

## 7. Integrity or Immorality

Paul's teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, was particularly necessary in view of the cultural background of the Thessalonians. In contrast to the Jews who had the Law, these Gentiles had come out of gross idolatry which had little or no restraint on their moral character especially in matters of sex. In fact, prostitution was a very prominent part of their religious life since the worship of the so called gods involved the use of temple prostitutes. The moral climate in the Roman Empire was morally decadent. "Immorality was a way of life; and, thanks to slavery, people had the leisure time to indulge in the latest pleasures. The Christian message of holy living was new to that culture, and it was not easy for these young believers to fight the temptations around them." Understandably then, Paul addresses this particular ethical issue in his letter to warn and admonish these new believers.

Q. In sexual matters, what are some of the ways a person could "wrong" or "take advantage" of another? (see vs. 6)

Verse 3 sets out God's purpose clearly: that we should be "sanctified" (that is, to be holy, set apart for God).

Q. What might sanctified living look like in regard to sexual matters?

Paul wrote his letter from Corinth; a city about which the term "to Corinthianize" was coined to speak of sexually immoral behaviour. Historians note how it was not unlikely for the average man of the time to take great liberty in sexual pleasure and not limit himself to his wife or one partner. Verse 4, literally translated would read: "each of you should possess your vessel in purity and honor." Several commentators have difficulty determining whether this verse refers to controlling one's body or to taking one wife and being faithful. Whatever the case, the implications here, taught more explicitly in other letters, is for Christians to live sexually honourable lives which affirm God's loving principles of selflessness, holiness and faithfulness.

In the Bible's teaching, God affirms that:

1. sex has a God-given relationship structure— a faithful commitment between a man and a woman, and
2. sex has a God-given ethical imperative to act with honor and purity towards one's partner

Q. What dilemmas do these lasting principles raise for new Christians today?

Q. How can a healthy Christian community help new Christians to leave behind former behaviours and to learn "new" Christian principles of relationships and sex?



CHURCH HEALTH CHECK

1 THESSALONIANS

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12



#4

In 1  
Thessalonians

4:1 the apostle writes about ....

*"how you must live (lit. "walk") and please God"*

Understanding the "street" on which we "walk"

- Comparing the lifestyles of Thessalonika 1st century to Melbourne 21st century
- "Walking" in the global village

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### 1. The Urgency of Integrity

**4:1** Finally then, brothers and sisters, we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received instruction from us about how you must live and please God (as you are in fact living) that you do so more and more. **4:2** For you know what commands we gave you through the Lord Jesus.



### 2. A leader's example (1 Thess. 2:5-12)



### 3. How to be "in the world, but not of it"?

**4:3** For this is God's will: for you to become holy, for you to keep away from sexual immorality, **4:4** for each of you to know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor, **4:5** not in lustful passion like the Gentiles who do not know God. **4:6** In this matter no one should violate the rights of his brother or take advantage of him, because the Lord is the avenger in all these cases, as we also told you earlier and warned you solemnly. **4:7** For God did not call us to impurity but in holiness. **4:8** Consequently the one who rejects this is not rejecting human authority but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

#### The three instructions:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ vs. 3b
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ vs. 4-5
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ vs. 6a

#### Three good reasons to live holy lives:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ vs. 6
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ vs. 7

### 4. Excel in Christian Love

**4:9** Now on the topic of brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another. **4:10** And indeed you are practicing it toward all the brothers and sisters in all of Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more...

- See chapter 3:12, 13



### 5. Keeping in step

**4:11** and to aspire to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, as we commanded you. **4:12** In this way you will live a decent life before outsiders and not be in need.

#### Three exhortations:

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ vs. 11
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ vs. 11b
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ vs. 11c

#### Two good reasons

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ vs. 12a
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ vs. 12b

### 6. Pleasing God

Paul is keen for Christians to lead lives that please God "more and more". List some of the not so sound reasons people might seek to please God: