

# CONTAGIOUS CHRISTIANITY

## A STUDY OF 1 THESSALONIANS

### STUDY SEVEN

## Behaving Properly Toward Outsiders

*1 Thessalonians 4:9–12*

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*Guard against extremes: becoming so exclusively Christian that we lose touch with the world or becoming so worldly no one would even know we're born again.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**P**ERHAPS you've done some bowling. At the bowling alley, after you've surveyed the available bowling balls and identified the best ball to fit your finger size and grip pattern, you're ready to step up to the lane. Gazing forward and eyeing your prized target of pins, you carefully quicken your pace, approach the shiny black stripe indicating “do not cross,” and let it fly.

With high hopes for a strike, you disappointingly watch your ball careen toward the gutter, settle in, and roll harmlessly to the end. No pins even struck. Taking a moment to analyze and correct your mistake, you retrieve your ball, line up, and do it once again. Once again, you find the gutter—this time on the other side of the lane!

From one extreme to the other, the Christian life can mirror these bowling blunders.

On one side, you have the *cloistered Christian*. Every conversation, every activity, every relationship is Christian. So much so, that we inadvertently push non-Christians away because they might “contaminate.” On another side, you have the *camouflaged Christian*. Veering the opposite direction, we work hard to look like the world—to fit in and join in so as not to offend. Only God knows for sure.

Thankfully, there's a middle path, a better path.

In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we continue our study of Thessalonians, in which the apostle Paul provides practical counsel for living in the world without drifting to either extreme. We rejoin Paul as he outlined the necessary correctives to a few errant Thessalonian tendencies.



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SEARCHING  
THE  
SCRIPTURES  
BIBLE STUDIES

# Behaving Properly Toward Outsiders

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## PREPARE YOUR HEART

Paul encourages us to “live wisely among those who are not believers” (Colossians 4:5). As you open the Word, invite the Holy Spirit to guide you in thought, word, and action in your engagement with those in need of a personal relationship with Christ.



## TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

In the early chapters of 1 Thessalonians, the apostle heaped praise and gratitude on the new believers. Their exercise of faith, their loving deeds, and their enduring hope shone like rays of sunlight through the thunderclouds of persecution. His heart ached to be with them to continue investing in their spiritual growth.

Paul opened chapter 4 with a fatherly appeal to “live in a way that pleases God” (1 Thessalonians 4:1). Immersed in a culture of pagan debauchery, the Thessalonians faced many temptations, and Paul implored them to “stay away from all sexual sin” (4:3).

In 1 Thessalonians 4:9–12, Paul added a corrective. Apparently, some of the believers had veered into extremes, and Paul needed to gently guide them back to center.



## Observation: Balanced Living Before Others

Use your skills of observation to see how Paul addresses this problem. Imagine sitting among the Thessalonians listening to the letter being read. Note Paul’s tone and his key phrases, contrasts, and metaphors as you hang on every word.<sup>1</sup>

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### Living Among Fellow Christians—1 Thessalonians 4:9–10

Paul wrapped his correction in velvet. He began gently, first pointing out what the believers do well—they love one another. As you read [1 Thessalonians 4:9–10](#), note the subject. Who taught the Thessalonians how to love? What was Paul affirming about their relationship with God?

Love draws people to Christ and is what makes Christianity contagious. It's what attracted the Thessalonians to Christ in the first place. Their church had become a showcase of Christian love, “an example to all the believers in Greece” (1 Thessalonians 1:7). Paul patted them on the back and urged them to love “even more.”

*Love one another to the point of excelling in it. Don't just love people when they have earned it. Don't just love them when they have met the conditions of a good love relationship. Love them even when they don't deserve it.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

### Living Before Non-Christians—1 Thessalonians 4:11–12

Paul went further to address how believers should relate with unbelievers. When we consider impacting unbelievers, we envision evangelistic crusades or passing out gospel tracts. While these are important evangelistic channels, in these verses, Paul had the nitty-gritty of day-to-day interactions in mind.

Apparently, Paul's previous teaching about Christ's return and the rapture of the church had made a deep impression on the Thessalonians. Fervor, confusion, and hysteria colored their outlook. In their zeal for Christ and for His return, the Thessalonians had been isolating themselves from the world.

