

A Man's Strategy for Conquering Temptation



Bob Vereen

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BIBLE STUDIES

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P R E S S

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A MAN'S STRATEGY FOR CONQUERING TEMPTATION

We live in a visual world. Every marketer knows that capturing the attention of a potential client is crucial, and visual appeal is key to stimulating a positive first impression. This is one of the reasons we see so much seductive sexual imagery in advertising and marketing. Every merchandiser around the world knows that he can capture the attention of most men through sexually explicit images. Every male product imaginable is being promoted by an attractive woman in seductive apparel.

We live in a world inundated with sexual images. Some of the most popular television programs among men today are filled with scenes of nudity, passion,

and promiscuity. Men are renting pornographic video movies at an alarming rate. Husbands are staying up late, after the wife and kids are in bed, tuning into their favorite late-night porn cable channel or hooking up to one of many pornographic Web sites. *After all*, they tell themselves, *I'm just looking, not touching*.

We live in a promiscuous world. The divorce rate is staggering. Immorality is becoming the norm. Sexual activity outside of marriage is condoned and promoted in every way imaginable. Sexual misconduct is becoming commonplace in even the most sacred of professions.

In the midst of this unbelievable bombardment of sexual immorality, is there any chance that a man can control his thoughts, passions, and desires? Should he even try? What does the Bible say about today's sexual standards? How can a man resist the temptations he faces on a daily basis? How can he overcome his weaknesses? How can he keep his thoughts under control, his passions in check, and his desires in line?

These are just a few of the questions we want to answer as we search the Bible *inductively* regarding this subject. This means you will observe the Word of God for yourself. Once you discover what it says and means, you can then adjust your life to live accordingly.

Let's get started.

WEEK ONE

Rules for behavior generally are established by the society in which one lives. Sometimes traditional values are written as laws, and sometimes they are simply understood and embraced by the majority of its members. With the passing of time, standards may change for a variety of reasons. What is considered acceptable behavior today may have once been deplored, and what was considered normal behavior at some point in time may one day be labeled “old-fashioned.”

God, too, has established rules for behavior. His standard, however, never changes; it has remained the same throughout the ages.

Which standard should the believer follow—God’s or the one established by his society? And in what area of life will a man experience the greatest pull between two standards? In what specific ways does God’s standard differ from our society’s, and how should it impact our daily choices?

Let’s see what we can learn about the answers to these questions as we dig into God’s Word.

OBSERVE

Leader: Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 aloud.

- *As you read these verses, have the group say aloud and circle every reference to **the recipients**, particularly the pronouns **you, your, and us** (when “us” refers to all believers).*

1 THESSALONIANS 4:1-8

¹ Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and

please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more.

² For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality;

⁴ that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,

⁵ not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God;

⁶ and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is

INSIGHT

The word *walk* in verse 1 describes one's lifestyle, conduct, or behavior.


DISCUSS

- What did you learn from marking the references to the recipients?
- Considering the definition in the Insight box and looking closely at verses 1 and 2, what would following the instructions and commandments enable the recipients to do?

OBSERVE

Leader: *Read aloud 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 again. This time have the group call out the following key words as they mark them as follows:*

- *Draw a box around each occurrence of the word **sanctification**.*

- Draw a cloud shape like this  around the words ***sexual immorality, lustful passion, and impurity.***

INSIGHT

The word *sanctification* refers to that ongoing, daily process of becoming holy and pure in mind and body, consecrated to God for His purposes and living separated from the influences of a sinful society.

DISCUSS

- According to verse 3, what is God's will for the believer?
- Look at each place you marked the word *sanctification*. What lifestyle was Paul contrasting with the sanctified lifestyle?
- What did Paul say believers had to "abstain from" in order to be sanctified?

the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you.

⁷ For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.

⁸ So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

- According to verse 7, for what purpose has God called us?
- If a man ignores Paul's teaching regarding the relationship between sanctification and immorality, whom is he rejecting?

INSIGHT

Sexual immorality refers to any sexual activity outside of the biblical marriage relationship between one man and one woman.

In the Greek the word translated as *abstain* is in the present tense, implying a continuous, habitual, ongoing lifestyle.

Many of the new believers in Thessalonica had formerly participated in pagan religious ceremonies where sexual immorality was part of the worship experience. In addition sexual immorality of all forms was accepted as the norm in their culture.

- Considering the culture in which the Thessalonians lived (see Insight box), why do you think Paul raised the issue of sexual immorality in connection with pleasing God? How might this be a particular concern for this group of believers?
- What similarities, if any, do you see between their culture and ours?
- What are some of the messages our culture sends men today regarding sexual immorality?

OBSERVE

Leader: Read aloud 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 again.

- As you read these verses, have the group double underline the word **vessel**.

1 THESSALONIANS 4:3-5

³ For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality;

4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,

5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God.

INSIGHT

In verse 4, Paul used the word *vessel* to describe something that the Thessalonian believers were to possess “in sanctification and honor.” Theologians are somewhat divided as to whether Paul was referring to one’s *body* or one’s *wife* when he used the word *vessel*. In the original Greek, the same word carries both definitions in the New Testament. Whatever Paul intended, both interpretations demand that the believer live before God in holiness and purity.

The word *possess* basically means “to get for oneself, purchase, or acquire.” It also carries the connotation of having something under control. If his wife is the vessel a man is to “possess,” then the believer is to acquire and maintain a marriage relationship that honors God through its sexual purity. If it is his body that a man is to “possess,” then he is to keep the desires of his flesh under control at all times and not engage in any sexual activity that is not holy and pure.

DISCUSS

- In light of the context of verses 3-5, if verse 4 read, “that each of you know how to possess his own *body* in sanctification and honor,” how would that affect a man’s daily choices?
- What boundaries does this set for a man, whether single or married, regarding what he does with his body?
- If verse 4 read, “that each of you know how to possess his own *wife* in sanctification and honor,” how would that affect a man’s marriage relationship?
- How should this affect what takes place between the husband and wife in the marriage bed? Are all behaviors biblically legitimate, or do the words *sanctification* and *honor* imply some limitations?
- According to this passage, what could prevent you from having the will of God accomplished in your life?

WRAP IT UP

Through this week's study we've seen that the will of God for the believer is sanctification. We are to live holy, pure, upright, blameless lives. Sexual immorality—adultery, fornication, lustful passions, sexual fantasizing, embracing sexually impure thoughts or images—defiles the body and the marriage bed. Of all sins, the sexual ones can cause the most damage to an intimate relationship with God, with spouses, and with fellow believers.

Holiness. Absolute purity. This is the standard for the believer. How in the world can a man overcome the fiery, powerful passions that challenge his firm commitment to live righteously? Wonderfully, God has not left us on our own to accomplish this.

God gave us the Bible so we could know the standard. If you learn its precepts, call them to mind in times of temptation, and choose to obey them without hesitation, then you will experience sanctification. We have been instructed on how we ought to walk and please God. Each of us is to “know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor” (1 Thessalonians 4:4).

Marriage, as Paul noted, can satisfy a man's sexual passions through an intimate relationship with his wife. In addition to honoring her before men, this allows a man to be holy before God. If he violates this principle, God will judge and avenge any illicit actions.

God also gave every believer, married or single, the Holy Spirit to convict us of sin and lead us in the ways of righteousness.

Yet despite all of this, staggering numbers of believers are falling

into sexual immorality. What's the problem? Are men doomed to failure in this area? Are we incapable of successfully living a life of holiness? How can we possibly please God amid a culture that advocates sexual immorality as a man's right?

If you want to know the answers to these questions, then don't miss the next five weeks.



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