

Explore the Bible: April 3

Demonstrated • I Thessalonians 4:1-12

By Cyndi Grace



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Our world today loves to say that God loves us just the way we are. There is nothing wrong with that statement; it is true. It becomes problematic when we *stay* the way we were when we met Him.

Meeting Jesus should cause us to change. Max Lucado, in his book, *Just Like Jesus*, said “God loves you just the way you are, but He refuses to leave you that way. He wants you to be just like Jesus.” This quote could have been penned by the Apostle Paul. There should be a visual difference in our lives once we’ve accepted Jesus as our Savior.

The theological terms to define our lives in Jesus are:

- **Justification** when we accept Jesus as our Savior.
- **Glorification** when we pass from this life to our eternal home.
- **Sanctification** is our life on earth, between Justification and Glorification.

The dictionary defines sanctification in these ways: *a. to make holy; set apart as sacred; consecrated. b. to purify or free from sin: Sanctify your hearts. c. to make productive of*

or conducive to spiritual blessing.

Paul states in Thessalonians 4:3 that it is God's will for us to be sanctified. He goes on to give a list of how we do that and He starts the list by admonishing us to keep away from sexual immorality.

When we are born into this world, we are wrapped in flesh and controlled by our own wants and desires. These desires can be sinful and keep us from being like Jesus. In speaking to Nicodemus in John 3, Jesus said because of this, we must be born again. He went on to say, "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6 ESV).

Sanctification begins when we surrender our bodies to the control of the Spirit. Romans 12:1-2, says, *Therefore, brothers and sisters, in view of the mercies of God, I urge you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God; this is your true worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God (CSB).*

If it is God's will for us to be sanctified, then surrendering our fleshly desires is the first and foremost indication that we follow Christ.

Although Paul begins with sexual immorality, he goes on to say that when we control our bodies, it spills over to other areas of our lives. We will treat others with respect and will obey God rather than our own desires.

Our lives are not our own, once we become a Believer (Colossians 3:3). We were bought with a price. We die to self to live in Christ. The world, however, says God made us the way we are and we do not have to change. Perhaps some in Thessalonica were saying the same thing and Paul wanted to clear up any misconception of what it means to follow Christ.

Verses seven and eight state it clearly: *For God has not called us to impurity but to live in holiness. Consequently, anyone who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who gives you His Holy Spirit (CSB).* A true believer would not want to reject God and Paul makes it clear that not following the Holy Spirit's guidance is rejecting God. These are powerful words.

The last part of our Scripture goes further as to what it means to follow God and not the flesh. Verses 11-12 might be harder for most of us than fleeing from sexual immorality – *To behave properly in the presence of outsiders...*

In the seventies we sang a song that said, "They will know we are Christians by our love." The "they" are unbelievers and outsiders. Today, too many people see fighting and angrily-spoken opinions and views instead of Jesus-like behavior.

We must learn to surrender this fleshly action as well, if we are to be salt and light. We don't tolerate any sin, but live a sanctified life that points to Jesus. How? II Peter 1:3 gives us hope: *His divine power, has given us everything required for life and godliness through the knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness.*

Yes, we can do everything through His power because He loves us too much to leave us this way!

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