

CALLED TO BE DIFFERENT: LIVING PURE IN AN IMPURE WORLD

Week #17; Nov. 15, 2026, 11AM

Taught at: Ridgeview Classical Schools
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Review:

- It's been three weeks since our last study in ***1 Thessalonians.*** We celebrated The Lord's Supper the last Sunday of October – as we always do at the end of each month.
- But then, for the two Sundays following, I gave a special two-part series called **"Living Out Our Calling In a Crazy World."** It turned out to be timely, and both of those lessons are already up on our YouTube channel.
- But now, back to ***1 Thessalonians.*** We've moved into ***Chapter 4,*** and we have studied ***vss. 1-3*** of that chapter. We've learned some of the basics about 'sanctification.'
- It's a word that is mentioned a lot in Scripture. 'Sanctification' means to be set apart for God's purpose, and to be made holy.
- Practically, it means we must "mature in the knowledge of Scripture - - AND - - to **apply** what we **know** so we can **grow**."

NOTE: Let me try to explain this another way: There are two groups of people you really don't want to be identified with.

- I'm going to paint with a broad brush to illustrate these two basic problems:
  - ➢ The first group is **'knowers, but they're not growers.'**
    - ✓ This group is often more **ineffective** in their faith than they think they are. You cannot tell them that, but their faith is a performance.
    - ✓ That's because they've measured themselves incorrectly – they've not used God's standards of self-evaluation and 'sanctification.'
    - ✓ Typically, this group has been raised in the church, or they've been around the church a lot. They tend to know a lot about the Bible.
    - ✓ But they've settled into the routines of comfortable 'Christian culture.' In fact, they tend to be strong supporters of 'Christian culture' because it affirms them.
    - ✓ These routines have become their identity - - but the problem is they don't REALLY apply the things they know the way they need to be doing.
    - ✓ This group tends to be rather rigid in their patterns – they like things the way they are. They are often more obsessed by what they are NOT than by what they SHOULD BE.

- ✓ This group has habits they keep, circles they run in, and comfortable structures and ideas they don't want to have challenged.
- ✓ Again – typically - they KNOW a lot, but **by the standards of God's Word**, they've demonstrated their faith very little.
- ✓ They're certainly 'set apart' in their own way. They've made sure that they have nothing to do with the world or with anyone in it. There's not much they've put into action as far as reaching out is concerned.
- ✓ As a result, they've not really GROWN as they ought to be doing, and so they're not really being used for God's special purpose.
- ✓ This group stays as it is. They are affirmed in their choices by others who are just like them. These folks are **knowers, but they are not growers.**

➢ The second group is trying to be **'growers before they are knowers.'**

- ✓ This group wants to jump in and change the world for Jesus before they are properly equipped to do that, or before they know what that means.
- ✓ They have very little foundation and discernment, and just like the first group, they've failed to measure themselves by God's standards.
- ✓ As a result, they're not 'holy' or 'set apart.' In fact, they often mix with the world and with the way the world thinks more than they choose to be different than that.
- ✓ Their identity is not as much 'in Christ' as it needs to be. It's much more in 'cultural' elements. It's much more driven by their peers.
- ✓ This group may be newer to the faith than the first group. As a result, they may be more unfamiliar with sound teaching and traditional 'Christianity' than the first group is.
- ✓ Or – they may be this way because they've perpetually avoided sound teaching and doctrine. It's too confrontational for them, and so they've moved away from it over and over.
- ✓ But…regardless, and for whatever reason, their knowledge of God's Word is not deep. They've stayed shallow and impressionable - - and they oftentimes are more emotionally-based.
- ✓ True 'knowledge of Scripture' is too hard for this bunch - - it's much easier for them to feel OK by being part of the 'in' crowd. It's much easier to show emotion and engage in surface worship.
- ✓ They have passion - - lots of it! But, they have little doctrinal substance and discernment, and so they enthusiastically reset their sails to the latest 'Christian breeze' without a lot of wisdom or care.
- ✓ As a result, this group is vulnerable to believing things that sound right on the surface – but they are **not the Bible's standards.** They don't realize this problem they have because they're not 'set apart' as they should be.
- ✓ This group ALSO has routines that have become their identity - - they stick with people and patterns that reinforce what **they** most want to believe about themselves. This group tends to compromise.

