

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 Answers God's Will: Your Sanctification

Introduction: In spy movies certain government agents are said to have a license to kill. Some people who claim to be Christians seem to think they have a license to sin (this is called licentiousness). Their false teaching is that God's grace gives liberty to do anything, especially sexually.

****You can know God's will for your life, no ifs ands or buts about it. **According to 4:1-8, what is God's will for you?** This is the will of God: your sanctification (4:3), i.e., that you abstain from sexual immorality.

Finally: The "finally" (4:1) flags a transition to new subject matter and that Paul is moving to the final points of this letter.

Zero in on 4:1. What did the apostles ask and urge (4:1)? The missionaries asked and urged them to walk and please God more and more.

1. What did Paul mean when he wrote he taught them how to "walk" (4:1)? *Compare 2:12.* They "received" from Paul how they ought to walk worthy of God's glory as regards their lifestyles.

2. Based on 4:2, by whose authority did the apostles presume to give instructions? They did so through the Lord Jesus. In the same way, it is not the church leader himself we obey so much as it is the truth he represents.

Word Study: "instructions" (4:2) is from *paraggelia*, a word originally drawn from the military sphere and denoting a command (Best, p. 157). It means more than advice, teaching or principle. Paul spoke from a position of authority (Best, p. 157). Thus the KJV renders this "commandments". Paul told Timothy to "command and teach these things" (1 Ti 4:11). Part of any church leader's job is to teach believers how to live in Christ.

3. What does the word sanctification mean (4:3)? Our word sanctification is from the Latin word *sanctus*. The Anglo-Saxon equivalent would be "holiness" (NBD, p. 1068). The actual Greek is *hagiasmos*; the root verb *hagiazō* means "to make holy". Thus it means consecration or purification (Thayer, #38).

4. Review: Based on 4:3-4, in what area is sanctification particularly relevant? Sanctification is especially relevant in the area of our sexual behavior. In our age of rampant sexual laxity and perversity, this is an important instruction for us. We are to abstain from sexual immorality.

5. How would you define sexual immorality (4:3)? *See Leviticus 18.* The Greek word here is *porneia* (basis for pornography); it covers sexual sins of all types (Best, p. 160). It refers to illicit sexual intercourse in general (Thayer, #4202). It is any sexual activity apart from a husband and wife in marriage.

New Covenant Theology: We are under the law of Christ, not the Law of Moses. Our starting point for ethics should be Jesus, not Moses. It is a matter of emphasis. However, what God considers to be right and wrong was revealed by the Law of Moses. Morality does not change. That which was ethical under Moses is ethical under Christ. Both covenants condemn fornication, adultery and homosexuality. An example of a sexual sin mentioned by Moses, but not in the new covenant, is bestiality. Yet it is never-the-less a sin. It was immoral under the Sinai covenant and it is immoral under the new covenant.

Based on 4:4, which of the Thessalonian believers were expected to obey this command? The text says “each of you” — no exceptions. Each one of us is to know how to control his own body in holiness and honor.

6. What is the difference between sanctification (4:3) and holiness (4:4)? There is no difference. They are the same and are from the same Greek word, *hagiasmos*.

7. What does it mean to control one’s body in honor (4:4)? See *Romans 1:24, 1 Corinthians 6:18-20*. Honor is from *timé* and originally meant to evaluate something so as to set a price on it. Then it came to refer to the price itself. Finally it grew to mean the respect you show to someone due to his rank or status, thus high respect or esteem. Sexual perversion is dishonoring.

ESV Romans 1:24-27 . . . God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves . . . God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error.

ESV 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or 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, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Wife? The word for body (*soma*) is not in this text (4:4). Instead, the word used is *skeuos*, which means vessel (KJV, NAS). Thus, some feel Paul used it metaphorically for a man’s wife. If so, the idea may be that a man is to learn how to keep his wife in honor. To honor your wife means you are faithful to your wife. In marriage the other partner is honored (Best, p. 164). This is in contrast to pagan, licentious, Roman society wherein a man’s wife was to produce legal heirs but he enjoyed himself with other women (Best, p. 163).

According to 4:5, what was not to be a part of their lives? We are not to live in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God. It is noteworthy that he did not write, “as the Jews who do not know God.” In the first century, pagan Gentile standards were much lower than that of the Jewish community. Sex was even linked to their religious practices. The danger of relapse by the converts was a real concern (Best, p. 160).

8. What is passion (4:5)? It is from *pathos*, a feeling of affection or emotion. It is used only in the bad sense in the New Testament and refers to a depraved passion, an ungovernable desire (Trench, p. 324).

Word Study: “lust” (4:5) is from *epithumia* and means “desire, longing, craving” (often for what is forbidden); *epi* is an intensifier and *thumia* (*thermos*) means heat, so hot heat or lust.

Paganism Revived: The West first abandoned Christianity for Modernism and it is now moving back toward the paganism of the first century. In paganism, the creature is worshipped rather than the creator. With revived paganism our society has been gripped by the “passion of lust”. It is evidence of a decayed society. Based on 4:5, people who do not know God commonly live in passionate lust. People who do know God are to live differently; they are to walk in a way that pleases God.

ESV Matthew 5:27-28 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’” But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

9. Paul warned not to transgress and wrong his brother in this matter; what did he mean (4:6)? “In this matter” (4:6) may refer to committing sexual immorality with the brother’s wife, the brother’s mother, the brother’s daughter or even the brother himself since homosexuality was rampant in the Roman Empire (Best, p. 166).

