Love does not always look for the evil in others - 1 Corinthians 13:5.
11. Love does not rejoice in sin - 1 Corinthians 13:6.
12. Love rejoices in truth - 1 Corinthians 13:6.
13. Love bears up under all strain - 1 Corinthians 13:7.
14. Love believes the best about all things - 1 Corinthians 13:7.
15. Love brings eternal hope - 1 Corinthians 13:7.
16. Love endures every trial - 1 Corinthians 13:7.

**11** *And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you;*

**12** *That ye may walk honestly toward them that are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.*

Paul now moves on to a third area of conduct, and that is our conduct towards those outside the faith. In the midst of persecution and trials, how is the believer to treat those outside the faith? We find our answer here.

First, we are to "study to be quiet." This refers to the conduct of one who makes it their task to not stir up social problems and create conflict. The believer is never encouraged to become an irritant to his society by creating conflict, rather he is to be a godly example which in and of itself will create conflict. The idea here is that society's problem with believers should never be because the believer is obnoxious or a troublemaker, rather it should be because the believer's message is offensive. The difference is between the message and the messenger. Our message is offensive, but we as messenger's should not.

This idea of being quiet is tough in an atmosphere of persecution and hardships. When society is at war with us, it is easy for us to act like them. Instead of praying for our society, we want to confront it and condemn it in anger. When we are persecuted, we want to strike back at our persecutors. When we do this, however, we do not show the true character that God would have us demonstrate to our lost society. If we are rejected, let us make sure it is because of our message, not our response to persecution.

Secondly, we are to do our own business and work with our own hands. This has the idea of diligence in labor. In whatever vocation we find ourselves in, we should be the best that we can be. This honors God and presents a solid testimony to the watching world. Unfortunately, some of the Thessalonian believers had failed in this area, as Paul must chide them again when he writes 2 Thessalonians. As believers, we never have the right to be lazy and live off the efforts of others. We are to be diligent in our service and avoid meddling in the affairs of others. When our world looks upon Christians, they should see a group of people who work hard, live holy lives, and avoid meddling in the affairs of others.

This command is especially important as Paul reminds them that this is how he lived among them. Earlier in chapter two he reminded them that although he had the right to be supported by them as an apostle, he set his rights aside and labored among them as an example. Paul was definitely not a lazy person, and he did not confront the social ills of his day by becoming a revolutionary. Rather, he labored to provide for his needs by day, and preached the gospel at night. When society had a problem with Paul it was purely for the message he preached, and not for his hostility to the society.

The third commandment is that we are to work hard so we may walk honestly towards those that are without. This means that as believers we should be diligent in our work so that we are not financially irresponsible in our affairs in society. It is a travesty for a Christian to be seen as a deadbeat. That is not to say that sometimes things happen that are beyond our control, but it does mean that God's solution to debt is hard work and diligent discipline. We cannot preach the lifesaving gospel to those we are defrauding.

Finally, if we do labor hard, then we will lack nothing. This does not mean that personally we would lack nothing, but as a body of believers we would lack nothing. There are always those believers that are unable to support themselves because of disease or some other incapacitation. In that case, it is the responsibility of those who have more to help those who have less. However, when one is merely lazy, the Paul commands that they should not eat.

The bottom line in these two verses is that our place in society is not one of being an irritant or taking advantage of others. We are to work hard at being the best citizen we can be and make sure that there is no accusation of laziness or irresponsibility that can be made against us. This makes the hostility of the society rest solely on our message, and not on our conduct.

### **Blaming God**

**One of the interesting things I have found is that often Christians blame God for some of the financially disastrous situations they find themselves in. Instead of doing what the Scriptures say, they make God the source behind bad decisions. "I am praying on whether the Lord wants me to pay this bill or not?" Others do not work diligently while at the same time saying that God has called them to work at a vocation that cannot meet their minimal needs. Others make a poor decision which puts them into a financial bind only to say "I prayed about it." God's will is not mystical! He has called us to work hard and be a good citizen. If we are not doing that, then what is there to pray about?**

**13** *But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.*

Paul next turns his attention to a problem that had evidently been troubling the Thessalonian believers. This problem had to do with those who had died after Paul made his visit to them and before Timothy returned to see how they were doing. During his brief stay in Thessalonica, Paul had told these young believers about the “blessed hope” of the believer, that being the visible and personal return of Christ for his Church. However, because of the persecution and because of the time that had elapsed since Paul’s visit, some of these believers had died. The question, then, in the mind of the Thessalonians is “What happened to those who died?”

