

1 Thessalonians Ch4v1-8 - Holiness Is Good For You

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Preacher: Jonny Grant

[0 : 00] For us this morning, thanks, Christine. So the reading is taken from 1 Thessalonians chapter 4.

! I don't have a page number if someone has one. 1 Thessalonians chapter 4.

As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. It is God's will that you should be sanctified, that you should avoid sexual immorality, that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans who do not know God, and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister.

The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

[1 : 42] Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being, but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

Thanks, Christine.

Well, let's keep our Bibles there as we continue in our studies of Thessalonians. Now we're going to pray and see what God has to teach us this morning.

Let's pray. Father, thank you that you have not left us in the dark, but you have given us your word that has been written down for us today.

A word that is powerful and able to change and transform. And so we ask that you would do a work in each one of us, that we would both become aware of our own hearts and the sin that needs to be dealt with, but also that we would experience your grace and your power to change us.

[3 : 21] So do a work amongst us individually and together as a church. And may it be for our good.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So how would you feel if someone called you holy?

Is that a prized remark? For most of us being called holy, it's something negative. You're such a holy Joe.

Anybody ever say that to you? Rather than a term to embrace, we can see it as something to erase. To be called holy, well, you're just boring.

You're judgmental. You're just religious. Why don't you just go and live in a monastery somewhere? No one wants to be called holy. Well, in our text today, we're going to see that holiness is actually good for you.

[4 : 32] In fact, everyone who says, I'm a Christian, should pursue holiness. Look at verse 1. As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God as in fact you are living.

We instructed you how to please God. So how do we please God with our lives? Well, if we read on, it tells us.

Look at verse 3. It is God's will that you should be sanctified. Sanctified simply means holy.

It is God's will that you should be holy. Verse 4. That each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy.

Verse 7. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.

[5 : 46] And the God who called us to live a holy life, look at the end of verse 8, is the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

You see, we get ourselves into such a mess trying to figure out what is God's will for my life? I mean, what course should I take in college?

Or what job should I apply for? Or who am I going to marry? Or where am I going to live? What's God's will for me come breakfast time? What cereal am I going to have?

Well, God is much more concerned, not so much with the jobs, or even the people we marry. He's much more concerned about our character and our behaviour.

Verse 3. It is God's will, it is God's design, his plan, his purpose, holiness, that we should be sanctified, that we should be holy.

[6 : 54] This is what God wants us to pursue. Holiness is good for you. Now, before we move on, it's important for us that we understand what holiness means.

Holy simply means to be set apart for God. God is different, he's separate, and we are to be set apart for God.

In other words, you belong to God. You live for God. But there's something else we need to understand about holiness.

Holiness is something we are and it's also something we become. Something we are and something we become. And to help us understand this, I want us to look at a verse in Hebrews. See what it says there on the screen? It's been talking about the death of Jesus and the effect that Jesus' death has on us. For by one sacrifice, he has made perfect or he has made holy forever, those who are being made holy.

[8 : 21] Do you know your past tense and your present tense? You see, through the death of Jesus, all our impure, unholy, sinful life is taken by Jesus as we trust in him and in its place we receive the purity and the holiness of Jesus.

So as I trust in Jesus, I am made holy forever. I am declared holy.

God looks at me right now and he sees me as holy. He treats me as being set apart for him and that is unchangeable and irreversible.

I am declared holy. That cannot be changed as I trust in Jesus. But it's also saying to us that not only are we made holy, we must now become what we are.

So daily I am being made holy. I am becoming more and more like the Lord Jesus. Think of it like this.

[9 : 38] Imagine that you've been elected to be the next president of Ireland. At your inauguration, the position of presidency is conferred upon you.

You can't take it, you can't just decide for yourself. It is something given to you. You are made president. And so from that time forward, everywhere you go and all that you do, you will be treated as president.

And now that you are the president of Ireland, you must start living as the president. So every ceremony you go to and all the different places you're called to, you become more presidential-like with every event that you do.

and so it is for the Christian. We're made holy and we are becoming holy. Verse 3, it is God's will, God's plan, God's design, that you should be sanctified, that you should be holiness.

Pursue a life of holiness. It will be good for us. So what does it mean for us to live a holy life? When we leave this building and we go to our homes and as we enter into a new week, what's it going to mean for us to be holy?

[11 : 09] Well, it affects every area of our life. Not least is sexual holiness. God is concerned with our sexual holiness.

Two big things we're going to look at from this. First, sexual holiness is best for you. So again, look at verse 3, it's so key.

It is God's will that you should be holy. Well, what does that look like? Well, look at the rest of verse 3. First, that you should avoid sexual immorality.

And second, verse 4, that each of you should learn to control your own body. And then verse 6, that you should do no wrong or take advantage of your brother or sister.

You see, it incorporates a whole area of our life. So we're going to look at these each in turn. First, it means that we avoid sexual immorality.

[12 : 19] now hang on a minute, you say. Who are you to tell me about how I should live? This is my life, my body, so I get to choose how I live, right?

