

Study Guide 4

“More and More”

Goal: To understand the content and purposes of 1 Thessalonians 4:1-5:28

1. *To become familiar with the content and purpose of 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12*
2. *To recognize the purpose and force of a “Petition” or “Request” in ancient letters*
3. *To become familiar with the content and purpose of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11*
4. *To recognize the nature and purpose of a “Disclosure” in ancient letters*
5. *To continue the process of noticing (i.e., highlighting) key words and phrases*

1. Revisit the Shape of 1 Thessalonians.

How would you divide 1 Thessalonians 4:1-5:28? What (literary or grammatical clues) did you use to separate the major sections? Add this to your structuring of 1:1-3:13.

You should finish your own outlining of 1 Thessalonians (discovering its shape), rather than just depending on the example below. Once you’ve done your work, however, feel free to compare and contrast with the following:

Introduction: 1:1-10

1:1: Prescript (Address and Greeting)

1:2-10: Thanksgiving: Introductory Narrative (Paul/Gospel Coming and Reception)

Middle 2:1-3:13

1:2-2:12: Narrating/Defending the Past

1:2-10: Thanksgiving: Introductory Narrative (Paul/Gospel Coming and Reception)

2:1-12: Defense of Paul’s Visit (His Gospel and Character) [Refutation: Visit not in vain]

2:1-20: Narrating/Defending the Present

2:13-20: Thanksgiving: Narrative (Thessalonians Suffering; Paul Wanted to Come)

3:1-10: Paul’s Passion and Purpose [Proof: Thessalonians are his passion and purpose]

3:11-13: Transition: Prayer

Middle: 4:1-5:11/22

4:1-12: Petition/Exhortations (Foundations: Do It More and More)

4:1-8: Petition: Sanctification (Marriage/Sexual Purity)

4:9-10: Brotherly Love

4:11-12: Work

4:13-5:11: Disclosure: The Coming of the Lord

4:13-18: Concerning Those Who Have Died (Disclosure)

5:1-11: Concerning Times and Seasons

Conclusion: 5:12-28

Community Exhortations: 5:12-22

Prayer: 5:23-24

Closing: 5:25-28

Though most forms of written communication have a relatively easily discernable 3-part shape, 1 Thessalonians does tend to challenge a simple Beginning-Middle-End pattern. You probably

noticed that the outline above “reuses” the opening in the “Narrating/Defending the Past” section. In a sense, we have more than one beginning:

1:2-2:12: Narrating/Defending the Past

Beginning/Introduction

1:2-10: Thanksgiving: Introductory Narrative (Paul/Gospel Coming and Reception)

Middle/Argumentation

2:1-12: Defense of Paul’s Visit (His Gospel and Character) [Refutation: Visit not in vain]

2:13-3:10: Narrating/Defending the Present

Beginning/Introduction

2:13-20: Thanksgiving: Narrative (Thessalonians Suffering; Paul Wanted to Come)

Middle/Argumentation

3:1-10: Paul’s Passion and Purpose [Proof: Thessalonians are his passion and purpose]

This is part of the reason that many Bible students simply lump all this together as one long “Narrative” section (1:2-3:10).

2. Explore 4:1-12: Petitions for Pleasing God.

Summarize 4:1-12. What separates or distinguishes 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 as a section of material? What are the subsections?

What are the major themes and exhortations of 4:1-12? Is there something in common between the three major exhortations 4:1-8, 9-10, 11-12 (this one’s a little harder to see—but it does reveal a “desire” or “passion”)? What is the basis of the exhortations (is there something the Thessalonians had already heard or learned)?

How does the prayer of 3:11-13 prepare for (transition to) 4:1-12?

What’s the relationship between the previous sections (1:2-2:12, 2:13-3:10) and 4:1-12? Is there a clue in 4:1 for the role or function of the earlier sections? Hint: Observe the tenses of the phrase beginning with “as you received from us . . .”

Summarize 4:1-8, 9-10, 11-12?

