

Sexual Purity and Brotherly Love

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Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 is all about pleasing God. We heard a couple weeks ago that Paul said that the Christian life is all about pleasing God.

! The Christian lives in order to please God. And if you aren't doing that, then you're not walking as a Christian. So let me ask you, how have you been doing at pleasing God?

Have you been thinking about it? No one can say, but it's been the holidays and there's been parties and get-togethers and I've been at all my family's house.

I've had too much to think about in order to please God. And I know. That is life. And what is life supposed to be about?

It's supposed to be about pleasing God. It's about making God our first priority before everyone and everything else. And it's about going to those parties and those get-togethers and those family gatherings and doing it with God in mind.

[1:11] So it's not an either-or option. It's not we're really busy or we please God. It's in the life that we live that God has given to us. We please God in those things.

And so you're either obeying God and obeying your commander's instructions, taking them seriously, or you're not. So I want to encourage you again. This is a very busy time of the year.

But let's think how we can please God. Remember 1 Thessalonians 4, the passage is a funnel shape. It starts very wide with about pleasing God.

And it moves in. And it talks about how we can do that by being sanctified. And that is God's will for you. It's God's will that you be sanctified. So whatever you're doing, whatever God has called you to in your life, whatever decisions you have to be making, it's God's will that you should be sanctified. He wants you to be holy. Well, what does that mean? So we're talking pleasing God, sanctified, living a sanctified life. And well, what does that mean?

[2:21] Paul says it means two things specifically in this passage, sexual purity and brotherly love. And Stuart Elliott compares them to two shoes. And you have to wear both of your shoes if you're going to walk well.

And you all know that. But you can think back when you had little children, and sometimes they played dress up, and they had one of your high heels on. Not one of my high heels. One of your lady's high heels on.

And they were barefoot in the other foot. And they could walk. You can walk with only one shoe.

You don't walk well, do you? Well, if we're going to walk the Christian life well, then we need both of these shoes on our feet.

We need sexual purity, and we need brotherly love. Tonight we're going to be talking about a lot of do this and don't do that. And that could be disheartening.

And I'm well aware of that. Paul is talking about sanctification. And sanctification is a work that believers do with God's help and with his strength.

[3:27] But nevertheless, it is the work that God has given to us in order to do. We work with all of his strength. But keep this in mind.

Sanctification is built on a foundation. And the foundation is justification. And what I mean is this. We are not talking about living life in order to please God, in order to make ourselves right with God. That he would be delighted and pleased with us. Because, believer, if you are in Jesus Christ, like we talked about this morning, if you have trusted in the Lord, then God is already delighted in you. He is well pleased with you. He loves you. Jesus Christ gave himself up for you. And God looks on you as his child.

Because Christ has reconciled us. We were at enmity with him. And he brought us together. So we live, and what we're talking about tonight, is we're talking about living to please God as a child

seeks to please his father.

[4:41] Now, you don't have to reconcile, in a normal situation, a daughter and her father, or a son and her father. Because, no matter how she fails, and no matter how much she sins, that relationship is never changed.

That girl is always his daughter. And she, or he, is always her father. And you could say, but I have sinned a lot.

I have sinned a lot. And my answer to that is, but Jesus Christ has paid it all. Jesus Christ, in his death, he was worthy enough.

He was glorious enough. When he died, your sins are taken care of. And so God relates to you as a father to a child. Not because you are good, but because Jesus Christ is good.

And so he has given you birth through the Holy Spirit. And so he loves you as a father loves his own baby, his own child. Now, at the Plymouth Hospital, when you have a baby, they have a little button in the maternity, in the OB unit, where the father usually can go and press the button.

[5:56] And when he presses the button, a lullaby is played over the entire hospital. And that is one of my favorite things to do. I've had the opportunity to press it two times.

Because I am so excited, so pleased, that I now have another daughter. And another one, yes. And if I, being evil, know how to enjoy my children, when they've done nothing good or bad, they've done nothing to earn my favor, if I can just delight myself in them, how much more does God, our Father, can he rejoice and delight and be completely happy in us and pleased with his children?

