

Called in Holiness

“For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness” (**I Thessalonians 4:7**). Thus Paul explains one aspect of our calling. The point is not to try to be holy enough to be saved, but rather the purpose for which God saved us by the blood of Christ is not to set us free to linger in sin, but to set us free to walk in a manner pleasing to God more and more (see **I Thessalonians 4:1**). As Jesus told the woman caught in adultery in **John 8:11**, He wasn’t going to condemn her and that meant she should be motivated to go and avoid sin.

In **I Thessalonians 4:1-8**, Paul unpacks a plan for pursuing this holiness, especially in contrast to sexual impurity.

Step #1: Abstain from sexual immorality (I Thessalonians 4:3)—God’s will for us is sanctification. That is, He wants us set apart for His holy use. We cannot be both set aside for holy use and pursue sexual immorality. We know that the marriage bed is undefiled (**Hebrews 13:4**), but all other sexual activity is immoral and opposed to our sanctification and holiness. No doubt, most Christians agree with this and strive to follow it. But Paul doesn’t stop here.

Step #2: Control your body with holiness and honor (I Thessalonians 4:4)—Too many people think holiness can be accomplished by trying really hard to avoid sexual immorality. However, the battle for holiness begins well before acts of immorality. It involves how we present and control our bodies. This includes modest dress and appropriate bearing. We must not publically promote sexuality with the way we present our bodies. This is not a matter of trying to keep others from lusting, but a matter of being useful to the Master for every good work (**II Timothy 2:20-22**). We dress and behave modestly not to keep others holy (though that is a beneficial thought), but because we want to present ourselves as set apart for holiness so everyone in the world will know who our Master is.

Step #3: Avoid the passions of lust (I Thessalonians 4:5)—The battle for holiness is not merely about externals, but primarily about internals: thought, attitude, desire. While this includes men drinking in the visual stimulations that often lead to sexual lust, women also need to consider the romantic desires, yearning for the knight in shining armor to sweep them off their feet, delivering them from the humdrum of their normal married life. As **II Corinthians 10:3-6** demonstrates, we are to take even our thoughts captive as we pursue holiness.

Step #4: Do so more and more without disregarding God (I Thessalonians 4:1, 8)—Too often, we become satisfied with status quo. Paul says to do so more and more (some translations say, “excel still more”). Further, we can become satisfied simply doing better than others. We develop a set of rules we believe is stricter than most and believe we’ve won the holiness battle. That is not Paul’s advice. He tells us to keep on growing no matter where we are now. Furthermore, he explains if we disregard this plan, we aren’t disregarding Paul, neither are we simply disregarding some small part of God’s will. Rather, we are disregarding God Himself. This is God’s will for us, not Paul’s, not some preacher’s.

Let’s face it. The world is opposed to us in this. God has called us in holiness. The world thinks that is a bit extreme. Who will we choose? The world or God?