



The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond

V25 N12

March 19, 2023

NOT HOME YET

“The Christian’s Alternative Lifestyle”

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

THIS WEEK’S CORE COMPETENCY

Self Control

I have the power through Christ to control myself.

“For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope – the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.”

Titus 2:11-13



What is the first step toward sanctification?

Every Christian would benefit from reflecting on the answers to two questions: What does God want *for* me? and What does God want *from* me? Of course, the two questions probably have a variety of correct answers, but reading 1 Thessalonians one might answer them this way. God wants *for* you your *sanctification*, and God wants *from* you your unflagging *effort* to live in order to please him.

Sanctification is a term most Christians are familiar with in *general* but not in *particular*. Perhaps readers will find the following particulars informative. Generally speaking, sanctification refers to the process Christians go through to become like Jesus (Rom 8:29). Here are a couple of descriptions from the pens of reputable theologians. One writes: Sanctification is “the gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, *involving our responsible participation*, by which he delivers us as justified sinners from the pollution of sin, renews our entire nature according to the image of God, and enables us to live lives that are pleasing to him” (Anthony A. Hoekema, “Sanctification,” in *Saved by Grace*, 192, italics added). Another adds: “Unlike justification, sanctification is not an act of God declaring us righteous; rather, *it is a continual process in the present* by which God is making us righteous. Justification is the act by which God gets us out of sin (legally). *Sanctification is the process by which God gets sin out of us (actually)*” (Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, *Sin, Salvation*, 237, italics added).

It’s worth knowing, too, that there are various aspects to sanctification. It has a *positional* aspect, which corresponds to sanctification in the past and refers to being made holy not as a process but a once-for-all definitive act (1Co 6:11). It also has *progressive* aspect. In an instant those who believe in Jesus are *declared* righteous (*justification*), but they not *made* righteous in an instant. *Making* righteous those who are *declared* righteous is the work of *sanctification*, which involves putting off the old self (Eph 4:22) and putting on the new self (v. 24). “Because sin continues to be present in those who are in Christ, the sanctification of believers must be

a continuing process” (Hoekema, 207). And finally, it has an *ultimate* aspect. Ultimate sanctification is anticipated by progressive sanctification and corresponds to sanctification in the future (1Th 5:23). “Ultimate sanctification awaits the believer’s glorification in his resurrection body and the removal of the sin nature” (Charles C. Ryrie, “Contrasting Views on Sanctification,” in *Walvoord: A Tribute*, 190).

Sanctification is the work of God **and** the responsibility of his people, according to Paul. In Philippians 2:12-13, he writes: “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (2:12-13). This might explain why the reference to “be sanctified” in 1 Thessalonians 4:3 is followed by instructions regarding sexual immorality, e.g., “avoid sexual immorality,” “learn to control your own body,” and “no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister.” Of course, God plays the *primary* role in sanctification; nevertheless, believers play a *necessary* role as well. The expression “let go and let God” is poor advice when it comes to living the Christian life because it is at best a half-truth. One theologian calls it “a tragic distortion of the doctrine of sanctification” (Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 754). Another writes: “The initiative in the process of [sanctification] is always God’s, and we would in fact do nothing without his initiative. However, that initiative is not something we are waiting upon. The ball is, as it were, in our court . . . The issue now concerns what we will do. The idea that we can do nothing is an unfortunate confusion, and those who sponsor it never practice it, thank goodness” (Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 82). It’s at this point that the connection between sanctification and the Central Virtue Self-Control becomes obvious. Self-control and sanctification go hand-in-hand, as the *means* goes hand-in-hand with the *end*. Self-control is of singular interest to a holy God.

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

3 *It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God; 6 and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister. The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. 7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. 8 Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.*

Read in another translation

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 one violate the rights and take advantage of his brother or sister in the matter, because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you previously and solemnly warned you. 7 For God has not called us for impurity, but in sanctification. 8 Therefore, the one who rejects this is not rejecting man, but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.*

(NASB)

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Underline "God's will" in v. 3.
- Circle "be sanctified" in v. 3.
- Underline "that" in vv. 3, 4, 6.
- Circle "sexual immorality" in v. 3.
- Circle "control" in v. 4.
- Circle "body" in v. 4.
- Circle "holy," and "honorable" in v. 4.
- Circle "passionate lust" in v. 5.
- Circle "pagans" in v. 5.
- Bracket "in this matter" in v. 6.
- Underline "wrong or take advantage of" in v. 6.
- Circle "punish" in v. 6.
- Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 7, 8.
- Box "Therefore" indicating *result* in v. 8.
- Bracket "does not reject a human being but God" in v. 8.

