"STAYING CLEAN IN A DIRTY WORLD"

(Sexual Sanctification)
I Thessalonians 4:1-8
11-12-2025

We need to stay clean in a dirty world!
(We need to stay pure in a perverted society)

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(God's Plea for You to Stay Clean)

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(Look back at what God did for you!)

C. SEXUAL SIN IS REJECTING (rebellion against) GOD (v. 8)
(Look up at who you are rejecting!)

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INTRODUCTION

ILLUS: trying to keep my hands clean (free of ink) in a print shop that was dirty.

Quotes & recent statistics about the sexual morality of America.

Our moral standards are being systematically destroyed by Hollywood, modern novels, T.V. magazines, lewd stories, advertising techniques, "Adult" Bookstores, Home Videos and mainly the internet. Every form of perverted sex is promoted as "normal." The odd-balls are those who seek to live satisfied lives and are the married heterosexuals who are content with their spouse.

We need to stay clean in a dirty world!
(We need to stay pure in a perverted society)

Briefly explain verse 3.

Sanctification = to be holy; to be "set apart"

Fornication = Gk. "porneia"

1) Generally, refers to any sexually-oriented immorality -prostitution and harlotry; homosexuality; pornography; incest; masturbation and all other forms of lust.

2) Specifically refers to premarital sex (I Cor. 7:2). it is distinguished from adultery (Gal 5:19; I Cor. 6:9, 18).

I. THE IMPORTANCE OF SANCTIFICATION (v. 1-3a)

(God's Plea for You to Stay Clean)

v. 1

"Furthermore then" introduces the second half of Paul's letter. The first half (chap. 1-3) was personal; the second half is practical. The first part was historical; the second part hortatory.
Paul now will instruct and exhort as a wise father (cp. 2:11).

There is a sense of urgency in Paul's words. This matter of sexual purity is of extreme importance!

"We beseech you, brethren" = as a friend pleading in love to another friend. Personal appeal.

We need each other's support in the matter of our sexual morality in the society we live in.
The world is saying "Fornication and adultery are okay." We must say, "No, it is not!" Keep yourself pure in mind and body.

"We exhort you in the Lord" = we urge you in a manner that deserves your attention. Authoritative appeal.

"By the Lord" = lit. in the Lord. Paul's exhortation was not something he made up. This is the Lord's Word!

The appeal to moral living is based on our union with the Lord (we are one with Christ - I Cor. 6:15-17).

Paul is saying: What I am about to exhort you to do is not something new; we already told you this but will do so again.

This shows the extreme urgency and importance of repetitious teaching on the matter of moral purity. We hear very little today about being pure sexually. Abstinence is a foreign concept to many.

"Ought to walk" - Ought = it is necessary; it is a must - no option! We are morally obligated to live right. It is our duty!

A. IT PLEASES GOD (v. 1)

Contrary to the lost world, we don't "walk" with a view to obtaining the maximum amount of satisfaction for ourselves, but to please our Lord.

If you love the Lord, you will do that which pleases Him.

In the last days, "men will be lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God."

The world seeks to get pleasure; the Christian seeks to give it.

We must conduct our lives in a way that pleases God. Are you more interested in God's pleasure than your own?

"To please God" is the goal of the way we live. (walk)

Our primary goal is not to keep ourselves pure so that:

1) We can offer ourselves pure to our spouse at the wedding altar (though this is a noble and praise-worthy reason) - but to please God.

2) We won't ruin our lives and the lives of others who are watching us - but to please God.

3) We won't get AIDS or other communicable diseases - but to please God!

Joseph said: "how then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9)

Our primary desire in life ought to be to please God.

Is that your desire?

If it is, you will say to yourself:
"I can't look at pornography, I want to please God."
"I can't look at women with lust in my heart, I want to please God."
"I can't read Harlequin romance books, I want to please God."
"I can't commit fornication or adultery, I want to please God."

Paul said that he didn't live to merely please men, but God (v. 2:4)

"Abound more and more" = Paul is not saying that they were committing immorality or that their lives were displeasing to God. As a matter of fact, their lives were pleasing to God (cp. 4:1 in NASV), but he wanted them to keep in growing, keep on pleasing God - to overflow ("abound") or go beyond the pleasure they were already bringing to God.