No. If you are a Christian, remember, we have been made holy. So we are now set apart for God. We belong to God. So we become what we are.

Now I know people think that Christians think that sex is bad. It's not bad. It is a beautiful gift from God for our good and for our pleasure.

However, there's boundaries for our life. Sex is only good and right in the context of a faithful and exclusive marriage between one man and one woman.

Sex in any other context is to be avoided. In other words, it's not going to be good for you. We should, verse three, avoid sexual immorality.

[13:38] So sleeping with someone before you're married is wrong. So too is sleeping with someone who isn't your husband or wife. If you're married, that's wrong.

But it's much more than that. It's also the programs and the films we watch on TV. It's the images that we scroll through on Instagram.

It's the porn that we watch in the secrecy of our bedroom. we are to avoid it. Literally, it means make a clean break from it.

Remove the access that we have to the things that trip us up. Block the content that we watch. Stay away from the places that cause our eyes to wander and our minds to fantasize.

Be holy. It's good for you. And that means avoiding sexual immorality. but it also means control your own body.

[15:00] Verse 4. It's God's will that you should be holy. Verse 4. That each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honourable.

Now, we've got to take responsibility for the choices and decisions we make. Rather than feed our sexual desires, we're to control our desires.

We're not to be ruled by or mastered by our sexual appetites. Now, in our culture, if we're to say that in public, people will say, you're backward.

You're repressive. The message in our culture is my body, my life, my choice. If it feels good, if it makes you happy, if it satisfies your desires, then go for it.

There's no boundaries. Do what you like. Oh, there's just one thing. Just make sure everyone is cool about it.

[16:07] As the TV advert keeps telling us, have the consent conversation. no. As Christians, we don't follow the standard of the world.

We don't follow the TV adverts. Look what it says in verse 4, that we should learn to control our own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the pagans who do not know God.

In other words, we don't just take our cues and our standards from the world. We know God. We've been set apart for God.

We belong to God. So we don't follow the culture. We don't do what society says or how they describe what is right. No, we follow God's word because God is the creator and the designer of the universe and he knows what is best and right for us.

So be holy. control your body and what you do with it. But there's another one.

[17:24] Verse three, it's God's will that you should be holy. Verse six, and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister.

You see, the argument goes like this, that what I do with my life and my body is private. It's none of your business. As long as my choices and my decisions don't affect anybody else, it's okay.

But the point here of verse six is my actions and my choices are never ever private. I can never say, oh, it's just my life.

Think about it. An affair hurts your spouse and your family and your wider circle of friends.

Watching porn is not just me and an image on screen. It hurts real people who are exploited, abused, and very often enslaved for my satisfaction.

[18:39] Having sex with multiple partners is not just my choice and my decision, it's actually robbing their future spouse of what only belongs to them.

you see, sexual immorality, the choices and the decisions we make, are never ever private. It's never just about me.

It has a far wide reaching long term effect on multiple people. It wrecks and breaks wider relationships.

Be holy. this is God's will for you. Don't wrong your brother or sister. Now, sexual immorality is not only affecting me, it not only hurts others, it also has a profound effect on our relationship with God. Do you see at the end of verse six? The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins as we told you and warned you before.

[19 : 55] You see, our actions with other people, whether in person or online, are not just objects for pleasure. People, like us, you and me, are God's special creation.

We've been made in God's image, loved and treasured by him. Likewise, sex is not just a commodity to satisfy my wants and desires.

Sex is a beautiful gift from God for our good. So if we go about mistreating God's people, the people he designed and he created, and if we misuse the good gifts that God's give to us, the gift of sex, well, it is serious.

God takes it very seriously. Verse 6, the Lord will punish those who commit such sins. But, Johnny, I thought you keep telling us that God forgives us.

Well, good news. God does forgive us, and we're going to see a little bit more of that in a minute. But the problem is not with confessed sin.

[21 : 18] Verse 6 here is talking about unrepentant sin. It's the person who doesn't deal with sexual immorality and can't be bothered with pursuing holiness.

This is a serious matter. You see, the sign that I am set apart for God, the evidence that we belong to God is that we strive to become holy.

I've been made holy, and I am becoming holy. So, first, sexual holiness is best for you.

It really is. second, sexual holiness is possible for you. Well, I'm not so sure.

I don't think I agree with you. I mean, it is just so difficult to avoid. All those images and all those pictures, they just keep bombarding me.

[22 : 29] I try so hard, but I can't seem to break it or stop it. this holy living stuff just seems impossible. Well, I hear you, and I'm with you.

None of us here is perfect. Every one of us has failed and are flawed in our sexuality. But in the midst of our brokenness, there is good news.

God wants us to know that sexual holiness is possible. And we're going to look at two ways in which we can see we can do this.

Here's the first one. Remember our union with Jesus. Go back to verse one. He tells us we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living.

Now we ask you and urge you, in the Lord Jesus, to do this more and more. His motivation is to remind us that we are in the Lord Jesus.