Observe [1 Thessalonians 4:11–12](#). What commands did Paul give in 4:11? What do you think the Thessalonians were doing—or not doing—that prompted Paul to give these commands?

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In 1 Thessalonians 4:12, Paul explained the reason for his commands. What positive outcomes would result?

*“Work with your hands” is the thought of being personally diligent to get a job done. People who do not earn their wage forfeit the right to be heard regarding the good news. An irresponsible, lazy lifestyle discredits the good news.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



### Interpretation: Lifestyle Evangelism

Paul encouraged the Thessalonian believers to “excel even more” in loving their brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:10 NASB). *Excel* means to “go beyond,” to “love to completion.” We live in a world immersed in a love that is earned—*reciprocal and conditional*—and that’s all unbelievers know.

Christ’s love, however, is *unconditional*. It goes beyond human love, and that’s the love Paul urged us to show to others as a form of evangelism through our lifestyle.

What about Christ’s love is winsome? Why does the world crave that type of love? Why did Paul understand its effectiveness in our witness to unbelievers?

Paul told believers to “live a quiet life,” “attend to your own business,” and “work with your hands” (4:11 NASB). What do these lifestyle qualities look like practically?

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The outcome is that we “will not need to depend on others” (1 Thessalonians 4:12). When we’re in need, we should feel free to ask for help. But Paul was addressing our normal lifestyle when we should be able to take care of ourselves. What Christian virtues does work display?

If Christians practice these qualities, unbelievers will “respect” the way we live. The Greek word is *euschemonos*, which means “respected,” “proper,” “becoming,” “fitting,” and “graceful.” Why do you think Paul thought it important that unbelievers respect us?

*Just because a person is unsaved doesn't mean the person can't think, doesn't mean the person isn't watching. On the contrary, many of them can outthink us, and they are watching. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### **Correlation: In the World, but Not of the World**

In the hours prior to His arrest and crucifixion, Jesus prayed to His Father for His disciples and all followers to come. What did Jesus ask of His Father on behalf of believers in [John 17:15–17](#)?

Jesus doesn't take His followers out of this world when they repent and believe in Him. What's His purpose for leaving us in the world, according to [17:18](#)?

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*Jesus prays not for our isolation but for our insulation. He says, “Father, don’t take them out of the world, because without the Christian, there’s no salt. There’s no light. There’s no hope. Father, leave them in the world but guard them from the evil one.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

How should we live in the world? The Thessalonian believers went to extremes and became irresponsible and dependent. They reasoned, “If Jesus is coming tomorrow, why work today?” In his second letter to them, Paul guided them back to center with what additional instructions in [2 Thessalonians 3:7–14](#)?

*The point is clear. You need to be in touch with people in the world—the immoral, the covetous, the idolaters—because they are living a lifestyle for which there is no power to change. They need what you have.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



## **Application: Behaving Wisely Before Watching Eyes**

How do we behave properly before a watching world? Pastor Chuck Swindoll offers three concluding principles that emerge from our passage.

First, *unbelievers are watching and wondering, so conduct yourself with wisdom.* Second, *unbelievers are listening and learning, so speak your words seasoned with grace.* Third, *unbelievers are individuals and they are important, so respond with dignity and sensitivity.*

Reflect on these principles and ask yourself, “Who around me needs help? Who needs grace? How can I demonstrate my faith through the Christian virtues of work and love?”

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In your relationships with unbelievers, how can you *excel* even more? What might you do to cultivate friendships?

How are you doing with *leading a quiet life? Attending to your own business? Working with your hands? Not being overly dependent on others?* If these are not problems for you, thank the Lord for His sustaining grace! If you need God’s help in any of these areas, seek Him and record your prayer below.

*If you determine to live a balanced Christian life in touch with your world, you will have to spend some time with the lost person. There’s no way around it. That’s not only essential; that is commendable. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



## A FINAL PRAYER

*Lord, today I come to You with gratitude for the opportunity You have allowed me to have. You didn’t save me and then remove me from this world, but You deliberately kept me in it. Lord, I realize that Your desire for me is not isolation but insulation. Give me the courage to live as I should live before outsiders. Give me the ability to love them. I ask this in the name of Christ my Lord. Amen.*

## ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “*How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?*”

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll’s messages. Copyright © 1984, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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