What one word would you use to describe the **TONE** of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the **THEME** of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, "This text is about _____."



DIG DEEPER

Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. When we talk about the *will of God*, what are we talking about? Define “God’s will.”
2. Likewise, define “sanctification.”
3. The term translated “control” can be translated differently. How so?
4. The term that literally means “vessel,” translated “body” can also be translated differently. How so?
5. Different translations give rise to two different interpretations of verse 4. Identify them.
6. In verse 5, “not” (rather than “but”) introduces a *contrast*. Explain it.
7. Does verse 6 apply to *sex between two unmarried consenting heterosexual adults*? What do you think and *why* do you think it?
8. Regarding the *punishment* mentioned in verse 7, do you think it occurs in this life or in the next? Explain why you think so.
9. Why would Paul refer to the giving of the Holy Spirit (v. 8) to make his point?
10. **Discussion:** Is living by the sexual ethic described by Paul easier for us than the Thessalonians? After all, we don’t live in an idolatrous society in which worship involves sexual immorality. Talk about it.

Commentary On The Text

Paul transitions to “other matters” in chapter 4 of his letter to the Thessalonians. He will go on to “supply what is lacking in their faith” (3:10). The first thing they lack is a clear understanding that their sanctification, which was God’s will (v. 3), required that they “avoid sexual immorality” (vv. 3-8). Simply put, God’s will is what he wants *for* them and what he wants *from* them. In this case, *sanctification* is what he wants *for* them, and *avoiding sexual immorality* is what he wants *from* them. By turning “from idols to serve the living and true God” (1:9), they naturally avoid the sexual immorality associated with their former worship. However, they are still culturally surrounded by sexual behavior prohibited by God. Regarding sexual ethics in the surrounding society, one commentator writes: “The Gentile members of the Thessalonian church would have found it difficult to understand how their conversion to the living God necessitated abandoning those pleasures that their previous religious alliances had approved or ignored. Moreover, the social norms of the day permitted those practices that the Christian ethic prohibited. For example, it was socially acceptable for young men to have sexual relationships before marriage . . . In Greek society, a man who owned female slaves could use his ‘human property’ to satisfy his sexual desires, while prostitutes were at the service of any man . . . At times a voice arose against sexual relationships outside of marriage, but in such cases the concern was only that illegitimate children might be sired in such liaisons who would then be the cause of shame” (Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC, 187-88). That said, some commentators infer Paul is addressing this issue because certain members of the church are somehow somehow presently engaged in sexual immorality (see Green, 187); others argue, he is simply addressing it because it remains an ongoing threat to their holiness and consequently, they need “to receive continual reminders concerning what God expected in the way of sexual morality” (Gary S. Shogren, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 13, ZECNT, 158).

Verse 4 is particularly difficult to interpret because two key words in the verse can each be translated in two different ways. A literal translation of the relevant clause in verse 4 reads, “that each of you know how to *possess* his own *vessel* in sanctification and honor” (NASB). The *verb* translated “possess” can also be translated “live with” (GNT), “control” (NIV) or “acquire” (NCB), and the noun translated “vessel” can also be translated “body” (NIV) or “wife” (GNT). Some translations pair “control” and “body.” For example, “that each one of you know how to *control* his

own *body*” (ESV, NIV). Other translations pair “live with” or “acquire” with “wife.” For example, “Each of you should know how to *live with your wife*” (GNT, NIV margin) and “that each of you know how to *acquire a wife for himself*” (NABRE, NIV margin). Interpreters are divided in their interpretations because they weigh the evidence for each one. The fact that the linguistic evidence in favor of one or another of these interpretations is ambiguous, at best, makes for uncertainty. Nevertheless, one concludes: “A wholesome marriage was thus Paul’s antidote for ‘sexual immorality’” (Robert L. Thomas, “1 Thessalonians,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 11, 271). Another concludes differently: “The best interpretation . . . is that *all Christians, men and women, should know how to maintain control of their bodies in a way that pleases God in sexual holiness*” (Shogren, 161). “Where Christian teaching concerning the problem of sexual immorality arises, the common call is to abstinence and self-control (Acts 15:20, 29; 21:25; 1 Cor. 6:12-20; Eph. 5:3; Col. 3:5)” (Green, 193). Therefore, I incline to the latter interpretation reflected in the NIV. The “holy and honorable” self-control God desires from his children stands in stark *contrast* to the “passionate lust” so characteristic of pagans who do not know him.

