

# 1 Thessalonians

## I. Introduction

A. **1 Thessalonians 4:1-8** [1] Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. [2] For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. [3] For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; [4] that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, [5] not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; [6] and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. [7] For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. [8] So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

## B. Pray

## II. God's will, your sanctification (*it is God's will that God's people live in God's way*)

A. [2] For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus, (*commandments that if obeyed will transform you into the likeness of Jesus Christ, and it is in keeping these commandments that we want you to excel still more.*)

1. Note the use of the word "commandments." It is the basis for the word "ought" in vs 1. In other words, commandments tell us how we ought to live. Therefore, in vs 1, God exhorts us to live like a Christian ought to live, and in vs 2 we see we are to do it by obeying His commandments – commandments that are found in God's word. The reality is, you cannot live as a Christian ought to live without obeying all of God's word about how to live.
2. Paul goes on to say that the commandments he is referring to are not his, but God's, and that his obligation and authority to teach them came from Jesus Christ.
  - a. Jesus spoke of the obligation and authority to teach His commandments when speaking to His disciples just prior to ascending into heaven.

- b. We read this in **Matthew 28:18-20**, “All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”
    3. We too have this same obligation and authority to teach new believers to live according to all that Jesus and the rest of scripture says about living a godly life.
- B. **[3a]** For this is the will of God, your sanctification;
1. Even though we can easily conclude from God’s commandments and the rest of scripture that it His will that we grow to Christian maturity and the likeness of Christ, here in **vs 3**, Paul makes it unmistakably clear. God’s will is our sanctification.
  2. When the scripture speaks of **God’s will**, it is referring to what God wants, what He commands, what He requires, or where He leads.
    - a. An example of doing what God wants or commands is found in **Ephesians 6:5-6**, “Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; [6] not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the **will of God** from the heart.”
    - b. We learn that there is a connection between doing the will of God and eternal life from **1 John 2:17**, “The world is passing away, and also its lusts; but the one who does the **will of God** lives forever.”
    - c. And in **Mark 3:35**, Jesus said, “Whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother (*a family member*).”
  3. Though the will of God is broader and covers more things than our sanctification, here in **vs 3**, Paul makes two things clear:
    - a. **First**, God wants or requires every Christian to be sanctified.
    - b. **Therefore**, sanctification is the Christian’s duty or obligation – a duty that involves us in a God-taught, God-empowered, God-led, biblically based process of putting off our old sinful ways and putting on godliness so that we are progressively purified and re-created into the likeness of Jesus Christ.
  4. In other words, sanctification is a process that takes us from willful sinners going our own way to willful and obedient children of God who are doing the will of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

5. Paul gives an overview of the process of sanctification in **Romans 6**, from which I will read **vs 12-13** and then **vs 19**. “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, [13] and do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. [19] For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.”
  6. And **Hebrews 12:14** affirms the connection between sanctification and eternal life, “Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.”
  7. Therefore, sanctification, or growing in godliness until we are Christ-like is God’s will, God’s requirement for all who come to Him for eternal salvation.
- C. **[3b]** Paul continues on and gives us a practical example of how the process of sanctification is to affect our lives. Therefore he says, “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, **that you abstain from sexual immorality.**”
1. The Thessalonian believers were saved out of idol worship, and idol worship often includes participation in various forms of sexual immorality – from temple prostitutes, to homosexuality, to feasts which included excessive drinking and orgies, and to the open and religiously supported practice of infidelity in the community.
  2. The reality is, idol worship has never been just a rejection of the one, true, living God. It has also included the rejection of moral goodness, marital faithfulness, sexual purity, and love. This was true in Paul’s day.
    - a. In addition to the evils of idol worship, Greece condoned the open practice of homosexuality – including adult men with young boys. And many in the Roman Empire believed there was nothing wrong with various forms of fornication and adultery.
    - b. The point is, the Thessalonian converts were not only saved out of idol worship and all the immoral beliefs and practices that were part of it, they were also saved out of a culture that openly condoned and practiced many forms of sexual immorality.
    - c. In fact, sexual immorality was such an accepted practice in the Gentile world that Jesus’ disciples, in deciding what was most

important for new Gentile believers to focus on in relation to spiritual growth, said this in, **Acts 15:19-20**, “Therefore it is our judgment that we do not trouble those who are turning to God from among the Gentiles, [20] but that we write to them that they (1) abstain from things contaminated by idols (2) and from fornication (3) and from what is strangled (4) and from blood.”

3. However, sexual immorality was not just a destructive evil in Paul’s day, it was a destructive evil in Abraham and Lot’s day (*remember Sodom and Gomorrah?*), and among the Israelites while they wandered in the desert (*remember Israel worshiping Baal of Peor and getting sexually involved with Moabite women?*).
4. And it is a destructive evil in our world today – so much so that it is likely we know someone near and dear, whether Christian or unbeliever, who has been or still is participating in some form of sexual immorality.
5. The reality is, sexual immorality has been and continues to be such a practiced and destructive evil in the world and among God’s people that from the Law of Moses through Revelation it holds a prominent place in the lists of evils God condemns. For example:
  - a. In **Matthew 15:19-20**, Jesus said, “For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, **adulteries, fornications**, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man.”
  - b. In giving a list of life-styles that will not inherit the kingdom of God, Paul said, “neither **fornicators**, nor idolaters, nor **adulterers**, nor effeminate, nor **homosexuals**, [10] nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God” (**1 Corinthians 6:9-10**).
  - c. In providing a similar list in **Galatians 5:19-21**, Paul said, “Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: **immorality, impurity, sensuality**, [20] idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, [21] envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I ... have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”
  - d. **Ephesians 5:1-5** says, “Be imitators of God, as beloved children; [2] and walk in love, just as Christ also loved you and gave Himself up for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God as a fragrant aroma. [3] But **immorality** or any **impurity** or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints;

[4] and there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks. [5] For this you know with certainty, that no **immoral** or **impure** person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.”

