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1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

A Life That Pleases God Part 3 – Sanctification and Sexual Purity

Related Topics: Spiritual Challenges; Abounding; The Christian Walk; Pleasing God; The Will of God; Sanctification; Holiness; Sexual Sin; Sexual Purity; Taught by God; Brotherly Love; An Orderly life.



1Finally, then, brothers, 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. 2For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, 5not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6that no one transgress 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. 7For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. 8Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. 9Now 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, 10for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, 11and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, 12so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

1 Thessalonians 4:3 3For this is the will of God, your sanctification:

First, notice this verse tells us that God WANTS us to know His will! Second, it is in the CONTEXT of:

- How to walk in agreement with God.
- How to walk in faith.
- And to be ABOUNDING more and more in it.

Paul essentially says – God wants you to KNOW HOW to do it! *This* is the will of God. The Holy Spirit doesn't leave us guessing as to what the will of God is for our lives. The ONLY thing we are left with is a choice. Will it be His will or my will? Do I desire THY will be done or MY will be done? There are essentially TWO ways in which we understand “the will of God.”

1. The DETERMINATION of God – his decrees / plans. For example, Peter in Acts said Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God.
2. The DESIRE of God.

The Greek word for “WILL” is *Thelema*. It conveys the idea of desire, even a heart's desire. Thus God's DETERMINATIONS spring from His DESIRES.

Vine's Expository Dictionary says, "The character of a person is expressed in his will. If we are afraid of the will of God it is because we have a faulty concept of God."

THAT is why it is so awesome to know that God has not left us to SPECULATE about who He is. He has graciously REVEALED HIMSELF to us, His CHARACTER, His HEART, and His DESIRES in:

- Creation
- Scripture
- The person of His Son, Jesus!

As we look at the Scriptures we discover that the DESIRES and the DETERMINATIONS of God are in CONFLICT with the desires of man. By nature, fallen man follows the desires (thelemata), of the flesh and of the mind.

Ephesians 2:3 Among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

Romans 8:7-8 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot. 8Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

The Scriptures tell us that it pleased God to walk with man, but man chose to have HIS DESIRE against and above GOD'S DESIRE. From that moment forward mankind has lived for the desires of his flesh, bringing himself constantly into opposition to the desires of God. The result is the train wreck of planet earth that we witness on the 10:00 pm News. Stonehill said, "We are all like foolish puppets, who desiring to be king, now lie pitifully crippled after cut our own strings."

But it PLEASSED God to send His Son to die on the cross so that through the DEATH of His Son, God might RECONCILE sinners to Himself. When a man or woman believes with their heart in the Lord Jesus Christ they are RECONCILED to God. Their sins are washed away; they are saved from the wrath that is to come. Though they were once dead in their sins – they are made alive to God!

By the miracle of the second birth we begin to DESIRE what God DESIRES.

I find myself no longer living to satisfy MY desires, but instead desiring to live for the WILL of God – His directions and desires. As a Christian, it is my NEW FOUND DESIRE to live for the will of God.

Philippians 2:13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

It is crucial to notice that God not only places within us a DESIRE to do His will – He DEFINES His will for us.

1 Thessalonians 4:3 For this is the will (direction an desire) of God, your sanctification:...

Paul is now addresses the subject of PRACTICAL SANTIFICATION. We have learned that practical SANCTIFICATION / HOLINESS is a very DIRECTIONAL thing. If I am drawing near to the Lord – walking with the Lord, two things happen:

First I find that my CLOSENESS to Him causes me to know more and more about the things that are in His heart for me (desires)and the plans that He has for me (direction). His WILL for me! And my nearness to Him makes me at home with His will – comfortable with His will.

Second, I find that as I am walking with God and moving in a direction towards God, I am inescapably am moving in a direction away from the course of this world. I am in a PRACTICAL sense becoming MORE SEPARATE from the world - All its desires and its directions. Sanctification begins with the word *that* in this verse:

1 Thessalonians 4:3-4 **3**For this is the will (direction and desire) 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;

The J.B. Phillips translation of the New Testament says it this way, “God’s plan is to make you holy, and that entails first of all a clean break with sexual immorality.” *1 Thessalonians 4:3*

WHY is THIS set forth as the first PRACTICAL step towards God and away from the world? William Barclay helps us understand this by way of the historical/cultural context....

“In Rome for the first five hundred and twenty years of the Republic there had not been a single divorce, but now under the Empire, as it has been put, divorce was a matter of caprice. As Seneca said, ‘Women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married.’ In Greece immorality had always been quite blatant. Long ago Demosthenes had written – ‘We keep prostitutes for pleasure; we keep mistresses for the day-to-day needs of the body; we keep wives for the begetting of children and for the faithful guardianship of our homes.’”

