



MODEL PURITY • Sexual Purity

What Do I Need to Know About the Passage?

I Thessalonians 4:1-8

I Thessalonians 4:1-2

In verse one, we read, “Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more.” A similar phrase is repeated in verse 10, and this lets us know that this is not so much a rebuke for wrongful behavior, as it is an encouragement to press on to greater holiness. As we’ve seen in the first chapter, this is a growing and healthy church. As a good discipler and coach, Paul wants to spur them on to even greater obedience.

I Thessalonians 4:3-6

Paul’s first encouragement to be sexually pure is grounded in the simple, yet profound, fact that it is God’s will. In verse 8, Paul says that to reject this teaching is to reject God and not man. Perhaps the Thessalonians were tempted to believe that these were simply Paul’s standards for personal holiness. Paul clarifies that these, in fact, are God’s standards, and not his personal lifestyle choices.

Second, he mentions that they are to take control of their bodies. In I Corinthians 6:13-20, we’re told that our bodies are the new “temple” of the Holy Spirit, who now resides within us. That’s sobering. As a result, there’s an awesome responsibility to keep our temples clean and free from sexual impurity. The emotional impact of this idea moves along these lines: our bodies are a place of worship and you wouldn’t have sex or show a pornographic movie in a cathedral would you? Our bodies no longer house us alone, but God’s Spirit as well. The opposite of “take control” is to “lose” it, which is what happens when we give the reigns of our life over to lust. Lust is a powerful, controlling influence.

Next, Paul says that they are to be distinct or “set apart” in the area of sexual morals from the heathen (the godless), whose lives are governed by “passionate lust.” The Greek word for lust means “over-passion” or “mega-passion,” and sexual immorality is the Greek word “pornea” from which we get the word pornography (the Greeks invented everything!) This would include all areas of sexual sin, including the aforementioned “porn.” This description of the godless (heathen) illuminates the meaning of the word “holy,” which literally means, “set apart from.” Christians are to be “set apart” in their sexual behavior from those who don’t know God.

The next point is somewhat obscured by its phrasing. Paul says that sexual immorality wrongs and robs (takes advantage of) our brother. Several things are probably in view. First, in engaging in sexual sin with another believer, we

What’s the Big Idea?

God’s will is for believers to be set apart from the rest of the world and set apart to God in the area of their sexual purity.

What’s the Problem?

As believers, our hearts are still inclined to turn from knowing God intimately and to live like the rest of the world by indulging our sexual lusts.



are not only defiling our “temple” but also the “temple” of the other believer. Second, some day that brother or sister may very well be married, at which time they will belong to another. Sexual immorality from this perspective is robbery – taking something that doesn’t ultimately belong to you. Or, to flip it around, someone engaged in sexual sin right now with your future husband or wife is actually stealing from *you* something that you can’t get back.

I Thessalonians 4:6-8

Paul closes his series of challenges with a warning that the Lord will punish such sins. Paul could be saying one of two things, here, and it’s difficult to see which it is. He could be saying that God is going to judge the godless for such sins when He comes, and it’s therefore ludicrous for Christians to be apart of it, or, he could be warning Christians that God will ultimately discipline them if they continue to engage in such activity. From other passages of Scripture, we know that both ideas are true, so both should be taken to heart.

In these final verses, Paul puts an accent on holiness (holy life, Holy Spirit) which, if you remember, means “set apart.” They are to be “set apart” from unbelievers in their sexual purity because the Holy Spirit has “set them apart” to God, and therefore their bodies should be “set-apart” from sexual immorality.

Knowing God

When we indulge in sexual sin, we are acting like those “who don’t know God.” So we should flip that around and ask: How does “knowing God” affect our sexual purity?

In knowing God, we begin to know true satisfaction (Ps. 90:14, 107:9). Sexual sin is not as much a pursuit of sex as it is a pursuit of satisfaction.

In knowing God, we begin to taste true love and acceptance. Sexual sin attempts to find love and acceptance in a person, or even an image.

In knowing God, we begin to experience true worship. That is, we experience “getting outside ourselves” (transcendence) in worshipping God, and sex is ultimately about escape from ourselves in transcendent experience.

In knowing God, we begin to experience true and ultimate beauty. Sexual sin replaces true beauty for a cheap imitation.

In knowing God, we want to live to please Him, while sexual sin seeks only to gratify ourselves.

In knowing God, we experience His empowerment and renewing presence throughout the day in prayerful reliance; we no longer need to turn to the rush and stimulation of lust.

Thus, as we grow in our knowledge and intimacy with God, lust diminishes in its allure and control over our lives.

What’s Our Response?

You want the group to understand the driving needs behind our attraction to sex and you want them to see the ways Christ can meet those needs.

You also want them to see our growth in purity as a process and a relationship: our main goal is to grow more and more in our intimacy with Christ.

