

**1 Thessalonians 4:1-8**  
**Bible Study Commentary and Discussion Questions – Living Holy Lives for God**

**Outline**

I. Command to be sexually pure (1-8)

**Discussion Questions**

- Why does Paul use the word “finally” in chapter 4 when there is so much of the book left?
- What kind of teaching had Paul and his team given them before?
- What was the basis by which Paul could give them commands on these important and sensitive topics?
- Whose opinion or idea is found in verses 3-8?
- What does sanctification mean?
- What are some examples of sexual immorality?
- So, what is the negative command which they are NOT allowed to do?
- In contrast, what are they supposed to do?
- What does this negative and positive example teach us about the proper view of sex?
- What Biblical examples show both positive and negative examples in this area?
- What temptations might we face in the modern world?
- How can we resist and flee from these temptations?
- What does verse 4 refer to? What does “his own vessel” refer to?
- What does verse 6 mean? How could someone transgress and defraud a brother?
- How can a single person apply this passage? What can a single person do to ensure that he/she remains pure?
- What can someone who is courting do to safeguard both his and his potential spouse’s purity?
- How about someone who is married?

**Cross References**

1 Timothy 4:12 – Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

1 Corinthians 6:18 – Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body.

Hebrews 13:4 – Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous.

Ephesians 5:5 – For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

Romans 13:14 – But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.

Psalms 51:10 – Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.

Colossians 3:5 – Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

Titus 2:12 – Training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age,

## Verse by Verse Commentary

1. Finally then – Many of Paul’s epistles are divided into two parts, doctrinal and practical segments. This book, however, is divided between the personal/historical and practical. Using the word “finally” here doesn’t necessarily denote the end of the book as much as it shows us a transition is taking place between the two segments of this book. Paul had shared about their history and background and where they had come from in their Christian walk. Now he would give them God’s standard for holy living.

2. We request and exhort – Paul continues his practice of encouraging Christlike behavior through encouragement and exhortation rather than only point-blank commands. We see in verse 2 he had also given them commands and instructions, but he doesn’t choose only one method of communication. Both methods are useful and important in their place. We saw in the previous chapter how Paul came alongside them like a father and pleaded with them like a father would his own children. From this, we learn how much he cared for them. His concern for them was genuine and from the heart.

3. As to how you ought to walk and please God – “Walk” is a word often used in the Bible to describe a believer’s life, as well as his relationship with the Lord. It shows us that our life should be one of action. Our life has direction and a purpose.

I am reminded of how I generally walk. Many people like to walk leisurely (stroll or amble) just to kill time and with no destination in mind. They may do this while window shopping or just for relaxation. I can barely stand it. Somehow it is just in my DNA that when I walk, I must walk fast! And I must be going somewhere. And if I am going somewhere, I should get there as soon as possible! Sometimes when our family goes out for a stroll by the river, I have to catch myself because I find myself straining to walk as quickly as possible even though we aren’t really going anywhere.

Well, the Christian life is to be “walked” like I walk. It is a journey and there is a destination. We don’t just amble around. Instead, we are to be people of action, full of purpose, with a clear direction.

And to please God.

The first part of that phrase shows our actions, our behavior. The second part focuses on our motives. Pleasing God should be our primary motive in all that we do. We should choose our careers to please God. We should manage our money to please God. When we get married, we should hold a wedding that will please God. We should raise our children in such a way that should please God. And so on. Everything we do should be to please God. He cares about our actions AND our motives.

4. Just as you actually do walk – Paul makes it clear that he is not accusing them. He is not blaming them for not doing this. Even people who are doing well need encouragement to keep doing well and to do even better.

A. Be encouraging to others – Do not only focus on the negatives by nitpicking others’ faults. When you see them doing well, tell them so.

B. Success yesterday does not guarantee success tomorrow – Paul understood this truth. When we do well, we may get prideful or complacent. Both of those attitudes are recipes for failure. Paul made sure they kept their heads in the game until the very end.

You don’t want to be like the 2013 San Antonio Spurs. They had an amazing regular season. They won 15 playoff games. They were ahead by 5 points with 27 seconds left in the game. Officials began bringing out the stage to hand out the trophies. Statistically, they had well over a 99% chance of winning that game and the NBA championship. But...they didn’t. In the last 27 seconds, they collapsed with a multitude of mistakes. The lesson

is to not live in the past. If you followed the Lord yesterday, great! But today is a new day. You will face new decisions and new temptations.

