

**Sanctification in the Lord, by the Spirit, at the Heart of Marriage**click [bit.ly/3rXVYw3](http://bit.ly/3rXVYw3) to hear this lesson as taught (or scan QR code→)

**What is God's will for me? What is God's will for my marriage?** Pastor leads his family in today's "Hopewell @Home" passage. 1Thessalonians 4:1–8 prepares us for the first serial reading in morning public worship on the coming Lord's Day. In these eight verses of Holy Scripture, the Holy Spirit teaches us that God's will for every part of a believer's life is sanctification. This means that just as important as the question of whom to marry is the question of how to approach marriage. In this, sanctification is to be prioritized, passions of the heart and flesh resisted, parents consulted, Christ to be pleased, and the Holy Spirit to be depended upon.

**Thursday, April 28, 2022 • Read 1Thessalonians 4:1–8**

Questions from the Scripture text: What does the apostle call them in v1? What two things does he do to them? In Whom? That they should do what? How much? What things had they received, in which he was now urging and exhorting them to abound? In what form (v2a) had he delivered this prescribed walking and pleasing God? Through Whom were these commandments given (v2b)? What is God's will for them (and for you!, v3a)? Upon what part of this sanctification does he zero in (v3b)? What is the first verb in v4? What is it that they should know—how to obtain his own wife (vessel, cf. 1Pet 3:7, commonly used term for wife) in what two ways? What manner of obtaining a wife is opposed to sanctification and honor (v5a)? Who take wives in this way (v5b)? Why do they do it that way? What is being done to a father or husband when a daughter or wife are romanced (or worse) without their knowledge (v6a)? Who will avenge such defrauding (v6b)? In how many cases? When/how have the Thessalonians heard this before (v6c, cf. v2)? What is at stake in obtaining a wife the right way (v7b)? Who has called us to this holiness (v7a)? What does the apostle anticipate will be the response of some (many) to such teaching (v8a)? But Whom are they really rejecting? Whom has God given us (v8b, as an indication both of His desire for us and power toward us to accomplish that desire)?

When the apostle begins "finally then," he may or may not be concluding an initial plan to finish his letter with this section. But what he is surely doing is underscoring the importance of what follows in these eight verses.

**Increase more and more in walking to please God (v1–3a).**

In 2:4, he had reminded them that the evidence of the authenticity of the apostolic team's ministry included that they speak "not as pleasing men but God." And when he commended them in 2:13 for receiving the Word as the Word of God, and for persevering under persecution in 2:14, he reminded them that persecutors "do not please God" (2:15) and would therefore suffer the complete wrath of God.

Now, he tells them to "increase more and more" in walking to please God. They were urging and exhorting them to this in the Lord Jesus now (v1a). They had delivered this to them before (v1b). The method of delivery had been commandments upon the authority of the Lord Jesus (v2). And this is "the will of God for" them: sanctification (v3a). Do you want to know God's will for your life? Sanctification. Walking to please God more and more.

**Especially in the area of sexual purity (v3b–6).**

There are so many areas of walking in holiness that the apostle might treat, but here, he emphasizes especially taking "one's own vessel in sanctification and honor" (v4b). It was common in rabbinic usage to refer to the wife as a "vessel," and the former Pharisee is almost certainly doing the same here. Another apostle certainly does so in 1Pet 3:7. And this form of the verb translated "possess" means "take possession," but not so crassly as that sounds in English. We might say "obtain his own wife."

The concern here is for forming marriages in an upright and pure way. There are many ways that one might "defraud" the father of the bride, or a woman's future (or current!) husband, as v5b warns against. And if you think such a dad or husband is furious and dangerous, you're not even beginning to glimpse the fury and danger with which you should really be concerned (v5c)! But the worst way is sexual immorality (v3b) and passion of lust (v5a). Giving in to sexual lust is the fruit of not knowing God (v5b). Not knowing that He created us. Not knowing that He created them from the beginning, one man and one woman for the purpose of marriage (cf. Matt 19:4–6; Mk 10:6–9). Not knowing that marriage exists not only so that we may image God well, but also as a picture of and help unto the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church. If we stir up romantic affection for someone other than our spouse, or harbor a fleshly desire for someone who is not our spouse, we despise God Himself. That's what v5 is saying.

To give in to lust is to set one's desires upon (or even mix one's flesh with) someone who is not *your own* vessel. God forbid! A father or a church (or in this case an apostle) must urge and exhort and deliver to and command the young (and old) people that they restrict their romantic desires to one spouse, ever, until death parts the two. Those who do not are literally exposing those entrusted to their care to the vengeance of God!

And how many of us, even now, wish that those over us in church and home had held before us the knowledge of God as the author of marriage and the avenger of marriage?!

**By the call and authority and power of God Himself (v7–8).**

One obstacle to this command is how difficult it is to overcome the willfulness of the flesh that refuses to be commanded. But the God Who called us unto Himself in our salvation "did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness" (v7). We must remember that it is impossible for an unbeliever to grow in holiness. But let us also remember that it is impossible that a genuine believer *will not* grow in holiness. This is what God has called us to in our salvation!

"Therefore, he who rejects this does not reject man, but God" (v8a). Just like the Word of the gospel was not the word of man but God, so also the command of sanctification is not the word of man but God!

A second obstacle to this command is how powerful romantic and sexual desires can be, and how pleasant the payoff seems to feel in the moment. But God has not left us without resources for this battle. He "has also given us His Holy Spirit" (v8b). If one of the great reasons for the gift of the Spirit is sexual purity, then we should not expect to maintain it without using all of God's means (including Word, sacrament, prayer, secret worship, family worship, public worship, the Lord's Day, parental accountability, elder accountability, spouse accountability, etc.). Yet, the use of the means of grace must not be in the vain hope that this is a fool-proof "technique" for sexual purity. Rather, the means must be used in conscientious awareness of the Holy Spirit Who gave those means and the hope that He is using them to work out in us the fellowship and life of our resurrected Lord Jesus!

Indeed, this is the only path for any sanctification. And especially in this most important area of sanctification which the apostle here so urgently underscores to us.

**What is "the will of God" for you? Why must this happen? How can this happen? How are you pursuing it?**

*Sample prayer: Lord, we praise and thank You for calling us to Yourself. We praise and thank You for preparing for us beforehand good works that we might walk in them. We praise and thank You for telling us so plainly what Your will for our life is—that we be sanctified. O forgive us, for we are ashamed of how easily our hearts give in to stubborn willfulness or passionate affection and desire. In this way, we have powerful, passionate moments of atheism. Forgive us! And deliver us! For, You have given us Your Holy Spirit for this reason—that He might apply Christ to us, in Whose Name we also ask this, AMEN!!*

**Suggested songs: ARP45B "Daughter, Incline Your Ear" or TPH45A "My Heart Is Greatly Stirred"**

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First Thessalonians chapter 4, verses 1 through 8. These are God's words Finally then brethren. We urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus, that you should abound more and more just as you received from us, how you ought to walk. And to please God for, you know what, commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus for, this is the will of God Your sanctification that you should abstain from sexual immorality.

That each of you should know how to possess his own vessel and sanctification and honor, not impassion of lust, like the Gentiles. You do not know God, that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter because the Lord is the Avenger of all such as we also, forewarned you and testified for God, did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness, Therefore, he who rejects this does not reject man.

But God who's also given us His Holy Spirit.

For the reading of gods inspired in an aren't, word the apostles coming. Now, to the end of the main argument of his letter and if not the end, at least he intends to add intensity to what he is saying. By saying, finally then brethren and he multiplies that intensity twice.

It doesn't just say finally. He then says we urge and exhort and to this triple intensity, he adds the authority and motivation of in the Lord Jesus. So it's very, very strong sort of appeal just as there are often just ordinary requests or instructions that I give you. But every once in a while, the turn of my voice and words that I used to introduce and the affectionate way that I address you, and I will add multiple things to impress upon you.

