

# Sanctification

<sup>3:6</sup> But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you--

<sup>7</sup> for this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your faith.

<sup>8</sup> For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord.

<sup>9</sup> For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God,

<sup>10</sup> as we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?

<sup>11</sup> Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you,

<sup>12</sup> and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you,

<sup>13</sup> so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

**4:1** 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.

<sup>2</sup> For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

<sup>3</sup> For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality;

<sup>4</sup> that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor,

<sup>5</sup> not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God;

<sup>6</sup> 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.

<sup>7</sup> For God has not called us (*epi*) for impurity, but in (*en*) holiness.

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

<sup>9</sup> Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another,

<sup>10</sup> for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more,

<sup>11</sup> and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you,

<sup>12</sup> so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

1 Thessalonians 3:6:4:12

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## Freedom and Sanctification: Are or Were?

THIS WEEK, A FRIEND SENT ME something he is working on for a class. It was on John Calvin's view of the vital importance of **Christian liberty** (*Institutes* 3.19), which Calvin calls "a necessary appendage to justification." Christian liberty is set forth in places like Galatians 5 and Romans 14. "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another" (**Gal 5:13**).

It is the idea that because **justification** is a matter of God's mercy alone, that he has adopted you into his family thereby

becoming your Heavenly Father, that obedience to him is to be done not out of a sense of force or constraint, but, because you are now freed from the yoke and bondage of the law, you obey freely and without compulsion. You obey because you want to, because you have been changed. Where there was once only hatred for God, now there is love, because God has made it so by his free grace being poured into your heart by his Holy Spirit.<sup>1</sup>

In our discussion, I mentioned that I was thinking about **sanctification** for this week's sermon. Sanctification and Christian Liberty are two sides of the same coin. The Greek noun "sanctification" (*hagiosmos*) appears in our passage **three times** in **1 Thessalonians 4:3, 4, and 7** (the ESV translates the latter two occurrences as "holiness," but it is the exact same word). This is amazing since it only appears in the entire Bible 13 times, including the LXX (it appears six times in the Apocrypha).<sup>2</sup> That means 23% of all its biblical usage is right here! It is obviously a major theme for us to look at today.

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<sup>1</sup> I highly recommend reading Calvin himself on this. He is quite easy to understand. But I found a short resource that provides a helpful introduction. See **William Edgar**, "Calvin's View of Christian Freedom" *Westminster Theological Seminary* (July 20, 2016), <https://faculty.wts.edu/posts/calvins-view-of-christian-freedom/>, accessed Nov 29, 2018.

<sup>2</sup> Adding to the wonder, Paul uses it 2 more times in 2 Thessalonians, moving its usage to this church to nearly 40% of all its biblical usage as a noun.

What is “sanctification?” Our word translates “Nazarete” (Amos 2:11), the consecrated Jews who took vows of separation. It translates, “sanctuary” (*miqdash*) a place set apart as holy (Ezek 45:4). It translates “dedicating” (*qadash*) silver to the LORD (Jdg 17:3). As you can see, the word identifies something as being set apart. That’s how it is always used. The verbal form, which is used hundreds of times in the OT, is always the setting of something apart from the profane, common, or ordinary use to that which serves God in a holy place (like a plate or a building or a priest). And this happened by the sprinkling of a pure animal’s blood, which ceremonial made the thing fit for this “clean” service to the LORD God.

In the NT, there are two different aspects of sanctification. Theologians call them definitive and progressive. Definitive sanctification is once-for-all sanctification. This is basically using the word to describe being justified, declared righteous in God’s sight by the blood of Jesus Christ. This is how Paul uses the word in his letter to the church from where he is writing his letter to the Thessalonians. “But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God”

(1Co 6:11; cf 1:2). You hear the **past tense** here: were sanctified.<sup>3</sup> This only happens **one time**. You are set apart for God at one point in time and after that point you serve him in holiness. This is what baptism signifies—you are set apart as holy to now serve the Lord in his NT temple as his priest.

**Progressive sanctification** is **ongoing**. It is a continual washing and renewal that you undergo as a Christian because of sin.<sup>4</sup> This sanctification is both **for** certain activities and **from** certain activities. This is the way the word is used in our passage. “**For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from...**” (1Th 4:3).

