
PURITY, PASSION, AND PLEASING GOD

1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-8

Brent Detwiler

I. LIVE TO PLEASE GOD

Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.

1 Thessalonians 4:1

A. “We Ask and Urge You”

“Pleasing God is not a matter of personal choice, but an imperative necessity for the Christian.”¹
--Leon Morris

- Not just an abstinence program.

B. “Live...to Please God”

1. Being a Christian means you are about the business of pleasing God. In essence, this is what the Christian life is all about.

- You can’t claim to be a Christian and have no deep desire to please God.

“Preach to yourself that there is more joy in God’s presence than in sin.”²
--John Piper

2. Sexual immorality is about pleasing yourself. Dating, as defined by the world, is about pleasing yourself. It is replacing the enjoyment of God for sexual pleasure and romantic feelings outside the commitment of marriage.

C. “Do So More and More”

The greatest protection against immorality and its consequences is living for the glory of God.

¹ Leon Morris, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, p. 79.

² John Piper, “Strategies for Fighting Sexual Sin,” April 17, 1995.

II. SUBMIT TO GOD'S WORD

For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

1 Thessalonians 4:2

- A. We need to be instructed or commanded on how to live in a way that pleases God. We wouldn't know how to please God without the written word of God.**
- B. God is the creator of sex and therefore is all-wise in his administration of this gift. We want to honor him by honoring his commands.**
- C. These are authoritative instructions not personal suggestions or opinions. If you reject Paul's instructions you are really rejecting Christ's instructions.**
- D. Do you have a biblical understanding of sexuality and the gift of sex? Do you have strong and righteous convictions about these things.**
 - "Everyone is doing it! Having sex is not a big deal! Who's to say it is wrong?"
- E. You must guard against the corruption of your values. The break down of personal convictions leads to the break down of inhibitions. You begin to believe lies and make excuses for sinful actions.**
- F. In our culture, there is a diminishing sense that chastity or abstinence is worth pursuing. Constantly remind yourself it is always good for you to obey God.**
- G. Today the worse sin to commit is making someone feel bad for wrong doing. People think it is mean to say certain behaviors are wrong and unacceptable. People feel there should be no shame or embarrassment for immoral behavior.**

III. AVOID SEXUAL IMMORALITY

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality...

1 Thessalonians 4:3

A. Understand God's Will – Your Bodily Sanctification

1. Not my will, your parent's will or the will of the church that finally counts – it is God's will. God's will is God's desire and God's command.
2. "You should be sanctified" means you should "set apart" your body for God. It is the creation of God and the temple of God. It must be used for his purposes.

B. Understand What Sexually Immorality Includes

“Paul’s word is *porneia*, which strictly means ‘fornication’, but is used in New Testament times for any kind of sexual sin.”³

--Leon Morris

- Is it wrong to pet, touch, grope, or fondle another person’s sexual or private parts? Yes, you are committing immorality even though vaginal intercourse is omitted.

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

Matthew 5:27-29

1. First, it is wrong to entertain sexual lust in the heart. Second, it is additionally wrong to express it through the eyes. Third, it is worse to express it through physical acts.
 2. Romantic and sexual desires are not to be expressed to anyone besides your future husband or wife in the context of engagement (romance) and marriage (romance and sex).
 3. Kissing some one you are not engaged to, or married to, is sin if the motive of the heart is sexual (erotic) or romantic in nature. No desire of a sexual or sensual kind can be prompting the kiss in order for it to be considered righteous.
- Hypothetically, if you could kiss a girl with the exact same motive you kiss your mother then kissing would be fine.

C. How To Avoid Immorality

You avoid sexual immorality by avoiding sexual temptation. Dating involves the embracing of sexual temptation, not the avoiding of sexual temptation.

“We do not fall into immorality. We walk into it. Indeed, sometimes we run headlong into it. We must realize from the beginning that immorality is a choice. It is not something that happens to people. It is something that people make happen. We may do everything in our power to achieve physical health and prevent getting cancer, yet we can still get cancer. But this is not true of immorality. If we depend on our Savior and take deliberate and ongoing steps to cultivate purity and avoid immorality, we can avoid it. It does not choose us. We choose it – or choose to avoid it.”⁴

--Randy Alcorn

³ Morris, *Thessalonians*, p. 81.

⁴ Unknown.

Joseph's Example

So he left in Joseph's care everything he had; with Joseph in charge, he did not concern himself with anything except the food he ate. Now Joseph was well-built and handsome,⁷ and after a while his master's wife took notice of Joseph and said, "Come to bed with me!"⁸ But he refused. "With me in charge," he told her, "my master does not concern himself with anything in the house; everything he owns he has entrusted to my care.⁹ No one is greater in this house than I am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?"¹⁰ And though she spoke to Joseph day after day, he refused to go to bed with her or even be with her.¹¹ One day he went into the house to attend to his duties, and none of the household servants was inside.¹² She caught him by his cloak and said, "Come to bed with me!" But he left his cloak in her hand and ran out of the house.