And so, brothers and sisters, right from the very beginning, I'm going on at length, but you need to get this. From the very beginning, I am saying that God is pleased with you.

He has set his love on you, and he will never, ever take it from you, because it depends not on you, but it depends on Jesus Christ. And so, this pleasing that we're talking about, this sanctifying, it's not about earning God's love.

It's not earning his favor, because you already have it. It's about staying inside of his fatherly love and affection, staying inside of his smile. It's about keeping God's fatherly smile upon us.

[7:23] And so, a father and his children can have changes in their relationship, where if the child is disobedient, it becomes hard for the father to be really affectionate with the child.

He loves him or her still, and it's the same way with God and us. No matter how far we stray, God still loves us, but he might not smile on us anymore.

And so, what we're talking about tonight is staying inside that smile, making and obeying God in order to have his full fatherly affection on us, just to make our relationship sweeter.

We're talking about being able to enjoy God. And if we're going to enjoy God, we need to seek to please him. And so, these two things, sexual purity and brotherly love, they're absolutely necessary in order to please God.

They're not absolutely necessary for salvation, but they are absolutely vital if we're going to enjoy the salvation that God has given to us, to enjoy God.

[8:28] And so, don't look on them as dreadful things that you have to do, that you have to deny yourself, and it's going to be nothing but pain. Because these are the two ways that we can come into God's smile and his love, that we can enjoy our relationship with him.

And you want that, right? Well, if you do, listen as Paul tells us how to pursue that holiness that pleases God. He talks about sexual purity first.

Look at verse 3. It is God's will that you should be sanctified, that you should avoid sexual immorality. Well, how do you please God? You avoid sexual immorality.

The word avoid is abstain or keep off from something. If you want to keep God's smile on you, then keep sexual immorality away from you. Keep it at arm's length.

So, how do you fight sexual immorality? How do you pursue the sanctification? You don't get into hand-to-hand combat with it. You don't. You keep away from it.

[9:34] If, this is going to sound silly, this is the best I could do. If Chuck Norris were after you, wouldn't you do everything possible to stay away from him?

So, he can only hurt you when he is within punching and kicking distance. And so, what is my strategy? You stay as far away from him as possible.

And when you're fighting sexual sin, you do whatever you can to stay as far away from any temptation as possible. And that is the only way to fight this sin.

So, brothers, if you're in hand-to-hand combat with sexual sin, you are going to get beat up. So, avoid it. Flee youthful lusts.

So, you don't put up a fight. You don't go toe-to-toe with it and try to beat it down. You run for your life. Your heart is full of gasoline and temptation is the match.

[10:34] If they come together, you're going to be destroyed. So, run for your life. Stay away from places and things that can tempt you.

So, if you knew Chuck Norris liked to lurk around this corner and he was after you, you wouldn't mosey on by the corner. You would stay far away from it. And sexual sin will kill you if you just walk around and mosey on by where it likes to lurk.

So, put filters on your computers. You wouldn't keep a box of Playboys under your kitchen sink if you were one to be sexually pure.

And there are a million Playboys in your computer. So, keep a filter on it. Stay away from sexual immorality. Sexual immorality. Paul goes on in verse 4.

It's God's will that you should be sanctified, that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable. Now, Paul says, if you're going to fight and you're going to win against sexual immorality and you're going to keep that relationship open with God where God is smiling on you and He is pleased and happy with you, then you need to learn to control, to possess, your own body in the right way.

[11:55] Now, there's some debate here whether it's possible that Paul is talking about acquiring a wife. It's possible that if we read what he's saying correctly, that he's not talking about controlling your body, he's talking about basically get a wife.

The word body here is vessel. And sometimes the rabbis talked about the wife as the vessel. And Paul himself called wives the weaker vessel in 1 Corinthians.

I don't think that's what he's referring to. I think he is talking about controlling your body, about possessing it. But either way, it comes out to the same thing in the end.

God has designed sexual pleasure to be enjoyed, to be experienced in the covenant bond of marriage. And I've said this before, but I think it is so important to hear.