Don't ever be satisfied with how far you have arrived. Never give up striving for higher levels or moral purity!

Some people seem to think that our goal is to see how close to the world's morals we can get without getting burned.

Our goal should be to stay as far away as possible!

"Can a man take fire into his bosom and not be burned?" (Prov. 6:27)

B. IT IS THE WILL OF GOD (v. 2-3a)

v. 2

"Commandments" = orders. A military term which conveys a tone of authority. When a superior officer gives orders, they must be carried out.

How much more the orders from Christ, our Commander-in-chief! Like Paul, the exhortation I am giving is not just my opinion. It's from the Lord! (cp. v. 8)

Jesus spoke out severely against divorce and adultery (Lk. 16:18); and He stated that thought was as built-worthy as action (Mt. 5:27-29).

Paul gave the newly saved Thessalonians exhortation regarding their sanctification (sexual purity). He knew that new converts needed this instruction! (Preventive and corrective medicine) He was wise enough to know that "their conversion would not automatically undo the moral habits of a lifetime." (Hiebert, p. 166)

v. 3

Paul knew that the temptation for sexual immorality was great in 2 places - Corinth and Thessalonica. Why these two places?

Both cities were geographically, economically and morally like NYC - very loose morals.

Both cities were seaports and had traffic from all points of the world passing through.

With mixed nationalities and mixed religions prevalent, there would also exist mixed moral standards. Confusion in sexual matters was prevalent.

As a matter of fact, Paul is writing to Thess. from Corinth, and no doubt is reminded of the existing perversion daily.

Liberals try to say that the teachings of the N.T. came from (were adaptations from) the society in which Paul, etc., lived. Not true! The Bible's "moral demands stand in stark contrast to the immoral practices of that day." (Hiebert, p. 167)

The world then, like today, regarded all forms of immorality with indifference. They even defended it (like today) as a necessity of nature, like eating and drinking. (if it was a necessity, God would not forbid it)

They got perverted to the point of viewing it as "spiritual" in some religious cults of the day.

No matter how bad the world is, God's will remains the same!

If God's will is that we be sexually pure, then we (as his children and servants) have no choice but to obey.

--No situation ethics - it's God's will! (ILLUS: of woman who committed adultery with the prison guard so that they would free her husband)

--There's nothing to think about or pray about - it's God's will!

If you are involved in fornication (in any manner), you are living outside of God's will for your life (cp. Ro. 12:1-2). God's hand of blessing is not on your life because of: unconfessed sexual immorality, unconfessed wrong thoughts.

Whenever God says "No" to something, Satan comes along and tempts us to wonder why? (EX: Adam & Eve) "You must be missing out on something."

We are not missing anything that is beneficial for us when we are within God's will. Real, lasting pleasure is in God's will! Ps. 16:11 - "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."

II. THE MEANING OF SANCTIFICATION (v. 3b-6a)

(God's Plan for You to Stay Clean)

"Sanctification" = is related to the word "holy" and "saint" It means to be "set apart" from something morally evil, unto God.

In verses 3-6, God describes what He means by "sanctification" (v. 3) by using four explanatory infinitives.

A. Sanctification is:
SEPARATING YOURSELF FROM SEXUAL IMMORALITY (v. 3b)

God's plan for our sexual purity is not that we be like "Simeon the Stylite," who in 423 A.D. built a house up on the top of a pole (60 foot high pillar) and never came down; nor that we become a monk at a monastery.

You can keep yourself clean without having to move somewhere to some isolated island. We are in the world but not of it.

"Abstain from" =

1. It takes personal determination - Middle voice. You must "hold yourself off from" or "separate yourself" from fornication.
It's not enough to pray, "God, keep me from it." Although we must be in prayer. Praying “Deliver us from evil” or “Lead us not into temptation” are very important requests.

