

Living so as to please God; on becoming sanctified (3)

Introduction:

This is the third Lord's Day in which we will give our attention to 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, which addresses the subject, the believer's sanctification. We have already set forth the definition of the teaching of the Bible regarding practical sanctification. "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness."¹ Let us again read the first 8 verses of 1 Thessalonians 4.

Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. ²For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. ³For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. ⁷For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. ⁸Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

We have already considered in some detail verses 3 and 4, which again read, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality, that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor." We have seen from these words that our sanctification involves two aspects of living. First, our sanctification involves *abstaining from sin*, and second, our sanctification involves *living righteously*. I would like us today to examine the statement of verse 4 in more detail but also to consider some matters suggested by this verse and then proceed to examine the few verses that follow it. Again, verse 4 reads, "*that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor.*"

I. Sanctification involves the Christian controlling his own body in holiness and honor.

Notice first, that the apostle states that the Christian is to be in control of his body. He seems to distinguish the identity of the person from his body. Look at the language closely: "*that each one of you know how to control his own body.*" The body is indwelt, as it were, by the true person, that being the soul.

The Holy Scriptures set forth a human being as comprised of both a soul and a body.² We read in Genesis 2:7, "And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." In this world, every human being has a physical body, but

¹ This is the definition given to question #35 in the historic Westminster Shorter Catechism.

² The Bible does not teach that a person is a trinity of body, soul, and spirit, which is commonly assumed by evangelicals; but rather, the Bible teaches that God has made a person as a living soul that animates a physical body. A human person is a body and soul, and often times instead of the word "soul" the word "spirit" is used, but these two words refer to the same thing. For further explanation, see our sermon, FBC690.

his true self is his soul, which animates, or makes alive, his physical body. God created man and gave him the responsibility to use or employ his body in order to accomplish in the world the will of God that He set before him. In other words, man, as God had originally constituted him, was a living soul that dwelt within his body; his true self--his soul--was to control his body, was to direct his body in doing the will of God.

This idea of the body being a dwelling place for the true self is suggested by our text. This is not so much so in the English Standard Version (ESV), but it is in the New King James Version, which better translates the Greek, in my opinion.³ Here are the two translations of verse 4.

ESV. "...that each one of you know how to control his own **body** in holiness and honor"

NKJV. "...that each of you should know how to possess his own **vessel** in sanctification and honor"

The Greek word, **σκεῦος** (*skevos*), is translated as "body" in the ESV but as "vessel" in the NKJV. Paul used this same Greek word in Romans 9:21f. "Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one **vessel** for honor and another for dishonor?" Here **σκεῦος** (*skevos*) is clearly a vessel, such as a clay pot. A vessel made for honor would be a pot or container designed to hold food or olive oil, or some other valuable commodity. A vessel made for dishonor would be a pot or container to hold less than desirable things, such as a chamber pot. To translate the word, **σκεῦος** (*skevos*), in 1 Thessalonians 4:4 in the NKJV as "vessel" rather than "body", better conveys the biblical teaching that the soul is the true self that dwells within, or animates, that is, makes alive the physical body.

There are other places where this same idea is conveyed. Paul described the human body as a tent, that is, a temporary dwelling place for the soul while in this world. We read this in 2 Corinthians 3.

For we know that if **our earthly house**, this **tent**, is destroyed, we have **a building from God**, a **house** not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ²For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be **clothed with our habitation** which is from heaven, ³if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. ⁴For we who are in this **tent** groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. ⁵Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. ⁶So we are always confident, knowing that while we are **at home in the body** we are absent from the Lord. ⁷For we walk by faith, not by sight. ⁸We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. ⁹Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. ¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that **each one may receive the things done in the body**, according to what he has done, whether good or bad. (2 Cor. 5:1-10)

Here Paul compares and contrasts the present existence of the Christian with his future existence. The Christian, that is, the soul of the Christian, presently dwells or inhabits the "tent" of his physical body. It is a temporary home for the soul. But one day he will dwell in a "house" that God has prepared for him, which is a reference to the glorified body that will be the Christian's upon the resurrection from the dead.

