

# The Believer's Walk

by A.W. Tozer

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of holiness and purity in the life of a believer, and warns against the dangers of sin and separation from God.*

**Duration:** 27:46

**Scripture:** 1 Thessalonians 4:1

**Topics:** "Christian Walk"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher shares a story about a man named James Williger who was living a sinful life but was transformed by the power of God. James was an alcoholic and was causing disgrace to himself and his Christian wife. However, through the prayers of his wife and a Christian doctor, James had a supernatural encounter with God and was instantly sober and converted. The preacher emphasizes that the worst part of sin is what it does inside a person, causing internal suffering and destruction. He also highlights the importance of living a holy life according to the will of God, as taught by Paul in the Bible.

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## Transcript

In the first of the two Thessalonian epistles, chapter four, Paul says, furthermore, we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication, that every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor, not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God, that no man go beyond and decrod his brother in any matter, because that the Lord is avenger of all such.

As we also have forewarned you and testified, for God has not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness, and he therefore that despises, despises not man but God, God who has also given unto us his Holy Spirit. This is only a little section of a letter written by a man named Paul and Quassel to a church in the city of Thessalonica, a Greek city, to a new church, relatively new, and these persons to whom he wrote were good Christians. It is that church was good.

There are seven things said about church, said about the Thessalonian Christians by the man Paul, for Paul was always very careful never to deliver a 100% condemnation. He always wove into his condemnation some complimentary remarks about their spiritual life. He knew that if you are too hard on people, you discourage them.

If you're not hard enough, you let them go to sleep. So he tried to keep them awake and still not to be too hard on them. He said this about them, that they had abandoned idolatry.

They were by nature, rather by culture, they were idolaters by religion. But they had now abandoned this, they had turned to God from idols, and they had turned to the true God. I've said many times, I suppose I will not say anything this morning, I haven't said many times, that God never recommends vacuums.

If he takes you out of a place, it's in order that he might take you into a place. He never takes you out and leaves you. If he says turn away from that, he says that in order that he might say turn in unto this.

So, they had turned away from idols and turned to the true God. They were not left in the middle, in a state of unanimous indecision. I think I heard it called last week on the board.

They were unanimous only in their indecision. But that would be a frightful place to leave a man. But they turned to the true God after turning from idols, and in their faith they worked and hoped and loved and labored.

And they received the gospel in power, Paul said, with much assurance, which he took as a proof of their election of God. And they were actively missionary-minded, for they sent out missionaries and supported them. They had continued through under persecution, which is a good test of a Christian.

And they were living in expectation of Christ's return. Now, those seven characteristics of the Thessalonians Christians were enough for them to get into any church in Christendom, and to be taken further as an example of other churches. And still Paul was not content.

He commended them for what they were, but he also urged the sacred duty of their being holy people, holy beyond the call of duty, holy beyond the current mores, holy beyond the standards of their time. And he warned them, as I warn you, that nothing else is enough if we do not seek and pursue purity of heart, which results in personal purity of life. Nothing else is enough.

Now, Paul said that he had taught this to them, and he had taught them what he called righteousness and true holiness. There is such a thing as righteousness that is not true holiness, but there is righteousness and true holiness. Now, Christ personalized righteousness when he came, and he took it out of the realm of what we now call ethics, or have always called ethics, and taught that righteousness was simply to please God.

We need not know what righteousness is, but we do need to know that if we please God, we're doing righteousness. John said that if we kept the commandments of the Lord, he'd hear our prayers, and then added, and also if we do the things that are pleasing in his sight. Not that keeping the commandments of the Lord was not pleasing in God's sight, but it was not enough.

There has to be affection shown toward God. It's the same as rules in a household. The average household has rules, and you keep those rules, and you see that the children do, and everybody takes it for granted, but that's not enough.

You could come, your children could come into your household and watch not to break the rules, and yet never do or say anything affectionate. Show that they really loved you. It isn't enough that I keep the laws of the New Testament, the commandments of Christ, that I'm to do this, and do that, and refrain from this.

That's not enough. That must be. But Christ personalized all this, and made it to be the result of a spontaneous loving relationship toward God.