[23 : 56] God and it reminds us that when we believe the gospel, that when we trust in Jesus, we are united to Jesus. And I know this is very simple, but if this hand here of mine is Jesus and this is me, when I trust him, I am in him.

So where he goes, I go. My life is united to him. His life is my life. one writer put it like this, we are one with Jesus, members of him.

It's not just our souls that are connected to Jesus, but our very bodies are too. Our bodies are members of Jesus, inseparably part of who he is.

Now that means Jesus is always with me. he never leaves me, he never forsakes me, and he's with me even when I sin, and he won't leave me when I sin.

Now that's a wonderful comfort to know that when I fail and fall, he doesn't run away from me, he doesn't abandon me, he's there when I confess to forgive me.

[25 : 12] But united to Jesus also means he is with me when I sin. In other words, Jesus is so united to us, and we are so united to Jesus, that when we sin, when I fail and fall, I am involving Jesus in that sin too.

In the letter to the Corinthian church, Paul addresses the same issue. And he's addressing an issue there, particularly amongst the men in the church who are sleeping with and using prostitutes.

And he wanted to address the issue. And here's what he said. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ himself?

Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never. Isn't it shocking what he's saying?

He's saying that if you are a Christian and you had sex with a prostitute, you are also uniting Jesus with that prostitute.

[26 : 40] That's the depth of our unity with Christ. You see, we can never view our sin as private and separate. We are united to him.

Again, a writer put it starkly like this. He says, it means we can't spiritually unhitch ourselves from Jesus to go off and sin and then come back to reattach ourselves.

We can't say, oh Jesus, you just stay here for a little minute. I'm going off here and I'm going to do what I want to do. My life, my choice, my body, don't tell me what to do and then I'll come back to Jesus again.

No, where I go, he goes. Where I am, he is. You see, Jesus is with you and will never abandon you when you sin.

Good news. But he is also there with us when we sin. When we watch things on our phones. When we let our hearts dwell on things we shouldn't.

[27 : 50] What we do with our spouse or partner. We are involving Jesus. So remembering our union with Jesus will cause us to remember his glory, his goodness and beauty so that we avoid sexual immorality.

So first we remember our union with Jesus. Second, we remember our source of help. Look at verse 8.

Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

It's good news. He hasn't left us alone to live this life. He's given to us his Holy Spirit. It's extraordinary that the God who is both pure and powerful lives in us by his Spirit.

He's taken up residence in our life. Again, from the same passage in Corinthians, Paul put it like this, do you do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit?

[29 : 10] Who is in you? Whom you've received from God? You are not your own. You were bought at a price through the death of Jesus. Therefore, honour God with your bodies.

So the Holy Spirit, God himself, is living in you if you're a Christian. But he's not just a lodger. We're not just giving him permission to stay.

He's a transformer. He's not just sitting down in our life, as it were, having a cup of tea. No, he's busy, he's working, and his goal within us is to help us to pursue holiness.

Now, his help comes to us in two ways. This isn't on the screen, but if you're taking notes, here you are. This help comes to us in two ways. First, the Spirit shows us the beauty of Jesus.

He shows us the beauty of Jesus. As we read God's word, the Spirit of God helps us to see how beautiful and good and bright Jesus is.

[30 : 28] You see, gratifying sex will never satisfy us, it will never fulfill us, it will leave us empty, the pleasure is always temporary.

But in Jesus we have one who is altogether pure, altogether better, one who is beautiful, one who is good, one who does satisfy, one who is truly pleasing.

C.S. Lewis, the author put it like this, it's a well-known quote, I'll read it to you.

He says, we are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with sex, when infinite joy is offered us. We're like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because we cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea.

We're just too easily pleased. Look at the beauty of Jesus who comes to us to forgive and give grace and mercy, one who is altogether better.

[31 : 46] First, the Spirit shows us the beauty of Jesus. Second, the Spirit gives us the power of Jesus. You see, we need the Spirit's help.

And as we ask him, he gives us the power to say no to what is impure and yes to what is holy. We come in humility, we come weak, we put our hands before him and say, I am broken, I am lost, fill me with the power of your Spirit to strengthen me so that I can live the life that will please you.

He will provide what we need in the fight and he will forgive when we fail. He will provide what we need in the fight and he will also forgive when we fail.

Verse 3, it is God's will that you should be holy. Pursue holiness.

It is good for you and it's not just good for you, it's possible. Through God, by the power of his Spirit, who enables us to see the beauty of Jesus and gives us the power of Jesus.

[33 : 21] Let's just take a moment where we are seated in the quietness just to reflect and ask God right now to do a work in our life that will holiness and turn from what is wrong.

As we began our time together this morning, we said that God's word would make us aware of our sin, but also that we would experience his grace.

Father, we confess where we have fallen and failed, where we have acted in purity, and we ask for your forgiveness and ask for the help of your Holy Spirit that you would continue to show us the beauty and the greatness of Jesus, and that you would give us the power that we need to live the life that you have called us to.

Thank you that you do not fail us, but you are good. So help us now this week to pursue holiness, because it's good for us, and it will reflect your glory.

In Jesus' name, amen.