Out of all the things Paul could exhort this young church to focus on to please God more and more—fundamental to the life of God in Christ—he chooses family/marriage (sexual purity), community (brotherly love), and honorable work/lifestyle. Why?

Requests/Petitions

A common “plug-and-play” form or “sub-shape” of letters in Bible days is the Request or Petition form. I call these conventional structures or shapes “special paragraph markers.” Here’s a description from *Rediscovering the Books of God* (pp. 95-96):

Another common stereotyped shape in ancient Greek letters and the letters of Paul is the Petition or Request form. As a means of making formal request, sentences beginning with “I appeal to you (brothers)” or “I ask you (brothers)” highlight a very significant section of material that often represents the main reason for the letter. The three basic and necessary (always present either explicitly or implicitly) elements are (1) the background, (2) the petition verb, and (3) the desired action; (4) the address and (5) the courtesy phrase appear frequently as optional elaborations: “I ask you, therefore, brothers . . .” All types of requests were put into this form.

In the letters of Paul, such standardized requests occur frequently. *These formal requests—especially the first one in the letter—usually reflect the situation that produced the letter (the epistolary setting) and thereby show the primary purpose or goal of the letter-writer, especially in combination with the Thanksgiving (and in some cases, a Disclosure).* The Petition thus contains the actual concern or request of the letter. Observing the literary and historical (epistolary) value of the Petition as an introduction to a key section of material in Paul’s letters (another sort of topic sentence) certainly helps us understand the function of these sections and underscore their significance as special paragraph makers. They are, in other words, a sort of ancient way of bolding or highlighting a request.

Where are the Petitions or Requests in 4:1-12? (Check out 4:1 and 4:10; compare also the language of verses 11-12).

If the first, main Petition of Paul’s letters functions as one of, if not the, key point, what does that say about the importance of sexual purity, marriage, and family within the Christian community?

Do you have an opinion about the meaning of 4:4-6 (how to possess/acquire one’s “own vessel”)? How does the choice one makes (and this verse, therefore) relate to 4:5 and 4:6? (Translations will likely give away the opinion of the translators, as 4:4 could be about “obtaining”/“acquiring” a wife (or maintaining a good marriage) or about “controlling” oneself sexually—which is involved either way. The verse also helps to show the “literal” versus “dynamic/free” translation philosophy of the various versions.)

Extra, Extra . . .

Most Bible books exist independently of other books in that the specific literary and historical context of the book is revealed almost exclusively from the book itself. 1 and 2 Thessalonians are exceptions, however, because they were written to the same church by the same person within a relatively short period of time. For this reason, information from 2 Thessalonians provides further

insight into the “picture” presented by these two letters. (We’ll see more about this as we look at 2 Thessalonians.)

If 1 Thessalonians were the only letter we had, the exhortations in 4:11-12 to aspire to a respectable, “quiet,” and hard-working lifestyle would have very little context with regard to the Thessalonian community (except perhaps by means of the emphasis on the 2nd coming of Christ, but the relationship would still be speculative at best). Though it doesn’t answer all the questions, 2 Thessalonians (3:6-12) provides a little more insight into the situation and is a good example of how a book from the Bible can help with the context and interpretation of another book.

3. Explore 4:13-5:11: Life in Light of the Lord’s Coming.

Disclosures

Another common “plug-and-play” form or “sub-shape” of letters in Bible days is the “Disclosure.” We find these often in Paul’s letters where he begins a new paragraph or section with the phrase “I/We want you to know, brothers and sisters . . .” or “I/We don’t want you to be ignorant [not to know] . . .” about something. These forms tend to function as topic sentences for sections of informational or teaching material that serves as background (narration) or key points (argument) for exhortations and petitions (compare 4:18 and 5:11). Here’s a description from *Rediscovering the Books of God* (pp. 94-95):

Occurring in some form in each of the major sections of the body, informational formulas or phrases of disclosure were an important convention in ancient Greek letters. The phrases “I . . .” or “We want you to know . . .” or “I don’t want you not to know . . .” (translated “be ignorant” or “unaware”) occur frequently in Paul’s letters as a way of introducing important informational sections. As a conventional form/shape, the disclosure has four basic and one optional element: (1) “I want,” (2) identification of the person addressed: “you,” (3) a verb of knowing in the infinitive: “to know,” (4) person(s) being addressed: “brothers,” “beloved” (this is the optional element), and (5) the information, usually introduced by “that.” Although the fullest expression occurs often in Paul, other versions of the form were common in the papyri and have also been detected in Paul’s letters. (Compare 1 Thessalonians 2:1 as a shortened version: “For you yourselves know, brothers and sisters . . .”)