There are two entities vying to use the body for their purposes--our sin and our God. Prior to becoming Christians, **sin** controlled our bodies; or rather, we employed our bodies in the committing of sin. When we became Christians, **God** gave to each of us the task not to allow sin to control our bodies any longer, but rather "each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and

³ The Revised Standard Version (RSV) has a translation of verse 4 that is far afield from the other translations. It reads, "that each one of you know how **to take a wife** for himself in holiness and honor." It translates the Greek word, **σκεῦος** (*skevos*), as "wife", rather than "vessel" or "body." They argue that Jewish rabbinic literature uses this Greek word for wives. I believe that they are mistaken.

honor.” This is not a sudden, one time securing of our bodies for this purpose. But it is a life-long endeavor. God’s sanctification of believers is such that they “are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.” And so, Christians are to gain control of their bodies so as not to employ them in committing sinful actions, but rather that they might be used to further the purposes of God in the world.

There is another word in our text that conveys this idea. Again, the ESV reads, “that each one of you know how *to control* his own body in holiness and honor.” The NKJV reads, “that each of you should know how *to possess* his own vessel in sanctification and honor.”⁴ The words “control” in the ESV and “possess” in the NKJV are the translation of the Greek word, *κτᾶσθαι* (*ktasthai*). This word is used only in one other place in the New Testament. Peter used this word when he revealed Simon the Sorcerer to be a spurious Christian. Here are the two translations of **Acts 8:20**:

NKJV. “But Peter said to him, ‘Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be *purchased* with money!’”

ESV. “But Peter said to him, ‘May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could *obtain* the gift of God with money!’”

It is clear that the Greek word, *κτᾶσθαι* (*ktasthai*), should be understood in that text as meaning “obtained”, “purchased”, or perhaps “acquired.” I would suggest a similar idea may be understood by the same Greek word in 1 Thessalonians 4:4. We may translate it in this way: “...that each of you should know how to *obtain* or *acquire* his own *vessel* in sanctification and honor.” As Christians we are to secure our bodies to be used for the service of our God in holiness and honor. We are to acquire them for the Lord, wresting them from their employment in sinning against God and employing them for the glory of God.

Before we leave this verse, perhaps it would be good to address a peripheral matter, one that has been put forth to me recently by several people. The question has been asked, “*Is it right for a Christian to arrange for his body to be cremated or buried?*” We have already considered the biblical truth that the physical body of the Christian is a “vessel” for the true self, which is the soul. Many in evangelicalism, however, have gone farther than this assertion by asserting that the body is “only” a vessel, and therefore of very little value or importance. “Whether or not one chooses burial or cremation does not matter in the least”, they would say. Now certainly it is true that cremation will not change anything with regard to the events of the last day. The Scriptures declare that no one will escape standing before God in judgment. We read in Revelation 20:

¹¹Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. ¹²And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is *the Book of Life*. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. ¹³*The sea gave up the dead who were in it*, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. (Rev. 20:11-13)

The statement, “*The sea gave up the dead who were in it*”, is designed to show that even bodies lost, decomposed, or even consumed, will be raised to stand before God in judgment. Some have chosen cremation for they think that this seals their fate, secures them from having to face God. They have deluded themselves in thinking this way. Everyone will one day stand before the Lord. “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.”

⁴ The New American Standard Version also translates this verse with the word, “possess.”

Now some have opted for cremation due to economic reasons. About half of all deaths are followed by the cremation of the body. The cost of doing so is about half the cost of a funeral involved with the burial of the body.

But some Christians have gone so far as to depreciate the body as though it were inherently evil. They believe that the hope of the Christian is to escape from this body. Cremation is not an issue to them for they have such little regard for the human body. But the Scriptures do not allow for this low view of the body. Consider the teaching of the Word of God that *our bodies have been redeemed by the precious blood of the Lord Jesus*. Paul wrote,

For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, *eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body*. (Rom. 8:22f)

Our bodies have been redeemed by Christ, and one day they will be transformed. Paul also wrote in **Philippians 3:20f**,

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*, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.

Our bodies are presently “lowly” bodies, but they are due to be transformed one day. They are not to be discarded as worthless. They are to be regarded as destined for a glorious transformation.

But with regard to whether or not the Christian should have his body cremated, consider how in contrast the followers of our Lord Jesus regarded and treated His body, even after it had undergone severe and abusive treatment, even death upon the cross.

