

GROUP LEADER GUIDE

Pleasing God: Live to Please God

Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8



ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- April 25- Pregnancy Center Walk for life (Mobilization)
- April 26- Parent Info Meeting for Camp (Kids)
- May 2- Gather (Women)

Check out the TJC Weekend Recap podcast for a more in-depth look at our sermons each week!

The podcast is available on all streaming platforms!

INTRODUCTION

Passage Warning

Have you ever wanted to know the answer to the question “What is God’s will for my life?”

THESIS: Because Christians are called by God, we must live lives that are set apart and pleasing to God.

Recap from last week

EXEGESIS

³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;

The word for sexual immorality is *porneia*, and it refers to any sexual activity outside of the covenant of marriage. So, he is saying to abstain from everything that is not one man and one woman in covenant for life.

⁴ that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor,

Abstaining from sin is not something that starts externally, it’s something that starts internally. It begins with controlling your own body. Not just controlling yourself for the sake of practicing self-discipline.

There is a whole movement today, particularly online, that is hyper-focused on self-discipline (exercising, abstaining from bad foods, screen time, bad habits, etc.). Those are all good things. Self-control is one of the virtues of a godly person that is repeated throughout the NT. The problem is that the majority of people today who are getting caught up in that movement aren't doing those things out of holiness and honor. They are simply doing it to get the positive results from it. But the Christian, who is set apart, must seek purity by controlling themselves in pursuit of holiness and honor.

To lack self control is a dishonorable thing.

⁵ not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God;

They are told to abstain from sexual sin because only unbelievers live like that. God's negative commands (the don't's) aren't arbitrary. When God tells you not to do something it isn't just because he doesn't like that thing. It's because you, as a Christian, have become a new creation. You are something completely different than you were before, therefore, you cannot live the same way that you did before.

We find this throughout Scripture: **Leviticus 18:1-5 – And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, ²“Speak to the people of Israel and say to them, I am the Lord your God. ³ You shall not do as they do in the land of Egypt, where you lived, and you shall not do as they do in the land of Canaan, to which I am bringing you. You shall not walk in their statutes. ⁴ You shall follow my rules and keep my statutes and walk in them. I am the Lord your God. ⁵ You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the Lord.**

Those that walk in this way, live like they do not know God. We recite this almost every week: “love and obey his commands” – If you don't obey his commands, you don't love him.

⁶ that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter,

In context, this is specifically referencing adultery.

More broadly, all sexual sin is a sin against yourself, your neighbor, and God.

Why should we not sin against our neighbor in this way?

because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.

Our holiness should be motivated, in part, by a fear of God.

Why is God an avenger of these things?

⁷ For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.

If you are in Christ, God has called you not only to himself, but also to live set apart.

1 Thess. 5:23-24 – ²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

This is not conditional language. It doesn't depend on you trying hard enough. This is a guarantee. The guarantee is rooted in the character of God. The God who has called you away from impurity and into holiness is faithful to get you there, and he will do it.

⁸ Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

Disregarding these commands isn't just ignoring someone's advice. These aren't Paul's thoughts on how to live a good life. This isn't Morgan's two cents on what might make you happy. This is the command of God on what is pleasing to him and what is displeasing to him.

This same God who commands us not to sin, doesn't just leave us with the command. He gives the commands then gives us the power to fulfill them. Why is it significant that God gives us the Holy Spirit? Because the Spirit is what empowers us to flee from sin.

Romans 8:12-13 – So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.

In sending us the Spirit, God gives us the will power to choose not to sin. Without the Spirit, you don't have the will power to choose not to sin. But in Christ, you are not only imputed with the righteousness of Christ like

Erik talked about last week, you are also infused with the power of the Holy Spirit who enables you to exercise control over your own desires and choices.

This means that God is not floating up in the clouds yelling down “Hey, here’s my will for you.” He is giving you the command and then actually living with you through it. So, when you disregard the commands of God and choose to live in impurity rather than holiness you are not only opposing the will of God, you are opposing the very presence of God in you.

APPLICATION

1. Flee from sexual immorality.

Acts 15:28-29 – ²⁸ For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements: ²⁹ that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

When the early church council was deciding how to include Gentiles into the covenant, they only gave them two commands: abstain from food that was sacrificed to idols and from sexual immorality.

Sexuality is a neutral thing. The question is, what direction are you using it in? Are you perverting sexuality or are you orienting it righteously?

Sexual sin is perhaps the most destructive sin there is, not because God just simply hates it more, but because it’s a sin that is both physical and spiritual at the same time.

Until you have taken marriage vows, your relationship to your significant other is no different than your relationship to everyone else in the world.

Flee from: Pornography (in all its forms), sleeping with boyfriend/girlfriend, playing house, having a child with someone and giving them the responsibility of parenthood without the blessing and protection of marriage, lust, inviting lust from others, embracing homosexual desires, entertaining attention from someone besides your spouse.

Don’t give yourself the opportunity to sin.

