

*1 Thessalonians 4:1-2***PREFACE**

Before we read and examine the details of our passage, I want to bring to your attention a pattern in the text. In the earliest moments of any study it is a good idea to look for patterns, or repetitions in the text, for this will often give clues as to what is of uppermost importance to the writer. And here—especially in the first three verses—something stands out: As he begins to offer sharper exhortation to the Thessalonians, Paul goes out of his way to establish the source of his authority.

v1: in the Lord Jesus

v2: by the authority of (or through) the Lord Jesus

v3: this is the will of God

And what is Paul's ultimate motive behind this exhortation?

v1: that they would "please God"

There is the pattern; Paul makes it clear that he is not speaking out of school, but for the Lord. This lends weight and authority to what he writes.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2.**v1**

The first word of v1 signals that Paul is beginning to wrap things up in this letter. Now, being Paul, this does not necessarily mean that the end is in sight. In this letter it means he has two more chapters to go—and not until v13 of this chapter will he even launch into this letter's most important topic.

This first word hearkens back not just to the end of Chapter Three, but to the previous two chapters. Several commentators have paraphrased his references:

Since our relations with you have been such as they have, since we have labored so much among you, since you have suffered for the gospel's sake, since there is yet progress to be made, since we have maintained a continuing prayerful interest in you, we ask you, brothers, and urge you in the Lord Jesus...

First Paul categorizes what he is about to ask and expect from the church.

request, urge, beseech, ask = *erotomen* = apparently from <G2046> (ereo) [compare <G2045> (ereunao)]; **to interrogate**; by implication to request :- ask, beseech, **desire, intreat, pray**. Compare <G4441> (punthanomai).

exhort, urge = *parakaloumen* = from <G3844> (para) and <G2564> (kaleo); to call near, i.e. invite, invoke (by imploration, hortation or consolation) :- **beseech**, call for, (be of good) comfort, desire, (give) **exhort** (-ation), **entreat, pray**.

The first word is a gentle, friendly request, and the latter is an authoritative apostolic plea; *such urging is more than a request, but less than a command.* (Thomas)

But Paul wants them to know that he is not just doing this on his own; what follows he urges “in the Lord Jesus”—that is, in communion with the Lord Jesus (JFB); similar to how we end our prayers: speaking by the authority of, or as a representative for Christ, united with His mind.

And once again Paul combines exhortation with affirmation (“just as you actually do walk”); when they had been in their midst, the missionaries had given the new church instruction on how they were to live as Christians (“instruction” in the NASB, and “instructed” in the NIV are inserted; they are implied by the “you received from us how you ought to walk.”

that you excel still more

Let us consider for a moment this encouragement Paul adds to excel or abound still more (or more and more).

excel, abound = *perisseuete* = from <G4053> (perissos); **to superabound (in quantity or quality)**, be in excess, be superfluous; also (transposed) to cause to superabound or excel :- (make, more) abound, (have, have more) abundance, (be more) abundant, be the better, enough and to spare, **exceed, excel**, increase, be left, redound, remain (over and above).

still more, more and more = *mallon* = neuter of the comparative of the same as <G3122> (malista); (adverb) **more (in a greater degree)** or rather :- + better, × far, (the) more (and more), (so) much (the more), rather.

Subtle variations in our translations offer us two ways of interpreting this—and we get wonderful application from both. This is a call for upward sanctification—essentially, that we should never be satisfied with the status quo in our walk with Christ Jesus.

Human Effort and Desire

We see the first way to interpret this in the NASB, NKJV, ESV, and most explicitly, the NIV:

Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.

This is a familiar theme for the apostle; perhaps its most eloquent expression is found in his letter to the church in Philippi.

Read Philippians 3:12-14.

There is a place in the Christian walk for human endeavor—desire translated into effort. We, like the Thessalonians, are to make an effort to do those things that please God, and walk *away* from those things that displease Him.

And the writer to the Hebrews says something similar, but also includes a statement that hints at a second interpretation for our verse in Thessalonians.

God's Effort and Desire

Read Hebrews 6:1-3.

Note that hint in v3: God has a part in our efforts toward maturity, sanctification.