And the Church of Christ is righteous when she does those things which she knows to be pleasing in the eyes of her righteous Savior. And those belong to her keeping of rules, however important they may be, and Paul lays many of them down. We can talk about grace all we want to, and freedom all we please.

We've got to draw a tremendous lot of the New Testament out if we reject commandments and rules, for they're here, and a lot of them are here. But keeping of those rules is not enough. There must be added to this, or perhaps I should say that we keep them because they are to us the mind of our Lord, that we do the things that are pleasing in its sight.

Philosophers analyze righteousness, but Christians obey and are righteous because they do the things that are righteous without knowing why they're doing them. We're now in a time of analysis. Somebody referred once in to the paralysis of analysis, and we're now in seminaries and Bible schools where they analyze until they're paralyzed.

They stand halfway between two extremes of things in trying to make up their mind which, and split hairs and divide them until there's no spontaneity left. We scarcely know which side we're on at all. Well, that's not a Christian's approach.

If a Christian knows that the Lord wants it that way, he wants it that way whether he knows why or not. We might, and I think it wouldn't hurt us if we studied into the why of things. Why is it wrong to steal, and why is it wrong to lie? There are good sound philosophical reasons underneath it all, but that isn't the reason a Christian stops lying.

He stops lying because he knows lying that pleases his Lord. He allows these scholastic hair-splitters and casuists, he allows them to write long commentaries on why it's wrong to steal. And if you steal with a certain high principle in mind, you're doing right, and why it's wrong to lie, and in some quarters they even taught their devotees that you can lie provided you say instantly afterward, Lord, I didn't mean that.

They even say that you can go to court and lie in court. If, after you have told the lie in court, you say to God, now God, excuse it, that one doesn't count. Now, that actually in print I can show you where it is.

That's real. That's real. That's Jesuit casuistry, the hair-splitting morals.

Is it ever wrong to tell a lie, or is it ever right to tell a lie? Is it always wrong to lie? Well, the hair-splitters have good reasons why sometimes that a lie is a good thing. For instance, they've argued if you know that somebody is very sick, and that a shock would kill them, you can lie to them. I wouldn't do it to save anybody's life, but I wouldn't shock them either.

I believe God would help a man or woman out so that you would neither need to lie nor kill anybody by shocking them with the news of their friend's death or accident. I believe it's entirely possible to preserve the righteousness of truth, and at the same time not give anybody a heart attack. Well, anyway, the Christians who teach morals from that standpoint sit around and talk by the hour about temple.

Can you do this, or is it wrong to do that? And, just how far can you go in this direction? That is a proof of the lack of spirituality. Paul said that we were to do these things in Jesus, because we will do the things that are pleasing in his sight. And Jesus said, Thou hearest me always because I'm always doing what's

pleasing to thee, pleasing in thy sight.

Of course, we have rules at our house. We always had when we bring up the boys. I used to say to them, now boys, if you were on a basketball team, there'd be certain things that you wouldn't be permitted to do.

There'd be certain rules, and if you played on the socks or cubs, there'd be certain things that they'd say, now you can't do this. And I said, at home it's the same. There are certain rules that you keep, and that's it.

When we have our grandchildren out to the house now, there are certain rules, there are things they can't do. We rarely ever have any trouble with them, but there are things they can't do. But, the beautiful part about it is, when they go beyond the call of duty, and respond to your affection in a way, righteousness and true holiness is a spontaneous response of the heart to the love of God.

Of course, it takes certain directions, and so Paul wants to lay those directions down for us. He points out the importance of a holy walk. He said, this is the will of God, eventification, to be devoted to God's uses.

Of course, that's one in the primary meaning of the word sanctify, but it also means to be cleansed for that purpose. Those who don't believe too much in cleansing argue that sanctify means to set apart for sacred uses. But, I have one question which I want to ask you.

Can you conceive of God setting anything aside for his sacred use that wasn't first claimed? Can you conceive of a priest in the Levitical temple, standing and singing your offering and thanks from a vessel that was dirty that needed to be washed? No. They believed in washings and washings, says the writer of the Gospels, for the Jews will not eat until they've washed their hands. They're always keeping clean.

Their idea of a sanctified vessel was a vessel that was as clean as it could be made, and then dedicated to God. It had those two connotations, not one, but two. I can't think of a holy God using an unholy vessel.

