

# How to 'Guarantee' Your Life Is Pleasing to God

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*First Things*

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**Bible Text:** 1 Thessalonians 4:1-5  
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The morning, I want to encourage you to actually open your Bibles to two very specific places in the New Testament. The book of 1 Thessalonians 4, that's where we're going to spend the majority of our time today, but we're also going to go back into 1 Corinthians 6 for a brief moment. If you are a guest, a visitor with us or maybe you haven't joined us in worship in some time, I want to invite you to a very specific and strategic journey through a small book of the Bible known as 1 Thessalonians.

Now, why is this book of the Bible so strategic? Why is it so timely? And the reason is because this is the very first letter, this is the very first book of the Bible that the Lord gave the early church some 20 years after the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And the reason it is so strategic is that you and I live in a world today when you use the phrase Christian or Christianity, it can mean a multitude of things to a various group of people. There are so many different expressions, there are so many different means, ways and preferences. In fact, over the years, Christians have gathered themselves together, and they have formed creeds and confessions, which oftentimes have led to debate and division. And so 1 Thessalonians allows us to recapture what was it or who was the church called to be, and one of the things that we've noticed by walking through 1 Thessalonians is much of the dissension, much of the division that we have under that umbrella of terms today is really not found in 1 Thessalonians because it was later infused by the personal preferences of humanity.

Today, as we come to chapter 4, we're in this section of 1 Thessalonians dealing with how we navigate life, how do we just walk in faith day after day? A couple weeks ago we talked about or we asked the question, whose voice should we listen to, and we went back into the prophet Amos who said that the word of God is a plumb line. So, whoever we're listening to, whoever's advice we're seeking, we need to make sure that it aligns up with what scripture has already communicated. And last week, we talked about who should we celebrate? Who's lives should we imitate, emulate? We talked about those seasoned believers who've been through thick and thin with the Lord. Today in chapter 4, we're going to deal with a subject matter that is one of the blessed curses of just walking through scripture. When you go chapter by chapter and verse by verse, you just have to deal with what the Lord puts before you. But the title of today's message is "How to Guarantee that Your Life is Pleasing to God." In just a moment, that phrase is going to be

used about how we are pleasing to God and this passage deals with a subject matter there is no debate, there should be no division, there is no "gray areas," the Bible is going to make it very clear that on this issue, you are either living a life that is pleasing to God or one that is "much contrary to."

1 Thessalonians 4, beginning in verse 1. It says,

1 Furthermore then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. 2 For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication: 4 That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; 5 Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:

So today's we walk to this very important passage, it's going to make it very clear how our lives can be that which is "pleasing to God." So I want to begin with a synopsis, the subject matter that is at hand. How do you define this subject when it says that we should abstain from it, we should have nothing to do with it? Allow me to use the definition and the description that Jesus Christ himself utilized. Matthew 19, there's a group of people who have come into his presence, they're debating with him, they're discussing not only his validity as being the claimed Messiah, but that which he is teaching that is so contrary to their lives as well as those within their culture and in their community. And when pressed upon this subject matter, I want you to hear what Jesus Christ says in Matthew 19. He says, "And since it was from the beginning that a man and a woman as husband and wife should be in marriage together." He basically says that anything else finds itself under the umbrella of the subject that is at hand. It says that we are to abstain from anything that does not match and/or reflect how God has ordained us to live our lives one with another.

So what's the attitude that God is using here in the chapter? Let me be honest with you, it's very negative. I mean, think about abstain, keep away, don't be like, don't do this. It's kind of reminiscent of what we know as the 10 Commandments and a lot of times we give the 10 Commandments a bad name because it's thou shalt not, thou shalt not, but then you read the book of Exodus and you read Leviticus and you read Numbers and what you discover is that humanity has found hundreds of different varieties of ways to try to get around what God said does not or is not beneficial to us and so the Lord then begins to expound. In fact, per this subject matter alone, if you'll go back to Leviticus 18 and 19, it lists almost every conceivable way that humanity has tried to get around what God says is not profitable for us.

