

"Sanctified"

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- 1 Thess 4 -

1 Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; 2 for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord [is] the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. 7 For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. 8 Therefore he who rejects [this] does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit. 9 But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; 10 and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; 11 that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, 12 that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and [that] you may lack nothing. 13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. 14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. 15 For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive [and] remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. 16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 Then we who are alive [and] remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 18 Therefore comfort one another with these words.

Last week we slowed to emphasize a particular truth...that a committed and faithful believer walks to please God. Proactively. With purpose and priority. If an individual is indeed born again and loves their Redeemer, then He or she will live as God directs.

4:3

Verse 3 of our text clearly communicates God's desire ...His "want" for our "sanctification." In fact, we are told that it is more than just His desire, but indeed it is His "will." Sanctification is being "set apart." Living different. Being 'special.' It is something that is done to us, and something we actively engage in ourselves. Few attributes are so quintessentially Christian. We are "set apart" unto God and unto His directives. Sadly, many folks will consider themselves Christians while at the same time actively and overtly rejecting some if not many of the commands, the very decrees God says literally define us.

We often are guilty of claiming ...usually just feigning actually, that we don't know what God's will is. What *does* He actually want from us? The truth is we usually *do* know much more than we are willing to acknowledge but just don't want to own up to such because we believe that that would somehow make us accountable and responsible for its handling. Indeed! Moreover, the language here really couldn't be easier for us to understand: "*this is the will of God, your sanctification...*"

This one issue...this one aspect in our faith, suddenly becomes a sort of sieve...a "funnel" wherein everything we are and everything we do is required to pass: *our financial dealings, our jobs, our relationships, our dating habits, our time management, etc etc*. In this call to sanctification, we can reason, argue, give excuses, and whine and complain. But God's will doesn't change. He wants this.

The essence of sanctification essentially is "holiness," but it is a holiness that does not come quickly or easily. There is a "positional sanctification" which is your standing in heaven. It is earned solely by Christ and His work upon the cross. Your only role in that is your acceptance of such. If you are reborn, that sanctification is done and finished and secure in heaven. But there is another sanctification, and that is a "practical" sanctification. This is a fluid thing. It is a living and moving thing in which we are called to grow throughout our lives.



If we *can* claim that we are blind in some matter for which we do not yet know the will of God, our sexual practices are certainly not one of them! Despite our modern thinking and new pervasive morality, we still don't get to write the book on this, because God already did.

Fewer issues have caused and frankly *will cause* so much disobedience and falling away than the issue of sexual immorality. It comes with many faces: from pornography, to lurid behaviors, to sex with your boyfriend or girlfriend because, well, "*you're in love.*"

I don't pretend that this is an easy issue, nor can such drives be "switched off" like a light switch. To make matters worse, the biblical position on this issue is often the greatest criticism of Christianity as archaic and prudish. And yet seldom will anyone *even secularly* argue that such activities inevitably come with lots of baggage and many regrets and pain. Sexual promiscuity leads the way on the emotional preeminence in our society...where our culture marches to the mantra of "*if it feels good and feels right then it IS right and you should engage in it!*" But trailing behind the parade is all of the casualties and expenses of such, ranging from unwanted pregnancies, STD's, broken relationships, self image disasters, guilt and psychological damage. Where did the idea come from that because we "feel" something, such should drive our decisional processes? Because I "feel" something I should of course engage in it? "Feelings" seem to be "where the buck stops" in our day and they come with a mandate to feed them! This is not just a worldly concept! Even within some branches of the greater church today, we incorporate charged emotional experience with worship and prayer, and try to force God into a box wherein our communicate and relationship is driven by feelings and emotions instead of scripture and obedience! Many are simply rewriting the Bible to accommodate their positions in these matters!

Sometimes we will try to deny that we have such desires in the flesh, believing that simply acknowledging temptations places me in a bad light and paints me as an evil person. However, that is ridiculous and certainly does not hold up under the scrutiny of scripture. God made sex and made sexual attraction and desire. Temptations in this area is not sin, but engagement outside of Godly context is!

Life has many such situations! I think parachuting or hang-gliding looks awesome, but I also know that I had better make sure all of the guidelines are followed throughout those processes if I would like to avoid falling to my death! Overall, we get that! But when it comes to sex many of us are simply jumping out of the plane without a chute because we are so excited to fly!