I told my friend something that was very close to what Calvin was saying about Christian liberty. I said that what always strikes me about this subject is how Paul first tells the people that they are sanctified, and then that they need to be sanctified. This is backwards from what people would normally think. You would normally think that you need to be increasingly sanctified in order to be definitively sanctified.

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<sup>3</sup> It is an aorist passive verb in the Greek.

<sup>4</sup> I thought here of **Ephesians 5:25** and the “**washing of water with the word**.” This aorist active verb is placed in the context of both Christ definitively sanctifying his bride and husbands not having to ongoingly love their wives in emulation of Christ’s love for his church. Thus, it is a dance between definitive and progressive sanctification.

You would think that you progress your way to final, definitive, perfect holiness, like climbing a ladder to get to the top. But that is not what we find in the NT.<sup>5</sup>

Paul's teaching that they need to be sanctified **presupposes** that they aren't obeying perfectly, which is why they need to persevere in it, and so do better. But their *need* is rooted in their "*are*," because the only way this works is if you first understand that *Christ already did it for you* and *granted you* the legal status of already being sanctified first. Since Christ obeyed perfectly and has justified any who have faith in him, he has **imputed a definitive sanctification** to that person. They are reckoned by God as sanctified. They are sanctified. Definitive sanctification thereby gives them the status (and hence the freedom) they need to carry out obedience without constant moral frustration, which if they didn't have this, they would always be under.

Our passage is **1 Thessalonians 3:6-4:12**. It is summarized beautifully in one short section of 1 Corinthians 6, which we already saw a portion of: "**But you were washed,**

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<sup>5</sup> Here, we could think about a kind of final removal of all sin in a Final Sanctification which we call glorification. But the thing is, definitive sanctification is the bringing about legally of this future sanctification in the here and now. And so while this future sanctification will mean an experiential removal of sin, in this legal there is no separating definitive from final sanctification. The definitive necessitates the final.

you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (1Co 6:11). This short section begins, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God?” (9). That makes perfect sense, right? No unrighteous thing can enter the holy place to be with God.

He then gives a list which begins with a warning. “Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God” (1Co 6:9-10). Apart from the Gospel, there are two ways that the natural mind interprets what is taught here. The first is to interpret it judgmentally. “See those vile homosexuals! What has this nation come to? Those people will never inherit the kingdom of God.” This kind of interpretation looks outward at everyone else, judging from a position of superiority that *I* am not like *them*. It usually conveniently leaves off things in these lists that they are presently guilty of committing themselves, things that also keep people out of the kingdom.

The other is to become totally introspective. “Oh no. I believe in Jesus. I was baptized. I confess his name. But I

keep sinning and doing some of these things. God help me. How can I possibly make it to the kingdom?” Do you get frustrated by your lack of perfect obedience to God? Do you find yourself constantly feeling under the pressure of, “Why God can’t I stop doing this?” Does it create in your feelings of panic, doubt, worry (sins themselves) that maybe you aren’t even a Christian? Do you have thoughts that if you don’t stop that God’s love will be taken away from you and you will go to hell?

The answer to former judgmental interpretation is that you, my friend, need to see *yourself* as a sinner, not them. If your *first* thought it is to judge your neighbor and think you are fine, then it is more than likely that you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ. For if you did, you would see that he is a perfect man and you are not. You would see that he loved you while you were his enemy, and you do not return the favor to others. You would see that your gossip, slander, hate, insolence, arrogance, and boastfulness, your drunkenness, cheating of others, lying, lusting, stealing, disobedience to your parents, doing terrible things to others, and so on is just as bad as theirs. You need to repent of your sins and turn to Christ for forgiveness. You need to bow your

knee to the Lord and Maker of heaven and earth and plead with him for mercy upon your own vile offenses against Him.

The answer to the introspective interpretation is found in six little English words in **1 Corinthians 6:11**, and as we will see, in the entirety of our passage today. Those six words are “and such were some of you.” Past tense. Thing is, Paul says this to what is probably **the most messed up church** morally speaking in the NT. He immediately chides some of them for sleeping with prostitutes even as he has just finished scolding them for lawsuits against one another. Of the nine things mentioned in his list of people who won't inherit the kingdom of God, one can make a case that these two things alone constitute up to six of those nine. In other words, they *are* doing these things. But he tells them that that is what they *were*, not what they are.

