



[Our next three devotions will focus on specific ways we believers are to live holy lives.]

Pleasing God with a Life of Sexual Purity

Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to acquire a wife in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit. (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8)

Now that Paul and the Thessalonian's relationship rested on the reassurance of their mutual love and affection in Christ, Paul felt all the more comfortable and proper giving them instructions from God on holy living. Thus, the Thessalonians knew that what Paul was about to say was meant for their good and sprung from his pastoral concern for their souls. Yet Paul also spoke with divine authority, since the advice he was giving was not merely his opinion but came from the Lord Jesus himself. In this way Paul showed equal humility by including himself under the same injunction when he writes, "God did not call US to be impure, but to live a holy life." Clearly Paul did not consider himself above the law as an apostle or point out sins in others that he didn't first acknowledge in himself.

Repeatedly in this section the apostle speaks of God's will for us to live a sanctified and holy lives. Both of these words have the same idea of being "set apart for the Lord's sacred use". Perhaps think of holiness as the difference between your everyday dishes and your fine china. You use your ornate porcelainware on special occasions—for Thanksgiving dinner and Christmas Day, but grab a chipped, stained plate out of the cupboard to reheat your leftovers. When he called us to faith in Jesus, God changed us from plates to porcelain. He has made us different. Forgiven he has put a new spirit in our hearts, and so he wants our lives to reflect that difference: that we intentionally live each moment in God's service and to his glory. But as Paul says, this is a process in which the Holy Spirit helps us grow more and more throughout life while fully realizing that we will never be totally perfect until the life to come (cf. 1 Cor. 13:10).

But rather than speak in generalities about sanctification, Paul gets specific. One way that we please God and live separate from the unbelieving world around us is by avoiding sexual immorality. In the Bible sexual immorality includes any and all sexual activity that takes place outside of one-man, one-woman marriage. Now should we think that our society is over-sexed, with sexual images and temptations bombarding us at every turn, Paul could definitely relate. In his day there were pornographic frescos on street corners, pederasty was culturally acceptable, and ritual prostitution was considered part of one's religious and civic duty. In contrast to the world around us that sees nothing improper with indulging our sexual appetites, the Lord would have us

keep ourselves pure by showing self-restraint and keeping our distance from the people, places, and things that promote illicit sexuality.

Sexual purity also guides Christians in how we go about finding a spouse. Again our world says that this life is a soap opera where surface sexual attraction is all that matters—is the person hot or not—but the Lord says there is so much more to consider when looking for a spouse such as sharing common faith in Jesus (1 Cor. 7:39), possessing godly character (Ruth 2:11-12; 3:10) and industry (Prov. 31:10ff). Yes, sexual attraction is real, but it is not something God would have us indulge by letting our hormones and lust take over because that only leads to reckless ungodly choices. We've all seen or heard of people seducing or stealing away another's boyfriend, girlfriend, or fiancé, breaking hearts and destroying relationships in the process. Paul warns us that God will judge people for all such sins. Moreover, any Christian who refuses to live a sexually pure life is not rejecting Paul's opinion, but God's instruction. They are on the way to committing spiritual suicide because by giving in to promiscuity they are resisting the will of the Holy Spirit whom God has put inside of us and are in danger of driving him out and losing their faith and salvation completely. May the Holy Spirit help us and keep us in the narrow way of sexual purity and chastity!

Prayer: Dear God, you have given men and women the gift of sex to be used as an unselfish blessing in marriage. Yet this world and our sinful flesh within are always twisting your good gifts. When we are tempted by sinful sexual images, thoughts, or situations, cause your Spirit to rise up in us so that we flee from them and look to your grace and power alone. Should we fall, forgive us and free us from our shame and empower us to rededicate ourselves to purity for Jesus' sake. Amen.