   However, God has told us to keep ourselves from it. God tells us to flee from fornication (I Cor. 6:18). Run from it! Don't flirt with it! Don't sample it! It will ruin you! Does God ever deny us anything that is good for us? NO!

   You must decide also to keep yourself away from anything that might lead to sexual impurity (whether in thought or action). If premarital sex is wrong, then anything that would lead to it is wrong also (EX: petting). If adultery is wrong, then anything that would lead to it is wrong also (EX: reading wrong materials, developing emotional relationship with secretary, etc.)

2. It takes <u>continual determination</u> - Present tense. Keep on abstaining. We can't rely upon past victory over wrong sexual thoughts, etc., and think the battle is over! We must continually keep ourselves away from it!

Satan may tempt you to take liberties in your sexual life when:

1) Close to marriage
2) You let your guard down (EX: David)
3) You have committed fornication in the past (developed an appetite) When you give in to something, it gets harder to resist the next time. Abstain from all appearance of evil; Stay away from all avenues of temptation.

SEE Prov. 5:1-8 **v. 8 "Remove thy way far from her" (EX: Joseph - Gen. 39:10

SEE Prov. 7:5-27

a. The victim wanders aimlessly into temptation (v. 6a)
b. The huntress uses planned-out tactics
--shock treatment (v. 13)
--spiritual story (v. 14)
--flattery (v. 15) (he is the very one she had to find)
--sensuous appeal (v. 16-18)
--reassurance (v. 19, 20)
c. The kill (v. 22, 23)

***V. 25 - Keep away!

B. Sanctification is:
STRENGTHENING YOURSELF AGAINST SEXUAL IMMORALITY
(v. 4-5)

v. 4

"Every one of you" - Purity is for all in the church. No exceptions. The same moral standards hold for all - not just pastor, deacons, and Sunday school teachers.

Sexual purity requires 2 things:

1. Instruction - "Should know"

   --know your weaknesses (sinful tendencies)
   Know what leads up to your wrong thinking, etc.

   --know God's Word - memorize Scripture dealing with purity and Biblical sexual relationships in marriage.

   NOTE: This knowledge is more than theoretical; it is practical

2. Self-Discipline - "Possess his (own) vessel"
   "Vessel" refers to our physical body (which is also called a "temple" - I Cor. 6:19) Paul speaks about having "this treasure in earthen vessels" (II Cor. 4:7).

   "Possess" = lit. to "gain ownership"; to acquire or obtain something. Hence, to have mastery or control over.

   That which I possess, I am in control over.

   Proverbs tells us it is better for a man to be able to control himself than to be able to conquer a walled city.

   God wants all of us to attain complete control over our bodies ("vessel") (over the wrong way of satisfying fleshly appetites).

The world does not have control (v. 5)

God wants us to know what it means to gain mastery (control) over our bodies.

To gain mastery over our bodies means positively:

1. Keep your body pure for God's use - "Sanctification" = set apart for God. View yourself as "holy unto the Lord" - Zech. 14:20.

   "Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body" (I Cor. 6:13).

   Immorality will zap your interest in godliness. You will lose your appetite for righteousness. Why? You are feeding yourself with a God-substitute.

   a. Covetousness (obsession) is idolatry
   b. You grieve the Spirit
   c. You will lose interest in praying, reading Bible, fellowshipping with God's people, etc.

   God only fills clean (holy) vessels. God only uses clean instruments.

2. View your body as valuable - "Honor"

   In II Tim. 2:21, Paul refers to the man who purges himself from impurity as being a "vessel unto honor."

   "Honor" = that which is valuable (precious). You don't throw away that which is valuable. You protect that which is valuable. You save that which is valuable.

   Your virginity is priceless! Don't throw it away! (like meat to the dogs or pearls to the pigs)

   Determine to save yourself for the one spouse God has for you.

   Sexual immorality cheapens God's design for sex in marriage. That which is common is not valuable. That which everyone has access to is not priceless. EX: Diamonds and gold are valuable. Why? Because diamonds are not a common stone and gold is not a common metal.

   --Pornography degrades women (it does not honor them); Women are viewed as nothing more than an object to satisfy the sexual lusts of perverted people.

