

# 1 Thessalonians 4:1-3

by St. John Chrysostom

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*St. John Chrysostom emphasizes the necessity of sanctification and moral purity in the Christian life, urging believers to avoid fornication and live in a manner that pleases God.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 5:3, Isaiah 1:19, Matthew 19:12, 2 Corinthians 6:5, 1 Thessalonians 4:1, 1 Timothy 5:22, Hebrews 12:14

**Topics:** "Sanctification", "Chastity"

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## Description

John Chrysostom preaches about the importance of sanctification and living a life that pleases God. He emphasizes the need to go beyond mere obedience to God's commandments and strive for a life that reflects voluntary choice and a desire to please God. Chrysostom warns against the dangers of fornication and adultery, urging believers to possess themselves in sanctification and honor, avoiding the passions of lust that lead to sin. He highlights the significance of marriage and the importance of guarding against impurity and immorality, encouraging young men to pursue chastity and self-control, especially in a culture that promotes sensuality and indulgence.

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## Transcript

Finally then, brethren, we beseech and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that, as you received of us how you ought to walk and to please God, so you abound more and more. For you know what charge we gave you through the Lord Jesus Christ. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification.

When he has met what was pressing, and what was upon his hands, and is about henceforth to enter upon things that are perpetual, and which they ought continually to hear, he adds this expression, finally, that is, always and forever. We beseech and exhort you in the Lord. Strange! He does not even speak of himself as of sufficient credit to exhort. And yet who was so worthy of credit? But he takes Christ along with him. We exhort you, he says, by God. Which also he said to the Corinthians, God entreats (exhorts) you through us. 2 Corinthians 5:20 That as you received of us. This received is not of words only, but of actions also, viz. how you ought to walk, and he means thereby the whole conduct of life. And to please God, that you abound more and more. That is, that by more abounding you do not stop at the limit of the commandments, but that you even go beyond them. For this it is, that you abound more and more. In what preceded he accepts the marvel of their firm faith, but here he regulates their life. For this is proficiency, even to go beyond the commandments and the statutes. For no longer from the constraint of a teacher, but from their own voluntary choice, is all this performed. For as the earth ought not to bear only what is

thrown upon it, so too ought the soul not to stop at those things which have been inculcated, but to go beyond them. Do you see that he has properly said to go beyond? For virtue is divided into these two things, to decline from evil, and to do good. For the withdrawal from evil is not sufficient for the arrival at virtue, but it is a kind of path, and a beginning leading thereto; still we have need of great alacrity. The things therefore to be avoided he tells them in the order of commandment. And justly. For these things indeed being done bring punishment, but not being done, yet bring no praise. The acts of virtue however, such as to give away our goods, and such like, are not of the order of commandment, he says. But what? He that is able to receive, let him receive. Matthew 19:12 It is profitable, therefore, that as he with much fear and trembling had given these commandments to them, he also by these letters reminds them of that his care. Wherefore he does not repeat them, but reminds them of them.

For you know, he says, what charge we gave you through our Lord Jesus Christ. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification. And observe how he nowhere so vehemently glances at any other thing, as at this. As elsewhere also he writes to this effect; Follow after peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no man shall see the Lord. Hebrews 12:14 And why do you wonder, if he everywhere writes to his disciples upon this subject, when even in his Epistle to Timothy he has said, Keep yourself pure. 1 Timothy 5:22 Also in his second Epistle to the Corinthians he has said, In much patience, in fastings, by pureness. 2 Corinthians 6:5-6 And one may find this in many places, both in this Epistle to the Romans, and everywhere, and in all his Epistles. For in truth this is an evil pernicious to all. And as a swine full charged with mire, wherever he enters, fills all places with his ill odor, and chokes the senses with dung, so too does fornication; it is an evil not easy to be washed away. But when some even who have wives practice this, how excessive is the outrage! For this, he says, is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you abstain from all fornication. For there are many forms of disorderly conduct. The pleasures of wantonness are of many kinds and various, it were not tolerable to mention them. But having said from all fornication, he leaves it to those who know them.

