

1 Thessalonians 4:4-5 Commentary

PREVIOUS

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JESUS IS COMING AGAIN
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Chart by Charles Swindoll

1 Thessalonians Overview					
1 Th 1:1-10		1 Th 2:1-20	1 Th 3:1-13	1 Th 4:1-18	1 Th 5:1-28
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Exemplary Hope of Young Converts	Motivating Hope of Faithful Servants	Purifying Hope of Tried Believers	Comforting Hope of Bereaved Saints	Invigorating Hope of Diligent Christians	
Written from Corinth Approximately 51AD					

Greek: [eidenai \(RAN\)](#) [hekaston humon to heautou skeuos ktasthai \(PMN\)](#) [en hagio kai time](#)

Amplified: That each one of you should know how to possess (control, manage) his own body in consecration (purity, separated from things profane) and honor, ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

Expanded Version: That each and every one of you (singular) know and understand beyond a shadow of a doubt how to continually possess (control, master) his own vessel (neuter singular, cp 2Ti 2:21, 2Cor 4:7, Acts 9:15) in sanctification (holiness, consecration, dedication to God) and honor (dignity, reverence, esteem, value, cp 1Cor 6:20)

NLT: Then each of you will control your body and live in holiness and honor-- [NLT - Tyndale House](#)

Phillips: Every one of you should learn to control his body, keeping it pure and treating it with respect, ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

Wuest: that each one of you should know that he is to procure his own vessel [wife] in [personal] holiness and honor, ([Eerdmans](#))

Young's Literal: that each of you know his own vessel to possess in sanctification and honour

THAT EACH OF YOU KNOW HOW TO POSSESS HIS OWN VESSEL: eidenai (RAN) hekaston humon to heautou skeuos ktasthai (PMN):

- Romans 6:19; 12:1; 1 Corinthians 6:15,18, 19, 20) (1Samuel 21:5; Acts 9:15; Romans 9:21, 22, 23; 2Timothy 2:20,21; 1Peter 3:7) (Philippians 4:8; Hebrews 13:4)

1Thessalonians 4 can be divided as follows...

1Thes 4:1-2 = General Call to a God Pleasing Walk

1Thes 4:3-12 = Specific Aspects of God Pleasing Walk

1Thes 4:3-8 = Sanctification in Area of Sexual Purity

1Thes 4:9-12 = Sanctification in Area of Love and Work

1Thes 4:13-18 = Hope for Grieving Saints

Vessel is translated in one of two ways - **body** or **wife**. Here are several translations:

- That each one of you should know how to possess (control, manage) his own **body** in consecration (purity, separated from things profane) and honor (Amplified)
- that each one of you know how to possess himself of his own **vessel** in sanctification and honor (ASV)
- So that every one of you may keep his body holy and in honour (BBE)
- that each one of you know how to control his own **body** in holiness and honor (ESV)
- Each of you men should know how to live with his **wife** in a holy and honourable way, (GNT)
- That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour (KJV)
- that each of you know how to acquire a **wife** for himself in holiness and honor (NAB)
- every one of you must learn to gain mastery over his **body**, to hallow and honor it (NEB)
- and each one of you to know how to control his body in a way that is holy and honourable, (NJB)
- that each of you know how to possess his own **body** in holiness and honor (NET)
- that each of you should learn to control his own **body** in a way that is holy and honorable, (NIV)
- Then each of you will control his own **body** and live in holiness and honor (NLT)
- that each one of you know how to control your own **body** [how to take a wife for himself] in holiness and honor, (NRSV)
- That ye should know, each one of you, how, of his own **vessel**, to possess himself in sanctification and honour: (Rotherman)
- learn how to take a **wife** for himself in holiness and honor (RSV)
- so that each of you will marry in holiness and honor (TLB)

- Each of you must learn to control his own **body**, as something holy and held in honour (UBS)
- that each man among you shall know how to procure a **wife** who shall be his own in purity and honour (Weymouth)

Stedman comments on the RSV writing...

I am sorry that the RSV, which is normally an excellent translation, does not include the margin reading ("how to control his own body") in the text because it is more accurate. The reason for this disparity is because neither the word "**wife**" nor the word "**body**" appears in the Greek text. "**Vessel**" is the word that is used there: "that you may know how to handle your vessel in holiness and honor." People differ as to what Paul meant by "vessel." It may be that it means a **wife**, although I doubt that. It is clear from the context that he is talking about **our bodies**. They are the vessel, as he tells the Corinthians, "the temple of the Holy Spirit," {1 Cor 6:19a RSV}.