   --Pre-marital sex takes the thrill and anticipation out of marriage (it does not honor marriage) Heb. 13:5 - "Marriage is honorable in all and the bed [sex in marriage] undefiled..."

--Pre-marital sex is a sin against your own body (I Cor. 6:18) (it does not honor the body)

You will lose self-respect, respect for others.

v. 5

To gain mastery over our bodies means negatively:

1. Don't satisfy your appetites like the world. "Gentiles" = nations of the world. Non-Christians.

   The world is out of control - "lust of concupiscence" = desires of passion or a passionate lust (desire). Appetites that spring out of a restless, suffering passion.

   Paul is describing a lust out of control; ungovernable; no restraints. The world's lust is like a lion out of a cage, like a raging river with no dam, like a fire out of control (no barriers, no walls, no fences)

   The world says, "If you have an appetite, feed it. If you have a desire, satisfy it. If you have anger, vent it. If you have something to brag about, display it." etc.

   The world says, "Let it out! It's wrong to hold back; do your own thing (right or wrong); have it your way."

   As believers, we are to have fences - not boundaries (restraining walls) that we think up (EX: celibacy of RCC priests) but that God has set up, and revealed in the Scriptures.

Four walls:

--Think right (beware of what you think) (Mt. 5:28; Phil. 4:8) "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

--Do right (beware of how you behave) (Phil. 4:9)

--Dress right (Beware of what you wear - modesty) (I Tim. 2:9)

--Look right (Beware of what you see) (Mt. 5:29)
(cp. Job 31:1 - "Covenant with mine eyes") Prov. 6:25a - "Lust not after her beauty in thine heart"

The world does not know God, nor His word; so therefore they go unrestrained.

We, like the Thessalonians, have no excuse; we know "the living and true God" (1:9).

The Gentiles in Paul's day invented gods that were like the people who made them up - gods of sexual immorality.

NOTE: progression in Rom. 1 -
Willful 1) ignorance 2) idolatry 3) immorality

C. Sanctification is:
NOT STEPPING INTO FORBIDDEN TERRITORY (v. 6a)

V. 6

"Go beyond" = transgress; to exceed the proper limits; to overstep the God-ordained boundaries.

Satan lies to us, saying: "The grass is greener on the other side of the fence." God says: "Eat out of your own orchard." (Prov. 5:15 - "Drink waters out of thine own cistern, and running waters out of thine own well.")

God's plan for sexual relations was not limited to propagation, but also for pleasure (to please your spouse - I Cor. 7:3-4).

Your physical relationship in marriage is a reassurance of love and affection.

Pre-marital sex is not love but lust.

It is a physical demonstration of the unity (oneness) of husband and wife (I Cor. 6:16).

So with anyone other than your spouse, it is acting out a lie!

Just as Christ has a unity with his church and no one else (Eph. 5), you are to have a unity with your mate and no one else.

Any other form of sex, other than between husband and wife is a perversion.
A person is outside of God's boundary; In Satan's territory.

D. Sanctification is:
NOT STEALING WHAT BELONGS TO SOMEONE ELSE (v. 6a)

V. 6

"Defraud" = to selfishly take that which belongs to someone else. To cheat or take advantage of someone else; to steal.

Proverbs 9:17-18 says: Stolen waters are sweet, and bread *eaten* in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead *are* there; *and that* her guests *are* in the depths of hell.

When someone has illicit sex with someone they are not married to, they are doing 2 things:

1) You are stealing from that person (robbing virtue; EX: like robbing a piggy bank - money that had been saved for the future and you stole it).

2) You are stealing from the one who will marry that person. The future partner of a person like this should be able to marry a spouse who has been preserved. You are kissing another man's wife! Adultery and fornication are stealing!

   People I used to work with used this perverted logic to try to justify their premarital sex: "You don't buy a car unless you test drive it, do you? You have to try it out" Well my response was: A person is not a car and secondly if a car is used to test drive it ins no longer new. Someone else will get a used car; A demonstration model.

   Do you like buying packages that have been opened and the contents tampered with? Don't defraud someone of what is rightfully theirs.

