

**"The Lifestyle of Holiness"
(1 Thessalonians 4:1-12)
Pastor Peter Yi
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Introduction:

NIV 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

¹Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. ²For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

³It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; ⁶and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. ⁷For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. ⁸Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

⁹Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. ¹⁰And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.

¹¹Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, ¹²so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.

The anchor for a holy lifestyle is God.

- how to live in order to please God (v1)
- urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more (v1)
- the authority of the Lord Jesus (v2)
- it is God's will that you should be sanctified(v3)
- for God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life (v7)
- rejects God (v8)
- taught by God (v9)

You and I need to be reminded of this again and again. These are the basics of holiness. And the basics need to be drilled into us over and over again.

When you and I are tempted and even fall into sin, as we often times do, what's our reference point? In the heat of the battle of temptation, is God in the picture? I think you and I would agree that every single time we sin, we sin because we have consciously or subconsciously pushed God out of our lives. Think of it another way. If you physically were in the presence of Jesus would you sin? I think the answer is no. Say you and your girlfriend or boyfriend and Jesus were on a date and you had a nice Thai dinner, pad Thai, some spring rolls, coconut soup, you enjoyed some real deep conversation and you sensed a real growth in your emotional intimacy, and afterwards you go to see a PG movie. You snuggle up close to each other sharing a bag of popcorn and a drink. Great movie, great company. Great evening. And then you head over to your place to hang out. No one else is home, it's just the three of you. You two are on the sofa watching some television and Jesus is there on the armchair. Okay. You got the picture?

Now, would you make a sexual move on your boyfriend or girlfriend with Jesus right there? If you tried anything, would you not hear the “ah-hem”? But the reason why we also temptation to turn into sin is because we have consciously removed God from the picture.

So you and I have to constantly remind ourselves that God is, in fact, present with me all the time. When I wake, and when I get breakfast ready for the kids, when I shower and dress, when I go to work or school, when I have to make an ethical decision in the meeting room, when I commute home through gridlock traffic, when I get back home and plop down on the sofa, when I go on my date, when I head over to the health club, when I put my children to sleep, when I have sex with my spouse, when I sleep, God is there.

You have heard me say this several times throughout the years, but I believe it deserves repeating. We are not pursuing holiness so that we can become better people, so we can feel better about ourselves. It is not a self-help program. We are not pursuing holiness to look good in front of others, as if we are trying to win someone’s approval.

The primary reason and rationale for being holy is 1 Peter 1:15-16.

¹⁵But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; ¹⁶for it is written: "Be holy, because I am holy."

Think of monthly memory verses. They all have a God reference.

<p>Exodus 15:11 <i>Who among the gods is like you, O LORD ? Who is like you— majestic in holiness, awesome in glory, working wonders?</i></p>
<p>1 Peter 2:9 ⁹<i>But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.</i></p>
<p>Romans 6:11-14 ¹¹<i>In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. ¹²Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. ¹³Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. ¹⁴For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace.</i></p>
<p>Galatians 2:20 ²⁰<i>I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.</i></p>
<p>Hebrews 12:14 ¹⁴<i>Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord.</i></p>
<p>1 Thes 4:7 ⁷<i>For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.</i></p>

Holiness pleases God. Holiness is the will of God. (v.3) This is His calling for me. The command to be holy comes from the highest authority. V2 – these are the commands of Jesus. V.8, v.9. It is to reject the authority of our triune God. This authority is in the apostles. (v.1, 2, 10,11), for us today, in the Scriptures.

The most important questions are not God should I be a doctor or a lawyer? They're not should I work at Bell or Rogers? Sure those are important questions and we should seek out God's will in those decisions. But they're not the most important questions. The most important questions are "Lord Jesus, in what area of my life are you wanting me to be more holy?" "God, how can I be more holy as an employee?" "God, how can I be more holy with my finances?" "God, how can I be more holy with my thought life?" and so on. So you and I can ask those questions today and throughout our lives.

The anchor for holiness is not primarily found in us. We don't dig deeper. We don't try harder, so to speak. We tighten the rope on the anchor. We must know God more. We must grapple with his holiness.

The application of holiness is lived out among people.

Holiness is good, more holiness is better. (v.1,10b)

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¹⁰And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, **to do so more and more.**

Paul gives us here an encouragement and an exhortation. He's saying, "I couldn't be more pleased with the holy life you are now living. It gives me great joy to witness your progress and growth in holiness. That's essentially what he is saying. Great job. But you can do better. Keep going. Don't give up. You're holy, now be more holy."

What a great coach. If you are a competitive athlete, you don't want a coach that says, that's good enough, give me 90% and I'll be happy. You want the coach that says, reach down inside. Dig deeper. Give me a little more. I'm glad Joe Quenville, the coach of the 2010 Stanley Cup hoisting Chicago Blackhawks didn't say to his team, those words.

Sexual purity

³It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; ⁴that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, ⁵not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; ⁶and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. ⁷For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. ⁸Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.