The importance, the seriousness, the necessity, The urgency. And he does that here and he says that you should abound that you should increase. And again there's tripling here. You could just say that you should abound whatever it is because that you should have bound more, which abounding is already more, okay?

But a bounding more is more more But then he says he says you should have bound more and more. So you need to triply increase and what and you don't actually get the what until a couple of phrases into verse 3, because he pauses or interrupts his own sentence, there saying, just as you received from us, how you ought to walk.

And to please God. In other words, this isn't some new thing that came lately but the, the moment that they came to faith in Jesus Christ, when Paul and Silas and Timothy were there in Thessalonica, they immediately began to teach them that you're, you're not saved from sins so that you can keep going going on sinning.

But that if you belong to God, if you are His and he is your pleasure, then you should seek to live. You should want to live in a way that pleases him because he already pleases you and pleasing him then should please you. This is one of the things that's so hard on those of us who have a good doctrine of the Lord's day and the Lord Himself being the delight of the day and the Lord himself being the pleasure is that we know our own flesh isn't as pleased with him as it ought to be and that's one of the wise what?

One of the reasons why and the rest of our life Because we are not as pleased with Him as we ought to be. We are not pleased with pleasing Him as we ought to be in the way that we live. And so he gives us a day in which he says okay no other pleasures but me on that day it's it's pleasure in God day so that we will.

So that we will be helped in delighting in him and helped in living to please him pleasure in God today. So we can have a pleased to please God life. As one of the main reasons for the Lord's day and that was something that Paul says here was the very one of the very first things that he had told them.

He didn't get them all converted and then go away to a safe distance, and then write a letter and say. And by the way, here's how you ought to lift. No, as soon as they were converted and as soon as God in Christ, Jesus was their pleasure. He had begun to tell them how they ought to walk and to please God, he says for, you know, what, commandments we gave you through the Lord.

Jesus, So he didn't say okay. Jesus got you. Your forgiveness. Now, you've got forgiveness from Jesus. And here's all the rules for how to live, and he says, Jesus, that's his name. Yahwe says has saved you. And now Jesus is your master. Jesus is your Lord and your Creator and your God, the one from whom you have your life and now you don't receive the commandments a trembling before a fiery mountain engraved in stone that feels like it's going to crush you God's commandments.

Come to you from the hand of the Lord Jesus Christ from the mouth of the Lord. Jesus Christ to be kept by the life of the Lord Jesus Christ. So that whereas your sin, you're the ongoing presence of your sin and effective, your sin may be a burden to you.

The guilt of your sin is gone. He's removed that burden and the commandments themselves are no longer a burden because they come to you from the one who has removed your guilt and given you his life. So that, you know, that when he is done with you, you will be like him.

What a wonderful phrase that is in verse 2. What commandments we gave you through the Lord. Jesus. So, when he comes to say for this is, the will of God. You're sanctification. That's finally, the identification of what is it? That he is saying that. He said, finally, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus, that you should abound more and more in what in sanctification and growing in holiness.

A lot of people, you know, are so focused on this world and particular activities in this world, they always want to know. They're always thinking of what is the will of God for and it can be kind of big things like what job I should have whom I should marry where I should live, those kinds of things and or little things, what I should order, you know, this this morning at breakfast or whatever it is.

But there's this idea that we have to figure out what God's plan for our lives is. Now, you don't whatever God's plan for your life is is going to happen. You'll find out when you get there, The part of God's will that is for us or His commandments. Like the Lord says in Deuteronomy the secret things belong to our God.

But the revealed things, belonged to us, and our children that we may do them and that we make amend our children to do them. So here is, yeah, The answer to what is God's will for my life. First Thessalonians 4 verse 3. For this is the will of God.