But learning how to handle our **bodies** properly is not always easy. God gave our bodies to us. We did not design them ourselves. We would probably change a lot of things if it were up to us to invent or even rearrange our bodies. Included in the gift of our bodies is a remarkable capacity to churn out certain hormones that pour into the bloodstream. Those hormones have a profound effect upon the way our bodies function. At puberty, new hormones pour into the bloodstream and we experience sexual changes, along with which come very powerful drives that urge us, and almost seem to compel us, to certain sexual activities. Society tells us that those urges that boys and girls feel in their bodies are natural and therefore ought to be satisfied whenever opportunity affords. They argue that the sexual appetite should be satisfied just like the urge to hunger, thirst, sleep, or any other natural function. By extension, this argument says that there is nothing wrong with the fulfilling of sexual desires.

Now they are right in saying that sex is a natural function, but what they are not saying, and what the Scriptures reveal, is that all natural functions need certain degrees of control. Take hunger, for instance. You do not eat anytime you feel like eating. You learn to restrict your eating for certain reasons. If you do not want to put on too much weight, or if you want to enjoy your meals better, you do not eat between meals. Certain aspects and habits of control must be learned to handle the hunger function. The same rules apply to sleep. You do not go to sleep whenever you feel like it. (At least, I hope you do not, not now.)...

But all of these functions must be controlled. Control increases the enjoyment of a natural function. When a flooding river is controlled by banks, its intensity is increased. Many young people are discovering that in these days when the moral restraints have been removed from sexual practices, that it results in a kind of listless flood in which you wade continually with no enjoyment whatsoever. But God has designed sex to be stimulating and arousing. That is why marriage constitutes a kind of channeled control for sex. There is ample provision made for the stream, but the limits increase the intensity and enjoyment. That is what God has in mind as part of the process of producing a whole person. Anything that tears down those boundaries destroys the beauty of wholeness.

So Paul says that we are to learn how to control our bodies in holiness -- wholeness -- and honor. Control contributes to that sense of wholeness. You are in charge of your own body. You are not bound to it. You are not a slave to it. ([1Thessalonians 4:1-8: Sex Drive](#))

Each ([1538](#)) (**hekastos** from **hékas** = separate) every single one. This idea of separation or singling out is expressed still more strongly by *heís hékastos*. This phrase (each of you) indicates that the demand being made applies to each individual member of the church - no one gets a pass. The same moral standards hold for all believers for all time.

Each of you know how - As Richison quips "Avoiding sexual temptation requires some **"know how."** Each believer has the duty to learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable.

Eido/oida was often used to describe "**know-how**" or the possession of knowledge necessary to accomplish a desired goal. In the present context, this "**know-how**" of course comes from the Word of God, including passages such as 1Thessalonians 4:1-8.

Know ([1492](#)) (**eido, oida** - eido is used only in the perfect tense = oida) literally means perception by sight (perceive, see) as in Mt 2:2 where the wise men "saw His star". The meaning of **eido** is somewhat difficult to convey but in general this type of "knowing" is distinguished from **ginosko** (and epiginosko, epignosis), the other major NT word for knowing, because ginosko refers to knowledge obtained by experience or "experiential knowledge" whereas **eido** often refers to more intuitive knowledge, although the distinction is not always crystal clear.

Eido (oida) then is not so much by experience as an intuitive insight that is "drilled into your heart". In spiritual terms, **eido** is that

perception, that being aware of, that understanding, that intuitive knowledge that only the Holy Spirit of God can give. It is an absolute knowledge, a knowledge that is without a doubt. **Oida** describes absolute, positive, beyond a peradventure of a doubt, knowledge.

Oida suggests fullness of knowledge, rather than progress in knowledge, which is expressed by *ginosko*, a distinction illustrated in John 8:55, (Jesus said "you have not come to **know** {*ginosko*} Him, but I **know** {*oida*} Him). Here Jesus says in essence "I know God perfectly (*oida*)". In John 13:7 Jesus addresses Peter (Jesus answered and said to him, "What I do you do not **realize** {*oida*} now, but you shall **understand** {*ginosko*} hereafter.")

Know (*oida*) then carries the idea of having the "know how", the knowledge or skill necessary to accomplish a desired goal. Every Christian needs to **know** himself or herself well, so as to understand their weaknesses and evil propensities and, thereby, **know how** to possess or "gain mastery over" their own vessel.

Ro 6:19 I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.

Possess ([2932](#)) (**ктаομαι**) means to get, procure, obtain or acquire something for oneself by purchase for a price (Acts 1:18; 8:20; 22:28) or otherwise. To gain possession of.

In the present context Paul uses the idiomatic phrase possess your vessel giving the idea of having control of one's vessel or mastery over one's vessel. If this is indeed the meaning of *ктаομαι* in the present verse, it would make little sense if the vessel was a wife - "each one of you know how to gain mastery over your wife." Is she a tool? Is she an instrument or an implement? Many hold this view and try to justify this interpretation by making a parallel with *skeuos* in 1Peter 3:7 where Peter writes that "the woman is the weaker vessel". However if the woman is the *weaker* *skeuos*, the man therefore by comparative is a *weak* *skeuos* and thus both of them are vessels in that passage. The Bible does not see the man as the power and the woman as his tool as he might use for his own gratification. She is not the vessel of the man, but instead they are both the vessels of God. Also, note that the context is **not** about marriage and wife but is about sexual immorality.

