

# 1<sup>st</sup> Thessalonians Ch 4:1-12

## Practical Holiness

The reason I emphasize the word “Practical” is because sanctification, in reality is 3-fold in it’s work concerning our lives. and If you take notes you might jot this down (now we realize as the given that every aspect of sanctification in our lives is to the credit of the Holy Spirit), it’s not by our might, it’s not by our power, but it’s by My Spirit says the Lord of Hosts. So Sanctification has at it’s roots and it’s working out in my life the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, but pertaining to it’s various “dimensions” in my life (for lack of a better vocabulary) there is #1 “Positional” sanctification, #2 “Practical” Sanctification, and #3 what we might call “Perfect” sanctification.

Now “positional” sanctification is what you get as soon as you say, “Yes” to Jesus. You are washed by the blood of Jesus Christ, robbed in the fine linen of His righteousness, and stand justified before God, which as you know means “Just as if I’d never sinned at all.” The bible says that “*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*” 2 Cor 5:17 We read in 1 Cor 1:30-31 “*But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God -- and righteousness and sanctification and redemption -- that, as it is written, "He who glories, let him glory in the LORD."* This is your position in Christ, there is nothing that you can do, there is nothing that I can do to improve on that. The moment you give your life to Christ you are as clean before God as you’re ever going to get, you are *positionally sanctified*.

“Practical” sanctification on the other hand deals with the here and now, it is the Holy Spirit’s working out, of your *positional* sanctification in your everyday life in your walk with Christ, as you grow and mature, as I come into greater understanding of what it means to lead a life set apart to God and let that permeate my being so that it becomes practical in my life. Now this particular aspect of sanctification will never be fully developed on this side of eternity, and it doesn’t justify sin in our lives. But we need to be able to acknowledge the biblical truth that as long as we live in this tent, or this shell that we call a body, as long as we have this body of death and desires of the flesh at war in us, there will be times that we miss the mark and fall short. So practical sanctification is a continual transforming of our lives by the work of the Holy Spirit, which has as it’s aim, the image of Jesus Christ on this side of eternity. I think the apostle Paul summarized this best in 2 Cor 3:18 when he said, “*But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*” This is the work of *practical sanctification*.

Then “Perfect” sanctification is what we might consider the culmination of the positional, and the practical coming together when we see Jesus Christ face to face, when we are conformed fully into the image, or likeness of Jesus Christ Not in deity, but in holiness and perfection, and absolute sinlessness. The Psalmist said, “*As for me, I will see Your face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness.*” Ps 17:15

In perfect sanctification, to the Corinthians Paul wrote, “*And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.*” 1 Cor 15:49 To the Philippians he said, “*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body.*” Phil 3:20-21 and Probably the most popular passage regarding this aspect of our sanctification finds itself in 1 John, “*Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.*” 1 John 3:2 We shall be perfectly sanctified, not only positionally, but practically when we see Him face to face. But in *this* passage it’s the here and now that Paul is concerned with. Paul is in this section narrowing his scope in on this 2<sup>nd</sup> aspect of sanctification, where the shoe leather hits the sidewalk.

That’s why the bible refers to the Christian experience as a “walk” because you start out at salvation, continue to progress towards your destination which is practical sanctification, throughout the process of your life.

It’s this practical aspect of sanctification that people look on and see from the outside peering into the life of the believer, and it’s for this reason that Paul is so concerned for the way we lead our lives. Not only because it’s critical to our relationship with the Lord, but if others are going to be drawn to the Lord through our lives, then it’s essential that we reflect the Lord accurately to them, and so he says here.

Vs 1

This word “Finally” here in your NKJ doesn’t mean “now I’m finished” it’s better translated in the OKJ by simply saying “Furthermore” or “Moreover” today we might say, “Moving on.” and We spoke last week briefly of how the element that is to act as the catalyst, spurring us on blamelessness and holiness (according to vs 13 of ch 3) is the coming again of the Lord Jesus Christ Because *we don’t know* what hour the Master of the house is returning; we want to be found so doing what we’ve been called to do. and Jesus told us very clearly to watch and be ready, because He’s coming at an hour that we won’t expect Him to come. and The very fact that we don’t know, should spur us on to holiness; that we should abound more and more in how we ought to #1 walk and to #2 please God.

In other words on this side of eternity we’ll never arrive at that state of perfect sanctification, no matter how far along you’ve come (and no doubt we should be progressing daily concerning our being transformed into the image of Jesus Christ) but there’s always room to grow, more and more we’re to be abounding. Again we shouldn’t grow too comfortable regarding our condition in Christ and begin to settle in the dregs, because to do so is to invite that pouring that we spoke about last week, we’re not to become *apathetic*, we’re to abound more and more.

