



NG Study Guide: 1 Th. 4:1-8 “Be Pure” [10.14.18]

Love God + know the Bible better:

1. Read the passage cited above, and try to answer the questions below before your group meets.
2. *Leader note: Please review the brief instructions for leaders at the bottom.*

The Study

Thesis:

Throughout the ages, sexual temptation and sin have been a snare to God’s people that can keep them from experiencing God’s best, and inflicting unrecognized harm upon themselves and others. The moral values of the prevailing culture often influence perception of sexual morality. The 1st Century Roman Empire, especially Greece where Thessalonica was located, was characterized by sexual immorality. Diana, the goddess of fertility was worshipped through prostitutes who served as temple priestesses. Exploitive sexual activity including men with boys, men with slaves, and men with male and female prostitutes was common. Suffice it to say that it can be difficult to be sexually pure in a world full of immorality, strong temptation, and access. Today, the United States has the highest teen pregnancy rate in the developed world. And an estimated almost fifty percent of High School students will have intercourse before graduation (2018 CDC). Nevertheless, God has called His people to a high moral standard to abstain from sexual immorality, and experience pure love, and today we discover why and how.

1. God’s will: your sanctification - that you should abstain from sexual immorality [1-5]

Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; ²for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 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;

Paul begins this section with the word *finally* [1]. They had established firm foundations of faith, hope, and love in Christ, but Paul was *urging and exhorting* [1] that they grow in their faith. The term, *abound more and more* [1] could be translated “hypergrow.” The aim of the Christian life is to live in such a way that we please God [1]. Paul reminds them that they knew God’s commandments [2], but knowledge without a desire to yield to Christ would not please God. Paul eliminated any ambiguity about God’s will, *for this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality* [3]. *Sanctification* is the idea that followers of Jesus are set-apart to God. Because we are set-apart to God, we are to be set-apart from sin generally, and sexual sin in particular. The Greek term translated *sexual immorality* is *porneia* which is the root of our English word pornography. Sexual immorality includes pornography and sexual activity outside of marriage. We are *to possess our own vessel in sanctification and honor* [4] which means that we are to be pure with our body as well as our mind. Jesus followers are not to be controlled by *passion of lust like unbelievers who don’t know God* [5]. We are to be controlled by God’s Spirit not our flesh.

God’s will would be so foreign in a place like Thessalonica. Unfortunately, God’s view has become foreign in our culture. Seventy percent (70%) of U.S. adults under 35 believe that it is morally acceptable to have sex outside of marriage (Gallup). The world’s view of sex perverts God’s love and never truly satisfies.

Sexual sin is an obstacle to experiencing pure love from and with God

Our most basic need is God’s perfect pure love. We yearn to be loved by One who chooses to love us, and sees something worthy in us. We long for the sense of security and comfort that flows from perfect love and

acceptance. God has set forth boundaries so that we can experience His pure love that satisfies, and experience true intimacy with Him.

Satan's scheme, going back to the Garden of Eden, is always to suggest that God is trying to withhold something that is good [Gen. 3], but the devil is a liar. God is not seeking to make you miserable or deprive you, to the contrary He loves you perfectly and knows what is best for you.

God has ordained that sexual intimacy should be enjoyed in the context of the marriage relationship between a man and a woman. And that this union should reflect the unity, love, and relationship between Jesus and His Church [Gen. 2:24-25, Mk. 10:5-9, Eph. 5:21-33, Rev. 22].

2. God's warning: sexual sin will harm you and others [v.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.

Sexual sin *takes advantage of* or exploits, and *defrauds* or takes something that doesn't belong to you. Sex or *eros* love is not the same as God's *agape* love. Certainly, *eros* love is tempting for the flesh, and can be pleasurable, but it won't truly satisfy like God's love. Furthermore, when we look to sex, like a drug, to fill the void in us, it keeps us from experiencing the filling and contentment that only God provides.

Sex outside of marriage creates obstacles to experiencing true intimacy with your spouse. Marriage is to be characterized by spiritual, emotional, and physical intimacy. Sex outside of marriage creates obstacles including, but not limited to: insecurities, and inability to associate sexual behavior with true love and intimacy.

Sexual sin is an obstacle to experiencing intimacy with God and others and thus it violates another person and inflicts unrecognized harm. All sexual sin is an obstacle to experiencing true intimacy with God, and hinders people from discovering God's pure love that satisfies.

Sexual sin never has the other person's best interests in mind or in heart.