Sex is a fire and marriage is the fireplace. And as long as the fire is in the fireplace, it's beautiful, it's warming, it's delightful, it's safe.

[13:03] But when the fire gets outside of the fireplace, it burns your house to the ground. And that is what sex is like. Take it outside of marriage and it will destroy you.

So whichever it means, whether we're to keep our bodies in check, we're to keep our desires in check. And if that means finding a wife as quickly as may be, provided that she is in the Lord, then that is good.

That's what it means for you. Marriage is holy and honorable. And so if we're single or we're married, we are to control our bodies in all honor and holiness.

And so the picture is you have a vessel and it's used in temple service. It's used to worship God. Now, you wouldn't take a temple vessel that's used to worship God and haul table scraps and kitty litter outside with it.

You would use it for holy purposes. And your body is more than just a vessel used in temple worship. We read it in Sunday school.

[14:08] Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. He is at work in you. He is working. He is living inside of you. And so, how do you treat your own body?

Are you going to treat it like a holy thing? An honorable thing? Because that is what it is. Whether you feel it or not, God says, your body is holy and honorable because it is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

So are you going to treat it like a holy thing, or are you going to basically treat it like a brothel instead of a temple? And you invite whatever and whoever into your life and to your mind and to defile you.

And that is what the heathen do. Paul says that. They just go about in a passionate lust and a heated, uncontrollable desire for sex.

They don't know God and that doesn't stop them from worshiping. They just turn their worship on the idol of sex. Well, God has called you to something completely different.

[15:14] He has called you to self-control, to self-possession. And you've seen a self-possessed person. They're put into a difficult situation and they don't lose control.

They stay within themselves and they control themselves and they maintain their composure. And Paul is calling us to possess our bodies with all composure, with all sobriety. God has made us stewards of our bodies. They belong to Jesus Christ because he died for them. But he gives them to us and he tells us to take care of them like Adam and Eve took care of the garden.

So, are you taking care of your temple your garden like it belongs to Jesus Christ because it does belong to him? Do you give it, do you give your body the exercise that it needs?

Do you feed it nothing but junk food? Or do you possess your body as a gift from the Lord in a way that is meant to worship him?

[16 : 23] Or do you treat it like your own little plantation where you get to run things and do things your way? Paul goes on in verse 6. And in this matter, this matter of sexual immorality, sexual purity, no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him.

The Lord will punish men for all such sins. What does that mean? What is he talking about? Taking advantage of and wronging his brother.

John Calvin thinks it alludes to Jeremiah chapter 5 verse 8 and 9. I won't ask you to turn there. But listen to what Jeremiah says. He's in the middle of talking about how the Israelites have thrown off God.

They've abandoned the covenant. They've broken away from the Lord. And he says this about their sexual behavior. And it sounds very much like what Paul says here.

They, the Israelites, are well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man's wife. Should I not punish them for this, declares the Lord?

[17 : 32] Should I not avenge myself on such a nation as this? What a horrible way to talk about people. But what a horrible way to be.

And that is what precisely, that's precisely what Paul warns the Thessalonians of. No one should wrong his brother. You shouldn't be looking on your brother's wife. You shouldn't be touching her in any way of taking advantage of him.

In other words, keep your hands, keep your thoughts where they belong. Don't act like a stupid horse in heat with God's people. Don't act like a con man always stealing what belongs to your brother or sister.

brother. And if you do, the Lord will punish you. That could mean hell. And it also could just mean that God's going to turn his smile away from you.

And he will put you in the darkness. And you will be trapped in your little world. And he won't break in for a long, long time. Where you had joy, there'll be darkness.

[18 : 46] Where you had light, there'll be darkness. darkness. And God will hide himself from you if you persist in walking that way. If you walk like a heathen, he will treat you like a heathen.