Ver. 4, 5. That each one of you know how to possess himself of his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in the passion of lust, even as the Gentiles which know not God.

He says, That each one of you know how to possess himself of his own vessel. It is, then, a matter to be learned, and that diligently, not to be wanton. But we possess our vessel, when it is pure; when it is impure, sin possesses it. And reasonably. For it does not do the things which we wish, but what sin commands. Not in the passion of lust, he says. Here he shows also the manner, according to which one ought to be temperate; that we should cut off the passions of lust. For luxury, and wealth, and idleness, and sloth, and ease, and all such things, lead us on to irregular lust. Even as the Gentiles, he says, which know not God. For such are they who do not expect that they shall suffer punishment.

Ver. 6. That no man transgress, and wrong his brother in the matter.

He has well said, that no man transgress. To each man God has assigned a wife, he has set bounds to nature, that intercourse with one only: therefore intercourse with another is transgression, and the taking of more than belongs to one, and robbery; or rather it is more cruel than any robbery; for we grieve not so much, when our riches are carried off, as when marriage is invaded. Do you call him brother, and wrongest him, and that in things which are unlawful? Here he speaks concerning adultery, but above also concerning all fornication. For since he was about to say, That no man transgress and wrong his brother, Do not think, he says, that I say this only in the case of brethren; you must not have the wives of others at all, nor even women that have no husbands, and that are common. You must abstain from all fornication;

Because, he says, the Lord is an avenger in all these things. He exhorted them first, he shamed them, saying, even as the Gentiles. Then from reasonings he showed the impropriety of defrauding a brother. Afterwards he adds the principal thing; Because, he says, the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as also we forewarned you and testified. For we do not these things without being punished, neither do we enjoy so much pleasure, as we undergo punishment.

Ver. 7. For God called us not for uncleanness, but in sanctification.

Because he had said his brother, and had also added, that God is the avenger, showing that even if an unbeliever has suffered this, he who has done it shall suffer punishment, he says, it is not as avenging him that He punishes you, but because you have insulted Himself. He Himself called you, you have insulted Him who called you. On this account, he has added,

Ver. 8. Therefore he that rejects, rejects not man, but God, who gives His Holy Spirit unto you.

So that even if you should defile the Empress, he says, or even your own handmaid, that has a husband, the crime is the same. Why? Because He avenges not the persons that are injured, but Himself. For you are equally defiled, you have equally insulted God; for both the one and the other is adultery, as both the one and the other is marriage. And though you should not commit adultery, but fornication, though the harlot has no husband, yet nevertheless God avenges, for He avenges Himself. For thou dost this act, not despising the man, so much as God. And it is manifest from this, that you do it concealing it from man, but you pretend that God does not see you. For tell me, if one who was thought worthy of the purple, and of infinite honor from the king (Emperor), and was commanded to live suitably to the honor, should go and defile himself with any woman; whom has he insulted? Her, or the king who gave him all? She indeed is insulted too, but not equally.

Wherefore, I beseech you, let us guard against this sin. For as we punish women, when, being married to us, they give themselves to others, so also are we punished, though not by the Roman laws, yet by God. For this also is adultery. For not only is adultery committed in doing so by her who is married to another, but by him also, who is yoked to a wife. Attend carefully to what I say. For although what is said is offensive to many, it is necessary to be said, to set the matter right for the future. Not only is this adultery, when we defile a woman who is married to a man; but if we ourselves being married to a woman defile one who is free and disengaged, the matter is adultery. For what, if she with whom the adultery is committed is not bound? Yet are you bound. You have transgressed the law. You have injured your own flesh. For tell me, wherefore do you punish your wife, if she commit fornication with a man who is loosed, and has not a wife? Because it is adultery. Why? Yet he who defiled her has not a wife, but she is bound to a husband. Well then, thou also art bound to a wife; so that in like manner your offense also is adultery. For it is said, Every one that puts away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication, makes her an adulteress: and whosoever shall marry her when she is put away, commits adultery. Matthew 5:32 If he who marries her who is divorced commits adultery, he who, with a wife of his own, defiles himself also with that other -- it is manifest to every one. But perhaps to you who are men, enough has been said on this subject. For concerning them that are such, Christ says, Their worm will not die and the fire will not be quenched. Mark 9:44 But for the sake of the young it is necessary to speak to you, not to the young themselves so much, but to you. For these things are suitable not to them only, but also to you. And how? I will now tell you. He who has not learned to commit fornication, will neither know how to commit adultery. But he who wallows among harlots, will quickly also arrive at the other, and will defile himself, if not with the married, yet with those who are disengaged.

