

# CONTAGIOUS CHRISTIANITY

## A STUDY OF 1 THESSALONIANS

### STUDY SIX

## Straight Talk About Moral Purity

*1 Thessalonians 4:1–9*

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*It's almost as though holiness is the private preserve of an austere group of monks, missionaries, mystics, and martyrs. It certainly doesn't seem like what you would have if you were living in the twenty-first century.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

**H**OLINESS. The word may conjure up mental images of quiet chambers of hooded monks, cloistered in medieval monasteries and mountaintop cathedrals, mystically communing with God through hours of Gregorian chanting.

Is holiness really that mystical? Is it limited to a select few? Is it best practiced far removed from the temptation, fray, and chaos of everyday living?

The Scriptures paint a vastly different portrait of holiness for the *everyday saint* of God. As God's ambassadors to a world stumbling along in a moral fog, the apostle Peter commands us,

*But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. For the Scriptures say, "You must be holy because I am holy." (1 Peter 1:15–16)*

That's a command for saints like you and me. Holiness was a normal state of being when Adam and Eve lived in paradise before the fall. It's the life God created us to live—the healthiest life for body and soul.

As we turn to 1 Thessalonians 4, the apostle Paul focused on a particular aspect of holiness. *Moral purity*. Its absence destroys relationships, ruins marriages, undermines cultures, devastates the body of Christ, and tarnishes the glory of God.



INSIGHT FOR LIVING



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SEARCHING  
THE  
SCRIPTURES  
BIBLE STUDIES

# Straight Talk About Moral Purity

## 1 Thessalonians 4:1–9

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In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives us straight talk about moral purity. His message cuts against the grain of our pleasure-worshiping culture and offers hope. Hope that is spiritually life-giving, morally life-protecting, and culturally preserving. We rejoin the apostle as he appeals to the young believers in Thessalonica to stay pure.



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

King Solomon searched for happiness on hedonism highway. “I denied myself no pleasure,” he boasted. Later in life, as he looked back on his self-indulgence, he admitted, “it was all so meaningless—like chasing the wind” (Ecclesiastes 2:10–11). After reflecting on Solomon’s experience, record your prayer to God as your sole hedge of protection for upright living in a decadent culture.



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Paul was concerned about the Thessalonian believers’ faithfulness amid persecution, but he was also concerned about their moral purity. He wrote his letter while living in Corinth, known as a morally licentious city. In fact, the coined phrase, “to Corinthianize,” means to give oneself over to wanton, promiscuous living. Paul knew that the currents of immorality flowed just as strong in Thessalonica, and he didn’t want the new believers to get swept away.

He fervently prayed for them:

*May [the Lord], as a result, make your hearts strong, blameless, and holy as you stand before God our Father when our Lord Jesus comes again with all his holy people. Amen.*  
(1 Thessalonians 3:13)

Let’s turn to 1 Thessalonians 4:1–8 to see how Paul built on his prayer for holiness in his appeal for moral purity.

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## *1 Thessalonians 4:1–9*

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### **Observation: The Will of God—Believers’ Holiness**

In the observation phase of the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, carefully observe words, phrases, repetition, commands, and promises to grasp all that the biblical writer has communicated to the original recipients and to us.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Excel in Pleasing God—1 Thessalonians 4:1–2**

Paul started by affirming the Thessalonians. According to *1 Thessalonians 4:1–2*, how did he affirm them, and what did he urge them to do?

Paul twice reminded the believers that he had taught them to live in a manner pleasing to God. He also twice reminded them that his teaching was not of human origin. Who gave Paul his authority? Why do you think Paul emphasized this point?

*Underline that—“excel still more” [1 Thessalonians 1:4 NASB]. We have words for that today. “Go for it!” “Give it your best shot!” “Don’t just drift, pursue!”*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

#### **Abstain from Immorality—1 Thessalonians 4:3–6**

Paul had a specific matter in mind when he urged his readers to please God: sexual purity. Read *1 Thessalonians 4:3–6* in the NLT, NASB, and the Amplified Bible. What is Paul’s command? What is the basis of his command? How do the different Bible versions translate these key concepts?

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God designed sex for husbands and wives in marriage. Sex outside marriage strays beyond the boundaries of God’s will into sin. How did Paul say we keep ourselves pure, according to *1 Thessalonians 4:4–5* in the NLT, NASB, and The Message. How do these Bible versions explain Paul’s point? What opposite lifestyles did Paul contrast?

In 4:6, Paul firmly instructs believers never to exploit, take advantage of, violate, defraud, or cheat another person. What connection was Paul making between sexual sin and harming a brother or sister in Christ? What is the consequence of violating another person?

*“This is the will of God.” Very seldom will you find such straight talk in Scripture. You don’t even have to pray about it. You know His will. Now, in the fog of horizontal standards, you will be left with any number of options. You will be counseled to be discreet but not to abstain. How relieving it is to know exactly where you stand with the living, holy God. If you are not married, you have no business being involved sexually with any other person.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

### **God’s Calling for Us—1 Thessalonians 4:7–8**

For the third time in this passage, Paul issued a charge. Observe *1 Thessalonians 4:7–8*. According to 4:7, what is that charge, or calling?

