

How does the gospel affect the way I live my life? Today Paul teaches us how the gospel affects the way we live our lives in two areas: the area of sexual purity and the area of brotherly love. When I hear what Jesus has done for me, I want to say thank you to him. With hearts changed by the gospel, we are eager to do what Paul says today:

Live in a Way that Pleases God

- I. He called you to live a holy life
- II. He teaches you to love your neighbor

First, God called you to live a holy life. Paul’s writes: **“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified.”** To be “sanctified” means to be “set apart.” We are set apart *from* sinful behavior and set apart *for* God. Paul gives us an example of the kind of sinful behavior that God wants us to be set apart *from*. **“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: you should avoid sexual immorality” (4:3).** “Sexual immorality” includes any sex outside of marriage. It is God’s will that couples not have sex before marriage. God says in Hebrews chapter 13, **“Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure” (Hebrews 13:4).**

Some people have said that this is just the church’s teaching on marriage, but notice that Paul emphasizes several times in this passage that these instructions on sexual purity come from God. He says **“For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus” (1 Thess. 4:2).** And then he says in verse 8, **“Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God” (4:8).** It is *God’s* will that sex be used only within marriage.

And God is very serious about this. The passage in Hebrews 13 goes on, **“Marriage is to be honored by all and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.” (Heb 13:4)** Paul says the same thing in our passage from 1 Thessalonians. **“The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before” (1 Thess 4:6).**

Since God is serious about this, Paul instructed the Thessalonians about what God’s will is. He said, **“It is God’s will that each of you learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable,” (1 Thess 4:4).** Christians should control their own bodies by waiting until marriage to have sex. This is holy and honorable. This seems strange to the world around us. In their sinful natures even Christians might see this as restrictive. But I would like to highlight three reasons why Christians want to follow this instruction from God. Christians follow this instruction from God out of consideration for themselves, out of consideration for others, and finally and most importantly to honor God.

First, Christians follow this instruction from God out of consideration for themselves. In this passage Paul reminds the Thessalonians that God gives them the Holy Spirit. In our passage Paul reminds us: **“Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 4:8).** The Bible teaches that willful, purposeful, unrepentant sin could drive the Holy Spirit away. So Christians want to follow this instruction from God for their own sake, so that they do not drive the Holy Spirit away.

Second, Christians want to follow these instructions from God for the sake of others. Paul says, **“and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister” (1 Thess 4:6).** Who might be wronged if you have sex outside of marriage? If the other person is already married, then it certainly wrongs their spouse. If you have sex with the person you are dating, then you are taking something that God intended

for that person and their future spouse. So a Christian wants to follow these instructions for their own sakes, for the sake of others, and finally for the honor of God.

God the Father called you. Paul says, **“not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God” (4:5)**. You know God. And because you know God you don’t want to sin against him. When Potiphar’s wife tempted Joseph. Joseph said, **“How can I do such a wicked thing and sin against God.” (Genesis 39:9)**. Joseph knew God and he didn’t want to sin against God. You also know God because God called you. Paul says, **“God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life” (1 Thess 4:7)**. God called you into a special relationship with him. Paul says, **“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified” (1 Thess. 4:3)**. To be sanctified means to be “set apart for God.” God set you apart as his special possession. We don’t want to sin against our loving heavenly Father by committing sexual immorality.

God the Father called you. God the Son redeemed you. Jesus paid the price of his holy precious blood to buy you back from sin. 1 Corinthians says, **“You are not your own, you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies” (1 Cor 6:19-20)**. Elsewhere in 1 Corinthians Paul gives a list of sins including sexual sins and then he says **“that is what some of you were, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor 6:11)**. His blood cleanses you from every sin. You might feel ashamed when you consider your sins against this commandment. But Jesus’ blood has cleansed you so that through faith in Jesus your guilt is gone and you are sparkling and holy in God’s sight. God the Father called you. God the Son redeemed you. And God the Spirit dwells in you.

The Bible says that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians says **“Whoever sins sexually sins against their own body. Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit” (1 Cor 6:19)**. Paul makes the same point here when he says, **“Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit” (1 Thess 4:8)**. That Holy Spirit continues to sanctify you and give you the power to do what pleases him. So by the power of the Spirit **Live in a way that pleases God. God called you to a holy life. And, secondly, God teaches you to love your neighbor.**

After giving the Thessalonians instructions about sexual purity, Paul also gives them an encouragement to continue the brotherly love that they are already showing to one another. He says, **“Now about your love for one another we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other” (4:9)**. The Thessalonians were an exemplary congregation in this regard. They loved each other.

And this all the more remarkable when you consider that Paul founded the congregation, but then soon after that Paul got run out of town. And then the Thessalonian Christians suffered persecution. Earlier in this letter Paul says, **“You suffered from your own people the same things [the churches in Judea] suffered from the Jews” (2:14)**. Paul was gone. They were suffering persecution. But their love for each other was part of the glue that held them together.

And the same Holy Spirit who bound the Thessalonians together in love wants to do the same thing for every other congregation as well. Paul prayed for the Thessalonians **“May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other” (1 Thess. 3:12)**. And the Holy Spirit wants to do the same thing for us. He wants to bind us together in love for one another. He wants our love for one another to overflow more and more.

Paul also wanted them to love their neighbors outside the church. And he wanted them to show love for their neighbors by working hard. He says, **“You should make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you” (1 Thess. 4:10-11)**. Apparently some of the Thessalonians had the tendency to not work. And this created two problems. First, they would live off of others and second, while they were being idle and lazy, they would get into other people’s business and be

disruptive. Later in this letter Paul said, **“Warn those who are idle and disruptive” (1 Thess. 5:14)**. Apparently this was a continuing problem for the Thessalonians, because in his second letter to the Thessalonians, Paul said, **“We hear that some among you are idle and disruptive. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus to settle down and earn the food they eat” (1 Thess. 3:11-12)**. Instead of being idle and disruptive, Paul said that they should **“make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you” (1 Thess. 4:10-11)**.

Paul himself worked hard with his own hands. He was a tent maker. And even while he was a missionary in Thessalonica he did this. And one of the reasons he did this was to set a good example for the Thessalonians. One of the reasons Paul wanted them to do this was so that they would win the respect of those outside the church. He says, **“so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders” (1 Thess 4:12)**. Their love for one another would attract people to the church. But their being idle and disruptive would keep people away.

The Thessalonian Christians lived in a society that was hostile to the church. But if they loved one another and worked hard with their own hands. Then that might cause some outside the church to change their opinion and maybe give the gospel a hearing. The same thing is true today. If we love one another and work hard at our jobs, that might cause some to be attracted to our church and give the gospel a hearing and be saved.

So how does the Gospel affect the way I live my life? When I hear what Jesus has done for me, I want to say thank you to him. I want to live a holy life. I want my love for my fellow believers to abound more and more. I want to work hard at my job. Those are the affects of the gospel in your life and mine. And those fruits of the gospel please God and win the respect of outsider to the glory of God and the furthering of his kingdom. So out of thankfulness for the gospel lets live a life that pleases God. Amen.