You want the group to understand how important purity is to God and His Spirit who dwells with us. There is no place to justify even the smallest compromise.

Last, from the perspective of discipleship, you want the group members to have an idea of what they might say to a disciple struggling in the sexual area.

To this end you should make them aware of the Campus resource dealing with this issue: *Flesh* (For Men) and *Fantasy* (For Women) available at crupress.com

What Are the Questions?

I Thessalonians 4:1-8

LAUNCH

Imagine getting a call from a believer telling you they'd failed miserably with their boyfriend/girlfriend in the sexual area and felt horrible. What would you say to them.? Imagine the same scenario, only they say "it's no big deal." What do you say then?

EXPLORE

- Read I Thessalonians. 4:1-12. Where are the two occurrences of the phrase "more and more" found? What does this tell you about Paul's primary purpose in writing these words?
- God's will for you isn't just to not have sex until you get married and not look at pornography. What is God's will for your life? What does this mean? How does this differ from just not having sex?
- In v. 3-6, the goal of our spiritual growth in the sexual area is expressed in three "that" statements. What are they?
- Read verses 3-5 and define the following words:
Sanctified, Sexual immorality, Passionate lust, Heathen
- What sorts of things would fall under the category of sexual immorality? What would constitute sexual impurity in a dating relationship?
- The Greek word for "abstain" (ESV and NASB) or "avoid" (NIV) in v. 3 has the idea of "to hold back, keep off, be distant, to be away." In light of this, which of these English translations are better? And, how is this idea different from simple "abstinence"?
- The second "that" statement relates to honoring God by controlling our bodies. This is a consistent theme in Paul's letters. What do these other verses say on this issue:
Romans 6:19
Romans 12:1
- I Corinthians 6:13-20
Philippians 1:20-24
- What insights do these passages give you with regard to I Thessalonians 4:3-6?
- The third "that" statement relates to wronging or stealing from (taking advantage of) another brother or sister. How does sexual immorality do this? And, how does this contradict what love really is?
- Imagine a conversation with your spouse about your sexual history. At what level of physical involvement would you feel someone had taken something from you?
- In verses 6-8, what further motivations to remain sexually pure do you see here? In verse 8, why do you think Paul adds the parenthetical phrase "who gives you His Spirit"?
- Unbelievers turn to sex to meet their needs because they don't "know God." What needs do people try to meet through sex?
- As believers who "know God" we steadily grow in experiencing or "knowing" Christ as the satisfier of these needs. Why is the process gradual? How are you beginning to experience Christ meeting these needs?
- Why is there still a need to exercise self-control in dealing with lust?

APPLY

- As our "knowing God" is woefully incomplete, we will continue to struggle with inappropriate lust. How have you found yourself *not* wanting to "avoid" sexual immorality?
- A desire for beauty, to get outside ourselves (transcendence), acceptance, intimacy, satisfaction, love: which of these does your heart most long to experience? How can you cultivate coming to Christ for this need?
- Following our focus on discipleship, how would you help a disciple deal with issues of sexual immorality in her life?
- In the area of sexual purity, what's the most helpful thing you've shared with another believer or disciple, or the most helpful thing someone has shared with you?

What Are the Answers?

1. It occurs in verses 1 and 10. This is not a rebuke but he's writing to spur them on to greater purity.
2. His will is that we grow in our love and knowledge of Him. Our focus is on growing in this relationship not on "not sinning."
3. That you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his body...; and that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter.
4. 'Heathen' means 'godless'. 'Sanctified' means 'set apart for holiness'. 'lust' means 'over-passion'. And 'sexual immorality' applies to any and all inappropriate sexual practices.
5. The Greek word for sexual immorality is pornea and would include anything from pornography to inappropriate touching. In a dating relationship, seeking and causing sexual arousal is inappropriate for a believer.
6. The NIV seems to get it better here. The word has an idea of avoiding sexual immorality all together, not just "not doing it."
7. Look up the verses.
8. Share insight from the passages.
9. Some day, the brother or sister with whom you've been intimate may get married and belong to another. Sexual immorality from this perspective is like robbery: taking something that doesn't ultimately belong to you.
10. This question is a helpful way to get at the question of "how far is too far?"
11. Discuss. A reminder that our bodies are the temples of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we have a responsibility to keep our bodies pure from sexual immorality.
12. A desire for beauty, to get outside ourselves (transcendence), acceptance, intimacy, satisfaction, love.
13. Our "knowing God" is a growing process and therefore victory over lust is a process. See notes under "Knowing God."
14. We will still be tempted to act out on our desires and the sexual habits we've established. God empowers us in many ways, but we still must make difficult choices.
15. Allow the group to discuss.
16. You might read the list in the "Knowing God" section of the notes.
17. Allow the group to discuss.
18. Allow the group to discuss.

Memorize

It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality.

I Thessalonians 4:3