

WALK THAT PLEASES GOD (PART I): A LIFE OF PURITY 1 THESSALONIANS 04:01–08

Introduction

This begins a major new discussion in *First Thessalonians* — the model walk or life of the believer. The model believer walks to please God. What does this mean? It means that he lives as God tells him to live, that he keeps God’s commandments. Six commandments in particular are covered, one in this passage and five in the next passage. But note where the emphasis is: it is on this passage, the passage where moral purity is discussed. Why is more emphasis given to the commandment on morality than to the others? The answer is obvious. Immorality is the rampaging monster that destroys more lives, families and nations than any other single evil. What God has to say is strong, and it must be heeded by all.

- I. The earnest but tender exhortation (vv. 1-2).
- II. The commandment: God’s will is your sanctification (vv. 3-5).
- III. The reasons for purity (vv. 6-8).

I. *1 Thessalonians 04:01–02 Believer’s Walk: To Please God*

The earnest but tender exhortation — walk to please God, and do so more and more. The Christian life is often described as a walk. Walking is a picture of moving forward and progressing step by step and day by day. It pictures the utter necessity of pleasing God every step of the day as we walk throughout life. God is interested in every step we take. And He is going to judge us on the basis of how we live and walk. Therefore, the primary concern of our lives must be to please God.

=> If we please God, we will be accepted by God.

=> If we do not please God, we will not be accepted by God.

This alone shows the utter necessity of pleasing God. We must please Him if we wish to be accepted by Him. A person is foolish not to want to be accepted by God, for to be rejected by God leads to the worst consequences that can be imagined: rejection by God Himself. Note how tender, yet strong this exhortation is.

1. The tenderness is seen in the words “ask and urge” and “brothers.” By calling believers “brothers,” Paul was expressing deep affection and care for them. The words “ask and urge” (erotomen) means to ask or request. But note: it always has a sense of urgency about it. Paul was tenderly requesting his dear brothers to continue to please God in their daily walk, but it was an urgent request. Their walking to please God was an absolute necessity, a necessity that carried with it great blessings for obedience and terrible judgment for disobedience (the displeasure of God).
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2. The strength of the exhortation is seen in the following facts.
 - a. The believers had been taught how they must live and please God. They had sat under the teachers and preachers of the Word; therefore, they were without excuse, for they knew exactly how to live and to please God. Once the believers had heard and been taught how they should live and please God, they were responsible to live that way. Pleasing God was not an option; it was a duty.
 - b. The exhortation was based upon the Lord Jesus. It was what the *Lord Himself* had taught. There is no greater authority than the Lord. He is the supreme majestic Being of the universe; therefore, the exhortation to live and walk to please God is of the highest authority.
 - c. The exhortation involves the actual commandments of the Lord Jesus. This is a repeat of verse one: keeping the commandments of the Lord Jesus is not an option. A commandment is a commandment, a law that is to be obeyed. In addition, it has been given by the Lord Himself. Therefore, it must be kept — regardless. We must walk and please God, and we must grow in our Christian walk day by day more and more.

II. *1 Thessalonians 04:03–05 God’s Will is Your Sanctification*

The major commandment is sanctification, that is, moral purity. It can be stated no clearer: “This is *God’s will*.” There is no higher will than the will of God. When the will of God is known, then the will of God must be done. Sanctification — moral purity — is *the will of God*. The word *sanctified* means to be set apart and separated. We are to be set apart to God and His will, and His will is moral purity. Therefore, we are to be set apart to live pure lives before God. This means three things.

1. Sanctification means avoiding from sexual immorality. The word “immorality” (porneias) means all kinds of immoral sexual acts: adultery, pre-marital sex, homosexuality, and all forms of sexual deviation.

The believer is not to give his body to an immoral person, not to a prostitute or to an immoral neighbour. The believer’s body belongs to Christ, which means that we are to honour Christ with our bodies. We are to take the sexual drive and energy of our bodies and use them as He has instructed:

=> either we dedicate our bodies solely to Him as eunuchs;

=> or we marry and build a family with the dynamic virtues of love and care, trust and loyalty.

2. Sanctification means that a person knows how to control his body and his spouse. Leon Morris points out that the word “body” (skeuos) can refer either to a person’s own body or to a person’s spouse (*The Epistles of Paul to the Thessalonians*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, p. 75). Both hold great meaning for the Christian believer.