Genesis 39:6-12 (NIV)

IV. CONTROL YOURSELF

⁴ ...that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵not in the passion of lust [NASB – lustful passion] like the Gentiles who do not know God...

1 Thessalonians 4:4-5

A. Control Your Body

1. Discipline eyes.

Train your self to look away. This goes against your sinful instincts.

➤ Sexual gratification through eyes – not like looking at a sunset or waterfall.

2. Discipline thoughts.

Guard your thought life. Don't fantasize about the opposite sex. Your mind is the most powerful "sex organ".

3. Discipline affections.

Emotional involvement always precedes sexual involvement. Avoid emotional fornication. Avoid all unnecessary stimulation.

4. Discipline lips.

Be careful how you speak to the opposite sex.

5. Discipline hands.

Avoid all physical contact.

B. Control Your Heart and Its Lusts

1. Lust is a strong or passionate desire. Purity is the opposite of lust. Seek to be cleansed of lust.
2. Lust doesn't simply lead to sin, lust is sin. It is a big deal to God. It is not just hormones but sinful desires or cravings.
3. No such thing as sex in moderation. If you get started you will want to keep going. There is no release value. After awhile you can lose the ability to care.
 - Like lighting a fuse and then trying to pinch it out at the last minute.
4. Little sins will lead to larger sin. Making out and petting are wrong because they promote sexual cravings and desires. Each promotes lust with all its dangers.
5. Sexual lust is coveting or desiring what doesn't belong to you. Lust is a discontentment with what we have. It begins with an attraction. It turns into dissatisfaction. It results in a fixation, leaving you ungrateful, discontent and obsessive.
 - TV program, sports radio, commercials
6. Adultery is ever so serious a sin. It is the only grounds whereby the faithful spouse can initiate a divorce.
7. Immorality begins in the heart. It must be fought there. It is a sinful craving and desire.
8. Jesus prohibits even looking at a woman with sexual desire. If there is lust in your heart you are capable of committing fornication or adultery in your actions.

C. Put Sin to Death

*²⁹If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go to hell.
Matthew 5:29-30*

“Jesus is not teaching self-mutilation, for even a blind man can lust. The point is that we should deal as drastically with sin as necessary.”⁵

--New International Version Study Bible

⁵ New International Version Study Bible on Matthew 5:29.

“What then is this killing of sin? It is the constant battle against sin which we fight – the refusal to allow the eye to wander, the mind to contemplate, the affections to run after anything which will draw us from Christ. It is the deliberate rejection of any sinful thought, suggestions, desire, aspiration, deed, circumstance or provocation at the moment we become conscious of its existence. It is the endeavor to do all in our power to weaken the grip which sin in general, and its manifestations in our own lives in particular has. It is not only accomplished by saying no to what is wrong, but by a determined acceptance of the good and spiritually nourishing disciplines of the gospel.”⁶

--Sinclair Ferguson

- What tempts you? To what degree? Who knows? What sin is of greatest concern to you presently? Are others aware of it?

Be aggressive in dealing with temptations. Make no provision for your sinful desires.

- Job reassignment
- Break off relationship
- Travel with colleague
- Internet websites and chat rooms – don’t look at or go to out of curiosity
- E-mail and instant messaging – block who children receive from and don’t allow to use without permission
- Immodest commercials – use remote control
- Movies with sexual scenes and nudity

V. DO NOT WRONG OTHERS

...that no one transgress and wrong [NASB – defraud] his brother in this matter...

1 Thessalonians 4:6a

To “defraud” is to cheat and take advantage of another person.

- Amnon & Tamar

¹⁸So his [Amnon’s] servant put her [Tamar] out and bolted the door after her. She was wearing a richly ornamented robe, for this was the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore. ¹⁹Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornamented robe she was wearing. She put her hand on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went.

2 Samuel 13:18-19

⁶ Sinclair Ferguson, *The Christian Life*, p. 162.

“Sexual sin harms others besides those who engage in it. In adultery, e.g., the spouse is always wronged. Premarital sex wrongs the future partner by robbing him or her of the virginity that ought to be brought to marriage.”⁷

--New International Version Study Bible

“The impure person cannot bring to the marriage that virginity that is the other’s due.”⁸

--Leon Morris

A. Sex Comes After Marriage

²¹So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s ribs and closed up the place with flesh. ²²Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. ²³The man said, “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called ‘woman,’ for she was taken out of man.” ²⁴For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united [NASB – joined] to his wife, and they will become one flesh. ²⁵The man and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

Genesis 2:21-25

1. Leave father and mother.

Until you are ready to marry don’t look to be “hooked” up with someone.