As you know the walk refers to our daily conduct, how we're to occupy until His return. and The basic desire of *every* believer's heart and life should be that of pleasing God. That's the key to the Christian life, those who are outside of Christ, seek to please themselves. But those who are in Christ are to live to please God, of course the irony is that the man who lives to please himself is rarely pleased, and when he is it's but for a moment that passes like a vapor in time. You've heard me quote Mick Jagger time and again, he's been everywhere and done everything that the world has to offer, and still can't get no satisfaction. But the man or the woman, who lives to please God, finds contentment and real satisfaction. It's that spiritual principal that Jesus laid out when He told us very plainly that, "*Whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.*" Matt 16:25 One of the greatest pleasures in life is knowing that you've done something that's pleased the Father, that you've led your life in a manner that glorified Him. Jesus said, "*I always do those things that please Him*" John 8:29 and So ought we to seek to live in a manner that pleases the Father.

Vs2

It's just amazing to take notice of all the times Paul brings up the things that he's sharing with them in this letter only to stir them by way of remembrance because he already told them these things when he was with them, because he was with them less than a month. and Yet he taught them so much, in his 2<sup>nd</sup> epistle he speaks of how he labored among them night and day, and he's quick to remind them here that he wasn't just seeking to lay some type of trip on them so that they would be submissive to him.

These commands that he gave them were through the Lord, they weren't just some idealistic concepts that he made up that he thought might help them out, or at least look real good. Nor are they just good suggestions from the mind of a spiritual overseer that they might want to consider, these are commands (and that word "commandments" is a military term used strictly of a command that is received from a superior officer and therefore with out question must be obeyed or carried out.) Or to understand it another way, for the believer, there's no ifs, ands, or buts regarding this, this is a mandatory order from the commander and chief Jesus Christ Himself. Because make no mistake believer, you're in a spiritual war, when you came to Christ, you enlisted into the Lord's army and as Paul told Timothy, "*No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier.*" 2 Tim 2:4 and What is the command in this case?

Vs 3-4

The command, as I see it is 2-fold, #1 Sexual purity, and #2 Self-control, vs 3 deals with the the 1<sup>st</sup> aspect and vs 4 deals with the 2<sup>nd</sup>. You know, probably one of the most common questions that Pastor's are faced with in the ministry concerns people wanting to know the will of God for their lives. and Yet I find that the bible is very clear in multifaceted aspects on that very subject. and Not to take up much time on that particular subject, but Peter said very clearly that God's "*not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.*" 2 Peter 3:9

So I know that God desires all men everywhere to repent and to be saved, that's God's will, but the problem comes in that God won't violate man's will and so there's conflict and God will yield His will to man's in that respect. If you don't want to surrender to Christ, that's your choice, but it's His will that you would. In vs 18 of ch 5 of this very epistle we read (read), what's that tell you? It's God's will that you would be thankful, regardless of what's going on, because you have everlasting life, and so much more to be thankful for in how God has blessed and taken care of you. It's God's will that you be thankful, well, here's another aspect of God's will for every believer, "*Your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality.*"

Now as you know this word "sanctification" speaks of being set apart, as the scriptures say, to come out from among them (that is the world) and be *separate* says the Lord, don't touch what is unclean. It's the Greek word "hagiasmos" (hag-ee-as-mos') and it means, consecration, purification, and holiness. So we could understand this to say, "This is the will of God, your purification" or "Your consecration" or even, "Your holiness" now what does that entail? Well, in this context specifically it regards abstaining from sexual immorality, again the Greek word translated "sexual immorality" is the word "Porneia" which is the word (as you know) from which comes our English word "Pornography." and It's a very broad word that includes any form of sexual impurity, whether it be on cable TV, the Internet, Magazines, movies, any sexual activity outside of marriage, be it premarital relations, extra-marital relations in the form of adultery, it includes homosexuality, bestiality, or any other type of sexual activity or innuendo outside of the marriage bed. You remember when the early church counsel in the book of Acts ch 15 was establishing what, if any, laws needed to be yoked on the Gentile believers. and Peter stood up in the midst of the controversy under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and said, "*I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.*" Acts 15:19-20

Paul was writing here to a culture that was heavily inundated with sexuality. The Greek culture and the early Roman culture weren't known for their puritan points of view. As a matter of fact much of the worship of their pagan gods involved sexual activity and fornication, it served (really) as a mark of their godlessness.

and Paul is saying here that God desires that we be set apart from a godless culture and their sexual impurities. and If our lifestyle, or sexual behavior is no different from the ungodly, then we're not set apart in the fashion that God would have us be. and It's sad to say but if there was ever a generation that paralleled Paul's in it's loose living standards, and sexual liberties taken for granted to a place that God never intended it's this one.