In 2014, the Spurs went on to face the same opponent in the finals, the Miami Heat. And this time, they won and didn't look back. Instead of reliving their past mistakes, they looked forward and had one of the best finals performance in NBA history.

Application: Whatever you have done in the past, good or bad, you need to move past it. Face each new day with purpose, relying on God's strength for victory.

5. That you excel still more – This was Paul's hope. As well as they were doing, he wanted them to do even better. Believers should always have a certain amount of "healthy dissatisfaction." That doesn't mean we should be discontent with our circumstances. It means we should not be content with our own behavior and thoughts but should strive to "excel still more."

6. Verse 2 – We need lots of reminders – Many Christians like to learn "new truth." Pastors and teachers feel pressure to give sermons with fresh angles. But there isn't actually any new truth from the Bible because it is complete already. One can only share the Christmas story in so many different ways. Most of the Bible is not new things, but rather the same things repeated again and again.

7. For this is the will of God – In the world today, people think that believers who preach fidelity and sexual purity are bigoted and judgmental. We are out of touch with reality and living in the past. We don't accept progress. Maybe some would say that is just our opinion, "It's fine if you want to live that way. Just keep it to yourself." Well, this is not Paul's opinion or our opinion. It is the will of God. God's will in the following verses is very clear: He wants us to be holy and pure and to follow his guidelines for properly exercising our sexual desires.

8. Your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality – This principle was not given because the world was conservative or traditional at the time—quite the opposite. Greek culture was decadent. Sexual immorality was in vogue. Divorce was rampant. Mistresses were commonplace. Slaves were bought and sold as concubines. Every kind of sexual perversion and practice was engaged in. For the most part, it wasn't done in secret. There was little shame.

One of the root causes was the religion of that area. Temple cult prostitution was commonplace. Prostitution was considered a form of worship. This command did not stem from culture's "backward" views. It, instead, was necessary because people/culture had fallen so far from God's original plan.

Thessalonian believers grew up in this environment. They faced these temptations every day, everywhere they went. But the fallen culture wasn't an excuse to practice the same sins that were so commonplace around them. God wanted them to be sanctified. He wanted them to be set apart from the evil around them. He wanted them to be different. Whereas the people around them would run toward these sins, God wanted them to run in the other direction. The Thessalonians were to abstain, to stay far away. Other verses, like 2 Timothy 2:22, command us to flee (like Joseph did).

So, let's discuss some of the common areas of sexual immorality these days.

A. Fornication – Living together before marriage is rampant. In most countries in the world, it has been completely accepted. Those who do not live together before marriage are considered weird. This brainwashing starts in public schools with sex education. It is proliferated by organizations like Planned Parenthood. What are schools teaching about this issue now? People are taught about "safe sex." They learn to protect themselves from STDs. Women learn to protect themselves from pregnancy with various types of birth control.

Let me give you God's authoritative guide to "safe sex." You don't need a long curriculum. There aren't any difficult terms or hard-to-understand words. What is more, it is the absolute cheapest and the absolute safest way to protect yourself possible. ABSTAIN. The only place for sex is within marriage. Every other place is immoral. Let me make it clear that this verse does not prohibit sex. It does not say "abstain from sex." It says, "abstain from sexual immorality."

God created our sex drive, and like everything else God created, it is "good." But like almost everything else, it can also be twisted to become bad. Evolutionists teach us that sex drive is nature's way of ensuring reproduction. It is necessary to propagate our race. God wanted sex not just to be a chore but to be something that could be greatly enjoyed. How do I know? Read Song of Solomon and many of the Proverbs. Sex within God's guidelines (of one-man, one-woman marriage for life) is very pleasurable. If God didn't want sex to be enjoyed, He wouldn't have set it up like He did. Interestingly, people who don't follow God claim to be liberated about sex. Yet, it is our theology that tells us that sex should be pleasurable and enjoyable and not only as a means of reproduction.

B. Adultery – Note that the Bible includes impure thoughts and divorce/remarriage as types of adultery in God's eyes.

C. Pornography – This is widespread, even in the church. Is it right or wrong? How do we know since the internet (which is not the only type, but the most prevalent type) didn't exist at that time? How can we guard ourselves against this? How can we get/sustain victory?