Let me remind you, John 1, it says to those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, that we have the privilege, we have the right to be declared his children. You say, "Why is that important?" Because I want you to imagine as a child or as a parent now or as a grandparent, if you had a loved one, if you had a child that was determined to run out into

the middle of oncoming traffic, you'd get a little negative, wouldn't you? "Stop! Don't! Get back!" Why? Because you know the damage that's about to incur. You know the destruction that is about to take place. And so the reason that this passage is so negative is because God realizes, and we're going to explore this in just a moment, how destructive this subject matter has been not just for decades or centuries but since time beginning.

So what are the actions? What does God call us to do? It says in verse 1 we ought to walk to please God and abound more for you know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, we are called to progress, to walk, to take step after step doing it "God's way." And I know again we look at these issues, we look at these commandments, we look at all these things and in the flesh it seems so restrictive. "Don't be there. Don't go there. Don't participate therein." But can I remind you not only as you go back in the Old Testament but as you come throughout in the New Testament, the reason that God does this, the reason he says walk within my commandments, the reason he says do it according to what I've said, is not so that he can somehow be the great cosmic killjoy in our life. He's trying to protect us. He's trying to ensure that our lives are all that he has designed them to be.

Can I give you some awareness for a moment? This subject matter that's at hand in this passage, I believe not only through personal experience of observing humanity for almost half a century but from reading scripture, this is the number 1 issue that derails humanity's life. This is the issue that brings more discouragement, more destruction and more damage to our homes, to our culture and to our community, and basically God is saying that if you'll just do it my way, everything can work out but when you try to do it any other way, it always brings the opposite of what you hope that it would.

So allow me to walk through the biblical record of how this subject matter has brought so much damage and destruction to humanity. Let's go all the way back to the book of Genesis. Chapter 3, Adam and Eve fall into temptation and sin. They're exiled from the garden of Eden. Chapters 4 and 5 are pretty much a genealogical report of who's born to who and who lives where. Then you get to chapter 6, it's really the first major event in the Bible post-humanity's fall into sin. We know it as Noah's flood. It's a famous event. God comes to Noah. He says, "I'm bringing destruction through water upon the earth. I need you to build a boat. I need you to build a boat not only to hold the animals but to hold humanity. 120 years from now if they are not on the boat, they're going to die." And he says this, "because humanity's every thought is completely wicked against God." You say, "Well, what does that have to do with 1 Thessalonians 4?" The first two verses of Genesis 6 say this, "That in those days the sons of God went into the daughters of men and they had children of renown." Now it doesn't go into explicit detail and there's a lot of different theories, but what we discover is this: that whatever they were doing in Genesis 6 did not match what Jesus said in Matthew 19.

And so from the very beginning, we see that this struggle and this issue has derailed humanity and led us to the opposite of what we aspired to do and be. Fifteen months later after the flood, they get off the boat. You would think that the eight souls that were on the boat would have learned their lesson. There was a common denominator to everybody

who drowned in the flood. But in Genesis 9, it says shortly after disembarking off the ark that one of the children of Noah, Ham, goes into the tent of Noah and all we know is that whatever he did in that tent was so vile and so contrary to God that his son was cursed because of it. You would think that word would get around that this is not a wise decision of how to behave ourselves.

A couple chapters later, there's a man by the name of Abram. He's out just tending the font, minding his own business. The Lord comes to him and says, "Hey, I need you to go to a place you've never heard of. You and your wife, though your older in age, you're going to have a child and that lineage is going to produce the Messiah, the one who's going to atone for all this mess." They go to the land, they go to the place where God tells them to go. They're aged, seeing that things aren't working the way they thought, so what happens? Abram makes a decision along with his wife to have a relationship with a woman named Hagar that classifies as the issue we find in 1 Thessalonians 4, and if you don't think this issue brings damage and destruction, the child that Hagar produced and the child that Sarah produced are still waging war with each other today. Why? Because they decided to go in an area God warned them not to go.