This is a much-needed exhortation for the man and woman of God today, having evolved into a pagan society in which these types of practices are once again extremely common. But

you are to be, I am to be, set apart from sexual immorality, we each should know how to possess our own vessel in #1(Vs4) Sanctification, that is in a manner that's set apart from the world and worldly standards. and #2 Honor, that is, high esteem, placing high value on your vessel, that is, your body, we have this treasure (referring to Jesus Christ, referring to the gospel) Paul said, in earthen vessels, which is our bodies, our beings. This is God's will, not only abstaining from sexual immorality, but knowing how to possess your vessel, or your body in sanctification and honor.

#### Vs5-6

The non-believer often lives in unbridled lusts, they don't know the Lord, they don't have the necessary resources to really be any other way, they're slaves to their flesh, but such is not the case with you child of God. You're to know how to possess your vessel in sanctification, or purity and holiness, and honor. This is the will of God for you, now this word vessel, is an interesting word, it means container, or pitcher as in a pitcher of water, it's that word that was used in the OT for the golden pitchers, or the vessels that was used in the tabernacle and placed around the table of showbread, and these vessels were filled with wine. The drink offering that was poured out before the Lord. Now for those of you who've maybe been around awhile you know that that's a picture of communion, the bread upon the table, the wine in vessels around the table. Now last week we spoke of the wine of God's Spirit that is poured into and through these earthen vessels, and knowing that the vessels of the tabernacle were set apart and consecrated for the work of the ministry, they were in God's service. The apostle Paul is telling us, make sure that you know how to possess your vessel, that you keep them holy, that you honor them, or esteem them so as to keep them pure before God. Keep them away from pornography; from immorality; from adultery and whatever is unclean; innuendos on certain sitcoms on TV, soap operas and like filth. We're to learn to possess our vessels. Why, what happens when a vessel of God, a holy vessel that's been sanctified for the purposes of God is miss used? Or is used in an immoral and wrong manner, when the corruption of the world is poured through them? What happens when one uses the vessels of God, vessels that were once around the table of the Lord, and in the temple of the Lord, in a dishonorable fashion? Turn to Daniel ch 5

Now to set the scene Belshazzar is in Babylon and man, he's throwing a party, which is amazing because at this very hour there are 10's of thousands of the enemy outside the city, who were they, the Medes. But Belshazzar thought let them come, he wasn't afraid, why? Because around this city was walls that were 350' high, 87' thick, and inside the city there was enough grain stored to keep everyone in food for a year with out having to worry about any other source. So he's thinking, "Hey, let them hang out there and try and besiege the city day after week after month. We're ok the walls are impenetrable, there's nothing to worry about, let's party."

#### Vs1-7

So there they are partying, and he gets this bright idea, “Hey, bring in those vessels of honor that were used for the service of the Lord and let’s use them to party with let’s treat them dishonorably.” and As they’re partying on, suddenly this hand appears and starts writing on the wall, and it scares the stuff out of him, and he says, “What does this say, we’ve got to figure this out.” and As you know Daniel comes onto the scene and we find out the inscription in vs 25 But look at what Daniel says to him beginning in vs 23.

### Vs23-28

and You know what happened, that very night the Medes dammed up the Euphrates river, crawled on their bellies underneath the wall, and while everyone was in a drunken stupor they wiped them out and killed Belshazzar the king. What’s the point of all this? Miss use your vessel, and the party is over, give this (your holy vessel) over to immorality, to partying, to pornography, lustful living, certain movies that you know you shouldn’t be watching and to uncleanness. and Mark my words they day will come when God will look at you, when God would look at me, and say lovingly but assuredly, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. The party’s over son, the party’s over daughter, you’ve been weighed in the balance and found wanting, and it all comes to an end tonight. Oh, maybe not your salvation, maybe, but your kingdom will come crashing down around you, and you may never be restored to such a position again. The kingdom of your ministry, the kingdom of your family, the kingdom of your usability or your joy, or the kingdom of peace, and the kingdom of purpose. It will all come crashing down just as sure as I’m standing here, upon the man or the woman who commits themselves to immorality or uncleanness with the holy vessel of God