Unfortunately, I became sexually active at age thirteen. There were many sexual encounters and relationships prior to marriage. When I became a follower of Christ, that changed. I look back at those experiences with regret. I realize that I've been forgiven by Jesus, but I also came to realize, after some time walking with Jesus, that I had harmed other people, myself, and my bride Karen because of my flesh being in control rather than Christ.

In essence, putting aside STDs and unwanted pregnancies, "safe sex" outside of marriage is never really safe because it is always harming someone. Pornography is always reducing a person created in God's image to an object, and addiction to pornography actually changes your brain. Adultery will never satisfy, and will always leave a wake of carnage as it destroys marriages, families, and lives. Because of the harm caused by sexual immorality, the Lord shall avenge, *because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified*. Paul had previously warned them and taught them about purity and sexual immorality. Thus, even though he was only in Thessalonica for a brief period of time Paul understood the vital importance of the subject of sexual purity in connection with a relationship with God.

3. God's way: how to experience pure love [7-8]

⁷ *For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.* ⁸ *Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.*

As followers of Jesus, we are to reflect His high standard of morality. We are called to holiness, not uncleanness or immorality [7]. Holiness is akin to sanctification. We are set-apart to God and thus set-apart from sin. Those who reject sexual purity are rejecting God, His pure love, and His salvation [8]. God has *given us His Holy Spirit* [8] to bring conviction of sin, draw us to Christ, and to empower us to have victory over the flesh.

Abstinence, in and of itself, without Christ won't satisfy, because it is Christ's perfect love that satisfies. Similarly, we are not simply trying to be more moral or better human beings. Holiness, and the experience of pure love, flow from proximity to Jesus. The closer you are to Jesus the more satisfied you will be.

Every temptation begins in the mind with desire [Ja. 1:12-15]. When tempted, bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ [2Cor. 10:5]. God is faithful and will provide a way of escape when we are tempted [1Cor. 10:13, 1Cor. 6:18, 2Tim. 2:22, Gen. 39]. Finally, it is important to remember that we cannot change our past, but we can reduce regrets by receiving Christ's forgiveness, and choosing to be pure and experience pure love.

Study Guide Qs

1. Why do you think sexual purity is so challenging for people living in our culture?

**2. What are some of the potential benefits of sexual purity that come to mind?
What are some of the potential dangers of sexual impurity that come to mind?**

3. If you could go back in time, what would you tell your adolescent self?

4. How would you like to apply this lesson to your life?

“Digging Deeper” (optional or alternative study)

1. Here are two helpful articles regarding dangers related to pornography:

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/9-things-you-should-know-about-pornography-and-the-brain/> and <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/men/thinking-man/scary-effects-pornography-21st-centurys-accute-addiction-re-wiring/>.

2. Here is a selection of Scriptures regarding marriage and how to respond to sexual temptation: Gen. 2:24-25, Mk. 10:5-9, Eph. 5:21-33, Rev. 22; 1Cor. 10:13, 1Cor. 6:9-20, 2Tim. 2:22, Gen. 39. What did you discover? What was interesting? What would you like to apply to your life?

Love your neighbor *outside* the group better:

1. Who would like to share how they sought to befriend or build relationship with their neighbors where they live, work, study, or play this past week?

2. Are there some needs that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor outside the group?

3. Here is a neighboring idea(s) for us to consider for the week(s) ahead:

Talk with a neighbor about what trends they see in the culture that are a concern to them, and what they believe the potential solutions might be.

Love your neighbor *inside* the group better:

1. Are there some needs in our group that can provide us an opportunity to love our neighbor within the group?

2. What might we do about that need to help?

Prayer [Loving God and Neighbors better]:

Close the NG meeting with a time of group prayer. Encourage each participant to pray, but don't force anyone to pray. Encourage the group to keep their prayers brief so that each person can pray.

Leader Notes:

- 1. Seek to involve as many group participants as possible.** A good group discussion time allows people to get to know the passage and one another better.
- 2. Feel free to pre-select the discussion questions that you want to focus on** in case there isn't enough time to answer them all.
- 3. The "Digging Deeper" section provides some optional or alternative study and discussion activities.** As a group leader, you can choose to focus on the "Digging Deeper" section, include part of that section in your group meeting, or not use it at all. Try to give the group sufficient notice so they can be prepared for the meeting.
- 4. Every time you meet consider asking:**
 - a. What about this passage is particularly exciting, challenging, or confusing?** If a leader is uncertain about a question of doctrine or theology don't hesitate to follow-up with your coach during the week. Then revisit the issue(s) when the group gathers next time.