³⁸After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. ³⁹And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. ⁴¹Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. ⁴²So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews’ Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby. (John 19:38-42)

Joseph had been a disciple of Jesus, but secretly. But where our Lord’s open disciples abandoned our Lord in His death, Joseph became a visible disciple of Jesus Christ in His death. He felt compelled to care for the physical body of Jesus, to such an extent, that he went before Roman authorities to obtain His body. Joseph took great care and at great expense to treat the body of our Lord with respect and dignity, laying him in a tomb, that he had prepared for his own death. We may conclude, I believe, that the human body is to be highly regarded and treated with respect and dignity. If we honored the man or woman in life, we are to respect and honor his or her body in death. But further, those societies or cultures that have historically shown a high regard and treatment of the bodies of those who have died, have tended toward a higher view of the value of human life, in contrast to those societies that have disposed of bodies through incineration or mass unmarked graves. Treating the bodies of dead human beings with dignity will lead a society to treat human beings with dignity and regard them with value. But it is not my opinion that we should make cremation or burial a matter of contention.

II. Sanctification involves the Christian controlling his own body “not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles.” (4:3-5)

We read further in our passage the words of verse 5:

³For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵*not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God...*

This suggests a matter that we have addressed in the past. God made each of us a living soul. The components of every soul of man include the *mind*, *emotions*, and *will*. Our soul includes the capacity for thinking, which is the function of the *mind*, the capability of feeling, which is the role of our *emotions* or affections, and the ability to act upon what we know, or believe we know, which is the function of our *will*. When God created Adam and Eve, and until their fall into sin, God had created them with their minds as the arbiters of their lives. Or it has been termed in this way: God had created man in his prelapsarian⁵ state, with his mind as the governor of his soul; in other words, man's mind had hegemony, or dominion, over the soul. Originally Adam and Eve's thoughts were in harmony with God and His will. Our first parents ordered their existence governed by their understanding of truth as God had revealed to them. Their affections, that is, their desires and their delights, were in accordance with what their holy thoughts; they delighted in doing the will of God. They enjoyed richly doing the will of God and they enjoyed fellowship with God in the garden in the cool of the day.

But something terrible resulted from their sin. Upon their sin, the minds of Adam and Eve, formerly informed by the Word of God, no longer governed their faith and practice, for their minds had become darkened through sin. In the place of the mind, their sinful lusts, or desires, or affections--the emotions or affections, took presidency in the soul. Thereafter man has insisted on doing what he desires, what he wants to do, not what he knows in his mind that God has told Him to do. This is a pathological problem that is inherent in the human race. Paul made reference to it here in verse 5. He told these Christians, "that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor", that would be according to God's truth in their *minds*, and then he said, "*not in the passion of lust* like the Gentiles who do not know God." There you have it. Here the Gentiles are a reference to those without Christ, who are given over to sin and dominated by sin. They govern their actions by "the passion of lust", in other words, by their sinful desires, that is, their affections, but these Christians were not to live in that manner, but rather according to their knowledge of the will of God. Their minds were to preside over their lives, not their sinful lusts, as in the case of unbelievers.

And so, God corrected this problem of sin in His people through regeneration, or the new birth. Through His sovereign act of grace in which He imparts spiritual life to His people, His people become responsive to Him in their understanding and obedience to the Word of God. Their renewed mind, that is, their new spiritual understanding of who they are and who God is and who God's Son is as their Savior and Lord, once again begins to govern their affections, which results in their compliant resolve and commitment to do the will of God. They will to do God's will because they love what they have come to know about God and His Word. As the Scriptures say, it is "he who does the will of God that abides forever" (1 John 2:17).

And so, every fallen human being has this pathological problem, which is the usurpation of the emotions over the mind, our lusts becoming the leading functionary of the soul. As the Scripture says,

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God (1 Pet. 4:1f).

And so, how does this work of God of sanctification take place? As our minds are informed by the Word of God, and because God has placed in our hearts (affections, emotions) love for His Word, our will is to apply in our lives what we have come to understand. We are active in this process of

⁵ i.e. "prelapsarian" state speaks of man in his condition prior to his "lapse" into sin.

sanctification. God teaches us, we understand what He has said, we then purpose to act upon it, for our hearts desire to please Him in doing His will.

Now there are many evangelicals who have been taught a wrong understanding of how sanctification is experienced by the believer. Rather than following the biblical instruction to act with all diligence, they have been taught to be wholly passive in the matter. They advocate that the believer is not to do anything, but only believe, simply trust God to do in him what he cannot do for himself. Others say that sanctification is the product of the Holy Spirit working, but that this can only be experienced after a second blessing after salvation in which the believer is baptized in the Holy Spirit. They say that this second blessing is essential in order to experience sanctification in your life. They say when this even occurs in the life of the Christian, that the Christian is all of a sudden elevated to a higher degree of spirituality, that he is transformed into a Christian who can only then enjoy a new and victorious life. Both of these views put little emphasis on the believer's responsibility to grow in understanding of the will of God and resolve in faith to conform one's life to that understanding. We would assert that the Bible teaches sanctification involves the mind. Sanctification occurs only when there is clear rational thinking in correcting errant belief and practice, coming to understand truth. Consider Colossians 1:9-14.