Intriguing? Let's turn to our passage and see how this works itself out with the Thessalonians. **Outlining** what we will look at we will see that we can break the passage up into two halves, with a doxology in the middle. The **first half (1Th 3:6-10)** provides **the grounding** upon which the **sec-**

ond half (4:1-12) may proceed. The first half is the definitive, the past tense, the thing that God has already done, the miracle, the grace, the work of Christ alone. It is for this that the doxology (3:11-13) or prayer is offered up which both gives thanks to God for this work, but also prepares the soil for the law to bear fruit. That law takes the form of two basic kinds of commands. One is negative and shows what they need to stop doing, in other words what they are doing that pollutes them. The other is positive and shows them what they need to start doing, can, and must do because of what God has done.

## Definitively Set Apart

We begin in four verses that are connected to what has already been said. “But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and has brought us the good news of your faith and love and reported that you always remember us kindly and long to see us, as we long to see you—” (1Th 3:6). You will recall that we have seen how the Apostle has spoken of all of these things in the letter up to this point. He was nervous that his hasty departure might have been used by Satan

to choke out the seed he planted. He was anxious that his brief stay was not long enough and that the nature of the departure might have caused many to stumble away from the Faith they initially responded to positively.

But **none of that has happened**. Timothy had been sent to them and returned to Corinth with good news. Their faith and love and longing and prayers continued uninterrupted. His repeated thankfulness for their salvation was not in vain. God *had* saved them. The Word was powerfully at work in them. God was working, even though they were not able to. Is this not reason to rejoice that sometimes, when it is God's will, a person merely hears the barest of gospel messages, responds by God's grace, is truly converted, and continues even though all the outward appearances would say that this should not be possible. They weren't disciplined long enough. They weren't shepherded good enough. But Jesus is the Good Shepherd, and his people do hear his voice. They come to him and he leads them in green pastures.

Thus, Paul and his companions offer up thanks yet again. **“For this reason, brothers, in all our distress and affliction we have been comforted about you through your**

faith” (7). As we saw last time, because faith is God’s gift, God’s work, God’s grace, when it is seen—especially when you are the one who planted the seed of the gospel—it causes all other things to melt away. That God can do this kind of a work while we undergo such distress and affliction for his Name makes it all worth it.

This is the very definition of life, to know that God is still working in the lives of those you present the gospel to. “For now we live, if you are standing fast in the Lord” (8). Imagine the hardships of Paul. It is really almost impossible. He gives us a list in another place (2Co 11:23-28).

- great labors
- countless beatings
- Five times from Jews forty lashes minus one
- Once stoned
- a night and a day adrift at sea
- in danger from rivers
- danger from my own people
- danger in the city
- imprisonments
- often near death
- Three times beaten with rods
- Three times shipwrecked
- frequent journeys
- danger from robbers
- danger from Gentiles
- danger in the wilderness

- danger at sea
- in toil and hardship
- hunger and thirst
- in cold and exposure
- danger from false brothers
- many a sleepless night
- often without food
- daily pressure of my anxiety for all the churches.

Why is this life? Because God is imparting eternal life through them who live their life for Christ and the expansion of his kingdom by preaching the gospel and starting churches. All these people transformed, moved from darkness to light, the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God and of his Christ. And then the saints who are themselves undergoing similar difficulties “are standing fast in the Lord,” what joy. Why? Because, again, from a human point of view, it makes no sense. It is absolute proof that God is working. Therefore, these men become virtually speechless, “For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God” (9).

All they want at this point, then, is to be able to return to Thessalonica that they may see their brothers and sisters in Christ again, and so that they might help these precious

saints who have been left orphaned as infants, from a spiritual point of view, with their pastors and shepherds having been driven off unable to return. “As we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith?” (10).

It is important here to take stock of what we have just seen. These are **real Christians**, saved by God. They have **persevered** through much hardship, without the Apostles even being there to help them. They have **continued** not only to persevere, but to love those whom they could easily have turned against because of the nature of their fast departure. They have been saved. Everything in this letter up to this point has pressed this upon them and therefore upon us. These are Christians and God has been at work. They have believed the Faith by faith. In a word that he uses in other places, **they have been sanctified**. This is the grounding. This is the starting point. Everything else presupposes this.

## Set Apart From

Let us move from 3:10 to 4:1, skipping the doxology for the moment. **4:1** is a **transitional** verse, perhaps *the*

transitional verse of the entire letter. For it moves us from these great doctrines of election and salvation and suffering to more practical matters of how and why they should live for Christ. It begins with the word “**finally**” (*loipoi*). We’ve said the most important stuff. Not to the rest of it.