- e. There are more scriptures like these, but I will leave it to you to look at them. They are found in **1 Corinthians 5:9-13, 2 Corinthians 12:21, Colossians 3:5-6, Jude 1:5-7.**
  - f. The point of all this is that sexual immorality was rampant in the world and in the NT church, and it continues to be rampant today. We may be too polite or proper to talk about this evil, but that doesn't stop it from being participated in by those in our own homes, in our church, or by us, ourselves.
- D. I suspect most of know how rampant sexual immorality is in the world around us. However, you may be wondering how rampant it is in the church today.
- 1. We could name names of well known ministers and Christian leaders who were caught in sexual immorality just in 2020, but the reality is, they aren't even the tip of the iceberg.
  - 2. The reality is, from pulpit to pew, sexual immorality is in the church, and based on what I know about myself, I'm guessing there are some here today who are in currently involved in some form of sexual immorality that only you and God know about.
  - 3. However, I will give you some statistics related to pornography and adultery that come from studies done in 2014 and 2016. According to a Barna Group study in 2016,
    - a. Among Christian men between 18 and 30 years old, 77% admit to looking at pornography at least monthly, while 36% admit to viewing pornography on a daily basis.
    - b. The statistics for middle-aged Christian men (ages 31 to 49) are equally grim. 77% looked at pornography while at work, and 64% viewed pornography at least monthly.
    - c. And according to this study, 35% of married Christian men have had an extramarital affair, while 17% of married Christian women admitted to cheating on their spouses.
  - 4. A study done for Today's Christian Woman claims that as many as 65% of men and 55% of women will have an extramarital affair by the time they are 40. Though the numbers among Christians is lower, it is an indication of how rampant sexual immorality is.

5. A Christianity Today survey found that 23% of the 300 pastors surveyed admitted to sexually inappropriate behavior with someone other than their wives while in the ministry.
  6. And in 2014, the Huffington Post headlined an article with this statement: "You May Be Surprised How Many Born-Again Christians Use Ashley Madison" (an online company that helps married people arrange affairs). The article went on to point out that Ashley Madison had surveyed its members and discovered that 25% were evangelical ("born-again") Christians, with Catholics making up almost 23% of the membership.
- E. So why is sexual immorality this much of a problem among Christians? The most simple answer from a spiritual perspective is that we love the world and the things of the world more than we love God. We want to gratify our physical passions and experience physical pleasures more than we want godliness. And we want the closeness of another human being more than we want the closeness of God.
1. However, if we look at this problem from a human perspective, the general answer is that for men, it feels good, its pleasurable, and that is mostly what they are focused on when indulging in the various forms of this sin. For women, though it can feel good, most of them are looking for a sense of closeness and belonging, or for an affirming feeling of being important and loved.
  2. However, whether for pleasure or for a comforting sense of belonging and feeling loved, going outside God's boundaries to gain the satisfaction you seek is always an act of selfishness.
  3. It is an act of selfishness because no one does this for God's sake, or for their family's sake, or for their spouse's sake, or for the church's sake. They do it for their own sake, and they do it at the expense or to the harm of God's honor and reputation in the world as well as to the harm of their family, their spouse, and the church.
  4. However, the reality is, selfishness in some form or another coupled with a strong sense of need and discontent over the need not being met form two of the greatest enemies of godliness. In fact, when you add serious pleasure or the strong and comforting sense of belonging and feeling loved to the outcome of selfishness, it makes saying no to sexual immorality and yes to godliness that much harder.
  5. But that doesn't justify choosing sexual immorality over godliness to satisfy them. And yet, how many of us have done just that? I

know I have. And sadly, I have not just sinned in this way, I have justified my sin on the basis that my sense of need was not being met the way I wanted it to be met.

6. Yet selfishness coupled with discontentment are only the human reasons sexual immorality exists in us as individual Christians and in the church. Spiritually speaking, it is our lack of faith in God's goodness; and our lack of faith in the truth of His word; and our lack of faith in the fact that God's way of living produces a life full of inner peace, contentment, and joy that far exceeds the pleasure, satisfaction, and comfort gained from sexual immorality; and it is our lack of faith in the fact that God, when known intimately and loved more nearly as He ought satisfies us so fully that it overshadows our fleshly desires for pleasure and sense of neediness and makes them seem unimportant.

### III. Ask yourself,

- A. Do you believe David's words in **Psalm 16:11**, "You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever."
  1. Do you believe Jesus' words in **John 10:10**, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly."
- B. You could believe the truth in these two scriptures, and if you would and then live accordingly, you would discover that God alone is enough, and that in His presence is fullness of joy in spite of what is going on around you or what is happening to you or what you are not getting that you want.
  1. And you would discover that intimate fellowship with God from a pure heart does lead to pleasures forever – pleasures that are profoundly different and greater than any pleasures gained from sexual immorality.
  2. And you would discover that having God and His son, Jesus Christ making their abode in you does give you the greatest, most satisfying sense of belonging and being loved that you could get anywhere.