- We sometimes have this misunderstanding that in order to defeat our sin we have to defeat temptation. The wiser thing to do is to be wise enough that you don't have to deal with the temptation itself.
- If you're dating, never be alone. I don't care if that makes you feel like some weird religious zealot. I would rather you feel crazy than walk into hell holding hands.
- If you're watching pornography, or watching movies you shouldn't be watching, or reading things you shouldn't be reading, throw them away today.
- If you know that every time you text that person you end up doing something that you regret, block them.
- If you're living together and not married, get married. We can get you out of sin in 15 minutes. (Howerton story)

2. Practice self-discipline.

If you don't practice self-discipline in any other area of your life, don't be surprised when you can't practice it in the face of temptation.

If you don't have the discipline to control little things in your life like what you eat, when you go to bed, when you wake up, how often you eat out, how long you watch TV, how much time you spend watching bad AI videos on facebook, then you shouldn't be shocked when you don't have the will power to say no to anger, laziness, lust, gossip, etc.

(MacArthur's book *The Art of Self-Discipline*) Start by disciplining yourself in the little things. Organize your home and schedule. Stop ordering your life around the next time you get entertainment. Be on time for everything. Keep your word in every promise you make. Deny yourself bad things that you want (that aren't sinful).

3. Orient your life around the question "How can I please God?"

If you've been listening to this sermon and thought to yourself "well, sexual immorality isn't really my struggle" you aren't off the hook. Even if I haven't named your particular sin struggle so far in this sermon, I could start naming them off and eventually I would hit yours.

Every sin is a failure to please God because it is a failure to live like what he has called us to be.

You may ask the question “How do I know if I am living a life pleasing to God?” He tells us the answer.

1 Corinthians 6:9-11 – ⁹Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Notice that he doesn't say “those who struggle with (sexual immorality, homosexuality, greediness, negativity, putting others down, pridefulness, gossip,) will not inherit the kingdom.” Why? Because those who struggle with their sin are not those who are defined by their sin.

Why must you abstain from sin? Because that isn't who you are anymore.

- How was your week? What is one thing you're grateful for and one thing that challenged you?
- How did you grow in obedience to Christ over the last week?
- Where did you go to share the gospel or have a spiritual conversation with someone?
- What is a sin you have been struggling with that you need to repent of?



Discussion:

1: God's Will Defined – Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:3

Question: How does this passage clarify what God's will is for your life, and how does that challenge the way you typically think about God's will? How do we make sure we don't only apply God's will to a specific decision to make and ignore His will for our lives regarding holiness?

Leader Note: Help shift from decision-focused (job, location) to holiness-focused (who you are becoming).

2: Holiness Starts Internally – Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:4

Question: How would you explain internal holiness to a nonbeliever who thinks their external behavior is good enough to be considered a person of right standing

Leader Note: Emphasize heart transformation, not behavior modification.

3: Self-Control with the Right Motive – Read: Galatians 5:22–23

Question: What is the difference between worldly self-discipline and Spirit-empowered self-control? What are some signs we need to look out for to determine if our self discipline is more me focused instead of Spirit focused?

Leader Note: One is for results or image; the other is for holiness and honoring God.

4: Motivated by the Fear of God – Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:6

Question: What role should a healthy fear of God play in our pursuit of holiness? What is the context of God being an avenger regarding sexual temptations & offending a brother/sister?

Leader Note: Clarify fear as reverence and accountability, not terror for those in Christ. God will take the side of a mourning Christian who is the victim of adultery.

5: Identity Drives Behavior – Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:7

Question: How does understanding your identity in Christ change the way you approach sin?

Leader Note: Behavior flows from identity. You don't fight for identity—you fight from it.

6: Rejecting God vs. Ignoring Advice – Read: 1 Thessalonians 4:8

Question: The culture often minimizes sin as simple mistakes because “nobody is perfect.” How does this verse challenge that mindset and raise the stakes of obedience in the Christian life? What is the difference between stumbling in sin as an imperfect believer and willfully rejecting Christ's authority to live for yourself?

Leader Note: Emphasize that sin is not merely a mistake—it is a rejection of God’s authority. This should move the group from casual attitudes toward sin to a deeper sense of reverence, accountability, and dependence on the Spirit.

7: Living to Please God – Read: 1 Corinthians 6:11

Question: How does remembering who you were and who you now are in Christ motivate you to pursue a life that pleases God?

Leader Note: This is the gospel fuel—gratitude and transformation, not guilt-driven effort.



- **BUILD UP | SEND OUT | REAP THE HARVEST**
 - How are you making yourself known at church this week?
 - How are you growing to know Christ better this week?
 - How are you making Christ known this week?
- **PRAYER**
 - Pray over any request from your group members.
 - Pray for our team: Timo Serrano, Director of Facility Maintenance
 - Pray for our short-term teams:
 -
 - Pray for our long-term units on the mission field:
 - The Wilsons
 - The Grays
 - The Browns
 - Pray for the unreached. Want to keep up with Unreached People Groups? Download the Unreached of the Day App <https://joshuaproject.net/pray/unreachedoftheday/app>