Few years later, we have a man who is celebrated rightfully so, we know him as King David. King David took the kingdom further and greater than anybody past or present. In doing so, he was a mighty warrior for the Lord. 2 Samuel 3 says in the days that kings went out to war, David stayed home. That night he stayed home. He went up in the moonlight. He couldn't sleep and he noticed in the distance a young lady by the name of Bathsheba. He decided to follow in the footsteps of Abram and of Ham and of humanity in general, and you know what that relationship brought? Damage and destruction not only in his own personal life, it led to the destruction of her husband and the subsequent events.

Time cannot allow for me today to walk through every single biblical account that every time humanity decides that this is an area we need to participate in, it always goes sideways, it always brings damage and it always brings destruction. So basically God's said, "Hey, it's a pretty clear line. If you'll walk in my ways on this one, you're pleasing to me. If you don't, destruction will always follow."

Now let's deal with particular situations, not just a grand synopsis. Let me encourage you to go back to 1 Corinthians 6 for just a moment. 1 Corinthians 6:18 through 20. The same subject matter is being addressed. The same issues are "being struggled with." I want you to hear how the Lord directs them to respond to the subject matter. Verse 18, "Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's." So what is the attitude that God desires us to have in response to this passage? He says that we should see our lives, we should see our bodies as the temple, the dwelling place or the house of the Holy Spirit of God.

Now I want to take that and kind of run with it just a little bit. You and I today, and I know we have those that are watching online, but we have physically gathered in a place that we call "a church." This is a building, it's a structure where we have gathered to worship, to study, to fellowship, etc. But you understand that even as parents and grandparents and those of you remember as children, there are very clear instructions that we've been raised with of when it comes to how we should behave at places like this. How many of you at some point in your life were told by a parent or grandparent don't run in church? Don't yell in church? As we get a little bit older, I don't think I'd say that in church or I've got something to tell you but I'm going to wait until we're out of church. In other words, we recognize that there are some behaviors, there are some dispositions, there are some communications that just have no place here. But here's the attitude that whenever you walk off of these grounds, you're still the church. Wherever you go, wherever the Lord takes you whether you're at home, the office, the ballfield, it doesn't matter, if you're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you're the temple of the Holy Spirit, and so if we wouldn't advocate it here, why would we advocate it out there?

Now let's deal with the subject matter. There is not a single solitary person who is either watching or listening to my voice right now that thinks this subject matter would be appropriate in church. At least I hope you don't. Not one of us, so why should it be appropriate outside of church? You see the attitude? The attitude is that we ought to live lives "out there" that we would advocate in here because we're just as much as the church out there as we are in here.

So what are the actions? What does he say in verse 18? Flee! Let me put that in Southern-ese. Run! That's what it means, that when the situation, when the subject matter presents itself, get away as quickly and as fast as you can. Now there is a movie series that has happened over the last couple of decades that was based on a book series entitled Jurassic Park. Now this is one of those pretty well-known in our culture stories and I hate to be the spoiler, but if you haven't seen it, I'm about to spoil it because you should have seen it by now. Okay, that's just straight up. You should have seen it by now. But basically the story of Jurassic Park goes a little something like this, that through scientific investigation and exploration, they have found the DNA of what we know as dinosaurs within the fossil record. They've extrapolated it and they have resurfaced the dinosaurs. Now here's the spoiler alert: it does not go well at all. And we discover that these creatures in the movie are not as friendly to humanity as humanity would have desired. And so allow me to give you a brief summary of how the latter half of every one of these movies goes. You ready? Humanity's minding their own business. Dinosaur shows up. Run! They run over here. Okay, we're okay. Dinosaur. Run! Dinosaur. Run! That's all they do for the last half of the movie is everywhere a dinosaur shows up, they run. Why? Because in every single case where humanity gets awed by or stays stationary or says, "Wow, isn't that impressive," what happens? They get eaten. That's the movie. That's what happens. And so when the Bible says flee this issue, can I implore some Jurassic Park in you? When you're in a situation where it shows up, run! If you're in a place where all of a sudden it presents itself to you, get away as quickly as you can because it only brings death and destruction.