Besides helping to demarcate the opening and closing of the body of the letter, disclosures function as transitions to major subjects within the body of the letter. Stereotyped in form, *Disclosures call attention to these transitions to important subjects and thus provide a sort of heading or topic sentence that states briefly the content of the paragraph*—analogous to a newspaper headline or subtitle. Often in papyrus letters and the letters of Paul, however, the disclosure does not stand on its own, but introduces information that explains the occasion, need, or rationale for a request to be made of the audience (another important form). Disclosures function, then, as background for requests, and the combination produces a background-request letter structure.

Summarize 4:13-18 and 5:1-11? Are there separate subjects in these two paragraphs? How do they relate to each other?

What's the key point or points of 4:13-18 regarding the coming of the Lord? How does 4:13-14 encapsulate or summarize the topic? How does 4:18 conclude the first section?

What's the key point or points of 5:1-11 regarding "the times and the seasons"? How is the metaphor of light versus darkness (day vs. night) used to describe the Christian lifestyle (and in light of judgment/the Lord's coming)? How does 5:11 conclude the second section?

How does this section of material relate to the previous content of the letter? What about the Thessalonians' concern over those who have died? Are their deaths only natural, or could they be related to the intense suffering of the Thessalonian believers?

How does 5:1-11 function to bring the middle portion of the letter to a degree of climax or conclusion? Hints: Consider the day/light vs. night/darkness metaphor as a summary exhortation to continue living for God ("to do so more and more"); 5:8: a brief armor of God, using the key words "faith," "love," "hope"; 5:9-10: reference to the coming/judgment of Christ like previously in the letter; and 5:11: concluding exhortation. **Did you notice the connection of the pieces of the armor Paul mentions to the first, introductory themes of the letter: faith, love, and hope?**

How do you think Paul learned of the questions the Thessalonian Christians had on this topic? (Sort of a dumb question, huh?, since Timothy had just arrived with a report about them.)

6. Highlight Key Words and Phrases.

Go through 1 Thessalonians 4:1-5:11 and highlight/color-code key words, ideas, and phrases. Note how they connect with previous sections.

See the sample highlightings below.

Expert's Corner**Key Questions Review****1 Thessalonians 4:1-12**

- What is the first or primary exhortation (“Petition”) of 1 Thessalonians? What are the two Petitions (and three exhortations) of 4:1-12?
- How does this Petition section relate to the first half of the letter? What importance or role does each of the Thanksgiving sections (1:2-2:12 and 2:13-3:11) have in preparing for 4:1-12?
- What’s Paul’s view of the importance of marriage and sexual control, love/community, and honorable work in the church?
- What key Christian concept (spirituality or “discipleship”) is evident in Paul’s exhortations? Hint: “. . . more and more”?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-5:11

- What is the key/leading topic of 4:13-18 and 5:1-11? How would you summarize the key teachings about the 2nd coming of Christ in each section?
- How do the introductory narratives of chapters 1-3 prepare for this teaching?
- What does 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 say about Christians’ response to death?
- What does 4:12 and 5:11 imply about Christians’ responsibility toward each other. How important is encouragement in the Christian lifestyle?
- How does 5:1-11 bring the middle/body of the letter to a degree of conclusion?

Sample Highlighting

1 Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,
To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace.

²We give thanks to God always for all of you,

constantly mentioning you in our prayers,

³remembering before our God and Father your **work of faith** and **labor of love** and **steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father.