What he will say is not unimportant. It just isn’t foundational. You can’t build an eternal house upon the law; it has to be built out of the gospel. Not because the law is bad, but because you are. But since Jesus kept the law for us, we are now able to transition to things like the “how” and “why” of the Christian life. The “how” is the law of God.

“**Finally, then, brothers...**” (4:1). Again, he reminds them that they are of one and the same holy family, fellow brothers in Christ. Saved. Justified. Sanctified. “**We ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus...**” Asking and urging is translated sometimes as requesting and exhorting, calling upon you, praying and beseeching. In other words, he is about ready to tell them what they need to do.

“... that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God...” **Walking to please God.** This is what they are to do. It is summarized, basically, in the Ten Commandments. Walking to please God is **doing the things he**

requires in his law. It is doing the things he commands. He is the King, these are the rules of his Kingdom. It is a Kingdom that you have already been brought into by faith.

Notice next the vital words, “... just as you are doing.” This is followed immediately by, “... you do so more and more.” This is what I said earlier that it is always this way with the NT. Brothers, you are sanctified. Brothers, be sanctified. Sisters you were these things, but are not something new. So stop doing them and do new things. Acts as you are, not as you were. Just as you are doing, do so more and more. Do you see this? This is key to all Christian obedience. It is how to understand ongoing, progressive sanctification. It is exactly what Calvin spoke about with Christian liberty. Your conscience is set at ease by the truth so that you may obey freely.

“For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus” (4:2). Notice, Jesus still gives instructions, commands, laws. The Gospel of Grace is not a gospel of amorality or immorality. Jesus is holy.

Doing or carrying out his instructions is what he calls “the will of God, your sanctification” (3). Now, “will of God” here could be taken in one of two ways, for it is used

in two ways in the Scripture. We could think of it as the **decretive will**, this is God's sovereign decree, the thing that does not fail. All that God decrees comes to pass. As the will of God for them is their sanctification, it makes sense to think of this as the decretive will, for God decrees that all his people be sanctified and keep being sanctified, and there will not be a single saint in heaven who is not sanctified.

However, surrounding this on either side is their own compliance to these instructions. “**You know the instructions ... for this is the will of God ... that you abstain from...**” The Scripture speaks of God's will in a second sense, and that is his commands. We call this the **revealed will** or will of command. This is basically God's law. God wills that people obey him, that is he tells them what to do. Clearly, this is in view here. Though commentaries usually make a judgment call on which one is in view here,<sup>6</sup> I don't know why the one word can't be doing double duty.

What do I mean? It can be hard to wrap your mind around this because the Bible uses one word (*thelema*) for two ideas. One can't be thwarted; the other is thwarted all the

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<sup>6</sup> For example, Beale has a good discussion; he ends up taking the will of command view (see p. 116).

time. And yet, in the thwarting, the other is still not thwarted. Nevertheless, both exist simultaneously. And since they both exist simultaneously, why can't this particular instance be speaking of both? God wants you to be sanctified, and you will be if you are his. God wants you to obey him, and you need to if you are his. Both are true. This is exactly what he just said, “just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.”

Theological Language for the Will of God	
Sovereign Will	Moral Will
Efficient Will	Permissive Will
Secret Will	Revealed Will
Will of Decree	Will of Command

So now we come to the question, **what had he told them to do?** Undoubtedly, it was many things, but he only picks one of them to talk about here. He picks **sexual immorality**. “For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality...” (4:3). The word here is *porneia*. It is a word that encompasses all kinds of things from

extra-marital intercourse (including fornication and adultery, i.e. one not married and the other married), to prostitution (in their case, usually cultic-religious prostitution). Since there is virtually no logical end to what this word can include in our day, I'll leave the rest to your own imagination. But just know that many of those things you are thinking of are condemned in the Old Testament (homosexuality, bestiality, incest, rape, etc., etc.).

Notice that Paul does not say “that you abstain from sex,” but that you abstain from sexual *immorality*. In other words, there is a context that God has provided wherein sex is not only permitted, it is good! The devil didn't make sex; God did. And he made it wonderful. But he put boundaries upon it for *our* sake, so that we wouldn't know the hurt that comes from abusing it; and for his sake, so that we might know what a holy and good God he is.