For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask *that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that you may walk worthy of the Lord*, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

I would suggest that this reveals to us that much of what characterizes evangelicals regarding their understanding of the nature of the Christian life is errant. There are many today who reject the importance of the mind. In fact, they say that if one must become holy, the believer must bypass the mind so as to truly experience God. Most Christians believe that they are most spiritual when they feel moved by God and their affections are influenced, this is when they truly experience God. They believe that they are closest to God and most pleasing to God when they are caught up in an ecstatic state, in which they are filled with a sense of joy and peace. But if their affections are not influenced by, even produced by, and understanding of truth in the Word of God, they are not being spiritual, but rather they are being carnal. Spirituality has to do with learning and knowing the truth of God's Word, and then being transformed by that renewed mind ordering his actions accordingly. Our Christian experience flows from and due to our understanding of God and His will. Our lives are to be governed by our understanding, not by mindless impulses or "movements of the Spirit" that are actually not of the Holy Spirit. The mind with its understanding of biblical truth, doctrinal truth, is to govern the life of the Christian.

The Lord teaches us through the hand of Paul that when we live in this manner, seeking to conform our thinking to the Word of God, ordering our lives according to this knowledge, that we will then be able to determine the will of God to be good, acceptable, and perfect. **Romans 12:2** reads:

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. (Rom. 12:1f)

The idea being conveyed is that after a process of testing and examining, you discover that the will of God as directed by the Word of God is the most pleasing, beneficial, and in every way perfect way to live. In a sense, this is one of God's overall purposes in history in bringing salvation to His people. In the beginning while in the garden, Adam and Eve made a determination, after having been influenced by

the devil, to yield to their own lusts (affections), they thereby and thereafter determined that the will of God was not good, was not acceptable, and was not perfect. They would be as “gods”, determining for themselves what was good, acceptable, and perfect. As a result, their minds became darkened. They thought that their own desires, their own lusts, doing their own will would result in their best good, their happiness. And this has been the state of fallen man ever since. God’s will does not appear to be the best course to take. God’s commands, God’s ways, appear to be the way of misery and alienation, a life of slavery and drudgery. And because our minds are so darkened, it appears to us that to order our lives according to our own desires will surely result in our happiness. But the Christian, in faith begins to order his life according to the Word of God out of obedience, because He has come to know God is good and true. There are times when God’s word instructs him to take a course that to him does not make sense. It appears that things will fall apart and chaos and sadness would result from following such a course. But what does he discover? He discovers that by renewing his mind, conforming his values and his ways to God’s Word, proves to be in every way good, acceptable, even perfect. He comes to understand and believe he would have it no other way. He comes to understand experientially the truth and reality of true Christian experience. And then his affections are also stirred, due to his apprehension of the truth that is in Jesus. Here are J. C. Philpot’s words in which he describes the soul that comes to know God through deep experience that is informed by the Word of God:

As the veil is taken off the heart, we begin to see and feel what a power there is in true religion, what a reality in divine teaching, and what a sweetness there is in the inward testimonies of God. Most men’s religion is nothing else but a round of forms. Some have their doings, some their doctrines, and others their duties; and when the one has performed his doings, the other learnt his doctrines, and the third discharged his duties, why, he is as good a Christian, he thinks, as anybody; whilst all the time, the poor deceived creature is thoroughly ignorant of the kingdom of God, which stands not in word, but in power. But as the veil of ignorance and unbelief is taken off the heart, we begin to see and feel that there is a power in vital godliness, a reality in the teachings of the Spirit; that religion is not to be put on and put off as a man puts on and off his Sunday clothes; but when we come away from chapel we cannot take off our religion, fold it up, and put it away into the drawer, and there let it lie safe and quiet all the week. Where vital godliness is wrought with divine power in a man’s heart, and preached by the Holy Ghost into his conscience, it mingles, daily and often hourly, with his thoughts, entwines itself with his feelings and becomes the very meat and drink of his soul. But till the veil was taken away, we could put our religion on and off at pleasure; and were often glad to take off the tight Sunday coat, and slip on the easy week-day clothes. As then we begin to see and feel the reality and power of vital godliness, it separates us from those who have only a name to live while they are dead; it makes us manifest as one of “the peculiar people;” and our friends and companions, nay, the only persons whose society we really love, are those who have felt divine realities by divine teaching. We can no more do with a dead profession of truth, than with a dead profession of error. We can no more make friends and companions of presumptuous professors, than of swearers, adulterers, or drunkards. And feeling, or at least desiring to feel, in our hearts, light, life, savour, dew, and power for ourselves, we look out for those who have experienced these things themselves; and in whom we can read, if we have a discerning eye, the legible lines of God's Spirit written upon their conscience, or towards whom we can feel a sweet knitting of soul, as taught by the same Spirit the same realities which we believe the Holy Ghost has taught us.