I can't think of a holy God eating out, or wanting his people to eat out of a vessel that's dirty. Now, this is neglected in our day, and we want to talk about it a little. It's not denied, I think, that Christians should be holy, but not too much is said about it.

And most, I think that most of our preaching, after we've got the sinner in, we can be rough on him, but after we've got him in and he's joined and got baptized, he's gotten into our fellowship, then after that most preaching consists of telling them how nice they are. At least, that's what I hear when I listen on the radio. Most all that is telling people how nice they are.

Well, now we want to do that, as I pointed out that Paul does, and Jesus does it in his seven letters, but they also, we must shout aloud that he that said he abided in him ought also himself so to walk even as he walked. That it is the will of God that we should be a holy people, and in this particular chapter Paul talks about one kind of evil which our missionaries tell us sometimes creeps right into their churches, and I'm afraid in our own churches too. He talks about, he said that everybody should be freed and delivered from fornication.

Now, the damning effect of impurity will never quite be known in this world. We'll never know until the judgment, till we know it will know. The ravages of impurity are greater than that of any disease, greater than the ravages of any of the great killers, and the victims of these sins are found by millions in hospitals and insane institutions and institutions for the blind.

But the most deadly effect of sin is always in the heart of its victim. Never forget that. A man may, as has happened sometimes, a man may get drunk and fall into fire.

I knew a man whose neck was all burned. He said years ago he'd become a Christian, and he turned around and showed him the scars on his neck. He said, I worked in a in a factory where there were blazing fires, and he said I'd get drunk and stagger around, even at my work, and fall in after being dragged out.

He said that's the result of it. Well, now that was bad, because it had burnt him, might have killed him, but it burnt his neck and left great ugly scars there. But those scars didn't represent the real deadly result of his sin, which happened to be drinking, but something inside the man was suffering.

Something inside the man was getting sore, shriveling, cracking, splitting, dividing, withering, dying. Thank God our Lord Jesus Christ got a hold of that man, and saved him, saved him wonderfully, saved him. If you don't mind, I might as well carry on that little story.

This man was named Jim Terwilliger, and he's about that high, and about that thick, too. And I knew him when he was in his 70s. He'd been saved when he was 56.

And that dear man of God, here's how he was saved. He was dead drunk, lying on a couch. His wife was kneeling at his head, and his Christian doctor kneeling at his feet, praying for him.

He said he heard a voice say, Wake thou that keepest the wise from the dead, and Christ will give thee life. And he stood and wept as he told his story. He said, I woke up completely cold, sober, and thoroughly converted and born again.

Now, don't ask me about how it happened. That's not the way the little book tells you. That little book you get three for a quarter on how to win souls, and what to say to them, and then what to say next.

That isn't that little way to do it in the little books. But that's the way the Holy Ghost did it, brother. This man lived with a Christian wife, and he was drinking and disgracing himself like an old pig.

But she'd gotten a hold of God, and that physician had gotten a hold of God, and here was a man came bouncing out of a dead junk, cold, sober, and converted. From that time on to the end of his life, he did nothing but weep, and sing, and shout, and praise God, and testify to what the Lord has done for him. Don't ask me to explain that.

I can't. That isn't found in any of the books. That was just done.

Now, dear people, the worst part of anything is what it does inside of you. A real estate man cheats a widow. The widow suffers, her children suffer.

But that's not the worst. The worst thing is what happened to the man. Emerson said, the thief always steals from himself.

And when I cheat anybody, man, anything, I've cheated my own soul and done myself harm. Always remember that the great evil of sin is internal. That it's what happens inside.

Sometimes in an accident, you come bearing on a stretcher, somebody in shock, and they will feel the arms, the legs, and say, well, there are no broken bones, no broken ribs, but there's internal injuries. And you die from those internal injuries, not from broken legs. And it's the internal injury of sin, iniquity.

What's happening to these people? I don't even get indignant anymore when I hear about them. These people that live like animals, and their concept of home is like animals, I don't even get angry anymore or indignant. The world is that way, and that's the way it is, until the Lord either comes and burns it with fire, or until he takes his people away, or sends a revival, or somehow changes things.

But the terrible part is the cancer eating inside the heart. Now, we live in a sodom today. Our American civilization is a sodom.