   Don't even think about it!

   You must think, "This woman belongs to that man. I can't think of stealing that which is his." "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house or wife!" (Ex. 20:17)

III. THE REASONS FOR SANCTIFICATION (v. 6b-8)

(God's Provocation for You to Stay Clean)

Paul gives three serious reasons why we must stay clean (sexually pure):

A. SEXUAL SIN WILL BE JUDGED BY GOD (v. 6b)

(Look ahead to what you will reap!)

V. 6b

"The Lord" = Jesus Christ is the Judge (Jn. 5:22; II Th. 1:7-9) who will avenge/reward you for what you did. Justice will be righteously carried out.

People think they will get away with it. "Fornicators and adulterers God will judge!" (Heb. 13:5)

Judgment is not always immediate!
Ecc 8:11 Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

Your sin may reap the undesirable results of affecting your children, and grandchildren (ex. 2 Samuel 21:1-9)

Not only does sexual sin bring a harvest of misery, guilt and sorrows, but it brings judgment from God. (Lev. 20:10 – The Death penalty for adultery under the old Testament. 2 Peter 2:6 – Sodom is an example.

God teaches us how bad sexual immorality is by sending (allowing) sexually transmitted diseases: There are 23 different infections (including gonorrhea, herpes, venereal diseases,; AIDS etch. God does so to teach us how wrong it is.

Many think they are slick in avoiding these diseases or unwanted pregnancies, but God will judge.

"Of all such" = all forms of fornication (sexual immorality)

"Forewarned" = Paul's warning was not something new.

"Testified" = to "seriously affirm"

"It was a warning intended to penetrate their conscience. `Men's dullness,' says Calvin, `is such that unless they are struck forcefully, they have no sense of the divine

judgment.'" (Hiebert, p. 174)

If God did not spare David the consequences of his sin, what makes us think that we will escape? (God's hatred for idolatrous sexual immorality is seen in Numbers 25:1-9).

Today the catch word is "safe sex."

Do you want to be really safe? Obey God or else!

B. SEXUAL SIN IS <u>CONTRARY</u> TO GOD'S PURPOSE FOR SAVING YOU (v. 7)
(Look <u>back</u> at what God did for you!)

v. 7

"Called" = shows that God took the initiative in pulling us out of darkness of sin into the light of salvation.

Immorality is inconsistent with God's gracious call. It's a slap in the face.

God did not save us to sin!

Our song is not:
"Free from the law, Oh, happy condition,
Now I can sin and still have remission."

Those who practice a lifestyle of sexual immorality will not enter the kingdom of God. (I Cor. 6:9-10; Compare also Galatians 5:19, 21; Ephesians 5:5-6; Revelation 21:8)

God saved us to be like Him - Holy. "Be ye holy, for I am holy."

We are united to Christ and therefore must be clean. (I Cor. 6:15-17)

C. SEXUAL SIN IS REJECTING (rebellion against) GOD
(v. 8)
(Look up at who you are rejecting!)

V. 8

"Despiseth" = reject, set aside.

Some may turn me off and not listen, but it is really God you are rejecting.

"He that despiseth" - present tense. Describes one who is a deliberate, continual rejector.

The world laughs and mocks at moral purity. They are laughing and mocking God.

Some so-called "Christians" would take what I'm saying lightly. God is very serious here!

Why does Paul mention the "Holy Spirit"?

1) The Holy Spirit convicts us that the command to moral purity is from God

2) The Holy Spirit is just that -- holy! Holiness (sanctification) is the emphasis in this context. Because He lives in us, we must not grieve or quench him. Having the Holy Spirit and living in immorality is a contradiction; an inconsistency; Immorality is sin against the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit!

3) The Holy Spirit is our source of victory over the flesh. "Walk in the Spirit and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh." This is a promise!

Yield to God today!

- If you have been reading wrong books, confess and forsake that sin;
- If you have been watching that which you know is wrong stop it for Jesus.
- If you have been thinking wrong thoughts (obsessed with evil thoughts) confess that to God and ask His forgiveness and grace.