So let me give you some awareness. Back in 1 Thessalonians 4, one of the things it says about this issue is that do not allow your lives to look like the Gentiles. Don't allow your lives to imitate the world that's out there. So let me give you some awareness. I can make this real simple because some of you are thinking, "Okay, I don't know when to run. I don't know where to run. I don't know how to run." If the subject matter on this issue is being advocated, supported, endorsed, or celebrated by the culture, just do the opposite. That's your awareness right there because how Jesus talked about the subject matter is completely opposite of what the world is promoting and pushing. They are trying to get you to participate and experiment with anything and everything that is contrary to what Jesus said. You need to be aware that on social media, television, podcasts, whatever they're celebrating, you need to run from and run fast because all it does is bring damage, death, and destruction and we have an entire historical record of the such which brings, shall we say for a lack of better terms, it brings to this issue in our lives of the struggle. This has been humanity's struggle from the very beginning and it's going to continue until the Lord returns. It's not going to go away and unfortunately in our world of technology, it's not going to get "any better or any easier."

So what should our attitude be? Back to 1 Thessalonians 4 for just a moment. There's a word that is used in verse 5 that is in some of your Bibles that I will be honest with you, it's one of the hardest English words in the language to pronounce in my opinion. It says concupiscence. It's a big fancy word, right? It's used three times in your Bible and every time that word is used, it is qualified by something. Here it says the "lust of." Later on it says "the evil of." And so when I talk about what should our attitude be in this struggle, understand that this word that God uses in scripture is a word for intense desire, passion, interest, or I want to be a participant of, and basically what the Bible is saying here is that this issue, this struggle, this concern, is something that is in every single one of us. It is desirous. We have this innate passion to want to participate in "the behavior" thereof. Here's the real question is how do we couple that attitude with the actions that God has called us to take, that we're to walk according to his commandments, we are to abstain from anything that is contrary to how he has defined and described?

So how do we take this attitude of desire and how do we couple it with a proper biblical action according to what God's word says? Allow me to give you an illustration. It is not new to myself. I'm sure you're somewhat familiar with it, but allow me to use it in light of this text. I want you to imagine a fireplace. I want you to imagine that it is a cold winter's night and that in that fireplace are the mechanisms by which to produce heat. You've got the fire and you've got the logs and you've got everything that makes it what it's supposed to be. Now within the context of that fireplace, everything's good but every now and then someone will communicate their desire to be warmer. They're not near as warm as they wish they were and so they want increased heat. So what does a responsible homeowner do? You either A) put more wood on the fire, B) blow, air on the fire, but you keep it contained within the fireplace because that's where it's safe. Now hypothetically and hopefully something that you have never have nor will ever do, let's just imagine for illustration sake that someone walks into the living room of your house and says, "Man, that fire sure does look good and I'm sure I'm needing some warmth in my life. Any way you can make it warmer in here?" You say, "Sure, no problem. I got this. Have a seat on

the couch." You go and take a log that is consumed with fire off the fire and you throw it on the couch.

Do you see the illustration? What is happening there is you're taking what they desired and you're pulling it out of the environment of which it was desired to be within. There's not a single one of you here who would ever take the log out and say, "Hey, I know you're 18, 19, 20, whatever it is. You've got passion and desire. Sit down on the couch and have some burning logs." You would never do it, right? And do you know why? Because it would bring death, damage, and destruction and basically what 1 Thessalonians 4 is saying is that this is a passion within humanity so I'd just keep it in the fireplace because soon as we pull it out it causes damage. Speaking of damage, you priced a new couch lately? They're not cheap. You priced a new recliner? How about an entire remodel of your living room? With home prices today, how about the replacement of your entire house? I got one for you because on this issue in particular not only can that log taken out of the fireplace set the couch on fire, the living room on fire, your house on fire, if the fire is not handled properly, it'll catch the neighbor's house on fire too and pretty soon the whole community can literally go up in flames because we didn't keep the fire where it was safe and designed to be.