Just so you can get a flavor for the things that were going on, consider **Demosthenes** (384–322 B.C.) who said: “Mistresses we keep for our pleasure, concubines for our day-to-day physical well-being, and wives to bear us legitimate children and to serve as trustworthy guardians over our households” (*Orations* 59.122). The philosopher **Cato** (95–46

B.C.) praised those men who satisfied their sexual desires with a prostitute rather than another man's wife. Ancient funerary inscriptions reveal that concubinage was common. Prostitution was a business and profit from prostitutes working at brothels was an important source of revenue for many respectable citizens. Innkeepers and owners of cookshops frequently kept slave girls for the sexual entertainment of their customers. Adulterous activity was, in fact, so widespread that the emperor Augustus (63 B.C.—A.D. 14) established a new code of laws having to do with adultery and marriage—the “Julian Laws”—in a failed attempt to reform sexual practices.”<sup>7</sup> So when you start thinking that America is worse than anyone else in history, know that there's nothing new under the sun. All we are doing is returning to the paganism of our ancestors.

At any rate, the Apostle continues, reminding them “that each one of you know how to control his own body”<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey A. D. Weima, “1 Thessalonians,” in Clinton E. Arnold, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon.*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 419.

<sup>8</sup> Body (*skeuos*) is actually a difficult word to know how to interpret, but “body” is probably the best option. It can mean, as the ESV has, a body and thus this would be parallel to 1 Cor 6:18 (which is interesting, because we've been in that chapter already today). It can mean more specifically the male sexual organ, in other words, this is especially a command to the men of the church. Or it can be taken to refer to a married man's wife, which would mean he is to marry for holiness and honor. The most interesting option (coming from “in this matter” in vs. 6) is

in holiness (i.e. sanctification) and honor” (4). The contrast is to “the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God” (5).

It goes without saying that we are living in a time of gross immorality, growing exponentially greater with each passing day. Our return to the darkness of the Gentiles seems to know no bounds nor no speed at which we will do everything we can to return here.

The thing is, for God’s people, we are not to be like the heathens. If they return to their gods, so be it. But we serve the Lord. Our God is holy and pure, and we are to be like him. I can think of few things that need to be said more directly than this to the churches of today that one can hardly tell the difference between the church and the culture. Every known kind of sexual immorality is now praised in places that call upon the name of Jesus. It is an abomination. And you, Christians, are not to be like this.

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that Paul is talking about a specific Greek inheritance law that forced a daughter to marry near-kin and thus be considered a “son.” Hence, the prohibition would be against incest. G. K. Beale, *1–2 Thessalonians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 116-123.

But in good Pauline fashion, **he never leaves you without a reason**. In fact, he gives two. First, “**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**” (6). This is **a second table of the law reason**. Love your neighbor as yourself. Specifically, it involves your “brother.” That is, not your neighbor generally, but your fellow Christian specifically. Sexual sin when two or more Christians are involved hurts all of them, but especially the one sinned against.

What he says next is that when a brother is sinned against in this way, he or she is **not left without vindication**. Though they are betrayed by their most loved one, God has not and will not forget the most intimate kind of wrong that can be done, be it a husband against a wife, a father against a son, or whatever else you can think of. God is **a God of justice**, and **vengeance is his**. Part of the reason for the return of Christ is to set all of these kinds of things right. This is what **Judgment Day** is all about. It is what **hell** is all about. Later in this letter and the next, much will be said the Return of Christ. Here, it is enough to know that it is associated

with terrible wrath and judgment against the ungodly who sin so terribly against fellows.

A question here involves what kind of judgment this will be. For those **pretending** to be Christians (and in a group like this, there can always be individuals who are faking it), the judgment will be swift and terrible and eternal. Hell is real, and it is the place of judgment for those who dare defy the Living God, especially those who pretend to be on his side. For those who are **believers**, they will make it through that Day, but only as those who have been purified with fire. I confess I do not understand this well, as Jesus has taken our final judgment upon himself. Nevertheless, there is something here about God not forgetting the things that we do, especially in these matters, against other Christians sexually. This is one of those reasons why you must thank God for the “are” part of this sermon. However it works, Paul is not saying that this is the unforgivable sin. He is saying you need to be very, very sober minded about it.