For a time, and maybe forever. Well, if you reject this, you aren't rejecting men. If you reject everything that I'm saying, you're not rejecting Jason Webb. You're rejecting the Holy Spirit. God has put his spirit inside of you to work out holiness. He has saved you in order to be holy. That is what he's called you to. And so to run after illicit sex and to run after porn is to say no to God. It is to reject the Holy Spirit. And he wants you to be pure and holy, and that is you saying, no. That's not what I want. And that is a tragedy.

It is a tragedy for a child of God to be fighting with God. God has done so much for you. And can you just glibly forget everything that he's done, all of his mercies?

[19 : 55] Remember, you're God's child, and he has loved you. He's given his son to die for you.

He's sent his Holy Spirit to live in you. He's called you to holiness. holiness. And Jesus loved holiness so much that he gave his life in order to have it in his people.

And so, will you take Jesus' sacrifice and just scorn what it was for? He has saved you. Not so that you can be a slave again to sin.

Not so that you can just go and do what you want and be in bondage. But he has saved you in order that you could be free. that you could live and love God.

And Jesus died for your body and he purchased it with his body and blood. And you know that. You know God. So live a pure life.

[20 : 58] Well, to please God, we need sexual purity and we need brotherly love. And that would be a very sick, a very lopsided Christian if he was only concerned about himself in his own purity.

And he wasn't considerate thinking of how he could love his brothers and sisters. And Paul, Jesus Christ, doesn't want us to be lopsided Christians always thinking about making our lives perfect and ourselves perfect at the expense of loving our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Paul says in verse 9, Now about brotherly love, we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. Paul says we don't need to say much about this.

We don't need to say much about this because God has already taught you. His spirit has been in work in you. He's made you born again. And by that process he has taught you to love.

And so God doesn't first teach us how to love by giving us commands. We don't read the word of God as a dead heart with a dead soul in us and learn to love God's people that way.

[22:10] It's not like that. God teaches us to love one another first by putting a new heart within us. By putting his life, his heart within us.

John says we know that we have passed from death to life because we love our brothers. Anyone who does not love remains in death.

So the dead heart, unbelieving heart, can't know brotherly love. But then God gives life. And he puts a new heart, new affection, new desires, new taste buds in the Christian's heart.

And they love God's people. Before, they could care less. They could care less about seeing God's people. They were not excited about coming and meeting with God's people. But now, they say with David, as for the saints who are in the land, they are the glorious ones in whom is all my delight.

Are Christian brothers and sisters the glorious ones? There's lots of people that are worshipped as heroes in this world. And they see them as glorious.

[23:28] Are the glorious ones in your life brothers and sisters who love the Lord? They're all your delight. The new heart is like the Father's heart.

He loves the children. And so we love our brothers and sisters too. Well, the Thessalonians had been born again. They've been brought from death to life.

They've been taught by God to love each other. And their love was so big that they loved their brothers throughout all of Macedonia, throughout the entire region. They didn't keep their love in a tight circle and just love us for and no more and shut the door.

They loved their brothers in the entire area, the entire state, the entire province where they lived. And they didn't love people just at their church.

Because there were other churches throughout Macedonia and their love spilled over into their lives, into those churches. And there were some people that were different than them, and they loved them because they had this affection for God's people.

[24:34] And as a matter of fact, Paul praised the Macedonians, that's these people, for how much they loved their brothers and sisters.

Paul was going around collecting money for the church in Jerusalem. And he took the opportunity to praise the Macedonians, which includes the Thessalonians, for their generosity to the Corinthians. Paul writes this in 2 Corinthians, Brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity.

For I testify that they gave as much as they were able and even beyond their ability. So the church in Thessalonica was extravagantly generous with their love.

And they loved the church in Jerusalem. The church in Jerusalem was mostly Jews, very different from the church in Thessalonica. The church in Jerusalem was hundreds of miles away.

[25:48] The Thessalonians had never been there, they had never seen them, they had never met them, but God's grace was at work in their heart and they loved them. And that is the kind of love that should mark Grace Fellowship Church.

If we have known God's grace, and we have, you have, then it will move us to love generously. And Paul says, you love, but now love more and more.