2. Be united or joined to your wife.

- a. The privileges and pleasures of marriage are reserved for those who take an oath of fidelity, exchange vows and swear solemn allegiance to one another before God and witnesses. The acceptance of roles, responsibilities, and obligations precede partaking of the privileges and pleasures.

“In the literal sense it [united or joined] refers to the process of gluing”⁹

--Leon Morris

- b. God wills that you be “glued” to only one person (Mal 2:14-16).

3. Then become one flesh.

- a. Sexual union is reserved for one person, your future husband or wife. All sexual activity outside of marriage is condemned by God.

⁷ New International Version Study Bible on 1 Thessalonians 4:6.

⁸ Morris, *Thessalonians*, p. 84.

⁹ Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, p. 102.

Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is one with her in body? For it is said, "The two will become one flesh."

1 Corinthians 6:16

- b. You must fight the power of sexual temptation with the power of purity and its alluring beauty. Pursue that which is holy and honorable, not that which is unholy and dishonorable.
 - The number one question asked by Christian youth is "How far can I go?"
- c. Value, treasure and esteem sex highly. Don't cheapen it. Save everything for marriage.
 - Casual sex is anything but casual. Don't share something so intimate with many people.

B. Treat One Another as Brothers and Sisters

1. Pursue mental, emotional and physical purity.

¹Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, ²older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.

1 Timothy 5:1-2 (NIV)

- a. Any activity that takes it out of brother/sister realm is prohibited. Brothers are called to protect the women as sisters.
- b. You must have a conviction about the dangers of dating. You must have a conviction about sexual purity. Sexual lust replaces the brother and sister relationship.
- c. Girls struggle with romantic feelings and emotional attraction. Boys struggle with sexual temptation.

1) Thoughts for young ladies.

- a) Pursue inward purity – don't seek to gain the attention, affection, and interest of boys.

Modesty – "...a disinclination to call attention to oneself."¹⁰

--Heritage Dictionary

- Avoid romance novels, music, movies, etc. that inflame passion.

¹⁰ Heritage Dictionary.

- b) Pursue outward modesty – not too low, too short, too tight or too sheer.
 - Motivation to wear the smallest size possible – pride.
 - Fathers – determine what is modest; some times mothers can be too permissive.
 - c) Men are drawn to the physical.
 - A father must lead and protect his daughter from ill motivated young men.
- 2) Thoughts for young men.
- a) Pursue inward purity – treat them as sisters with no ulterior motive.
 - b) Pursue outward modesty – don't try to impress with words or actions intended to attract a young lady.
 - Women are drawn to the emotional.
2. Keep your distance.
- a. Pursuing the Lord and sincerely fellowshiping is what will protect you from romance.
 - Can be relating to a girl with purity and innocence in a group but she may still be tempted to think you are interested in her romantically.
 - b. Pursue friendship but with clear boundaries. Be polite, friendly, and distant.
 - c. It is inadvisable to be alone with a young lady or young man in a compromising setting. Beware of deceitfully finding an excuse to do so.

Is Dating Sin?

- Dating is a 20th-Century invention. The destructive fruit is everywhere to be seen.

¹³Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. ¹⁴But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts.

Romans 13:13-14

Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

2 Timothy 2:22

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.

Ephesians 5:3

- Is “dating” sin? It depends on your definition and the motivation of the heart. Do you want to be alone with someone of the opposite sex to experience the pleasures of emotional or physical intimacy that are only appropriate for an engaged or married couple? Are you pursuing a young lady or sister in the Lord in the same way and for the same reasons you would pursue time with a young man or brother in the Lord? If so, then time together alone is not wrong because your heart is pure. But you still need to ask the question: “Is dating wise?” No, because our hearts so easily deceive us and tempt us.
3. Be honest, humble, and accountable.
 - a. Don't be proud in thinking you can handle guy/girl relationships or deal with sexual temptation on your own. Don't hide or conceal anything.
 - b. Don't allow the fear of your parents “overreacting” keep you from being honest.
 - c. Share feelings fully and completely. Don't make light of your attraction to the opposite sex with your parents.
 - d. Don't withhold information from your parents. Tell them how you feel and what is going on in your heart.
 4. Wait patiently for marriage.
 - a. You must fight discontentment, anxiety, fear, idolatry, etc.
 - b. Don't try to figure out who you will marry. Don't try to discover if someone “likes” you. Results in always being anxious, looking, searching and wondering.
 - c. Don't put much confidence in “crushes.” They will come and go – will likely occur with several people in your short lifetime. Trust God and don't hold on to a crush.
 - d. Don't put too much confidence in a “word from God.” Why would God tell you who to married way in advance? Typically God doesn't speak to you about who to marry until you are ready to pursue marriage.