In response Paul gives us this passage about the Coming of Christ. It should be noted that his response is given to deal with a very real issue faced by the Thessalonian believers. It was not given to provide a detailed, blow-by-blow description of the future. In spite of that, however, we have perhaps the single greatest text on the return of Christ for the believer anywhere in the new testament in these six short verses.

Paul begins his response by referring to those who were “asleep.” This was a euphemism used by the early believers to speak of death, since death to a believer is only temporary anyways. In Acts 7:60 we are told that Stephen “fell asleep” when stoned by the Jews. In Matthew 9:24 we read that Christ told the mourners at the home of the ruler that the little girl was not dead but sleeping. Since death is only temporary and not permanent for the believer, a most fitting description is that we sleep.

Paul then gives the Thessalonian believers the reason for this, and that is that we have hope as opposed to those with no hope. Outside of Christ, there is no hope for the person who faces eternity in their sins. To them, death is the great end-all. Their eternity will only be filled with torment and constant reminders of what they could have had, but refused. We have hope since Christ brings us the promise of future resurrection. Unfortunately, most Christians see death as the great end-all as well. We avoid death, and refuse to think about it since we find ourselves so attached to this life we can hardly ponder the next. As Christians, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law and freed us from the fear of death. All death does for us is issue us into the very presence of God, Christ, and the Holy Angels. Five minutes after we die we would not return to this life if God offered it to us. The joys and beauties of heaven are beyond our ability to describe, and yet many of us live our lives as though we had no hope.

### **The Doctrine of Immanency**

**The Doctrine of Immanency refers to the belief that Christ could come at any time for his Church. This coming would be unannounced, and would occur without any prior warning or signs.**

**Lately, this doctrine has been questioned. Those of the Amillennial or Post-Millennial viewpoint would teach this as well as those of the newest Tribulational persuasion, the Pre-Wrath Rapturists. However, from this passage we are led to believe that the fact that some believers had died troubled the Thessalonian christians. They wanted to know if those who had died would miss the Rapture. Evidently they were living with the understanding that Christ could return at any time, and they were looking for him to come soon. The fact that he delayed his coming so long that believers began to die troubled them.**



**14** *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.*

The possibility of our resurrection and the hope of future glory with Christ rests on the foundation of his resurrection. If Christ did not rise from the dead, then our hope is based on a futile foundation. Paul makes this very clear in 1 Corinthians 15 verses 14-19 we read these words, “And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not. For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.”

The “if” in this verse is not an “if” of possibility but a should be translated “since.” Since we believe Jesus died and rose again, then those who have died have not perished. Rather, they will be raised again when God brings Christ with Him at the coming of the Lord. This hope, however, is only for those who “sleep in Jesus.” This emphasizes the fact that it is only in Christ that we have this hope of returning with him.

**15** *For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.*

There have been many debates on what Paul meant when he said “by the word of the Lord.” There is no place recorded in the Gospels where we read of Christ saying anything about the details of his coming for the Church. All of his references to a Second Coming refer to his coming for the establishment of the Kingdom. Therefore, the question remains as to where Paul got this information.

Some say that there is a recorded message of Christ that we do not have in our Gospels. This is certainly a possibility as John said that not everything Christ said or did was written down since there were not enough books in the world to do that. Others say that this is a verbal message handed down to the disciples and from there to the early believers. Others say that it is inferred from all that Christ said about the future coupled with revelation of the mystery of the Church. Finally, some say that it is a message Paul received directly from the Lord.

I believe it is the latter. We know that Paul was commissioned by Christ to be the one who brought the message of the Gospel to the Gentiles (Ephesians 3). We also know that he was taught by the resurrected Lord and that his understanding of the Church came by divine revelation (Galatians 2). Therefore, it is very likely that his understanding of the rapture, or as it is termed here, the parousia, was obtained directly from Christ.