I’ve seen it happen over and over again, it destroys families, it renders ministries shipwrecked, it causes people to be placed on the shelf; no longer usable, no longer fit for the Kings use, they’re marred. The Proverbs tell us, *“Whoever commits adultery with a woman lacks understanding; He who does so destroys his own soul. Wounds and dishonor he will get, And his reproach will not be wiped away.”* Prov 6:32-33 . Prov 6:26 says, *“For by means of a harlot A man is reduced to a crust of bread; And an adulteress will prey upon his precious life.”* “But hey,” You might say, “It’s just a peep here and there, nothing physical, what harm is there?” Plenty, not only because you defraud that person, and defraud yourself in ripping them off and ripping yourself off in what and who God has for you, not only because just to look upon a woman with lust or a man with lust in your heart is to commit adultery and immorality before the Lord. But what happens if your married is you begin to view these unrealistic people who think you’re nothing but a joke anyway, and then you begin to look at your wife, and then you look at them, and suddenly your wife doesn’t excite you like she used to. Your husband doesn’t turn you on like he used to, you begin to become more and more perverted in your thinking and before you know it your caught in the landslide and you’re not satisfied with the family life anymore and you’re down the road.

Don’t think I don’t know what I’m talking about it’s a tale that’s all to common, even in the body of Christ, there’s a reason it’s called the net, or the web, I’m surprised it’s not called

the snare, because it snares you and takes you down, and destroys your life. Know how to possess your vessel, use wisdom, hey, use common sense, don't place yourself in environments that are going tempt you, if you have to get rid of the internet, do it. If you can't go to that place, quit going there, who do you love, your flesh, or your Lord? Who are you willing to neglect, your flesh, who wants to destroy you, or your Savior who paid the penalty for that, don't be foolish, don't think, but this is an opportunity for me to show how I've died to self by being here and being able to with stand temptation, don't be a fool, flee. Turn quickly to 1<sup>st</sup> Cor ch 6 Vs 12-20

You're not your own anymore, you don't have the liberty to decide what you're going to do in the face of temptation, the bible never calls you to fight temptation, it calls you to flee it, don't log on, don't get in your car if you know where you're going to wind up, let the flesh die, lest it kill you. and If you're already ensnared, and you feel the hand of judgment beginning to write on the wall of your life, listen. About 570 yrs later another hand showed up, and it began to write in the sand, it was the hand of Jesus Christ when a woman caught in the act of adultery was cast before Him. and When her accusers had fled (Jesus having dealt with them) He said, who is it that condemns you? and She looked around and said, no one Lord. and He said, *"Neither do I condemn you, go and sin no more."* John 8:11 In other words, take the time while there's still time to repent, go your way, but sin no more, cut it out, get right with God.

Vs7

and If the Salt loses is savor, then what is it good for? Do you remember when Paul told Timothy that a leader in the church needed to be able to rule his own home well, because if he didn't rule his own home with efficiency then how could he rule the church of God? Well, in the same manner if a person is unable to glorify God personally in their personal body, they how can we expect to glorify Him in the corporate sense, you see this is the problem with much of the church world today, there's no more salt. People's individual lives have come under justified scrutiny and been found wanting and it brings a reproach upon the entire body, Satan is so untactful in his approach. He tries to encourage sexual relations all that he can outside of marriage, and then tries to frustrate and discourage sexual relations with in the marriage where the union demonstrates the intimacy of the believer to Jesus. and Yet how many fall prey to his strategy, but God has called us to holiness, Peter said, *"But as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."* 1 Peter 1:15-16

Vs8

Rejects what? The command to lead a holy life, which in this context speaks of abstaining from sexual immorality. You can get mad at me all you want about it, but I'm just the delivery boy, it's God you need to take it up with you haven't rejected me in this, but God. Because He's called you to holiness, therefore He's given you His Holy Spirit, you see the connection?

Vs9-10

Now I want you to take note of the contrast here, don't think it's by coincidence. What does the world associate love with? They say they're making love when in fact they're gratifying lust, and indulging the flesh, Paul makes a very clear cut distinction, after he deals with immorality he brings up love, they're 2 radically different things. One is a matter of the will and the love of God at work in your own life, the other stems from the flesh, lets be clear on this. But as we mentioned last week as he commends them so I commend you, but lets not slip *in cruise*, lets continue to *increase*. There's always room for growth.

Vs11-12

We'll comment briefly here next week (God willing and then we'll move on into this issue the rapture of the church).

If you're here and God is calling you out from among the world in order that you might lead a life that's set apart to Him. A life that's yielded to Him in order that you might bring Him honor and glory, that you might be made whole, a vessel of honor, to be placed in the hands of the King. I encourage you today, respond to His voice, follow Christ, open your heart and your life and let Him in, if you've learned the lesson that living to please yourself, really isn't pleasing at all, and it's one misery to the next, God wants to fill that void today, lose your life for Christ's sake and I'll guarantee you'll find true life, everlasting life.