Let me give you some awareness as we close. 1 Corinthians 6 again. I want you to hear this last verse. Tells us to flee, tells us we're the temple the Holy Ghost. It says, "You are bought with a price therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's." We talk about the price of a couch, price of a living room, we talk about all the death of destruction that that could or would bring, but look at verse 20, it says that Jesus Christ was willing to pay the ultimate price so that our lives could be different. Pay the ultimate price so our sin could be forgiven. Pay the ultimate price so our destination could be heaven and not hell. The next time we think about risking it "in this area" we might want to remember the price Jesus paid so we don't have to. Jesus was willing to give and to sacrifice and to bleed and to die and eventually victoriously raise so that you and I, we don't have to have lives of destruction, we don't have to have lives that are surrounded by death and damage, and based on a couple of verses earlier, we can actually walk through life knowing that it is pleasing to God. In this area, the world likes to send a lot of mixed signals. The Bible makes it very clear. Jesus Christ has paid the price that we could not pay so that you and I could live the life that we could never live apart from him.

Let's pray with our heads bowed and our eyes closed. As we come to our time of response and decision, even though the majority of the message has been about a specific issue that the Bible calls righteousness and sanctification, there is that closing verse that Jesus Christ has paid the price so that our sins can be forgiven and our lives can be changed. Maybe today you're here in person, maybe you're watching online, maybe you're listening on the radio, and there's never been that time, there's never been that place in your life where you've confessed your sinful state, you've recognized Jesus Christ's incredible substitute and price he paid on the cross, and you've never called out for him to forgive you and to save you. The Bible says in Romans 10:13 whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Today, you can walk out of here, you can turn off the TV knowing that your sins are forgiven, your soul is saved and that your eternity is in

place the Bible calls heaven versus a place the Bible calls hell. It won't be based on the deeds you accomplish, the tests you passed, the boxes you check, or the t's you cross. It's all based on what Jesus Christ has done in your stead and the price he was willing to pay on your behalf.

Is today that day that you're willing to cry out to him? If you are, let me encourage you to do so just in your own words, you don't have to do so out loud, you don't have to say the same words that I or somebody else would say, but maybe your heart's cry today would go a little something like this, "God, today I recognize I've got a sin problem, not just the issue that was addressed specifically today, but in a whole lot of areas. God, there's a lot of places I've been, I had no business being. There's a lot of things I've participated in, I had no business being a part of. God, you know there are words that have come out of my mouth that should have never left my lips and there are thoughts between my ears that only you are aware of how destructive they are. God, I recognize the Bible says the wages or the result of my sin is death, but your word also says but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. So God today, I believe, I believe the only answer to my sin problem is Jesus Christ. God today, I believe, I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to come on my behalf, he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. God, I believe today that when he allowed himself to be crucified to his cross, Lord, he was paying that price, he was buying the punishment for my sin and my rebellion. And God today, I believe that when he rose from the grave victorious three days later, he made it possible for my sin to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. God today, I don't have all the answers to all the issues, the problems and the struggles of this world, but there's one thing I know, I've got a sin problem that only Jesus can solve. So the best way I know how I'm asking you to forgive me, I'm asking you to save me. I just want to turn my life over to you."

With our heads still bowed and our eyes still closed. Maybe you're that person today who for the very first time you cried out to the Lord. In a moment, I'm going to pray for us. We're going to stand and sing together. We just want to invite you just to step out and step forth. We have a team set aside, a room set aside, just to hear your story, just to encourage you, to pray with you and pray for you. But maybe today you say, "Pastor, I got that cover," but maybe you're like the other four individuals on our campus today that are going to walk through the baptism waters. Maybe you've never followed in that obedience or maybe you're like those each and every week who say, "This is our church home. This is where we want to get plugged in." Whatever the decision is, we would love the opportunity just to walk alongside of you whatever it is. But maybe in closing today before I pray, you say, "Pastor, I've got all that covered." But in a few moments, you're going to walk off this campus and the real issue is, is your life pleasing to God.

*Lord Jesus, as we come to this time of decision, God, thank you that much like the negativity of this passage, that you love us too much for death and destruction to occur in our life. You love us too much to let us walk down a path that is destructive. You love us too much to let us die and burn in hell forever. God, that you were willing to pay the price. God today, may we simply respond appropriately. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*