You're sanctification problem solved and all Christians can just stop being anxious about the will of God. He wants us to abound more and more to grow more and more in holiness. And there's one place in particular both because of its importance and because of its difficulty that this command applies that you should

abstain from sexual immorality.

So he zeroes in on the seventh commandment and not just because of its difficulty, we know it's difficult and we're going to, we're going to get to that. Not only when we think about not and passion of lust like the Gentiles, but also for God did not call us to unclean this button holiness.

We'll talk about the difficulty of it. But first of all, the importance of it, he says that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel and sanctification and honor. Now, the word translated possess actually focuses on the initiation of possessing. So obtain might be a better translation there, but that's correct.

It's fine. I'm not picking on the New King James here, but there's some question as to what he means by the word vessel and many think that the word vessel means means body and it can, and it does to a certain extent here. But it especially meant wife in the rabbinic teaching the Jewish rabbis they had referred to the the wife as a vessel and we see that even in the New Testament where Peter refers to the wife as the weaker vessel or the more fragile vessel.

If you want to use that language in 1st, Peter chapter 3. But this doesn't, This isn't actually in contention with or competition with the idea of it as his own body because that's one of the main things that the Lord teaches us about marriage, that a man is to consider his wife as bone, bone and flesh of his flesh and that he should nourish her and cherish her and and care for her every bit as reflexively and completely as he would care for his own body, assuming that he's not insane and self-harming, But that, if we're hungry, we eat.

And if we have a pain we we don't we have great sympathy with ourselves and our pain, you know, we might have to have self-discipline depending on what kind of pain it is or whatever and lived through it. But but there's always sympathy and care. And if there is something that can be done in wisdom for ourself, we do it and how we should love our our wife as our own flash.

And this is one of the things that God has especially given to man. That no other creature. Has the angels don't have it when Jesus is correcting the Sadducees. He says that in heaven will be like the angels neither marrying or giving in marriage. The the animals don't have it, you know, they mate and they reproduce, but they don't have a covenant of marriage in which a treasure one, another as their own self.

This this aspect of imaging God in the creation, that happens in in proper marriage, is something that is inherently tied to the knowledge of God. And that's why he says in verse 5 not in passion of lust. Like the Gentiles who do not know God, who do not know the purpose and glory of being married, that a man and his wife would treasure.

One another, not just delighting in one another, but delighting in the fact that the man and his wife, treasuring one, another as themselves as they're very own self. Not just like you would do for yourself. But as you're very unself that that is one of the ways that we image the mutual delight and love of the Godhead.

And that is one of the ways in which the final knowledge of God, which is in Christ Jesus. No one has seen God at any time, but the only begotten of the Son who is in the bosom of the Father, He has executed him. He is fully revealed him that it is especially in Christ that we come to know God and it especially then in how God has given himself for us and given himself to us in the Lord.

Jesus Christ and adopted us as His children in Christ and indwelt us with His Spirit because we are His children in Christ. So that the Triune God makes us to know Himself. By the way, Christ has loved the church and given himself up for her, which is the pattern for all marriage.

And so marriage has a very important central part in the knowledge of God and no wonder then the nations who do not know God, verse 5, The nations who do not know God would be given to passion and lust. But how grievous then when Christians who supposedly know God or make profession of knowing God in Christ are given to passion and lust.

It's exactly opposite what the knowledge of God and the knowledge of Christ and His church ought to produce in us. And how sad then when we don't obtain our own vessel, each of us, his own vessel, his own wife, in sanctification and honor. Because if God's will, for every believer is holiness and if marriage has this central high place in imaging God and knowing God It ought to be the thing that is approached with most consecration and it ought to be the thing in our life that is most helpful to our holiness and yet the very opposite ends up being true for so many.

It's the thing in which we're driven not by who God is and what he has done and a desire that it would help me be holy but often romance and marriage is that in which we follow our hearts, follow our desires and it becomes the least. Holy the most passionate or lustful, as verse 5, calls it.