Often, we want to imagine that we personally get a "pass" on the prohibition of pre-marital or extra-marital sex because of some perceived license or right. This again is simply a lie, even if it is a lie to ourselves. We think "well, we're going to get married, so..." or "my wife isn't sensitive and giving to my wants so I am justified to step out."

When we involve ourselves in sexual immorality, we break communion with God. And then ironically, we then wonder why it's so quiet or why we feel so alone. We want God to help us but it's so quiet. No mystery there. He didn't move, *we did*. We moved away from Him, and the way back is repentance and obedience. He'll be there, I promise, when you go back to that place where you left Him. He will forgive and restore. Will there be pain? Quite likely. Sin always leads to pain.

We want to believe that pornography is a victimless practice and that it is no big deal. Well it actually is to you and certainly is to those involved in the business. It's not like young girls aspire to grow up to be porn stars and their involvement invariably affects every part of their lives and eventually their deaths. Remember, that is someone's daughter...and certainly is God's creation.

Our natural reaction to the practice of this sin is to hide. That's a sure sign you're in the wrong. Sin wants darkness and privacy, so we run and we hide. If you only knew how many people are no longer in this church *because of this sin alone!*

4:4-5

Paul says we *should* know this! We *should know* how to "possess one's vessel" or "control his or her body" in sanctification... holiness, and honor. When we do not, the consequences can be devastating. Failed marriages, ruined families, public shame and disgrace, jail, illegitimate pregnancies, STD's and even death. If you manage to dodge all of these, there still awaits one sure reward: **pain**. This is because there is always a "bait and switch." Satan and the world promise you one thing, but deliver something very different! Because such behavior always seems to lead not to some wonderful Hollywood movie experience, but rather inevitably to pain. Oh yes...even the Bible acknowledges that sin is "sweet for a season." But there is always the day that we have to "pay the piper." And it is invariably quite expensive.

We need to note something however.

The great commentator Ray Stedman says "*In this day in which we live I know that probably many of you are thinking that it is too late for you; you already have messed up your lives. But the glory of the gospel is that the word is not that we must never do this;*

rather the word is, 'Do it no longer.' " We can be forgiven and washed. Jesus loves you, and he did even before your sin and He did when He knew you were going to sin before you even did. You can always 'come home.' "

Corinthians reminds us that God literally lives in these bodies. Perhaps that is why He is so emphatic on this issue. Because where we go, we take Him, and He doesn't want to go there. So when we do, we break the first commandment to not "have any other Gods before Him." Because when we act this way, we make ourselves gods, and that was the sin from the beginning which caused the fall of mankind.

The way to fight lust in ourselves is not just to put accountability software on our computers, though a locked door helps a lot! Ultimately however, it is to **draw nearer to God**. To spend more time with Him, to "walk" with Him closer and more often. When he becomes real and intimate, so does the reality of our relationship as well as the pain that we place upon Him when we sin. And remember...everyone knows that the "dog we feed the most is the dog that is the stronger." So it would greatly benefit you to stop feeding that dog. And always call it for what it is. It's lust, its sin. It's not an indiscretion. It's not the freedom of grace. It's sin.

4:6-7

According to scripture, sexual sin also has a secondary effect in that it "defrauds" others. "Brother" here no doubt refers to men and women alike, but if you reject that premise then just remember; *when you engage in sex with one you do not marry gentlemen, you steal from the one who does marry her later!* Men are fond of saying "I got a piece of her." Yes you did, and you stole it from not only her, but the guy she will eventually marry! God is the "avenger of such" and there is no need for commentary on that remark.

Numbers 32:33 says "Be sure your sin will find you out." Not GOD will find you out...that's a given, but your **sin will**. And public sin inevitably goes very badly. Ask King David! God has called the Christian to holiness. No space there to cheat, no room to wiggle out. Christian...God is calling you to be holy...to be like He is!

4:8-10

No doubt many will reject what I am saying on all of this today. You might say I'm archaic...just an old guy who doesn't know things have changed. Oh I know things have changed! But the point is that God hasn't. He never does. And thus neither has true Christianity. So if you reject these words today, you do not reject me, you reject God.

No one is really sure whether Paul herein is simply addressing issues at the Lord's leading alone, or whether the Thessalonian believers had previously sought his council on specific matters of faith and church, such as the issue of sex. But he does go on here to call this church *...the church*, to love each other. That seems on the surface to be a 'no brainer' ...an obvious inclusion in a walk of faith! But sadly, such is not the case. We need to be reminded!