Two helpful resources are [covenanteyes.com](http://covenanteyes.com) and [settingcaptivesfree.com](http://settingcaptivesfree.com).

D. Masturbation – It is sinful. Don't let Satan deceive you into thinking it is acceptable. It is not.

E. Lust – This is a general category that encompasses all of the above and more. Let's face it. In today's world, many ladies do not dress modestly. You might be walking along, minding your own business (perhaps even reading the Bible on your phone), and then boom, right in front of you is a lady wearing revealing clothes. What should you do? A lot of guys would gawk or stare. After all, they might think, who can blame them? It is not like it is their fault. Is it wrong to stare at a pretty lady? Is it wrong to notice someone is beautiful? What solutions are there for us to deal with these problems?

One method is to practice the "bounce off" philosophy. Let your eyes bounce off immodesty.

A side note on modesty – Husbands, it is also your responsibility to remind your wives about this and make sure what they wear is modest and will not cause guys to stumble. Women don't always know how guys think. Christian ladies will hopefully not intentionally wear revealing clothes, but they may do it unknowingly. Husbands can act as a screener. Remember to "speak the truth in love." Also, I should mention that it might require shelling out money for your wives to buy new clothes. If that is what it takes, do it. I've heard from my sisters and my wife that modest clothes are not very easy to find. You can help facilitate that by being willing to give your wife the money she needs to overhaul her wardrobe.

I would also like to encourage all future husbands to take in active role in what wedding dress your wife will wear. There is a widespread trend for women to wear a revealing dress at the wedding. This is commonplace even in the church but should not be so. Remember from the first part of this chapter that we should do everything to please God. God is not pleased with a wedding where the bride is not modest. The wedding is not a time for the husband to "show off" what he is getting. It is time for the wife to save herself and how she looks for her husband.

9. Verses 4-5 – There are two possible interpretations of this verse. One is that “his own vessel” refers to one’s spouse (1 Corinthians 7:2-5). In other words, a husband should cherish his marriage and show himself to be faithful. This meaning would be similar to the verse in Hebrews 13:4, which commands that the marriage bed be held in honor by all.

The second possible interpretation is that “his own vessel” refers to himself. In other words, he should use his sexual capability in the way God intended, not like the man in Proverbs 5:16.

It is unclear which one is referred to, but the debate is somewhat muted because the application of either interpretation is exactly the same. Husbands and wives are to be pure. Following God’s standard is the honorable and holy thing to do. Those who follow God’s way can enjoy the rich plan God has for them. True joy always comes from obeying God’s standards and waiting for His timing rather than fulfilling our desires outside of God’s guidelines.

10. Verse 6 – This verse is an important one. It tells us that the person who commits fornication actually defrauds his brother. That is, he robs the future husband. No husband would willingly let someone else take his wife and sleep with her. But that is what happens if a man sleeps with a woman and doesn’t marry her (assuming she gets married in the future, which she probably will).

Fornication is an inherently selfish action that robs everyone involved. It robs both parties who commit the act. Even if they end up getting married, there will be a lot of guilt and shame, which will cause problems in their relationship and take away their joy. If they don’t marry each other, the future spouses have been robbed, making the offending parties thieves in addition to their fornication.

The Lord is the avenger. He will judge those who break His laws in this. You might think no one sees, but God is watching.

11. Verse 7 – God has called us to purity. He does not want us to live the same way as before we were saved. Our lives should be transformed. Our minds should be changed. Our hearts should be transformed. How can you control and direct your thoughts so that you win the battle in your mind?

12. Verse 8 – This is God’s idea, not man’s. This is the message God has for all of us today. I know that we need it. We are all people. We are all sinners who live in this world. We all need God’s grace. Every one of us has sinned and fallen short of God’s commands in this area. If we refuse to change, we are rejecting God. If we refuse to repent, we are rejecting God. If we refuse to obey, we are rejecting God. He has given us the Holy Spirit to help us fight the battle on this issue. Get the help you need.

**Application:** Everyone take a paper and write down your application. You don’t have to show it to others. Just write down what God wants you to obey. Then I want you to choose a verse (maybe one we discussed today). I want you to write down the verse on that paper and memorize it. I would like to ask you to keep the paper in your pocket this week. Every time you are tempted, take it out of your pocket and read the verse. Then pray and ask God for help. Don’t keep doing the same sins again and again. Repent. Do whatever it takes to get the victory.