The command is that we avoid sexual immorality. It's a broad term. What does it mean? The biblical teaching on sexuality is basically this. All sexual activity outside the confines of a marriage between one man and one woman, a husband and wife, is sin. It's a hard truth to take in given the sexually permissive society we live in. From very early on we are bombarded with sexual images. The message of media doesn't place marriage on a pedestal, but rather says there are many options for sexuality. Our society says that masturbation is okay, that there is nothing moral or immoral about it, it's just a normal part of our sexuality. Society says that any sexual relationship is okay. Really the only sexual relationship frowned upon by our society is sex

with children. Isn't that true? Homosexuality, common-law marriage, fornication (pre-marital sexual activity), masturbation, any other type of activity, all qualified with what? "as long as it doesn't hurt anybody." "it's a private matter."

But for Christians, God places such a high value on heterosexual marriage and sex, so you and I, both single and married, must preserve and honor that. Does it mean we become stone-throwers at anyone and everyone who doesn't live by that standard? No. But in our witness, in loving and caring for people of all persuasions, we not only want them to find salvation in Jesus, but we want to experience the joy that can only be found in holiness.

For Christians, struggling with sexual sin and temptation what we need is self-control—control over our bodies. Again, this is contrary to the message taught to young people in schools and perhaps you've bought into this as well. What's the underlying message? "Kids, raging with hormones, they're sexual beings, they're gonna do it anyway, might as well teach them to do it right." Show them how to properly put on a condom. Teach them not about self control, not about abstinence, but how to do it and not get pregnant, and not get an STD, and so on.

What you and I need is to learn how to grow in self-control. Self control, though it sounds like a me thing, is really not. It's a spiritual thing, that originates and is empowered by the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5 clearly makes the point.

²²But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,
²³gentleness and self-control.

So if we look closer at Galatians, self-control and the other fruit are the byproducts, the evidences of a Spirit led, Spirit lived, and Spirit filled life. It is by becoming more Spiritual (capital S), that we begin to bear the fruit.

Think of a fruit tree. You don't focus on the fruit to grow the fruit. You focus on the environmental factors, Soil, Sun, Water, nutrition, health of the tree. If you focus on these things, when do you get? Good fruit.

Is the area of sexuality a place that God wants you to draw in deeper holiness? Surrender that area to him.

The next area to live out holiness is in Brotherly Love

⁹Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. ¹⁰And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.

What you notice here is that Paul is not telling us to avoid or not to participate in a negative behavior, but instead he is encouraging us to grow in a positive area. And I think we need to see that because most likely when we think of sins, we think more of the sins of commission, rather than the sins of omission. Isn't this true? Don't we think of not swearing, not lying, not cheating, not getting angry and so on and so on, and that's definitely a huge part of sin. And the avoidance, the mastery over various sins is a large part of growing in holiness, but it is only one part.

The other side of our growth in holiness is growing in Christian and biblical virtues. Again, Galatians and the fruit of the Spirit are a perfect example of this. None of these fruit are negative traits. All of them are positive.

²²*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,*

²³*gentleness and self-control.*

So growth in holiness can be seen when both things are happening—the decreasing of sinful behavior and the increasing of virtuous behavior.

The most important positive area in which we can grow in holiness is love. Love is the greatest of all the virtues.

1 Cor 13:

¹³*And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.*

God himself becomes the definition of love.

1 John 2 writes it like this.

⁹Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates his brother is still in the darkness. ¹⁰Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble. ¹¹But whoever hates his brother is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him.

Then in the next chapter, John writes

¹⁶*This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. ¹⁷If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? ¹⁸Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.*

In our relationships with fellow Christians we don't want to settle. We don't want to say in our Life Groups, "I guess this is as good as it's gonna get." No, we wanna say, "It can be better. In fact, it must be better." *I remember when our former senior pastor Rev. Lee was still alive. And the church was just above the 3000 mark at the time. And he had to make some serious leadership decisions as the church was continuing to grow. And one of the decisions he made was that he will no longer do visitations with every member of the church. And I remember being in staff meeting with him and he was sharing his pain of not being able to know each member face-to-face. He, as a pastor, wanted that more than anything. He wanted to grow in his love with his people, ministering to them. And the associates would always get yelled at my him if we allowed a member to fall through the cracks or if we didn't know what was going on in a church member's life and so on. I share this with you as an example of one way we can grow in brotherly love.*

Here are two very very practical things you can do.

1. Grow in intimacy in your existing relationships.
2. Grow by forming new relationships.

There's one more. Work ethic, but I will have to stop there.

¹¹*Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, ¹²so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.*

Conclusion:

Friends, We are striving to be holy because of God. We are his children. He is our Father. And because he is holy, he longs for us to be holy as well. Whether it's a sin we have to stop or a virtue we have to attain, both are dimensions of pursuing holiness. Let's lean and depend on God for help and strength so that we might be holy.