We should please God more and more, and we should love our brothers and sisters more and more, excel still more. Well then, how can we love each other more and more? Paul tells us in verses 11 and 12.

Lead a quiet life, mind your own business, and work with your hands. And from 2 Thessalonians, we know that some of these people in this church had been taking to just, they quit their jobs, and they were going from house to house, mooching, loafing about.

Expecting their brothers and sisters to feed them when they weren't working themselves. And that isn't love. Paul wants to teach them how to love.

[27:04] They sort of had a case of the what about hymns. And you know what that is, right? Jesus is on the beach with Peter, and Jesus is telling Peter, this is your mission, this is what you have to do.

Feed my lambs, take care of my sheep, feed my sheep. And that's the instruction that Peter needs. And Jesus and Peter are walking, and remember, Peter turns around and he sees John.

And he says, well, what about him? Do you remember Jesus' answer? If I want him to live until I come back, what is that to you?

Does it really matter to you what happens to him? Quit worrying about him and worry about yourself.

And sometimes there are people in Christian churches, just like Thessalonica, where people are more concerned about what other people are doing and not so concerned about what they should be doing.

[28:12] They're like little children in the mall. And maybe you've been there, maybe you've just been there, you're walking with your little children, maybe you're getting some after Christmas deals, and there your girls, your boys are.

And what are they doing? They're standing around, gawking, and you're trying to walk somewhere, and they're elbowing their sister, and they're stopping, and they're looking at what this person's doing, and looking at what that person's doing, and you're trying to walk, and you turn around, and they're 25 feet behind you.

What do you do? You have the picture? Well, what does the parent do? He takes those little boys, little girls' hands, or their face, and his hands, and he says, quit worrying about everything else.

You need to be worried about yourself. You need to walk. You need to follow me. You need to quit worrying about what your sister's doing, and walk. Follow me. Pay attention to what I am doing.

And that's Christ's words to us. To the Thessalonians, mind your own business, and keep up with me. I'm going this way.

[29:21] You need to be worried about following me. You don't need to be worried about what your brother and sister's doing unnecessarily. So, are you pursuing holiness with single-mindedness, or are you kind of long-necking, you know, to see what your brother and sister's doing, saying, well, I wonder what he's up to, and I wonder what she's up to, and well, what are they doing now, and look what he did, and can you believe what she said?

And admittedly, sometimes we have to say those things. We have to ask those questions. But a lot of times, we need to stop worrying about others. Stop nosing about another people's business, and follow Jesus.

And that's what Paul is saying. And if we did that, if we were focused more on being like Jesus and following Jesus, we would love more like Jesus.

Well, this can be easily spun out of context, can't it? Because I know the human heart, because I know somewhat of my own heart, and we can easily take this and use it as an excuse not to love.

So don't let your heart be deceived by making your own ambition to lead a quiet life and to mind your own business. Because your heart will say, you know what, that's good.

[30:41] I like that, because now I don't have to worry about what they're doing. I don't have to encourage them. I don't have to find out how they're doing. I'm to mind my own business. You know, the point of the command is love.

We can't use the command as an excuse not to love, not to get involved in people's lives and encourage them and find out how they're doing and praying with them.

we've been memorizing all those one another verses, and we can't do any of those if we're just minding our own business in the sense of we don't let anyone into our lives.

So, it's going to be easier, it's going to be cleaner to just avoid people, avoid relationships, and not love people.

But relationships are a mess worth making, and we shouldn't, we can't take this command and use it as an excuse not to do that, to not to make relationships.

[31:45] So, now, you know, the Thessalonians, they're going about from house to house, they're mooching off of other people, they're loafing about, and Paul says, instead of that, you need to work with your own hands.

Work with your own hands. Don't live off of other people's labor. work for your, work yourself, save yourself, sacrifice so you have something. And there's times, of course, when the church must help folks out.

And we're not saying that, but if it's at all possible, people should be working hard to provide for themselves and their families, and so the church doesn't have to be burdened, because that is love. It's not loving to be living off of the church's people when it's not right for you to be doing that. Paul told the Ephesians, he who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need.

The goal is to work in order to share. You can steal to have, you can work to have, but those all, those fall short. The goal is to work in order that you have something to share.

[32 : 56] And so, carry your own luggage, and carry someone else's luggage, but don't sit around and watch everyone else carry your suitcase up the flight of stairs. That's the loving thing to do, to carry your own weight, to work to share.

That is what love looks like in action. So love more and more. Well, if we work hard and mind our own business, because it's the way we love each other, it's the way we're not dependent on anyone else, and there's a second motive.

You see it in verse 12. So that your daily life might win the respect of outsiders. And this is a powerful motive.

Going about mooching off of other people and slacking off, that is a great way to bring the gospel and the church into disrepute, to discredit them.

So if you're slouching off and other people see you, they're going to write off the gospel. They're going to write off the church. Instead, the way that we order our lives, the way we work and provide for our own, should earn, should win the respect of outsiders.

[34 : 16] And so let me ask you, if an unbeliever were to open up your checkbook, they were to look at your credit history. Would that earn their respect or would they say that is a joke and just completely write you off and the church off and the gospel off?

Does your daily life win the respect of outsiders? How do you take care of your house and your lawn? How do you take care of your body and those sorts of things?

do they win respect? And I'm not being picky here. Remember in Proverbs, Solomon was out walking one day and he walked by the field and the house of a sluggard.

How did he know that that was a house of a sluggard? Well, because it was clear as day to anyone who wanted to see it. Thorns had come up everywhere.

The ground was covered with weeds and the stone wall was in ruins. The point is people see how we live. People see how we take care of the things God has given us and they make judgments based on that.

[35 : 28] On what they see. So does your home do the gospel credit? You don't have to be wealthy in order to be tidy, in order to take care of your things well.

Or do they walk by and say that person is lazy and write you off, write the gospel off, and if you ever had a chance to tell them of the gospel, they are not going to listen if your house, your life, your family is in shambles.

So they need to hear the gospel. They need to believe the gospel if they're going to ever be happy forever and ever. And if you are going to love them, they need to hear the gospel from you and your life.

All of that stuff that we've talked about, it needs to be backing your message up. It needs to be winning their respect. So are you helping people onto the gospel?

Are you helping them forward to see how attractive and beautiful Jesus is? Or does your life not match what you say? If you want to love your brothers and sisters, if you want to love those on the outside, then work hard, live a respectable life.

[36 : 42] Well, Paul has given us two things to work on in order to please God. Sexual purity and brotherly love. And when we do those two things more and more, then we are going to have God's smile upon us.

His fatherly affection will be upon us. We don't do these things to save ourselves because Jesus Christ has already saved us. And so the motive isn't guilt.

The motive is what God has done for me. And I want to enjoy him more and more. And if you're going to enjoy God more and more, if you're going to meet him all throughout your life, then you

need to be pursuing holiness.

And that means sexual purity. And it means brotherly love. And so if we want to please him more and more, do those two things. Well, let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word that instructs us, that teaches us and corrects us and rebukes us and trains us in righteousness. We need your word to do that work in us now.

[37 : 59] Father, will you help my brothers and sisters to keep the gospel before them, to be enjoying God now? And so that they will begin to work out their salvation with fear and trembling and with great joy.

Will you give grace to any brother or sister mired in sexual immorality? many times in the songs you talk about, you write, that you have helped those people out of the miry clay and the pit.

So will you help my brothers and sisters out of that? They are there. Father, will you help us to love one another more and more? Thank you for the love, the grace that you have poured out into the people's hearts here at Grace Fellowship Church, and I pray that more and more of that would be found in us.

Will you keep us from being lazy, keep us from living off of one another and seek to live in order to give, whether that's financially, whether it's spiritually, in whatever way that we do.

Will you help us to love one another more and more? Thank you for the Lord Jesus that takes all of our sin and he washes us. He takes all of our righteousness that is still sinful and he washes it and presents it to you, our Father.

[39 : 26] We thank you that you are pleased with us because of him. Will you help us to rest in that? In Jesus' name, amen.