- ✓ THEIR problem is they are putting things into action before they really know what they ought to be doing. They THINK they have insights and understanding which they don't.
- ✓ THIS group's biggest problem is they lack a strong foundation in God's Word, and so they are easily deceived and misled. They fail to understand what 'holy' really means, and it's not what interests them.
- ✓ The dilemma here with this second group is **they're trying to be growers before they are really knowers.** They lack the foundation they need to be set apart for God's special purpose.

- Both groups I mentioned have some concerning things in common. They have each failed to demonstrate that God's Word is making the **RIGHT** difference in **their** lives and in the lives of **others** around them.
- Neither group can honestly say (by God's standards) they are "faithfully enduring in one direction." They've each chosen a path, but it's not the right one or the best one.
- Both groups show a lack of wisdom and a lack of effective service. The first group doesn't give what they have, and the second group gives what they shouldn't have.
- Neither group is really demonstrating that they are 'set apart' or 'holy,' and so neither group is being used much for God's special purposes.
- The solution for both groups is to be 'sanctified.' That means BOTH groups need to "mature in the knowledge of Scripture - - AND THEN - - they need to **apply** what they **know** so they can **grow**."
- It's not "either/or;" it's both. Being 'sanctified' – as we've learned – is God's will for us ***(Cf. 1 Thess. 4:3a),*** and that means He wants every one of us to show that we are SANCTIFIED.
- He wants us to embrace what it means to be 'holy' and 'set apart.' He wants us to properly **grow** in our faith, and He wants us to **show** that in a way that makes us effective in our faith and useful for His purposes.
- Nobody who is a true believer in Jesus Christ is exempt from this. If you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, if you are seeking God's will for your life - - **here it is! God's will is that you be sanctified: that you 'know, grow, and show.'**
- It's ineffective to 'take in' Biblical truth - and then not produce anything of impact and substance by God's standards. You are not really set apart for God's purpose if this is describing you.
- It's just as ineffective to NOT 'take in' Biblical truth as you should be doing – and then you act with misdirection and error because you don't understand God's standards. That demonstrates all sorts of things, but 'holiness' is not one of them.
- An obvious outcome of being 'sanctified' means our values, motives, and decisions will conform to God's Word – rather than forcing God's Word to conform to our values, motives, and decisions.
- If we TRULY believe God's Word is divinely inspired, complete, inerrant, a reflection of God Himself, and our ultimate authority in life – it will change everything about us. Our right response to God's Word will cause us to be 'sanctified.'

NOTE: Remember that loaded question I rhetorically asked last time: *"If you made all your choices based upon what **pleases** God, then how much would that change YOU from the person you are being right now?*

- If it changes you very little, that suggests you are being sanctified right now.
- If it changes you a lot, that suggests you are not being sanctified right now.

NOTE: Our text today is ***1 Thessalonians 4:3–8.*** Here, we move from a definition of sanctification to understanding what sanctification LOOKS like when compared against the real world. In various ways, it's about **living with purity in an impure world *(READ!).***

NOTE: As we've seen to this point, Paul has been intentionally emphasizing the practical side of Christianity. This is all that 'application stuff.'

- This is putting into action what we know. It's a key part of 'sanctification' and being set apart. It's the 'nuts and bolts' of being used for God's special purpose.
- Sometimes we are apt to neglect this application element. We are so consumed with doctrine and **knowing** God's Word, that we do not sufficiently stress our personal calling and responsibilities as believers.
- And - - as I also illustrated, the opposite problem is just as bad. Sometimes we are so preoccupied with putting our faith into action that we jump before we know. We don't have enough knowledge of God's Word and so big mistakes are often made.
- **Both** sides of our faith and walk in Christ are important. We must invest ourselves into the proper study and knowledge of God's Word - - **so we can then** conduct ourselves as believers who are 'holy and set apart for God's special purpose.'
- Being 'sanctified' means we must **show what we know so we grow**. God has not called believers to merely profess faith in Jesus Christ, but to also demonstrate lives that reflect His character and purpose.
- As we learned before, and as ***vs. 3*** reminds us here once more, *"It is God's will that you should be sanctified."*

NOTE: We've learned about the **knowledge** part. We need to **know** God's will. Now comes the application part in the rest of this passage.