The church in Thessalonica was in fact a loving fellowship, but Paul urged them not to get comfortable and passive on the issue. He said that they...*and we*, continue to grow and increase in this matter. John 13:35 reminds us clearly that "*By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*"

So as we have recently covered in the study of this book, the issue of brotherly love within the church is not a minor issue! It is a serious part of the sanctified life. Everything we do and every decision we make as a church must be grounded in the love we are to have for each other. This direction is not abstract in its terms nor is it obscure in its practice. This was to be a very real and concrete practice in a sanctified life.

Paul wasn't lowering the standard or cutting them any slack. For he says "on the issue of brotherly love in the fellowship there, you don't really need me to tell you anything about that...you know how important this issue is because God Himself has taught you to 'love' each other!" The word love in its second appearance in that verse changes from Phileo...*brotherly love*, to AGAPE...*God perfect love*. Agape love! Perfect unconditional love of God Himself. He wasn't calling for the gang there to be buddies and just to be nice to each other! He was calling them to really love...like a parent loves...unilaterally, without condition or recompense, in pleasantries **and** in correction or even rebuke!

They were to live out a love motivated interaction...an agape centered relationship. That kind of love can only be produced in the lives of believers and only through the presence of the Holy Spirit! Have you noticed that animals do instinctively what is necessary to keep them alive and safe? Fish do not attend classes to learn how to swim, and birds by nature put out their wings and flap them in order to fly. It is nature that determines action. Because a fish has a fish's nature, it swims; because a hawk has a hawk's nature, it flies. And because a true Christian has God's nature (2 Peter 1:4), he loves, because "God is love" (1 John 4:8).

4:11

Once in a while, we run into verses like this one that is almost wholly ignored and thus easily rejected by the greater Christian world. This particular one, is a terribly abused directive. And yet note that Paul is still speaking about the "sanctified life." Let me ask a question: Is the modern churches' massive foray into the political arena "leading a quiet life and minding our own business?" Is the adamant practice of churchgoer's involvement in Facebook and other social media? It's where we gossip, seek gossip, and detail our lives online for others to consume.

Indeed the author Thomas Constable points out that "Paul was telling the Thessalonians to be less frantic, not less exuberant." Paul is not calling us to an Amish lifestyle where we shut out the world and pretend it isn't happening out there. But often we can become so involved in the world that we essentially bear no semblance to the faithful lifestyle that Jesus redeemed us for and has called us to.

The fact is, many of us are just flat-out still in love with the world and our lifestyle proves it!

1John 2:15 "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him."

2 Thessalonians 3:11-12 says "For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread."

"to lead a quiet life" in its original language means to simply "be still...be quiet."

Luke 12:42, 43 "Who then is the faithful and sensible steward, whom his master will put in charge of his servants, to give them their rations at the proper time?" Blessed is that slave whom his master finds so doing when he comes.

4:12

Paul again uses that common theme in his writings... the idea of "walking" through life. It gives us a clear picture of movement and an active living. "Living quietly" does not mean inactivity or a spiritually sedentary lifestyle. But it does mean to live with purpose and self-control; not a common theme in today's society! It IS however an attribute of the sanctified life. We are to be good testimonies toward those on the outside of the faith...not reflecting poorly or bringing shame upon the faith by our actions. Perhaps the proper word would be "integrity."

The word "properly" is an adverb which literally means "seemly, becomingly, appropriately, suitably." This too is not a popular notion today within the greater Christian community! *I guess none of these "sanctified" attributes actually are!* It is all so...well, *old-fashioned*. We often reject it on those grounds alone and let the world dictate what the 'new' standard is. And the result is that we often look and act just like the world instead of "coming out from among unbelievers, and separating ourselves from them" in the practice of our living. (2Corinthians 6:17)

The writer Richison puts the whole matter this way:

"Credible Christians pay attention to the way they live on a day-to-day basis. A godless world looks upon those who leech off others with suspicion. Non-Christians can judge us only by appearances, so our walk should fit the fashion of Christ. What kind of testimony would we have to non-Christians if they viewed us as wranglers, gossips, critics, busybodies and lazy?"

In this passage today, we see how practical the Christian walk really is. The obedient Christian will have a holy life by abstaining from sexual sin; a harmonious life by loving the brethren; and an honest life by working with his hands and not meddling in the affairs of others. When unsaved people see Christ magnified in this kind of life, they will either oppose it with envy or desire to have it for themselves. Either way, God is glorified.