10. What reason did Paul offer to not wrong a brother (4:6)? See *Romans 12:19, Hebrews 13:4*. The first reason given is because the Lord is the avenger in all these things.

ESV Hebrews 13:4 Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

ESV Romans 12:19 . . . it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”

What words in 4:6 indicate the extent to which Paul warned about immorality? Paul wrote that he had solemnly warned them beforehand. This is a serious matter.

11. According to 4:7, to what has God called us? God has called us to be holy rather than impure. God calls some men to preach and some people into missions, but he calls all believers to holiness. God’s calling and election and predestination is not just to salvation, but also to sanctification.

Second Reason: The word “for” (4:7) flags God’s call as the second reason not to transgress or wrong a brother in the matter of sexual sin.

12. What is true of anyone who rejects this (4:8)? See *1 Samuel 8:7*. Those who reject this disregard God, not man. This may constitute a **third reason** not to wrong a brother in sexual matters.

What man was referred to in 4:8? The man was Paul. It is very common today for people to disregard Paul's teachings on various matters. This is especially true with his teachings on homosexuality. As is the case here, such people are not disregarding Paul, they are disregarding God.

In defending homosexuality, one person said, "I go by my conscience, not the Bible". Before we condemn her, we must ask ourselves if we are really any different in attitude. Submission to the teachings of Scripture means nothing unless there is disagreement.

ESV 1 Samuel 8:7 And the LORD said to Samuel, ". . . they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them."

ESV 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral . . . nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality . . . will inherit the kingdom of God.

13. Why do you suppose Paul made mention of the "Holy" Spirit (4:8) who has been given to us? Each believer has the Holy Spirit residing within him and the Holy Spirit will cause us to desire to be holy as well. He is the Holy Spirit, not an unclean spirit. Holy is from *hagios*, the root of the Greek word for sanctification.

14. Why might Paul have felt the need to pen what he did in 4:1-8? Paul knew that all people, even believers, have to be very careful in dealing with bodily passions. This was especially true in a pagan Gentile setting. The temptation to revert to old ways was real. He solemnly warned them about it when he was with them in person (4:6) and he wrote the letter to them about it.

Perspective: Our bodily desires are God given. The sex drive is one of our strongest motivations. The problem is that the devil, who is a pervert, tries to get us to fulfill a legitimate desire in an illegitimate way (either in at wrong time or the wrong person or in the wrong way). The devil perverts God's purposes.

15. Analyzing 4:1-8, what reasons were given as to why we should abstain from sexual immorality?

- 1) It is God's will, 4:3.
- 2) God will avenge such immorality, 4:6.
- 3) God has called us in holiness, 4:7.
- 4) To disregard this is to disregard God, 4:8.

Look back at 4:1. What did Paul urge them to do more and more? In 4:1 Paul urged them to walk in a way to please God more and more.

******What did Paul urge them to do more and more in 4:9-12?** Paul urged them to love one another more and more (4:10).

16. According to 4:11, why did they not need anyone to write to them concerning brotherly love (4:9-12)? Compare *Romans 13:8*, *1 John 3:14, 16*, *5:2*. They had no need because they had been taught by God to love one another and had been practicing it throughout Macedonia!

What does it look like when we love one another?

ESV **Romans 13:8** Owe no one anything, except to love each other, for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.

ESV **1 John 5:2** By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.

ESV **1 John 3:14** We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers. Whoever does not love abides in death.

ESV **1 John 3:16** By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.

Teacher's Note: Macedonia (4:10) was the name of the area surrounding Thessalonica (northern Greece). Alexander the Great's father was Phillip of Macedonia.

What three aspirations did Paul want them to have in 4:11? They were to aspire to **1)** live quietly, **2)** mind their own affairs and **3)** work with their hands.

17. Does living quietly mean you don't talk much (4:11)? Why? See *2 Thessalonians 3:11-12*, *1 Timothy 2:1-2*. Quietly is from *hesuchazo* and means still, silent or tranquil. It refers to those who are not running hither and thither but who stay home and mind their own business and do not meddle in the affairs of others (Thayer, # 2270). In short, you are not a trouble maker. Instead, you are settled down.

ESV **2 Thessalonians 3:11-12** . . . we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

ESV **1 Timothy 2:1-2** . . . I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.

18. What did Paul mean when he wanted them to work with their hands (4:11)? From the context it is clear it meant gainful employment.

19. What was the goal of doing the three things listed in 4:11? See *1 Peter 2:12*. The goal was "so that" they may live properly before outsiders and dependent on no one, meeting their own needs.

ESV 1 Peter 2:12 Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evil doers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

Application: *How is your work ethic?* We should have the old Puritan work ethic.

So What?

What is God's will for all believers (4:3)?

20. In what area is sanctification primarily expressed (4:3b-7)?

21. For what purpose has God called us (4:7)?

22. What is true of those who reject this instruction on sanctification (4:8)?

23. What did Paul want the Thessalonians to excel in still more and more that we should also excel in (4:9-10)?

24. To what should we aspire in our society (4:11-12)?

25. Summary: What three broad areas of Christian life are dealt with in 4:1-12? Sex (4:1-8), Love (4:9-10) and work (4:11-12).

So What?

**** = ask this question before reading the text aloud. This is put people's minds in gear and them something to look for as the text is read. It causes focus.

• These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the ESV.

Stephen E. Atkerson

www.NTRF.org

01/12/13