If we claim to **know** God's will, then that will show up through our sexual purity, our personal holiness, our self-control, and our genuine love for others. Both sides – the knowing and the showing – demonstrate together that we are 'set apart and holy.' They show we are growing.

A. The challenge to live holy: knowing God's will *(vs. 3a)*

NOTE: We touched on this last time, and now I want to unpack it a bit more…

1. IMPORTANT: God's will is not always the mystery we make it out to be.
    - I've known people that never really accomplished anything. They were too afraid of – or perhaps too consumed with - making a wrong move.

- ✓ They rarely made any decision because they were always afraid of being out of God's will.
- ✓ And so, they stayed put - spinning their wheels and going nowhere. I'd see them years later. Same thing. 'Spinning wheels and staying put.'
- ✓ I remember a 'Vicky' and an 'Allen' from Bible school. They were well-known on campus. They had dated forever and they were obviously in love and clearly good for each other.
- ✓ But they couldn't commit to each other as they needed to because they were afraid that they might be 'out of God's will.'
- ✓ I don't know what eventually happened to that couple – but for a long time they were so preoccupied with possibly missing "God's will" that they never got anything done. They never moved forward.

- There are a lot of things we don't know in life. There are a lot of things we need to pray about as we seek God's will. **But 'sanctification' is not one of those.**
- Paul plainly states in ***vs. 3*** that God desires our sanctification. It's His will for us! We don't have to guess, pray, or worry about this one.
  - ✓ God wants us to be 'holy and set apart.' He wants us to be used for His special purpose.
  - ✓ He wants us to **know** His word, to **show** a walk that impacts others, and to **grow** in our faith.
  - ✓ He wants us to apply the things we have learned. He WANTS us to be sanctified. It's perfectly clear!

2. And sanctification is a continuum. Being set apart for God purposes is not a 'start and stop' situation. It's not a neat little package we visit once in a while; it's an ongoing process and discipline.
   - Sanctification means our lives should **increasingly** reflect God's character and purposes. It means we are always having our rough edges chipped away.
   - None of this is easy, BTW. Sometimes being sanctified can feel like you are in the desert: feeling alone, thirsty, desperate, and maybe even 'trapped.'
     - ✓ There is no clear direction for you to go. May I suggest the best choice is for you to 'set up camp' right where you are and spend your time and energy diving into prayer and God's Word.
     - ✓ Even when it may seem everyone else around you is 'moving and shaking' in their relationships, in their ministries, in their jobs, and in their faith - - and you just feel stuck in first gear.
     - ✓ That's often a time God is trying to get our attention. It's a time God is shaping you and testing you for greater purposes.
     - ✓ He wants our focus to be on HIM and not on everything and everybody else. It's a time for you to mature in your relationship with God – and to get that right above **all else.**

NOTE: In the opening line of A.W. Tozer's classic book *The Knowledge of the Holy*, he says, *"What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us."*

I think - many times - we diminish the importance of knowing God's character and His purpose for our life. 'Sanctification,' by its very nature, means that God must be central to us.

3. Here's one more thought before I move on to my next point: sanctification requires our deliberate choices.
    - We cannot pursue Christ if we are choosing to treat sin as inconsequential. We cannot say we are being sanctified if we are making choices which take us off the narrow path that we need to be on.
        - ✓ For the true believer, there is a proper response to sin: we must confess it, and we must turn away from it. ***1 John 1:9*** says:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness"

        - ✓ Confessing it means we name it. We KNOW it. We are distraught by it, and we don't minimize it or blame others for it.
        - ✓ Turning away from it means we rely on Jesus Christ for the strength to go another direction instead. Repentance is what I'm talking about here.
        - ✓ Repentance means we need to have a change of heart that leads to a change in our behaviors. We don't **tolerate** sin; we **turn** from it.
        - ✓ Nobody's perfect – and nobody's going to be. Not in this life. But the point is sanctification does not coast – it does not hit cruise control.
    - Sanctification requires that we make deliberate choices to 'faithfully endure in ONE direction," and that direction is a righteous one.
        - ✓ It's a direction that chooses to set up **new habits.** It's one that establishes practical and sensible guardrails.
        - ✓ It's a direction that avoids vulnerable situations and temptations, and it's one which **chooses** to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit.
        - ✓ (Back to God's will for a moment): We cannot honestly say we are seeking God's will for our **future** if we are neglecting God's will for our **present**. We won't get to where we need to be if we are doing things we shouldn't be.