The second reason is a **first table of the law thing**. It is about God himself. “**For God has not called us for (*epi*) impurity, but in (*en*) holiness** (i.e. sanctification)” (7). It is a strange use of prepositions. But it seems that the idea is that

when you are saved, God has not saved you to just do whatever sin you feel like doing. Rather, he has set you apart. Learning to obey God in this matter is part of that ongoing sanctification we are talking about. But the reason it is first table of the law, is because this is God's doing. **This is for God.** We are sanctified for God, not for more sin. He did not make you into his temple so that you can go around defiling it with feces and excrement. Sexual sin is like that to the Lord.

He finishes this negative “do not” sin, this sin that we are set apart *from* doing in this way, with a warning. “**Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you**” (8). We are still in that first table idea, for the Spirit is God. It is interesting that it is of all the Persons, the “**Holy**” Spirit that he discusses, because it is holiness that he has in mind. Sexual impurity is the opposite of the very Spirit that God has caused to dwell inside of you. And to disregard this teaching, meaning you couldn't care less about what he is saying now, is to disregard God himself.

It is so popular in our day to insist that these kinds of sins are antiquated, dated taboos of a bunch of prudish Victorian

patriarchs who only want to keep you from having a good time. Every argument promoting sexual deviance these days, by “Christians,” is basically that men made them up and even if they worked in those days they have nothing to do with our enlightened, postmodern wokeness. Paul disagrees strongly. You are not arguing here with him, but with the living Christ who is going to return again and will avenge all these things. Beloved, hear the law of God and do not grieve the Holy Spirit within you.

## Set Apart For

He turns next to something that we are set apart to do. This becomes a positive commandment, an example of a perfect complement to the negative “do not” command he has just discussed. It is essentially the command to love. “Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another” (9).

Love is the heart of the OT Law, as Jesus himself taught. Love the LORD your God and love your neighbor as yourself. Both of those are OT commandments. Love is the heart

of the NT law as well. And it is so obvious to someone saved by God's love that to hear it is to know that it is the very heart of God who is love. I find this language particularly interesting, because basically the last commandment was about love too. Do not act in that way in order to love your brother.

In this one, it is **things you are supposed to do** in order to love your brother. It begins with another affirmation that they are doing this, therefore they need to do it more. **“For that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia” (10)**. They are showing this love to everyone. **“But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more” (10b)**. In other words, this side of heaven, your love is always incomplete. Here is how you, Thessalonians, can show love even better.

**“Aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one” (11-12)**. We have three commands that are related to one another. Probably the most basic and founda-

tional is to **work**. It is foundational because when it is working (no pun intended), the other two are much harder to commit.

Here I want you to think about something as it regards sanctification in the OT vs. the NT. In the OT, the **place of sanctification** was the tabernacle or the temple, because this is where God dwelt. All objects coming into contact with this place were to be purified or sanctified with the blood. Cups and plates, priests and even the mercy seat were all to be sprinkled with the blood. And when those things came into contact with the holy thing, they became holy themselves. That is, they were set apart from common and profane to sacred and holy. The nature of their reason for existence changed. Now they served God. This is not magic, but it is spiritual.

Consider work and how many people think of it is as a drudgery. Monday's stink, Wednesday is hump day because its half over, Friday is great because you've spent all that time working for the weekend. This is no way to live, even if you hate your job. The Reformation recovered something and it was the sacredness of something they called vocation.

**Vocation** means “calling.” But vocation particularly referred to **secular calling**, i.e. your job. They believed it was not a bad thing to be a shoe-maker or a baker or a tanner or a blacksmith. The reason is because the place of holiness changed from a temple in Jerusalem to the temple of the Christian. Thus, when they become holy, what they touch becomes holy (the opposite idea is in mind in sexual defilement by the way). That is, it is set apart from its ordinary drudgery to service of the living God. The way Evangelicals have thought of this is that you can be a book writer or a carpenter or an accountant, but you have to do it for a *Christian* company. That is what gives it goodness. No, said the Reformers. The goodness of the work comes from the sanctification of the worker and because God made work good.

It is all too common to hate and despise work. In a day when the government promises to take care of you (that’s how you get votes after all), it becomes all the more tempting to just give up working altogether. We will see that the Thessalonians had more than one reason for not working, but they did have the same temptation that many do today. Just don’t work. Maybe Jesus is coming back so who cares. Maybe you can’t find that good Christian organization to

work in so why bother. Maybe you aren't called to be a pastor, so what does it matter to God? Whatever the case, Paul says work with your hands.