⁴For we know [= knowing], brothers **loved** by God, that he has **chosen** you, ⁵because our **gospel came** to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we **proved to be** among you for your sake. ⁶And you **became** imitators of us and of the Lord, for you **received the word** in **much affliction**, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, ⁷so that you **became** an example to all the **believers** in Macedonia and in Achaia. ⁸For not only has **the word of the Lord** sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but **your faith** in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. ⁹For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols [1] to serve the living and true God, ¹⁰and [2] **wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come**.

2 For you yourselves know, brethren, that our **coming** to you **was** not in **vain**, ²but after we had already **suffered and been mistreated** in Philippi, as you know, we had the boldness in our God to speak to you **the gospel of God** amid much **opposition**. ³For our exhortation does not *come* from error or impurity or by way of deceit; ⁴but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with **the gospel**, so we speak, not as pleasing men, but God who examines our hearts. ⁵For we never **came** with flattering speech, as you know, nor with a pretext for greed—God is witness— ⁶nor did we seek glory from men, either from you or from others, even though as apostles of Christ we might have asserted our authority. ⁷But we **proved to be** gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children. ⁸Having so fond an affection for you, we were well-pleased to impart to you not only **the gospel of God** but also **our own lives**, because you had **become** very dear to us.

⁹ For you recall, brethren, our labor and hardship, how working night and day so as not to be a burden to any of you, we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰ You are witnesses, and so is God, how devoutly and uprightly and blamelessly we behaved toward you believers; ¹¹ just as you know how we were exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you as a father would his own children, ¹² so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

¹³ And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. ¹⁴ For you, brothers, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judea. For you suffered the same things from your own countrymen as they did from the Jews, ¹⁵ who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out, and displease God and oppose all mankind ¹⁶ by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles that they might be saved—so as always to fill up the measure of their sins. But wrath has come upon them at last!

¹⁷ But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, ¹⁸ because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. ¹⁹ For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? ²⁰ For you are our glory and joy.

3 Therefore when we could bear it no longer, we were willing to be left behind at Athens alone, ² and we sent Timothy, our brother and God's coworker in the gospel of Christ, to establish and exhort you in your faith, ³ that no one be moved by these afflictions. For you yourselves know that we are destined for this. ⁴ For when we were with you, we kept telling you beforehand that we were to suffer affliction, just as it has come to pass, and just as you know. ⁵ For this reason, when I could bear it no longer, I sent to learn about your faith, for fear that somehow the tempter had tempted you and our labor would be in vain.

⁶ But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you—⁷ for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith. ⁸ For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord. ⁹ For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God, ¹⁰ as we pray most earnestly night

and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

¹¹ Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, ¹² and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, ¹³ so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness **before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.**

4 Finally, then, brothers, [1] we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. ² For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. ³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵ not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶ that no one trans and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. ⁷ For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. ⁸ Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

⁹ Now [2] concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, ¹⁰ for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, ¹¹ and [3] to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, ¹² so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

¹³ But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. ¹⁴ For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁵ For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep.

¹⁶ For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore encourage one another with these words.

5 Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you. ²For you yourselves are fully aware that **the day of the Lord** will come like a thief in the **night**.³ While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. ⁴But you are not in **darkness**, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. ⁵For you are all children of **light**, children of the **day**. We are not of the **night** or of the **darkness**. ⁶So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. ⁷For those who sleep, sleep at **night**, and those who get drunk, are drunk at **night**. ⁸But since we belong to the **day**, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of **faith** and **love**, and for a helmet the **hope** of salvation. ⁹For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁰ who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. ¹¹Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

¹²We ask you, brothers, to respect those who **labor** among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, ¹³and to esteem them very highly in **love** because of their **work**. Be at peace among yourselves. ¹⁴And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. ¹⁵See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone. ¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray without ceasing, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not despise prophecies, ²¹but test everything; hold fast what is good. ²²Abstain from every form of evil.

²³Now may the God of peace himself **sanctify** you completely, **and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.** ²⁴He who **calls** you is **faithful**; he will surely do it.

²⁵Brothers, pray for us.

²⁶Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

²⁷I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

²⁸The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.