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Gospel Behaviour

Sanctification (verse 3) means to grow in holiness, the same word is used in verses 4 and 7, and it's related to the word "Holy" in Holy Spirit in verse 8. Paul's understanding of holiness came from the Old Testament, which defined God as holy (*e.g. Isaiah 6:3*) – set apart and separated. God sets some things and some people apart to be His, to be holy, changing their identity, their value, and their purpose. He did this with the people of Israel (*Exodus 19:6*) and dwelled among them in the Most Holy Place (*Exodus 26:33-34*). Geographically, it was the one place in all the nations of the world where God made Himself known. Spiritually, it meant those people had a unique calling to obey God because they were His possession. God's intention was always expansion – the whole world is to become holy again, as it was at the beginning.

The New Testament begins the completion of this plan, as God makes Himself a tent of flesh and Jesus dwells among us (*John 1:14*). And Jesus chooses people – making them holy - and fills them with His Holy Spirit, and tells them to fill the world. Christians are the temple of God now (*1 Corinthians 3:16*), we are where He dwells and His influence on us is meant to grow and grow and grow until we become just like Him. This is sanctification, learning to make choices that are less and less selfish, to obey God in all things, becoming more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle, self-controlled (*Galatians 5:22-23*). Unlike most other parts of our salvation, this happens gradually and with our co-operation.

Sanctification applies to all areas of our life but Paul chooses to focus on just one area in today's passage: sex (verses 3-5). The clearest explanation from Paul's letters and the teachings of Jesus, as well as the rest of the Bible, is that sexual immorality means anything that is not celibate singleness or faithful heterosexual marriage (*he most*

probably has in mind Leviticus 18, and the introduction in verses 2 to 5 sound very similar to his words here). This is hugely challenging emotionally and culturally, see the resources below for some ways to get great confidence that this is truly God's will.

Four points to help us become sanctified in this vital area:

1. It is God's will

Seven times in just eight verses Paul makes it clear that this teaching comes from God, so there's no scope for negotiation here. We need to know this when temptation is sending our thought processes all over the place, rationalising what we want as OK, when it feels like everyone around us thinks something different. God's Word is a rock we can hold on to and build our house on, even in a storm.

There is real hope for you, however you are tempted: if something is God's will, you can be sure that God will be working to achieve it.

God cares about you – and He cares about everyone else who might be harmed by you too (verse 6). We do not want to pick a fight with Him.

2. It is urgent

On top of referring so frequently to God's commands, Paul adds his own earnest encouragements (verses 1, twice, verse 6). Doing God's will is not something we can put off until later, and when it's an issue as significant as sex that is doubly the case (*Matthew 5:28-30*).

Urgent matters require immediate treatment: repenting of what you've been doing, confessing to a trusted Christian friend, asking them to pray for you and help you start living a new way, making whatever changes are necessary to help you avoid doing it again. See the John Piper A-N-T-H-E-M article referenced below.

3. It is a process

But sanctification is a process part of our salvation, lasting for as long as we live and follow Jesus, much less dramatic and more about day-to-day decisions. Moreover, the more you grow to hate your sins and love God's goodness, the more aware you will be of when you fall short. We mourn for when we've done wrong but we don't give up hope: our Father is patient and kind with us, amazingly so. He helps us to put one foot

in front of the next, learn how to live a long obedience in the same direction (the title of a book by Eugene Peterson). Then when we look back after a period of time we're amazed how far we've come.

4. It is impossible/ possible

Paul describes being led by your desires as non-Christian living (verse 5). He does this because not only is it God who defines right and wrong but because we can only obey this by His power at work in us (verse 8 and the reference to self-control in verse 4, a fruit of the Spirit). You cannot do this by yourself, you need to cry out to God that His power would work in your life. Don't try to do it in your own strength.

“Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24)

Resources mentioned:

- 8-part preaching series at King's: “Birds and Bees and Massive Questions.” (<http://www.kingschurchedinburgh.org/series/22>)
- Andrew Wilson: “Why would God care who I sleep with?” (<https://kings.church/teaching/why-would-god-care-who-i-sleep-with/>)
- LivingOut.org (livingout.org)
- Andrew Bunt's list of recommended resources on sexuality (https://thinktheology.co.uk/blog/article/recommended_resources_on_sexuality) (including singleness, marriage, same-sex attraction, transgender, the bigger cultural picture, and real-life stories).
- John Piper's A-N-T-H-E-M strategies for fighting lust. (<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/anthem-strategies-for-fighting-lust>)

Questions for small group discussion:

- If someone had asked you before Luke's preach what God's will for your life was, how would you have answered?
- What is your experience of sanctification, as a word used and as a process? Can

anyone give examples from their own life of how God has sanctified them? Are you more like Jesus than you used to be?

- Why is it important that we see holiness as more than just moral behaviour?
- What was helpful about the two images Luke used, of his special pen, and of God's tent? In what ways were they incomplete?
- Which of the four points Luke made at the end gave you most hope?
- If you could ask one question about the biblical teaching on sexuality, what would it be?
- How would you respond if a non-Christian asked you what you thought about sex? Or, how have you responded when this has happened? How can we do this with love and hope and confidence?
- A whole small group setting is probably not the place to talk honestly about our sexual temptations, but how can you as a group help each other in this vital area?



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