The **reason is two-fold**. First, so that you may **walk properly before outsiders**. People who see Christians being lazy import this laziness into their view of what it means to be a Christian. “**Oh, those Christians are lazy bums. They never work.**” I've seen it happen at work, with Christians who don't work hard. I've seen it happen with Christians who just won't get a job. So did Paul. And it is not a good witness to the world.

Second, so that you **be dependent on no one**. This is as anti-socialist a statement as you can possibly find. No food stamps, not government dependence, no welfare. You do not find that anywhere in the Scripture, though you do find *the church* taking care of its own. But they do this for those who can't find work or who can't go to work or who for whatever reason have fallen on hard times due not to their own refusal to work. There is a general attitude in the west that the state owes me. It is pervasive in certain segments of our society. And it is easy to fall into. The Apostle hates the

idea of being dependent upon others *because* of our own refusal to take care of ourselves.

**Work does two more things.** It helps us **live quietly** and **mind our own affairs.** These are the two things that precede working with your hands in the list. Living quietly probably means not being a busybody, a gossip of the town, the informant who knows everyone's business. Minding your own affairs naturally fits into this. If you are busy working, then you have no time for these games that Victorian High Society women in **Jane Austin** books do to pass their time. The **Puritans** put such great emphasis on this in their preaching that our entire nation for hundreds of years was known for its Protestant work ethic. That has gone the way of the dodo bird in many ways. And what we are seeing today with the explosion of social media busybodies that fight and gossip and everything else is, in my opinion, something that has a lot to do with the rejection of these principles here. Too much time on their hands.

God has saved us to be productive and busy and redemptive and creative and to work. It is actually what he put us in the Garden of Eden to do. It is good. And **sanctification is greatly affected simply by putting your hands to the plow**

and getting out there and doing something helpful for society and your family and yourself. There is nothing more able to give a good sense of pride and self-esteem than work, and nothing quite as damaging as the inability to work. How much more when we refuse because we would rather free-load off of others?

## Returning to a Doxology

You can hopefully see the practicality of these things. But I want to return here at the end to the middle of the text, that **doxology**. It is three verses. “Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints” (1Th 3:11-13).

It is a fascinating thing in and of itself that there is a doxology in the middle of this text. The reason for it seems to be to act as a **prayerful transition** to the commandments we

have just seen. God has done something. Thank God for doing that. Pray that he may help us be part of him continuing to do that. Here's how we want you to do it more. That's basically the flow of our passage.

Here, our pastors pray that God the Father and Jesus would **direct their way back to Thessalonica**. God had closed the door to them being there. They desperately want to return. It is not enough for them to just write a letter. They want to be there to answer questions and to help them grow by discipling them personally in the word. Just prior to the doxology, they had said that these Christians have things lacking in their faith (10). They want to return in order to help increase that lack.

He wants their **love to increase and abound for one another**. We've seen how he commands them specifically to put this into practice. Working and keeping busy is a form of loving your brothers! Not violating one another sexually. Both increase your love for one another. Finally, it is a means of **establishing their hearts as blameless and holy before God**, for in obeying the Lord in all things, he sets us apart day by day conforming us into the image of his Son. That is sanctification.

Let me leave you with this thought. It is about the Son of God. The doxology actually anticipates what we will begin to talk about next week with regard to the coming of Christ. We've even said a little something about this already today, as we have in earlier studies.

But here's what I want to leave you with. "at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints" is actually language taken from the OT. It comes from Zechariah. "And you shall flee as you fled from the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah. Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with him" (Zech 14:5). Note the parallel:

The coming of our Lord Jesus            with all his saints  
The coming of the LORD my God with all the holy ones

In other words, the LORD (Yahweh) my God is the Lord Jesus Christ. This happens so often in the NT that we don't even pay attention. Here is just one more example. The Christians believed that the Son of God was Israel's God, that he was Yahweh. But they also believed that this Son had a Father and that this Father was also Yahweh and was also

Israel's God. And they believed these two Persons were so inseparable so that they simply were One God.

With that thought, I simply want to ask you a question. So many people today despise the teachings of the OT on sexuality and even on work, because that's that God of the OT. Of course, they ignore the obvious things we've seen here that these are the commands of Jesus (again, **1Th 4:2**). But now you know why. It was Jesus who gave them in the OT, for he is the LORD our God. How much more with such a great salvation should you therefore obey him today?