That is why, when I hear speeches from here in Washington talking about our American way of life, and the free peoples of the world, and all that, I know what they mean, and I know what they think they mean and don't. There are no free peoples, and there are no righteous nations, and the best nations have no rules so much for which to repent. If America hopes to be preserved on the strength of her righteousness, she might just as well prepare herself for annihilation.

No nation is righteous. We're living in sodom. I know it's easy to make charges from the safety of the pulpit, I know that, and I know how hard it is to prove them, because sin is as slippery as an oiled eel, and I know that the attorneys for the defense are very, very many, and very alert.

You can get books now showing that sodomy is perfectly normal, and that it is simply one person's way of responding. That while naturally, and the majority don't respond that way, man falls in love with a woman. That seems to be the majority, but occasionally the sodomite man falls in love with a man.

Paul describes it in Romans 1. Back in Genesis, the city of Sodom was destroyed because of it. Now we have attorneys for the defense teaching in our institutions of higher learning, in the land supposed to be Christian, writing very carefully thought out and learned books to show that sodomy is not a sin, and that it ought not to be called a sin. We ought to stop that old 17th century view of it.

It is simply another person's way of responding to a situation. Though God Almighty set fire on Sodom, and though Paul warned in Romans 1 of the ghastly results of this kind of thing, our students in their universities now are hearing that it's all right, maybe not the most to be desired, but nothing wrong if that's the way you feel about it. Well, this sodom can defend its ways all right.

And those who would seek or would escape the fire, though, they can't stand on the street corner and argue. They can't sit in a class or somewhere and read a book showing that sodomy is all right. Escape to the hill, said the angel.

Escape to the mountain, said the angel. Escape for thy life, said the Holy Ghost. And Lot got up and escaped, and went, leaving his wife.

I'm thinking of the artist's pictures of it. I suppose he let her. At least she looked back, and he tried to drag her with him.

But she said, I want to catch that late TV show. I can't leave yet. So she turned to a pillar of salt, still back there.

Well, sodom can defend itself all right. And the thing to do is not argue or split hairs, but get out. Separate yourself severely and radically from sin of every kind, and regard it with horror and detestation, says the Holy Ghost.

He that despises, despises not man, the God that called us unto holiness. Any young man or woman that travels the sneezy way of borderline impurity does so at his own terrible risk. And whoever defends evil, defends what God has severely condemned.

And whoever despises holiness, despises that upon which God places such high value. After all, friends, spirituality isn't what you eat or don't eat, where you go or don't go. Spirituality is thinking about things the way God thinks about them, seeing them through God's eyes, appraising them with God's standards.

That's spirituality. And holiness isn't don't wear gold, don't wear a tie. I think you can doll up and look like a Christmas tree and hurt your Christian testimony.

I don't doubt that at all. That can be done. I think a lot of Christian women do it.

And I think that preachers sometimes get so much automobile out ahead of them that it's testimony. It's not for God, but for somebody else. And I think I know who.

But that holiness doesn't consist in having or not having, doing or not doing. It consists of thinking about it the way God thinks about it, judging it the way God judges it, responding toward it the way God responds, or acting from it as God reacts from it, loving it as God loves it, pleasing it as God is, and doing the things that are pleasing in His sight. And surely that will include holiness of life and righteousness of walk, which Paul calls here righteousness and true holiness.

May God grant that we have more than the new birth. May God grant that we have more than the knowledge that we've been born again. Let us go on unto perfection.

Let us seek, as the days go by, in our living, the way we handle our money, the way we treat our friends, the way we live in our homes, the way we conduct our business, the way we think when we're free to think the way we want to think, that in all that we will be exemplars of righteousness and true holiness. For he that despises, despises not man but God. May God grant that the words of Peter be fulfilled in us, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." Words spoken first by God and quoted by Peter, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." A yearning to be holy is about all I want to know that anybody had, and I'd call him my brother.

A yearning to be holy. I wouldn't ask that he know all the different views and the different theological areas. All I'd want to know is, within his heart is a great longing to be holy.

That, it seems to me, is more valuable than all the fine churches and all the well-bound Bibles. God grant that we have it. All right.

In the first of the two Thessalonian epistles, chapter four, Paul says, furthermore, we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus

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