What then do I advise, so as to extirpate the roots? So many of you as have young sons, and are bringing them up to a worldly life, quickly draw them under the yoke of marriage. For since while he is yet young desires trouble him, for the time before marriage, by admonitions, threats, fears, promises, and numberless other methods restrain them. But at the season of marriage, let no one defer it. Behold, I speak the words of a match-maker, that you should let your sons marry. But I am not ashamed to speak thus, since not even Paul was ashamed to say, Defraud ye not one the other 1 Corinthians 7:5, which seems more shameful than what I have said; yet he was not ashamed. For he did not pay heed to words, but to the acts that were set right by words. When your son is grown up, before he enters upon warfare, or any other course of life, consider of his marriage. And if he sees that you will soon take a bride for him, and that the time intervening will be short, he will be able to endure the flame patiently. But if he perceives that you are remiss and slow, and waitest until he shall acquire a large income, and then you will contract a marriage for him, despairing at the length of the time, he will readily fall into fornication. But alas! The root of evils here also is the love of money. For since no one cares how far his son shall be sober and modest, but all are mad for gold, for this reason no one makes this a matter of concern. Wherefore I exhort you first to regulate well their souls. If he find his bride chaste, and know that body alone, then will both his desire be vehement, and his fear of God the greater, and the marriage truly honorable, receiving bodies pure and undefiled; and the offspring will be full-charged with blessing, and the bride and bridegroom will comply with one another, for both being inexperienced in the manners of others, they will submit to one another. But one that begins when younger to wax wanton, and to have experience of the ways of harlots, for the first and second evening will praise his own wife; but after that he will soon fall back into that wantonness, seeking that dissolute and disorderly laughter, the words that are full of base import, the dissolute deportment, and all the other indecency, which it is not tolerable that we should mention. But a woman of free estate would not endure to make such exhibitions, nor to tarnish herself. For she was espoused to her husband to be his partner in life, and for the procreation of children, not for the purposes of indecency and laughter; that she might keep the house, and instruct him also to be grave, not that she might supply to him the fuel of fornication.

But the gestures of a harlot seem to you agreeable. I know it. For the Scripture says, The lips of a strange woman drop honey. Proverbs 5:3 For on this account I take all this trouble, that you may have no experience of that honey, for it straightway turns into gall. And this also the Scripture says, Who for a season is smooth to your throat, but afterwards you shall find her more bitter than gall, and sharper than a two-edged sword. Proverbs 5:3-4, Septuagint What do you say? Bear with me speaking somewhat impure, if I may say so -- and expressing myself as one shameless and unblushing. For I do not submit to this willingly, but on account of those who are shameless in their actions, I am compelled to speak this sort of words. And many such we see even in the Scriptures. For even Ezekiel, reproaching Jerusalem, utters many such things, and is not ashamed. And justly. For he did not say them from his own inclination, but from his concern. For although the words seem to be indecent, yet his aim is not indecent, but even highly becoming one who wishes to banish uncleanness from the soul. For if the shameless soul does not hear the very words, it is not affected. For a physician wishing to remove a putrid sore, first thrusts his fingers into the wound, and if he does not first defile his healing hands, he will not be able to cure it. So it is with me. Unless I first defile my mouth, that heals your passions, I shall not be able to heal you. But rather neither is my mouth defiled, nor his hands. Why then? Because the uncleanness is not that of nature, nor from our own body, as neither in that case from his hands, but from what is another's. But if where the body is another's, he does not refuse to dip his own hands, tell me, shall we refuse, where it is our own body? For you are our body, sickly indeed and impure, but ours nevertheless.