Now when a man comes to this spot, to see and feel what a reality there is in the things of God made manifest in the conscience by the power of the Holy Ghost, it effectually takes him out of dead churches, cuts him off from false ministers, winnows the chaff from the wheat, and brings him into close communion with the broken-hearted family of God.

But as the veil is removed, the soul also begins to see and feel the workings of inward sin that it was previously ignorant of. The removal of the veil not merely shows us the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, but every thing contrary to that glory. The pride of our heart, the power of our unbelief, the enmity of our carnal mind, the awful hypocrisy, the daring presumption, the abominable

treachery, the fleshy lusts, and all the obscene imaginations of our depraved nature, that will work in us in spite of all our groans and cries to the contrary—all this, as the veil is taken off the soul, becomes more and more manifested, and we have (and O, what a sight it is!) a sight of ourselves. Did ever a man see so filthy a sight as himself? When he looks down into the sewer of his own nature, does he not see every thing there, creeping and crawling, like tadpoles in a ditch, to disgust him? But even this works together for good; for as a man feels a measure of light and life in his conscience, and sees and feels too more and more of the workings of his depraved nature, and the breakings forth of the hypocrisy of a treacherous heart, he is brought to look more simply and more singly to the glorious Person of the Son of God, and cast himself more sincerely and unreservedly upon that blood which cleanseth from all sin.

And thus, as the veil is removed from off the heart, he begins to drink more deeply into the spirit of the gospel, into the mind of Christ, into the reality of the things of God, into union and communion with Jesus, into the solemn renunciation of himself, into an abhorrence of evil, and separation from the world, and learns to live a life of faith upon the Son of God.⁶

And so, the Apostle Paul instructed these Christians in the nature and the manner of their sanctification, “that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor”, that is in the realm of the *mind* and its understanding of the will of God. They were to be governed “not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God”, that is in the realm of the *affections*.

III. Sanctification involves the Christian not transgressing or wronging his brother in this matter. (4:6)

³For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, ⁵not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶*that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.* ⁷*For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.*

I prefer the NKJV here also, which translates **verses 6 and 7** this way:

³For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, ⁵not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶*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.* ⁷*For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.*

Paul is continuing to denounce sexual immorality, as he had done in verse 3. We considered in that context how sexual sin is chiefly a sin against one’s own body. Sexual immorality is supremely a selfish matter. But that is not to say that one’s sexual sin does not influence or impact others, or may even draw others into sexual sin. That is what is suggested in verse 6, “*that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter.*” When a man or woman involves others or entices others to commit sexual sin, he is defrauding that one. Not only will be people be found guilty on the Day of Judgment answer to God for their own sins, but they will answer to God for leading others to sin against God. Our Lord Jesus taught,

“But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea.” (Mark 9:42)

⁶ J. C. Philpot, *Sermons by J. C. Philpot* (1802 – 1869), vol. 10, pp. 106f

Sinning against God calls forth great judgment from God. Leading or causing others to sin also calls forth great judgment from God. Our Lord Jesus taught that "whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart" (Mat 5:28). But based on this verse we might also say, the woman that has so dressed or acted in order to lead a man to lust for her will also incur great judgment by God for her leading him into his sin. Paul wrote, "*the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified.*"

IV. Paul gives a concluding word of exhortation regarding sanctification. (4:7, 8)

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

These instructions of Paul were not merely his opinions. Paul claimed to set forth the will of God in these words of instruction. To set aside these commands is to defy God and to incur His certain judgment. And further, if one disregards God in these matters, how will he then receive the Holy Spirit from God, the Spirit through whom sanctification only may be realized?

May our Lord enable us to respond in faith and obedience to our Lord's Word set before us. May He enable us to be more and more sanctified, more and more holy before our Lord.

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thess. 5:23)