A believer is to know how to control his own body and how to control his spouse. A person can neglect, ignore and abuse his body and a person can neglect, ignore and abuse his or her spouse. In discussing a person's spouse it is important to note 1 Cor. 7:4-5. Neglecting, ignoring or abusing one's spouse can bring about temptation and can contribute significantly to the spouse becoming unfaithful and impure.

Note that the believer is to *know*, to possess his or her body and spouse in sanctification and honour. There is no excuse for ignorance in this matter nor for disobedience. The believer is to know...

- beyond a shadow of a doubt
- without equivocation
- without question

...that it is his duty to keep his body and spouse pure.

The point is strong: it is unthinkable that a believer would engage in immorality, that he would bring dishonour to his Lord and to his spouse, family and himself. The believing husband and wife are to know that they must keep themselves and each other in a way that is holy and honourable. They must not set themselves apart to dishonourable and immoral neighbours nor to prostitutes.

Rom 6:19 *I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.*

1 Cor 7:3-5 *The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband. The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.*

2 Cor 7:1 *Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*

3. Sanctification means resisting the passion of lust. We must resist the passion of lust. Note the double emphasis, that is, the wording, "not in passionate lust." It means the *passion of lust*, the *enslaving power* of lust. When a person begins to lust, he can soon become enslaved to lust; he can be held by the grip of lust to such a degree that it is almost impossible to break the bondage. This is true with the...

- passion for sex
- passion for pornographic films and literature
- passion for manipulation
- passion for exposure
- passion for sexual conquest
- passion for looking
- passion for touching
- passion for romantic and immoral reading

The passion of lust is the way of the world. It is not the way of God. It is the life-style of those who do not know God. This does not mean that they do not know that sexual immorality is wrong. It means that they have rejected God and His commandments; they have chosen to live in the passion of their lusts. The believer is commanded to please God and to keep the commandments of the Lord Jesus. And the major commandment is our sanctification, that is, moral purity. Therefore, we are to avoid sexual immorality — from all forms of immoral sex (cp. Rom. 1:18-32).

***1 Pet 4:3** For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do — living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry.*

***James 1:14-15** But each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.*

***Rom 1:27** In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.*

***1 Cor 6:9** Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders.*

***1 Cor 6:18** Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.*

***2 Cor 12:21** I am afraid that when I come again my God will humble me before you, and I will be grieved over many who have sinned earlier and have not repented of the impurity, sexual sin and debauchery in which they have indulged.*

***Gal 5:19, 21** The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

***Eph 4:19** Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more.*

***Eph 5:3** But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.*

***Col 3:5** Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*

***1 Th 4:3** It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality.*

Jude 1:4, 7 *For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only Sovereign and Lord. In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire.*

III. **1 Thessalonians 04:06–08** *Reasons for Living Pure Lives*

There are four reasons why we are to live pure lives, and the reasons stand as a severe warning to us.

1. Immorality defrauds and cheats a brother. Sexual immorality steals from a person. It either takes a wife from her husband or else it takes the husband from his wife. It is that simple — that tragic — that terrible. It steals one of the two major partners of a family, steals...

- their heart
- their affection
- their thoughts
- their purity
- their body
- their innocence
- their trust and trustworthiness

And the terrible tragedy is that none of these can ever be recovered — not completely, not fully. Once the heart, affection, thoughts, purity, body, innocence and trust have been lost, they are lost and affected forever thereafter. The marriage and its bond of trust are gone forever. The pain and hurt always linger to some degree and the commitment and ability to totally surrender to the spouse always suffers to some degree. This is the reason God allows divorce after sexual immorality has been committed within marriage. (Note: God *allows* divorce; He *does not command* it. All parties involved in sexual immorality — no matter the situation — should stay together if the injured spouse can bear the pain long enough to recover and build strength.)

Note this: the same effects take place upon the *unmarried* when they commit sexual immorality. The person who seduces the unmarried steals from the person seduced and from the future spouse — steals the person's heart, affection, thoughts, purity, body, innocence and trust.