[Now back to 1 Thessalonians.](#)

Again, here is how the NIV translates our clause (which it does as a complete sentence):

Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.

Now compare that to the KJV:

...how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

Young's Literal Translation handles it in a similar way:

...how it behoveth you to walk and to please God, that ye may abound the more,

Do you hear the difference? These two translations could be interpreted to mean that the *result* of walking in a way that pleases God is that we will abound more and more. That is, our growth in sanctification is not just from trying harder, but is God's response to our obedience!

I believe both are true: We, in ourselves, should never settle for the status quo, but our desire and effort should always be for the upward climb of our sanctification. But there is also a natural flow to this—a *spiritual* natural flow, as it were; the customary way God works in our lives—where we *will* excel still more if we obey Him as to how we should be conducting our lives in Him.

v2

For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

The "instructions" of the NIV and ESV is not inaccurate, but thin.

commandments, instructions = *parangelias* = from <G3853> (paraggello); a mandate :- charge, command; **a military term, order from above.**

Unlike the word translated "request" in v1 (*erotomen*), this word (*parangelia*) is no request or suggestion, but a command. When I was in the navy, and an officer issued you an order to do something, you did not argue the point, or suggest doing something else, but sharply saluted, and answered, "Aye aye, sir." We need not soften this word with the filter of today's political correctness; Paul here refers to his commands for the Thessalonians to behave a certain way. But we do need to point out a couple things.

1. The apostle Paul typically limited this practice to brand new churches, which, young in the faith, required a stronger, more specific hand. He seldom employed it to more established churches. [e.g., **our dealings with "young" believers**]
2. Here, as elsewhere, when Paul gives these commands, he makes sure to specify that they are not his, but the Lord's.

Matthew Henry: The apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ were only commissioned by him to teach men to observe all things whatsoever he had commanded them (Matthew 28:20). Though they had great authority from Christ, yet that was to teach men what Christ had commanded, not to give forth commandments of their own. They did not act as lords over God's heritage (1Peter 5:3), nor should any do so that pretend to be their successors. The apostle could appeal to the Thessalonians, who knew what commandments he gave them, that they were no other than what he had received from the Lord Jesus.

Turn to 1 Corinthians 7.

In 1 Corinthians we have examples of Paul making the same distinction, but not always using the same word; these examples also broach the topic Paul next addresses in our Thessalonian text: sexual purity, which we will look at in our next session. Note how the apostle differentiates between counsel or advice, and command.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:8-9.

Here Paul offers personal counsel (“I say”) that it is best to remain unmarried.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:10-11.

To those who are already married, however, he “commands” [form of our previous word, *parangelia*] that they remain married. This he can command because it comes from “not I, but the Lord.” Then in the next verse he addresses the topic of divorce for those who have after marriage become believers, or whose spouse has become a believer. This he offers as personal advice—i.e., *not* a command.

Read 1 Corinthians 7:12-13.

Later in this chapter he applies the same method in dispensing counsel to those who are virgins: “Now concerning virgins I have no command of the Lord, but I give an opinion as one who by the mercy of the Lord is trustworthy.” (v25)

Back to 1 Thessalonians.

In our passage Paul makes clear that he is speaking to them “in the Lord Jesus,” and (v2) “by the authority of the Lord Jesus.” This is not arrogance on his part, nor does he fear they will reject his claim to authority. In the first 12 verses of Chapter Two Paul goes on at length, explaining the righteous and unselfish nature of their speech and behavior. Then in v13 he expresses to God his appreciation for the Thessalonians’ understanding and acceptance of this.

Read 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

When we began this study, I didn’t realize that it was going to be such a wonderful *biographical* study of the apostle Paul. What we are seeing in these two letters is that, after the Christ Jesus, Paul is a pretty good role model for us.

And not least among his admirable character traits is his willingness to be subsumed within the authority and rule of his Lord. This does not render him a meek milquetoast; quite to the contrary, this *empowers* him with the knowledge that not just his intentions, but his very words and actions are just and true, because they are being guided from above.

And what is his intention? Why is he doing this? He joins with God the Father and the Lord Jesus in the first part of v3: “For this is the will of God, your sanctification.” It is all for them, the Thessalonians, and their standing before God.