

6. Being holy in an unholy world

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The world we are living in is consumed and dominated by selfish desires. We see, hear, and even feel the wave of the ungodly and worldly influences crashing into our hearts from every direction to entice us to join them in their chaos.

This ungodly and worldly influence is practically a religion itself. Here is why:

- This religion needs a god: Self.
- This religion needs priests: Celebrities.
- This religion needs a prophet: Music videos, movies, magazines, and more.
- This religion needs scriptures: Tabloids, entertainment news, etc.
- This religion has places of worship: Social media, amusement parks, theaters, concert halls, and sports arenas. Now we could say that televisions and smartphones are little chapels.

The religion of excitement and entertainment seduces people into living their lives for one thing – the thrill of the momentary pleasure. But these thrills are quickly over and forgotten, and all that is important is the next fun thing. This religion conditions its followers to only ask one question: “Is it fun?” It never wants us to ask more important questions such as, “Is it true?”, “Is it right?”, “Is it good?”, and “Is it godly?”

1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 Now may our God and Father Himself, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way to you. 12 And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you, 13 so that He may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all His saints.

In v11-13 of chapter 3 from the last study, the apostle Paul told us that God may establish their hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with His saints. Now he is going to expound what he just told us.

A. WALKING IN HOLINESS

1 Thessalonians 4:1-2 Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; 2 for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

Please give me your interpretation of this portion.

The moral climate in the Roman Empire was not only unhealthy but also perverse. Immorality was a way of life. Thanks to slavery, people had too much leisure time to indulge in the latest pleasures. The Christian message of holy living was new to that culture, and it was not easy for these spiritually young believers of Thessalonica to fight the temptations around them.

Pleasing God should be the major motive of the Christian life. Enoch walked with God, and before God called him to heaven, Enoch had this testimony, that he pleased God according to Hebrews 11:

Hebrews 11:5 By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, “and was not found, because God had taken him”; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

Then we have this question to ask ourselves: How do we know what pleases God? By listening to Him and living for Him. As we read the Bible, and as we fellowship in worship and service, we get to know the heart of God. This opens us up to the will of God.

The apostle Paul was not the first one to proclaim to the followers of God about holy living. As you have learned, the Old Testament is full of warnings and pleas to the people of Israel to take heed and to follow God's principles and precepts. But what did they do? Just like this 21st-century dying world, they rejected God's commandments for their earthly pleasure.

Jeremiah 6:8-15 Be instructed, O Jerusalem, Lest My soul depart from you; Lest I make you desolate, A land not inhabited." 9 Thus says the Lord of hosts: "They shall thoroughly glean as a vine the remnant of Israel; As a grape-gatherer, put your hand back into the branches." 10 To whom shall I speak and give warning, That they may hear? Indeed their ear is uncircumcised, And they cannot give heed. Behold, the word of the Lord is a reproach to them; They have no delight in it. 11 Therefore I am full of the fury of the Lord. I am weary of holding it in. "I will pour it out on the children outside, And on the assembly of young men together; For even the husband shall be taken with the wife, The aged with him who is full of days. 12 And their houses shall be turned over to others, Fields and wives together; For I will stretch out My hand Against the inhabitants of the land," says the Lord. 13 "Because from the least of them even to the greatest of them, Everyone is given to covetousness; And from the prophet even to the priest, Everyone deals falsely. 14 They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly, Saying, 'Peace, peace!' When there is no peace. 15 Were they ashamed when they had committed abomination? No! They were not at all ashamed; Nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; At the time I punish them, They shall be cast down," says the Lord.

On TV screens, movies, novels, music videos, and even our daily lives, gays and lesbians pushed open homosexual life as normal. They actually made it as a privileged and protected group.

One of the Tucson churches which has a K through 6 school asked for a cheaper educational version of QuarkXpress software to its company which is a desktop publishing layout software for graphic designers around the world. The former CEO of this company is a hardcore gay activist and the company is a staunch supporter of homosexuality agendas. They responded to the church that if the church would sign a paper that states that they would not discriminate homosexual applicants from hiring. The local church said to them, "Keep that software to yourself."

We become so accustomed to the worldly mess that our minds are numb, our consciences no longer sting, and our faces no longer burn with shame. Still, the media continues barraging us with images of immorality that range from homosexuality, adultery, and fornication to just about anything. And nobody blushes.

B. THE WILL OF GOD FOR US

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 that no one should take advantage

of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. 7 For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. 8 Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.

What is your interpretation of this?