What then is this which I say, and for which I have made so long a digression? A garment indeed which your slave wears, you would not choose ever to wear, being disgusted on account of its filth, but you would rather go naked than make use of it. But a body that is unclean and filthy, and which is used not only by your slave, but by numberless others, that will you abuse, and not be disgusted? Are you ashamed at hearing this? But be ashamed of the actions, not of the words. And I pass over all other things, the rudeness, and the corruption of their manners, the servility and illiberality of the rest of their life. Tell me, should you and your servant go to the same woman? And I wish it were only your servant, and not, it may be, the executioner! And yet you could not bear to take the executioner by the hand; but her who has been made one body with him you kiss and embrace, and do not shudder, nor fear! Are, you not ashamed? Are you not abashed? Are you not pierced with anguish?

I said indeed to your fathers, that they ought early to lead you to marriage: but nevertheless neither are you without liability to punishment. For if there were not other young men also, more numerous than you, living in chastity, both formerly, and now, there would perhaps be some excuse for you. But if there are, how can you say, that we were not able to restrain the flame of lust? For they, who have been able, are your accusers, in that they are partakers of the same nature. Hear Paul saying, Follow after peace...and the sanctification, without which no man shall see the Lord. Hebrews 12:14 Is not this threat sufficient to terrify you? Do you see others continuing altogether in chastity, and in gravity passing their lives; and cannot you command yourself even so long as the period of youth? Do you see others ten thousand times overcoming pleasure, and cannot you once refrain? With your leave, I will tell you the cause. For youth is not the cause, since then all young men would be dissolute. But we thrust ourselves into the fire. For when you go up to the theater, and sit feasting your eyes with the naked limbs of women, for the time indeed you are delighted, but afterwards, you have nourished thence a mighty fever. When you see women exhibited as it were in the form of their bodies and spectacles and songs containing nothing else but irregular loves: such a woman, it is said, loved such a man, and not obtaining him, hanged herself; and unlawful loves having mothers for their object; when you receive these things by hearing also, and through women, and through figures, yea, and even through old men, (for many there put masks upon their faces, and play the parts of women,) tell me, how will you be able to continue chaste afterwards, these narratives, these spectacles, these songs occupying your soul, and dreams of this sort henceforth succeeding. For it is the nature of the soul for the most part to raise visions of such things, as it wishes for and desires in the daytime. Therefore when you there both see base actions, and hear baser words, and receive indeed the wounds but do not apply the remedies, how will not the sore naturally be increased? How will not the disease become more intense; and in a much greater degree than in our bodies? For if we were willing, our will admits of correction more easily than our bodies. For there indeed drugs, and physicians, and time are required, but here it is sufficient having but the will, to become both good and bad. So that you have rather admitted the disorder. When therefore we gather to us indeed the things that injure, but pay no regard to the things that benefit, how can there ever be any health?

On this account Paul said, even as the Gentiles who knew not God. Let us be ashamed, let us be afraid, if the Gentiles, that know not God, are often chaste. Let us turn for shame, when we are worse than they. It is easy to achieve chastity, if we will, if we withdraw ourselves from those things that are injurious, since it is not even easy to avoid fornication, if we will not. For what is more easy than to walk in the market-place? But from the excess of laziness it has become difficult, not only in the case of women, but sometimes even in that of men. What is more easy than to sleep? But we have made even this difficult. Many however of the rich toss themselves through a whole night, from their not waiting for the need of sleep, and then sleeping. And in short nothing is difficult, when men are willing; as nothing is easy, when

they are unwilling; for we are masters of all these things. On this account the Scripture says, If you be willing and hear me. Isaiah 1:19, Septuagint And again, If you be unwilling, and hear not. Isaiah 1:20 So that all depends upon being willing or unwilling. On this account we both are punished and are praised. But may it be ours, being of those who are praised, to obtain the promised blessings, by the grace and lovingkindness, etc.

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