NOTE: That last point is a good transition into a very specific matter of our conduct that Paul outlines in ***vss. 3-8.*** This is the matter of our sexual purity, and I think there are few issues in our culture that are more problematic than this one.

B. The commitment to live with purity: controlling our bodies *(vss. 3–5)*
NOTE: Paul makes a clear point between the first half and the second half of ***vs. 3 –*** part of being 'sanctified,' and part of 'being holy and set apart for God's purposes' is *"avoiding sexual immorality."*

NOTE: Did Paul just pop off with a random thought here? I mean, he's been talking about living a life of faith, sharing the Gospel, persevering under persecution - - and now (BOOM!) he's talking about sex. Is there something more going on here that we need to consider?

- We need to keep the cultural context in mind as we study this passage. A major problem for the early church was maintaining sexual purity. Just like today!
- It was a big rumor in ***1 Cor. 5:1.*** It's one of multiple passages that outline this problem.
- Cities like Thessalonica (where these new believers lived) had all kinds of sexual looseness going on.
- The pagan religions around them were sexually immoral – they acted out their lewd desires without a flicker of conscience. There were hundreds of 'priestess prostitutes' at the Temple of Aphrodite in Corinth alone – that was the actual city Paul was in when he wrote this letter of ***1 Thessalonians*** about walking in holiness!
- The sanctity of marriage at that time and in these cultures was so distorted that extramarital sex was regarded as an act of worship.
- And so, Paul combats these things in this passage. He says it is the **will of God to live in holiness and sanctification,** and then he says that lifestyle cannot tolerate sexual immorality!
- His point is plain. There is NO liberty or latitude in the Christian faith that justifies or gives permission to sexual misconduct. The Bible is very plain that we need to pursue holiness, and that cannot be done if we are living as the world lives.

NOTE: One commentator (Jerry Bridges) writes of these issues: "*It is time for us Christians, to face up to our responsibility for holiness. Too often we say we are "defeated" by this or that sin. No, we are not defeated; we are simply disobedient. It might be well if we stopped using the terms victory and defeat to describe our progress in holiness. Rather we should use the terms obedience and disobedience."*

1. Paul gives us three basic instructions for how to live with purity and how to control our bodies in this area.
    - **First,** we need to avoid or flee sexual immorality ***(vs. 3).***
        - ✓ God has set boundaries which are for our good and for His glory.
        - ✓ When Potiphar's wife repeatedly tried to seduce Joseph in ***Gen.Ch. 39,*** he consistently rejected her advances. When she became more forceful about it, he was compelled to get out of his cloak in order to flee.
        - ✓ In ***Prov. 6:32,*** it says, *"He who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself."* It says the same thing in ***Proverbs Ch. 7;*** this type of sin shows a *'lack of judgement or sense.'*
        - ✓ These are just a few of the passages that show very clearly we bring self-destruction and ongoing adverse consequences into our lives when we engage in sexual sin.

- **Second,** Paul says in ***1 Thess. 4:4*** that we need to exercise self-control and personal discipline.
  - ✓ This means we need to govern our corrupt desires rather than be governed BY them.
  - ✓ It may feel like this is 'easier said than done,' but this point gets back to one I made earlier: we need to establish practical and sensible guardrails.
  - ✓ We cannot claim to be pursuing 'holiness and sanctification' if we are putting ourselves into vulnerable situations and exposing ourselves to temptations.
  - ✓ These two directions are incompatible. We cannot claim one thing if we are doing another.
- **And then, third,** we must choose to reject the world's standards in ***vs. 5.***
  - ✓ Paul contrasts Godly conduct with the passion-driven behaviors of those who do not **know God.**
  - ✓ When we act the way the world acts, it appears as though we do not **know God.**
  - ✓ This gets back to that 'set apart' element of sanctification: part of **knowing** God is **showing** we belong to God. We are different - -

C. The caution against taking advantage of others: honoring others instead *(vs. 6)*

NOTE: Paul is STILL dealing with the matter of sexual sins here. He says, *"in this matter,"* so he's referring to the issues he's just been writing about. But here, he takes a different angle on the same topic....