Many Christians whom I've met wanted to know what God's will is for them. Here it is in black and white. It spelled out simply and clearly. Oh yes, I know that it is not what they really wanted to know. Rather, they wanted to know what God has in mind for their jobs; where to live; and what to do in the future due to their curiosity and anxiety. But instead of answering their detailed questions, God says, "Sanctify yourself from this world."

We might argue with God at this point. "I want to know what I am going to do tomorrow, next month, and next year." God still gives us the same answer, "Sanctify yourself from this world." We have enough problems today, we don't need to be concerned about tomorrow as Jesus told us in Matthew 6:34. Do I mean we don't plan for the future? No, that is not what I meant. We need to plan for the future with God in mind. Living to please Him with sanctification is far more important than our own five-year plan.

The idea behind 'sanctification' is 'to be set apart', and God wants us to be set apart from a godless culture and their sexual immorality. If our sexual behavior is no different than the unbelievers who do not know God, then we are not sanctified in the way God wants us to be.

When it comes to living a pure and holy life, we don't have to wonder about God's will for it. "*Abstain from sexual immorality*" is His commandment, and no amount of liberal theology or modern philosophy can alter it. Throughout the Bible, God warns us against sexual sin. And these warnings must be heeded.

C. LIVING IN PURITY

Living in purity not only gives glory to the God who created sex for the marriage relationship but also provides us a healthy sense of self-respect and well-being. However, the world and our own flesh urge us to disregard God's holiness. What can we do to stay pure? Continuing on the subject of God's will for our lives, Paul offers us some practical steps:

1) Abstaining begins with "possessing" our own vessels, that is, knowing our own bodies – how our sex drives function, what weakens our self-control, and what strengthens it.

2 Corinthians 10:5b we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

2) Possessing our bodies involves admitting the temptations we can't handle and avoiding those enticing situations.

Some movies, books, or magazines may ignite lustful passions, and some settings may provide opportunities for compromise. We need to stay away from them. No one remains pure by accident.

3) Abstaining from immorality means aggressively building protective walls against lust long before we have the opportunity to become physically involved in fornication or adultery.

To some, these measures may seem prudish and overreacting. But it's better to be overly safe than risk the devastation that sexual immorality causes.

Some of you might think, "I am not that young anymore. I don't have to worry about that kind of thing." Think again. There are trends among senior citizens that they are getting into internet pornography more than ever before.

Before the internet came, people had to look around before they got into these so-called adult bookstores. If they try to build one of those strip clubs or adult bookstores near your homes or churches, you would fight against it tooth and nail. But many people don't have the foggiest idea that a regular adult bookstore comes right into your house where your computer, your smartphone, or tablet is connected to the internet.

47 percent of Christians admitted pornography is a serious problem at home, according to a survey reported in *World* magazine. Additionally, 37 percent of pastors have viewed Internet porn, according to a Christianity Today leadership survey. As noted by *World* magazine, pornographic websites provide 372 million pages of porn and service some 68 million daily search engine requests for such images that are available at anyone's fingertip.

Let's keep in mind that there are no secrets hidden before God. Although in Christ we're protected from His eternal punishment, God still allows the consequences of our sin.

When king David committed adultery, he tried to cover up his sin. But God chastened him severely. When David confessed his sins, God forgave him. But God would not change the consequences. David reaped what he sowed, and it was an extremely painful experience for him until he died.

How does the Spirit of God help us live a clean life, free from sexual impurity? To begin with, He creates holy desires within us so that we have an appetite for God's pure Word. Also, He teaches us the Word and helps us to recall God's promises in times of temptation. As we yield to the Spirit, He empowers us to walk in holiness and not be detoured into the lusts of the world and the flesh. The fruit of the Spirit overcomes the works of the flesh.

D. TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS WITH LOVE

1 Thessalonians 4:9-12 But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; 10 and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; 11 that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, 12 that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.

What do you see here?

Christians not only have the obligation to love one another but also to be good testimonies to the people of the world. Paul's great concern was that the Thessalonian believers earn their own wages and not become freeloaders depending on the support of unbelievers.

As believers, we must be careful in our relationships with *“those who are outside.”* It requires spiritual grace and wisdom to have contact without contamination and to be different without being judgmental and proud. If we lack this spiritual wisdom, we will do more harm than good.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) Abstaining from immorality means aggressively building protective walls against lust long before we have the opportunity to become physically involved in fornication or adultery.

2) As we yield to the Spirit through the Word of God, He empowers us to walk in holiness and not be detoured into the lusts of the world and the flesh.