Verse 6 is also difficult to interpret because the word translated “take advantage of” is translated “defraud” in some translations (NKJV, HCSB; cf. “cheat,” TLB), making it sound like “this matter” (v. 6) pertains to business rather than sex. But that is unlikely given the context. Verses 3-5 are about sexual immorality, and verse 7 is about sexual impurity. “Paul is not likely talking about sex, then changing to some other theme, and then switching back to sex again” (Shogren, 165). “Exploit” might be a good translation in this context, given that sexual “transgression” frequently involves the exploitation of a vulnerable partner. The reference to “a brother or sister” may suggest that Paul has a particular incident in the church in mind, reported to him by Timothy—perhaps an incident involving adultery with another man’s wife or a sexual encounter with a household slave (see Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NICNT, 150-51). His instructions concerning the sexual exploitation of others comes with the reiteration of a previous warning: “The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins” (v. 7).

Verse 8 contains Paul’s conclusion. To reject his instructions regarding sexual immorality amounts to a rejection not of a human being, namely, Paul, but a rejection of God who gives them and gives the Holy Spirit to enable his children to obey them.

Word Studies/Notes

v. 3 *God's will* Cf. 4:1. The "will of God" (NASB) is that which God desires i.e., living in a way that pleases him.

v. 3 *be sanctified* "The term used to reflect on their 'sanctification' is not the same as in 3.13, which focuses on the *state* rather than the *process* of sanctification (see comments). Here 'sanctification' (*hagiasmos*; cf. vv. 4, 7; Rom. 6.19, 22; 1 Cor. 1.30; 2 Thess. 2.13; Heb. 12.14; 1 Pet. 1.2) means the *process* of sanctification that began in their conversion and that is made a living reality in their lives through the power of the Holy Spirit (v. 8; 2 Thess. 2.13; 1 Pet. 1.2)" (Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC, 190, italics added).

vv. 3, 4, 6 *that* "In this context three aspects of sanctification are highlighted: one who is sanctified 'should avoid sexual immorality' (v. 3), should know how 'to control his own body' (vv. 4-5), and should not 'wrong his brother or take advantage of him' (v. 6)" (D. Michael Martin, *1, 2 Thessalonians*, NAC, 123).

v. 3 *sexual immorality* Cf. Ac 15:20, 29. "The word 'immorality' (*porneia*) was used frequently in Judeo-Christian literature where it could refer to premarital or extramarital intercourse, prostitution incest, and any other type of sexual impropriety. Used metaphorically it could refer to the practice of idolatry" (Martin, 123). "Far from prohibiting sexual immorality, the cults of Dionysus, Aphrodite, Osiris and Isis, the Cabirus, and Priapas promoted sexual license" (Green 187). What was considered immoral in Jewish and Christian communities was not considered immoral among pagan Gentiles . . . "one of whose philosophers could say as a matter of course, 'Mistresses we keep for the sake of pleasure, concubines for the daily care of our persons, but wives to bear us legitimate children'" (Gordon D. Fee, *The First and Second Letters to the Thessalonians*, NICNT, 143).

v. 4 *control* The verb translated *to control* (*ktasthai*) in classical Greek ranged in meaning from being proficient in something, such as music or poetry, to exercising lordship over slaves. The mastery one has over something is communicated by this word, making possible the translation *to control* . . . On the other hand, the word may convey the sense of 'to procure' or 'to acquire' (i.e., 'to get control')" (Green, 191).

v. 4 *body* "The noun translated *body* in the NIV (*skeuos*) was understood as any type of instrument that one could use to accomplish some work, including both furniture and implements. It could mean 'vessel' or, metaphorically, the human body

or the human person. But the literature of the era also shows us that 'vessel' could refer metaphorically to a man's wife" (Green, 192).

v. 4 *holy and honorable* "The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and is not meant for union with prostitutes or for any other type of sexual immorality (cf. 1 Cor 6:12-20) . . . The use of the body (a body created by God) for immoral purposes both degrades the person and dishonors the Creator" (Martin, 127).

v. 5 *passionate lust* Lit., "passions of lust;" i.e., "desires that are lustful." This is erotic 'passion' that Paul elsewhere warns against (Rom. 1.24; Col. 3.5) and is spoken about in other literature of the era. This passion is the fruit of 'desire' (*epithymias*) . . . Most frequently in the NT, the 'desires' spoken of are those that are sinful" (Green, 194).

v. 6 *in this matter* "Most commentators argue that 'in this matter' (*en tō pragmati*) refers back to the discussion of sexual morals in the preceding verses. But some are convinced that *pragmati* in conjunction with 'take advantage' (*pleonektein*) refers to business practices, not sexual behavior" (Martin, 128). Both interpretations are possible; the first is more probable (see Martin, 129).

v. 6 *wrong, take advantage of* "The first verb, 'wrong,' connotes an offense against a law (and the God who gave it; cf. v. 8). The second verb, 'take advantage of,' highlights an offense against a person" (Martin, 128).