1. Paul cautions us that sexual sin may be nothing less than taking advantage of another person. Why would he say something like that?
   - ➢ The reason is sexual sins almost always involve some form of deception, some type of betrayal, and always the violation of another person's dignity.
   - ➢ Paul says the Lord will punish all those who commit such sins. Remember that God sees and He judges wrongdoing.
   - ➢ Some sins are private, but sexual sin seldom is. It should never be rationalized as merely a private matter between individuals.

2. The word *'defraud'* shows up in some translations in this passage, and it has led some to believe that Paul is talking about financial matters here, but that is wrong.
   - ➢ Paul is making the point that we are supposed to treat others as people who are made in God's image, not as instruments for personal gratification or gain - - like one might ALSO do in a financial or business matter.
   - ➢ This is all about acting selfishly. That's an underlying motive of many sexual sins that we don't typically think about.
   - ➢ It boils down to selfishly attempting to gain more than we ought to at whatever costs and means. It's about disregarding others and not properly considering their rights.

- When the word *"defraud"* means to selfishly and greedily take something at someone else's expense. It's all about being self-seeking. That's what sexual sin comes down to.
- The overarching point here in ***vs. 6*** is to not go beyond the line that God has drawn – don't take advantage of another person in the matter of sexual sin, especially to gain that which is forbidden by God.
- Considering the larger issue of sanctification here, we should not have an unlawful desire for things that do not belong to us, or which cross God's lines.

D. The conduct of our lives: remember our calling *(vss. 7–8)*

NOTE: Paul summarizes the things he's been sharing here by stating very plainly that God calls us to holiness, not to impurity. Our calling must shape our conduct.

1. Paul emphasizes that rejecting God's instructions to us is serious business.
    - His point is underscored when he states that disregarding these teachings he's just provided ultimately comes down to rejecting God Himself.
    - It's not as much about our horizontal relationships, it's about our vertical relationship. The much bigger issue is not about how we have violated others around us, it's about how we have violated God who has given His Holy Spirit to us as believers.

NOTE: This is a big issue in the Bible because it's a big problem. Paul addresses this same problem in ***Romans 6:19*** where he uses the same language as ***1 Thess. Ch. 4,*** and he says:

"I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented the parts of your body as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your body's parts as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification."

- Here, in ***Romans 6:19,*** we come full circle with the main points of all this:
    - ✓ Our flesh is weak and our fleshly desires to sin are strong.
    - ✓ We have a choice that is in front of us – to be a slave to impurity, or to be a slave to righteousness.
    - ✓ If we choose impurity, that problem will persist and it will graduate.
    - ✓ If we choose purity, that will result in 'sanctification.' We will grow in our walk in holiness; we will learn what it means to be 'set apart.'

CONCLUSION: Our passion to be one who is 'holy' is a proper response to God's work in us. It is recognizing sanctification is God's will for us. We should not pursue purity merely to appear respectable, but we ought to pursue purity because we belong to God.

If there is an area of our lives where we have willfully compromised God's standards, then we are not honoring God. We have misused our bodies, we have misdirected our desires, and we have taken advantage of other people.

It is a dangerous thing to be living our lives by asking, “What can I get away with?” We should be asking ourselves instead, **“What honors God, and how do I show what I know?”**

NEXT WEEK: We continue in ***1 Thess. Ch. 4*** by examining what it means to love others and live quietly. These are two areas many of us need to improve.

Solid Bread Community was started with a passion to teach the truth of God’s Word – every part of it, as it was divinely inspired to be understood.

The rules are simple. First, teach what IS there. Don’t pretend the Bible is not saying what it is saying.

Second, don’t teach what is NOT there. Don’t force a passage to mean something it really doesn’t.

And – number three, if the Bible states it plainly, we should too.

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