THAT was the EVERY-DAY LIFE and CULTURE that had shaped the DIRECTION and DESIRES of the men and women of Thessalonica BEFORE coming to Christ!

Paul said to the men and women who had come to Christ in Corinth:

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 **9**Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters (involved sexual perversion in the worship of their pagan deities), nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, **10**nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. **11**And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

THAT was the EVERYDAY LIFE and CULTURE that PRESSED in upon them as followers of Christ from every direction, alluring them back to the sexual DIRECTION and DESIRES that ruled their lives BEFORE coming to Christ! Paul wants them to know that God’s DIRECTION and God’s DESIRES for them concerning sex – was in the OPPOSITE direction of that culture they came out of.

Our world today is virtually post-Christian. It is falling into the same abyss of sexual immorality. In the last Open Credo study we learned that when you reject God the Creator you end up with first-century paganism; you worship the body. Your master passion/desire is to find every way to experience pleasure with it.

This coming Credo study we’ll see that when you reject God the Creator, man is viewed as nothing more than a highly evolved animal. Hugh Hefner, Playboy Editor (cited in Eternity Magazine) said, “Sex is a function of the body, a drive which man shares with animals. Like eating, drinking and sleeping. It’s a physical demand that must be satisfied. If you don’t satisfy it you will have all sorts of neurosis and repression psychosis. Sex is here to stay. Let’s forget the prudery that makes us hide from it. Throw away those inhibitions, find a girl who’s like minded and let yourself go.”

HERE’S THE POINT: It is the DIRECTION of God for our life – and the DESIRE of God for our life to be SANCTIFIED – SET APART FROM – a godless culture and it’s direction and desires concerning sex. We are SANCTIFIED – SET APART. We are OTHER THAN the world WHEN we abstain from sexual immorality.

WHAT IS THE MEANING OF sexual immorality? Sexual immorality (*Porneia* in Greek - where our word “Pornography” comes from) denotes any and every form of sexual activity outside of the confines of a lifelong

– monogamous heterosexual union. Including:

- Adultery (sex outside of marriage)
- Premarital sex (sex before marriage)
- Homosexuality (any sex with someone of the same gender)

Let's pause here. To even speak of homosexual sex as sinful is considered a "hate speech" that incites "hate crimes," but if that is the case – it must also mean that it is "hate speech" to address *heterosexual* sin.

The Scriptures do not condemn HOMOsexual sin ONLY. The Scriptures EQUALLY condemn both HETERO-sexual and HOMO-sexual immorality. Somehow Christians have given the impression (and some actually think) that God HATES the Homosexual sinner but does NOT hate the Heterosexual sinner.

The Scriptures declare that God is not willing that ANY should perish, but that all would come to repentance.

ANY meaning:

- ANY living in homosexual sin
- ANY living in heterosexual sin.

HOW are we as Christians to respond to those who say, "I have ALWAYS had these desires for someone of the same sex."? I was just BORN that way and if I was born that way surely it CAN'T be wrong!"

First, they were NOT born with an inescapable proclivity for homosexual behavior!

The APA (American Psychological Association) reversed a 10 year old position that endorses this. The statement from their original position was, "There is considerable recent evidence to suggest that biology, including genetic or inborn hormonal factors, play a significant role in a person's sexuality." The statement of their new position recently released is, "Although much research has occurred... no findings have emerged that permit scientists to conclude that sexual orientation is determined by any particular factor or factors."

Second, if we were born with an inescapable proclivity for homosexual behavior, then I can then also say that I was born with an inescapable proclivity to have heterosexual sex whenever and with whomever. A crucial point to note here is that the Bible is not prejudicial against, nor favorable towards either sin! It calls BOTH PORNEIA!

GOD'S will for BOTH is our sanctification – that we ABSTAIN from PORNEIA. For the man or woman living a homosexual lifestyle it means spending the rest of your professed Christian life ABSTAINING from homosexual sex. For me it means spending the rest of my Christian life ABSTAINING from sex with any other woman except my wife. For both, our sanctification means that we ABSTAIN from sexual immorality meaning:

- No pre-marital sex (no fornication)
- No extra-marital sex (no messing around with someone else's wife or being faithless to your own husband or wife)
- No homosexual sex
- No pornography

"Abstain" is a crucial word here meaning to *Hold one's self off*.

David said in *Psalms 101:3* I will not set before my eyes anything that is worthless.