v. 6 *punish* Cf. "The Lord is the avenger in all these cases" (NET, NASB); "the Lord is an avenger" (ESV); "for the Lord avenges all such sins" (NLT). "The Lord is the Lord Jesus in his judicial capacity, who is here called an 'avenger' (*ekdikos*) or one who chastises those who do evil, executing the judicial decision" (Green, 197).

v. 8 *does not reject* . . . "Green argues on the basis of this verse that some men of the community were still living a lifestyle of pagan sexuality, and that someone was denigrating the apostolic teaching as being merely 'from a man.' However, there is little evidence in the text that Paul is doing anything more than reminding the Thessalonians of a teaching that in the Gentile world was particularly out of the ordinary" (Gary S. Shogren, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, vol. 13, ZECNT, 167).



APPLY THE TEXT

CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

God wants you to be sanctified, which requires that you avoid sexual immorality, learn to control your own body, and not exploit a brother or sister sexually.

CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?
2. What does this passage teach me about myself?
3. What does this passage lead me to do?



FAMILY TALK

Why does it feel easier to engage in a conversation about quantum physics or fiat currency than physical purity with our kids? Let's face it, *The Talk* is weird, and everyone is uncomfortable. But God gave you the privilege of raising these kids. With this privilege comes the responsibility of leading them along the God-honoring path of purity. As parents it's vital that we set ourselves up as the functional experts, or the person our kids go to with questions, especially when it comes to this important topic. Sometimes we don't know exactly what to say and we may choose to not say anything at all. It doesn't do your child any favors to shelter them completely because I promise, by third grade they've heard it. So rather than allow their friends on the playground to fill their heads with incorrect information, take today as an opportunity to share what God has to say about sanctification and holiness when it comes to purity. After all, He created marital intimacy, so let's teach our kids what He has to say about it. As you study this week's passage together, answer your child's questions with as much honesty as you can in an age-appropriate way. Discuss God's design and your hope for how they treat their bodies. Share with them the blessing their future holds as they cling to this biblical view. The more you speak honestly about this subject, the easier and more comfortable it will be to engage in quality conversations as your child gets older. Don't forget to throw in a little humor to lighten the mood. You can do this!

What Does The Bible Say?

Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

1. What is God's will for us?
2. What type of life does God call us to live?
3. When we reject these good instructions who are we rejecting?

What Do You Think?

How can we be sanctified (drawn closer to God) with our bodies?

What Do You Do?

Play freeze dance with your family. While the music plays everyone dances and moves. When the music stops everyone freezes and is absolutely still. Use this time to repeat the memory verse or core competency.

CORE COMPETENCY: Self Control

I take charge of myself with Jesus' help.

MEMORY VERSE: 1 Peter 1:15

"But just as He who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do."

KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRAL Kids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: kids@wearecentral.org

- _____ I completed my Bible Study
- _____ I memorized this week's verse
- _____ I brought my Bible to church
- _____ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

CENTRAL BELIEFS

Authority of the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

Church (Ephesians 4:15-16)

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

Eternity (John 14:1-4)

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

The Holy Spirit (Romans 8:9)

I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.

Humanity (John 3:16)

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

Identity in Christ (John 1:12)

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

Jesus Christ (Hebrews 1:1-4)

I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.

Life Purpose (Acts 20:24)

I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.

Personal God (Psalm 121:1-2)

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

Salvation by Grace (Ephesians 2:8-9)

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.



CENTRAL VIRTUES

Love (1 John 4:10-12)

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

Joy (John 15:11)

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

Peace (Philippians 4:6-7)

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.

Patience (Proverbs 14:29)

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

Kindness/Goodness (1 Thessalonians 5:15)

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others

Faithfulness (Proverbs 3:3-4)

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

Gentleness (Philippians 4:5)

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

Self-Control (Titus 2:11-13)

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

Grace (Colossians 3:13)

I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.

Hope (1 Peter 1:3-5)

I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.

Humility (Philippians 2:3-4)

I choose to esteem others above myself.



CENTRAL PRACTICES

Bible Study (Hebrews 4:12)

I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

Biblical Community (Acts 2:44-47)

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

Compassion (Psalm 82:3-4)

I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.

Disciple-Making (2 Timothy 2:2)

I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.

Evangelism (Acts 1:8)

I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.

Generosity (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)

I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.

Prayer (Psalm 66:16-20)

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

Single-Mindedness (Matthew 6:33)

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

Spiritual Gifts (Romans 12:4-6)

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

Worship (Psalm 95:1-7)

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

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Stephanie Thomas (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

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