Rom 12:9-10 *Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves.*

Rom 15:1-2 *We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbour for his good, to build him up.*

Gal 5:14 *The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbour as yourself."*

Exo 20:17 “*You shall not covet your neighbour’s house. You shall not covet your neighbour’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.*”

2. Immorality shall be revenged by God. This point needs to be heeded, especially in a promiscuous society like ours where immorality is not only accepted, but is encouraged. How can we dare say that immorality is accepted and encouraged in our society? Compare the emphasis and appeal of...

- dress in public and on the beach
- books and magazines
- conversations and jokes
- suggestive words and actions that are acceptable today
- television and films
- advertisements and promotions

The list could go on and on, but the point is this: God is going to judge immoral behaviour no matter how much society accepts it. Society does not make the rules for man’s behaviour: God *makes the rules*. He has given the intimacy and preciousness of sex for marriage and only for marriage. And He has made it perfectly clear that any sex outside of marriage will not only be judged, but He will *personally avenge* the guilty party. Why? Because the guilty party...

- stole the life of a person.
- broke the person’s trust and innocence for the rest of his or her life.

Rom 1:18 *The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.*

2 Th 1:8 *He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.*

Heb 10:26-31 *If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.” For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.” It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

Heb 13:4 *Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.*

Deu 32:32-35 *Their vine comes from the vine of Sodom and from the fields of Gomorrah. Their grapes are filled with poison, and their clusters with bitterness. (Their wine is the venom of serpents, the deadly poison of cobras. "Have I not kept this in reserve and sealed it in my vaults? It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time then – foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them."*

Psa 94:1 *O LORD, the God who avenges, O God who avenges, shine forth.*

Ezek 25:17 *"I will carry out great vengeance on them and punish them in my wrath. Then they will know that I am the LORD, when I take vengeance on them."*

Micah 5:15 *"I will take vengeance in anger and wrath upon the nations that have not obeyed me."*

3. Immorality is not God's call; holiness is. When God calls us to salvation, He does not call us to live unclean lives, giving us the license to go from person to person. Such immorality...

- destroys genuine love for self and for others.
- destroys trust and trustworthiness of self and of others.
- destroys discipline and control of self and of others.
- destroys true care and concern for self and for others.
- destroys ego and esteem of self and of others.
- destroys confidence and assurance in self and in others.
- destroys loyalty and commitment within self and within others.
- destroys freedom and will within self and within others.
- destroys justice and fair treatment of others.
- destroys family and nation

God would never call a person to do such terrible things. God calls us to holiness — to live lives that are set apart to Him and to purity, to our spouses and families. God calls us to build strong character and communities, strong families and nations. God calls us to holiness so that we can be strong enough to reach out to a world that reels under the awful weight of suffering and death. There is hope; there is salvation from evil and suffering and from death and judgment. But we must be sanctified and holy, totally set apart to building the strongest characters and families, communities and societies possible in order to reach the world.

Again, God does not call us to uncleanness and disintegration of character and society. God calls us to holiness.

2 Cor 7:1 *Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.*

Eph 4:24 *And to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.*

Eph 5:3 *But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people.*

Col 3:5 *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*

Heb 12:14 *Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.*

1 Pet 1:16 *For it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."*

2 Pet 3:15 *Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives.*

4. Immorality is a sin against God. Most persons reject this commandment of God as being *old fashioned* and *unacceptable* in an intellectual and enlightened society. But note what Scripture says: the person who rejects this commandment is rejecting God, not some man. The idea is that the preacher or teacher may be able to do little to us if we disregard the commandment. But God can take vengeance, and He will. Every human being who breaks the commandment shall receive the vengeance of God — unless he has repented and sought the forgiveness of God.

2 Pet 2:14-15 *With eyes full of adultery, they never stop sinning; they seduce the unstable; they are experts in greed — an accursed brood! They have left the straight way and wandered off to follow the way of Balaam son of Beor, who loved the wages of wickedness.*

1 John 2:19 *They went out from us, but they did not really belong to us. For if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us; but their going showed that none of them belonged to us.*

Prov 1:24-26 *But since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand. Since you ignored all my advice and would not accept my rebuke, I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you.*

Note this also: God has given believers the Holy Spirit. The very presence of God in all His majesty dwells within our bodies. We must not, therefore, dirty our bodies with a harlot or some immoral and destructive neighbour. The majesty of God Himself must not be defiled. The Holy Spirit — He who is *holy* — is within us. We must, therefore, keep our bodies *holy*. ■