And when you do that, you end up verse 6, defrauding your brother in the matter. Well, How was that the case? If you're talking about taking a wife, aren't you defrauding the wife? Well, she is, she is someone's daughter. And when you come into marriage the wrong way, you bring her into marriage, the wrong way.

And the final and most important thing that he was supposed to provide for his daughter. A good husband. You take that provision that opportunity of provision from him and you defraud, your brother, or if you commit adultery with a woman or who is married, you defraud her husband, who is your brother, Notice that there's no, there's not even the consideration of the possibility that you would marry an unbelieving woman.

A woman from an unbelieving family. And if, you know, we know of some cases where a guy hooked a girl, whether through passion and lust of the flesh or passion, and lust of emotion, this whole romantic dating falling in love stuff where the, where the wife is not obtained and sanctification and honor, but by the inflaming of emotions by coupling off before courtship before, and the inflaming of the emotions before the engagement in the betrothal to be married.

This is a form of defrauding. And and we know of situations where that has been done and the daughter was for all practical purposes Pride out of the father's hands. She herself coming and basically letting it know be known that she is going to marry this guy whether dad liked it or not.

And so let's come to terms. How can I make you like it? And she thinks that she's being a good Christian girl because you know, they asked daddy's permission and they want to know daddy's requirements even though they already decided that the marriage is going to happen, That is a defrauded brother.

Who did not, who was not given the opportunity to lead his daughter and choose for her. A husband who would be in sanctification and in honor and and Dad to him, that happens is understandably. Furious and grieved. You guys know of fathers of young ladies who got married and the man, she married did not turn out to be what they had presented him to be to the Father and what it's like for the dad after.

Now, that's one, One level of danger and grief, The problem for the man who isn't careful and intentional intentional about seeking a wife. And the proper way as much bigger. However, then a father of the bride who has been deceived and defrauded and is grieved and maybe furious, because there was a god who is grieved and furious that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter verse 6.

Because the Lord is the Avenger of all such as we also, forewarned you and testified. So, one of the very first things. Yeah, Paul goes, Paul hasn't Timothy, they go

to Thessalonica, they preach the gospel. People start to get converted and literally one of the first things they say is now let's talk about courtship Why?

Because of the importance of marriage and because of the place that marriage has in our sanctification and because of the place that sanctification has in the way that we ought to be entering into marriage and they had warned them, don't don't say that. Well, the, you know, this is the way it's done in our culture.

And so if it's okay with everyone else, it's okay with me. And we're gonna let her follow her heart. Or we're gonna, we're going to let them enjoy one another for a while and see how it works and have the romantic key defrauding approach. No, he says, doesn't matter who else?

It's okay with, it's not. Okay, with God and he's the avenger in every one of those cases and just think not just in terms of eternal consequence where a household becomes, how can we all follow our hearts together and compromise enough, have enough peace so that we can each seek what we want.

Instead of altogether seeking what Christ wants. And the eternal consequences of that the children growing up without the faith and needing to be reevangelized as if they were born to pagans to the Gentiles who know not God, like he said in verse 5 about how often those houses are full of misery.

And they're unable to live in peace and come to that. What are they call it? When there's a, when there's a ceasefire not enormous, just

I think they taunt is the French term, It doesn't matter. They're unable to all kind of agree with how they're going to proceed so that everyone can keep living for themselves near each other and have a compromise. But most many houses fall into each. Despising the other and being one another's.

Greatest grief instead of one another's, greatest help unto the Lord. Well, if entering into the marriage, is the wrong in the wrong way, is such a big deal for imaging. God and for knowing God and for not having God himself as a vendor against you, then that's a problem.

Because whether we're talking about sexual temptation, especially for men, but not only for men or romanticism temptation, especially for girls but not only for girls guys too. Can have that inflamed romantically idea that causes them to enter into marriage or to make marriage choices. Not in sanctification and honor.

But by following the heart, or following the flesh, That is very powerful because those desires, and those impulses are very powerful. And so the the will is very stubborn because it wants what it wants and it will not be told differently and the desires are very strong. So how can those things be overcome While there are overcome because verse 7 and 8.