VI. FEAR GOD

...because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.

1 Thessalonians 4:6b

- Sexual immorality is a sin and it is seeking to destroy you. The fear of punishment is a motivation to avoid all sexual immorality.
- We should fear God. We must rehearse the consequences of immortality.¹¹

²⁵Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes, ²⁶for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread, and the adulteress preys upon your very life. ²⁷Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? ²⁸Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? ²⁹So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished.

Proverbs 6:25-29 (NIV)

- Your deceitful heart would have you believe you won't be exposed when you sin and there won't be any consequences. The eyes of the Lord are everywhere. God will bring things to light.
 - Safe sex – there is no such thing! Don't think, "He may punish others but he won't punish me."
- Sex is real and someone will always get hurt. Sex is a great blessing in marriage but also terribly destructive outside of marriage.

A. Spiritual Consequences

1. You bring reproach upon Christ and his holiness.
2. You bring great delight to Satan.
3. You grieve God. Your sin affects your communion with him.
4. You experience the discipline of God now.
5. You have to stand before him one day and give an account for your actions and suffer eternal loss.
6. You think it is a small thing for God to forgive you and that repentance will come easily.

B. Relational Consequences

1. Undermine the reputation of the church and bring shame to the pastors and leaders who care for you.
2. Loose the trust of your parents and friends.
3. Forfeit or destroy the effect of witnessing to relatives and friends.

¹¹ Many of the consequences referenced below are adapted from material written by Randy Alcorn.

4. You “heap judgment and endless difficulty” on the person with whom you've committed sexual sin.

C. Physical Consequences

1. Sexually transmitted diseases

“To date, over 20 different and dangerous sexually transmitted diseases are rampant among the young.”¹²

--Focus on the Family

D. Social Consequences

1. Infected newborn
2. Unwed mother – can cause pregnancy with all manner of personal and financial complications.
3. Out of wedlock child – can have a terrible effect on any child born out of wedlock or illegitimately with no father.
4. Adoption – often a wise and necessary thing but certainly no easy thing.
5. Abortion – you may be an accomplice to the taking of life through abortion.

E. Moral Consequences

1. Destroys your character and integrity.
2. Dulls your conscience.

Guilt is like pain – it stops us from sinning. God gave your heart a pain receptor called your conscience.

3. Increases your lack of self-control.

Chastity before marriage is the best protection against adultery after marriage.

F. Marital Consequences

1. Negative impact on marriage relationship.

You will need to acknowledge your immorality to your future husband/wife and explain you are not a virgin.

¹² Newspaper ad entitled, “In Defenses of a Little Virginity – A Message from Focus on the Family”.

2. Can effect the enjoyment of sexual intimacy with your future marriage partner.
 - a. Emotional bonds can remain after marriage.
 - b. Form memories and flashbacks that can plague intimacy with your future spouse.

VII. DO NOT DESPISE GOD

For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. [8] Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

1 Thessalonians 4:7-8

- A. The call to holiness is another motivation for sexual purity. The culture attempts to desensitize you to sin. The standards set forth are given by God himself.**
- B. Means far more than accepting it as true. It means being pure in heart and living a decidedly holy life.**

“Because God has called us in sanctification it follows that those who treat this lightly are despising no less a person than God himself.”¹³

--Leon Morris

- C. God gives us the Holy Spirit so we can live a life pleasing to God.**

VIII. CONCLUSION

A. Get Serious with God

Without sincerity and diligence in a universality of obedience, there is no mortification of specific sins like immorality.

B. Make a Commitment to Avoid Sexual Immorality

C. Be Accountable

- Youth need to confront one another – must break the code of silence.

D. Be Completely Honest

Come clean. Immorality always involves lying, cover up, deception, and compromise.

¹³ Morris, *Thessalonians*, pp. 84-85.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what specific ways are you most tempted to compromise your moral integrity and purity?
2. Do you need to confess sexual sin to the group, your parents or trusted friends to whom you are accountable? Are there any hidden sins you need to acknowledge?
3. What does it mean to live for the glory of God? Are you living your life this way?
4. What does God's Word teach about sexual involvement outside of marriage? Why?
5. Why is it unhelpful and unwise to be involved in "matchmaking" or speculation on who people will marry in the future?
6. What guidelines should men follow when relating to women?
7. What does it mean in 1 Thess. 4:3 when it says that you should sanctify your body and avoid sexual immorality?
8. Why is worldly dating unwise and wrong?
9. What is the purpose of courtship? When should the process of courtship begin?