Wherever Paul got this information is not as relevant as the information itself. Those who died in the Lord will not miss anything, rather they will have a front-row seat. They will be the first to be resurrected (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:51-52, 1 John 3:1-3). Far from missing anything, they are the first ones to witness the “blessed hope” and the glorious return of Christ. Note that Paul numbers himself with the “we who are alive and remain.” Again, this is a clear reference to the fact that Paul saw himself as being alive at the time of the return of Christ. All believers in the early church lived with this expectancy as it is the “blessed hope” that enabled them to endure the trials and tests they were going through.

**16** *For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:*

How is this return of Christ to occur. First it will be with his descent initiated by a shout. Exactly what this shout is we do not know, but we may have a hint in John 5:28-29 where Christ tells his listeners, *“Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”* Another hint can be found in John 11:43 where Christ called Lazarus from the tomb with a loud voice. One preacher made the statement that had not Christ qualified his command with the name of Lazarus that all would have risen from the dead.

Whatever the shout is, and the contents of the shout, we do not know. However, we are also given two other loud noises. The second is the voice of an archangel. Many would make this to be Michael, others Gabriel, and others some other archangel. We do not know. All we do know is that it is the voice of an archangel. In Revelation 14 we are introduced to an angel flying in the midst of heaven giving the everlasting Gospel. However loud an archangel can speak we don't know, but it must be pretty loud if an angel can be heard by everyone on the earth.

The third loud noise is the trump of God. Some use this to refer to the seventh trumpet in Revelation and thus make the Rapture occur at that time. Others see this as merely the last in a series of trumpets. Most likely, the imagery Paul uses here is taken from the Old Testament when Israel was called together as a nation. Several trumpets would blow, the last being the final trumpet of assembly. This trumpet, then, most likely refers to God calling his Church together at the final, great assembly before our trip to heaven to be with Christ.

After these three loud sounds, we have the statement made that the dead in Christ will rise first. This refers to all who have died prior to this event. They will be raised from the dead and given a glorified body fit for heaven. At this time, those who have died are with Christ in their spirit state (Philippians 1:20). They have existence, but it is a non-physical one. Christ's redemption on the cross did not extend only to our spiritual dimension, but our physical one as well. Someday we will take off mortality and put on immortality in a body that will never suffer disease, decay, or death.

**17** *Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

Immediately after the resurrection of the dead we have the glorification of the living believers. In 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 we read, *“Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.”* Someday, our corruptible, mortal flesh will be transformed into an immortal body fit for heaven. It will be a glorious body, perfectly designed and suitable for an eternal existence in heaven.

When we receive our glorified bodies, we will be with Christ forever. This is a reference to the permanency and immutability of our eternal existence. We will meet Christ in the air, receive our glorified bodies, and return with him to his Father's house where he has prepared a place for us (John 14:1-6). So whether we get to this event through death, or whether we arrive through transformation, it will be a glorious event and the beginning of our eternal existence with Christ.

**18** *Wherefore comfort one another with these words.*

Paul summarizes his explanation of this future event by encouraging the believers to comfort one another with this knowledge. Unlike the lost who have no hope, we do. Someday our mortality will be swallowed up in immortality, and we will be with Christ forever. So when we are faced with the death of a loved one, or our own death, we can draw assurance and consolation by reminding ourselves that the separation is not an eternal one.

### **What Are We To Do In Light of the Rapture?**

- **Attend services regularly (Hebrews 10:25).**
- **Observe the Lord's supper (1 Corinthians 11:26).**
- **Love believers and all men (1 Thessalonians 3:12-13).**
- **Be patient (James 5:7).**
- **Live a separated life (1 John 3:1-4, Titus 2:11-13, 1 John 2:28).**
- **We should not judge another (1 Corinthians 4:5).**
- **Preach the word! (2 Timothy 4:1-2, 1 Peter 5:3-4).**
- **Comfort the bereaved (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).**
- **Win souls (Jude 21-23).**
- **Be concerned with heavenly things (Colossians 3:1-2).**