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Paul finished his thoughts in 1 Thessalonians 4:8 beginning with, “Therefore . . .” indicating a consequence or logical outcome for his readers. What was his conclusion?

*In His Word, God tells me straight what to do about moral purity. If you boil holiness down to its basic sense, you come to obedience.*

—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



### Interpretation: Sowing and Reaping

God’s will for us is to “stay away from all sexual sin” (1 Thessalonians 4:3). The Greek word for “sexual sin” is *porneia*. Review this term in Mounce’s Greek dictionary at [billmounce.com](http://billmounce.com) or consult *Constable’s Notes* at [netbible.org](http://netbible.org). What types of sexual activity does the Lord prohibit?

When tempted to have sex outside of marriage, we don’t have to pray for direction. We know God’s will. *Abstain!* To do that, Paul says, we must “possess [our] own vessel” (4:4 NASB). What does Paul’s statement mean and what image does it evoke?

*You must become a student of yourself to know how to handle yourself. We are to know how to possess our own drive, how to gain mastery over it, how to sustain ourselves in a life of purity, “not in lustful passion.”* —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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How can you become a student of yourself to faithfully apply the command to “possess [your] own vessel in sanctification and honor” (1 Thessalonians 4:3 NASB)? What do you need to know about yourself to live faithfully and purely?

Immorality leaves a wide wake of harm, including the innocent—spouses, children, family, friends. Paul warned us that “the Lord avenges all such sins” (4:6). To the Galatian believers, he gave this similar warning: “Don’t be misled—you cannot mock the justice of God. You will always harvest what you plant” (Galatians 6:7).

Although Christians are protected from God’s eternal wrath, consequences for sin still affect us. We reap a bitter harvest from the wild seeds we sow. How does God’s discipline, or God’s “avenging,” relate to the consequence of sexual immorality?

*That’s the truth. That’s part of the avenging. You sow a thought; you reap an act. You sow an act; you reap a habit. You sow your habit; you reap a character. You sow your character; you reap a destiny. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### **Correlation: Living in a Cultural Fog**

Christians live in a cultural fog, even a cultural smog, of morality. Voices urge us to, “do as you please,” “do what feels good,” “unleash your desires.” But that’s human wisdom on the horizontal plane. Believers are called to live on a vertical plane, committed to God’s moral standards. Listen instead to the voices of the Old Testament prophets, who urge us to follow God’s higher path.

What complaints did the prophet Habakkuk voice to God in [Habakkuk 1:2–4](#)? What did he lament?

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While Habakkuk called out to God, Jeremiah, the “weeping” prophet, sobbed before God. Writing later than Habakkuk, Jeremiah voiced a similar lament in *Jeremiah 6:8, 10–11, 13–15*. What broke Jeremiah’s heart? What sins did he spotlight?

The apostle Paul was all too familiar with Corinthian licentious living. According to *1 Corinthians 6:18*, what did Paul command? What was his rationale? In your own words, what does he mean?

Summarize Scripture’s overall teaching about maintaining moral purity.

*Jeremiah noted that there are no more red faces. No one seems shocked anymore. It’s what we shall call “compensating.” To handle the shock of our day, we compensate by remaining free of shock. That’s part of living in the fog.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



### **Application: Choosing How We Live**

Concerning our sexual purity, we have two choices. We may choose to live *horizontally*—where our lives look no differently than the unsaved. Or we may choose to live *vertically*—honoring the God of moral absolutes and trusting and obeying the words of Scripture. Our obedience will result in greater confidence and habits of holiness.

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What helps you “possess” your own body, that is, helps you understand what tempts you, weakens you, or makes you vulnerable to sin? What helps you stay pure?

Is there any way you are living in the shadows? Are you defrauding another? If so, call it what it is—sin. Confess it. How can you return to a faithful walk with Christ and to living with integrity among fellow believers? Who can come alongside to help you in this process?

Because God knows our wills are weak, He never commands us to do something and then leave us on our own to do it. Link up with Christian brothers and sisters who can support you. Occupy your mind with pure pursuits that honor God. Draw upon the Spirit’s power and find real satisfaction in your relationship with Christ, the Living Water. Keep yourself morally pure, for your sake and for the sake of those you love.



### A FINAL PRAYER

*Thank You, Father, for the incisive way You cut through the fog. Thank You for penetrating my world. Show me again that Your standard does not change, that Your expectations remain for me full of hope and love and power and encouragement. I pray You give me integrity and moral courage. I pray, as a result, that Your church will again be holy, even as You are, for the sake of the Savior. Amen.*

#### ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll’s *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, “[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)”

For the 2026 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Marshall F. Davis in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll’s messages. Copyright © 1984, 2026 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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