God did not call us to uncleanness but in holiness, Therefore, he who rejects this does not reject man. But God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit. So you start to talk to somebody about being careful about how you enter into marriage, how you make marriage choices. Obtaining, your vessel your own vessel and sanctification and honor.

And and he says, who do you think you are to tell me that there's a right and a wrong way to do this and that we shouldn't be led by our hearts and our desires in doing this. He said well he who rejects this does not reject man but God The will is very stubborn.

Who are you and say, well, I'm not the one who came up with this God is, and that's the answer to the stubbornness of our wills. He who will not yield himself to God in in this how can we know that he's actually yielding himself to God and anything?

And so that's the, this, the will is very stubborn. But also the desire is very strong. And what can we do against the flesh? Well, who is the one whom the Lord has given us to war against the flesh, to put to death, the deeds of the body to kill the works of the flesh and produce instead his own fruit.

It's the Holy Spirit and so he answers he answers both of those problems there in verse 8 Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man but God so take the willfulness, take the stubbornness and determinedness of your will and counter it with God commands this and your will have to bow to him.

But then also take the the intensity of the desire of the flesh, the passion of the flesh and which feels like it's insurmountable to us. But the Bible answer for how the flesh feels insurmountable is God the Holy Spirit and that's the second half of verse 8 who has also given us his Holy Spirit.

So rubber meets the road, you start to have a crush on a guy or feel desire for a girl and you they might actually be someone who would be a right person to have as husband or wife, but your own heart and your own desires are not proceeding towards.

Obtaining the vessel in sanctification and honor. What do you do? You remember. God is the one who commanded me about what marriage is and the place that it ought to have in my life and how I ought to enter into it, not being led by my desires. And so you take God's side against your own will say God commands this.

And then the other part is but I don't know if I can and you say yeah but he's given you his Holy Spirit, who is the third person of the Godhead? And though it feels like the good that you want to do, you don't do, but the evil that you hate you.

Do you flip the page into Romans chapter 8? And you say I am led by the Spirit of God because God has given me his own spirit. And if I live, according to the flesh, I will die. But He's given me his spirit, because those whom he predestined and called for new and predestined and called and justified, he also glorified and the spirit is the one who gets us from justification to glorification and you cry out, God, the Holy Spirit.

I am not strong enough to resist my desires but you are and you embrace that Christ has given you the power of his own resurrection. In the hands of the third person of the Godhead, the Holy Spirit to overcome our willfulness and the intensity of our desire because this is the will of God, not just the instruction of God, but the will of God, who will carry it out or sanctification.

Oh man let's pray Father thank you for this portion of your word. Thank you, that you address all of the nitty-gritty, all of the places in our life, where we need application. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to just moving straight through first Thessalonians to be able to think about these things as a family.

I pray that your Holy Spirit who gave us the words on the pages of the Bible. And these particular words in these eight verses that your same spirit, now whom you have given to your children that he would help each one of my children and that he would help them to think.

Clearly in a way that is shaped by your word particularly in this place where it is. So opposite the world and even so much of what calls itself the church, help them. Oh Lord to love you and know you to love Christ and His gospel to love the place that you have given marriage for imaging you and showing forth Christ and his church.

Help them Lord to think clearly and well about how to bring that to bear on finding a life or finding a husband grant that they and their mother. And I would all

be on the same page so that we can be a help to them and that rather than a point of contention in which there is danger of defrauding that we would all be joined together in the good enterprise of finding for them.

Their own vessel in a way of sanctification and honor by which they are helped not unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. So that their marriage would have in their lives, the place that it ought to have by your beautiful design for it. So help us O God in our relationships with one another in the way that we combat the stubbornness of our wills.

And the way that we combat the intensity of our desires to walk in such a way as to be able to follow your instruction here and glorify Christ in whom and through whom we receive your good commandments for. We ask it in his name, Amen.