Charles Spurgeon said, "I will neither delight in it, aim at it, or endure it. If I have wickedness brought before me by others I will turn away from it, I will not gaze upon it with pleasure...for what fascinates the eye is very apt to gain admission into the heart, even as Eve's apple first pleased her sight and then prevailed over her mind and hand."

A practical example of this occurred when we were watching TV and a Victoria Secret commercial came on. My son put a pillow over his face until over. Watching movies and something inappropriate comes up he'll do

the same and then ask, “Can I look now?”

Another practical example of this is when Valerie and Deb were planning the Bella Donna website magazine. Val was looking at some women’s magazines for lay out and art design – she made sure that she blacked out any part of pictures that would stumble me.

In writing to the Corinthians Paul would use the word “Flee” to describe how we are to deal with sexual immorality. I’m not a Greek scholar but here is what scholars say about that word and its particular form. FLEE is a present imperative, not a suggestion but a command meaning, *to make it our habit to flee, continue to flee and keep fleeing until the danger is past.*

FLEEING sexual sin is a DIRECTIONAL thing. First and FORERMOST it means that in the face of sexual temptation I will see the temptation and WALK TOWARDS Jesus.

COMMITTING sexual sin results when I choose to NOT walk with Jesus or choose to NOT walk in His direction. Instead I see the temptation and CHOSE to satisfy MY desire rather than HIS.

1 Corinthians 6:18-19 18Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. 19Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

This is radical! SEXUAL PURITY in the life of the individual believer and the local church brings the world face to face with the holiness of God. That is why Paul spoke so strongly to the issue of sexual purity in relationship to the churches he planted. The whole of 1 Corinthians 5 is devoted to immorality in the church. That chapter is directed not so much to those committing sexual sin – but to the church who didn’t see it as something opposed to the will of God.

The believers in Corinth did not view sexual purity as the direction and desire of God for their lives

Note this key point - A holy life will make the deepest impression. D.L. Moody said, “It is a great deal better to live a holy life than to talk about it. We are told to let our light shine, and if it does we won’t need to tell anybody it does. The light will be its own witness. Lighthouses don’t ring bells and fire cannons to call attention to their shining—they just shine.”

JESUS SAID THAT:

- We are to be the light of the world
- We are to let our light so shine....
- We are to be like cities on a hill

The town of Safed above the Mount of Beatitudes would shine in the night giving direction to the fishing boats on Galilee.

Romans 12:2 NLT Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Porneia begins in the heart. Jesus said that out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications (porneia) *Matthew 15:18-19 NLT*

Proverbs 4:23 Amplified Bible

Watch (preserve, guard with fidelity, keep blockaded) over your heart (the seat of our intellect, will, emotions - moral actions and attitudes of life are determined by the condition of one’s heart)

with all diligence, for from it flow the springs of life.

Here's a closing illustration:

In the forests of northern Europe and Asia lives a little animal called the ermine, known for his snow-white fur in winter. He instinctively protects his white coat against anything that would soil it. Fur hunters take advantage of this unusual trait of the ermine.

They don't set a snare to catch him, but instead they find his home, which is usually a cleft in a rock or a hollow in an old tree. They smear the entrance and interior with grime. Then the hunters set their dogs loose to find and chase the ermine. The frightened animal flees toward home but doesn't enter because of the filth. Rather than soil his white coat, he is trapped by the dogs and captured while preserving his purity. For the ermine, purity is more precious than life.

THE WAY TO PLEASE GOD is to KNOW HIS WILL. HIS WILL (direction / desire) for my life is for me to be growing in holiness. That means moving in His direction. That means growing more NEAR to Him resulting in – me having more DISTANTANCE from the world SPECIFICALLY in regards to sexual conduct.

That means I walk away from sexual temptation by walking towards God. That means I walk in agreement with His desires in the matter of sexual behavior.

MANY professing Christians are involved in porneia: pre-marital sex – extra-marital sex – homosexual sex – pornography. Speaking ESPECIALLY to the men here, looking at a computer screen filled with images that fuel sexual lust or standing at the magazine rack at the 7-11, or in the airport flipping through Penthouse or Playboy magazine and getting yourself turned on by looking at the pictures, or looking at the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue, or watching the Victoria Secret adds - ALL of that is sexual fantasy and that is wrong too, as Jesus pointed out!

It is God's will that you CHANGE DIRECTION (repent) in your life and Walk towards TOWARD Him (Sanctification). It is God's will that you acknowledge and surrender to HIS DESIRES and DIRECTION concerning sexual behavior rather than serve YOURS.

God makes it clear that if you COVER your sin you will not prosper, but if you confess and forsake your sin you will obtain mercy!