Hiebert explains that...

In classical Greek the verb rendered "control" (**ктаομαι**) in the present tense meant "to procure for oneself, to acquire," and only in the perfect tense did it have the meaning "to possess." But the verb used here is present tense. Both ancient and modern commentators have believed this fact to be a major difficulty in accepting the meaning of "**body**" for the noun *skeuos*, literally "**vessel**." Since it would be quite pointless to ask the readers to "acquire" their own bodies, it is held that Paul must be referring to acquiring or procuring a wife, getting married. But the use of the verb in the papyri indicates that in the popular language of the day the meaning "to gain control over" was not confined to the perfect tense; the present tense also took this meaning. This relieves the major difficulty to the view that the body is meant. In view of its papyrus usage, Moulton and Milligan suggest that in our passage the verb very probably has the meaning "gradually obtain the complete mastery of the body." This is in harmony with the fact that attainment to the Christian moral standard involves a struggle that must be won by persistent effort. ([Hiebert, D. Edmond: 1 & 2 Thessalonians: BMH Book. 1996](#))

In a secular use **ктаομαι** means to **bring upon oneself** ("I pray that they may not bring it (my message) upon themselves as a witness {against them}") but there are no NT uses with this nuance.

Here are the 7 uses in the NT...

Matthew 10:9 "Do not **acquire** gold, or silver, or copper for your money belts,

Luke 18:12 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I **get**.'

Luke 21:19 "By your endurance you **will gain** your lives. (**Comment:** Sinful men cannot acquire salvation by any merit of their own, but those who patiently endure for Christ rather than renouncing Him will prove the reality of their faith and in that sense "will acquire" their salvation.)

Acts 1:18 (Now this man **acquired** a field with the price of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out. (*Ktaomai* here means to acquire or purchase for a price. Cp the two other passages in Acts.)

Acts 8:20 But Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could **obtain** (secure) the gift of God with money!

Acts 22:28 And the commander answered, "I **acquired** this citizenship with a large sum of money." And Paul

said, "But I was actually born a citizen."

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

There are 76 uses of **ktaomai** in the Septuagint (LXX) (Ge 4:1; 12:5; 25:10; 33:19; 36:6; 39:1; 46:6; 47:19, 20, 22, 23; 49:30; 50:13; Ex 15:16; 21:2; Lev. 22:11; 25:14, 15, 28, 30, 44f, 50; 27:22, 24; Deut. 28:68; 32:6; Jos. 24:32; Ruth 4:4, 5, 8, 9, 10; 2Sa 12:3; 24:21, 24; 1Ki. 16:24; 2Ki. 12:12; 22:6; Neh. 5:8, 16; Ps. 74:2; 78:54; 139:13; Pr. 1:5, 14; 3:31; 16:22; 17:16, 21; 18:15; 19:8; 22:9; 31:29; Eccl. 2:7; Is 1:3; 26:13; 43:24; 57:13; Jer. 13:1, 2; 16:19; 19:1; 32:7, 8, 9, 15, 25, 43, 44; Ezek. 5:1; 7:12, 13; 8:3; Am 8:6; Zech 11:5) Here are some representative uses in the Septuagint (LXX)...

Genesis 4:1 Now the man had relations with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, and she said, "I have gotten (Lxx = ktaomai) a manchild with the help of the LORD."

Ruth 4:5 Then Boaz said, "On the day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you **must** also **acquire** (Lxx = ktaomai) Ruth the Moabitess, the widow of the deceased, in order to raise up the name of the deceased on his inheritance."

Vessel (4632)(**skeuos**) refers to a hollow vessel or container of any material used for a specific purpose, with the meaning varying according to the context - utensil, jar, dish, gear (e.g., translated an anchor in Acts 27:17 in NAS).

Figuratively **skeuos** is used of the human body as formed of clay thus frail and feeble. Of a human being exercising a function, as one who is chosen for specific divine service (Paul as an instrument in Acts 9:15). Of the body as a "container" of the soul (2Cor 4:7). Of people as vessels who would be recipients of either God's wrath or mercy (Ro 9:22 = the unregenerate lost men or Ro 9:23 referring to born again men).

The **NET Bible** has an interesting note writing that...

Vessel is most likely used figuratively for "body" (cf. 2 Cor 4:7). Some take it to mean "wife" (thus, "to take a wife for himself" or "to live with his wife"), but this is less likely. See J. Smith, "1Thes 4:4 - Breaking the Impasse," BBR 10 (Fall 2000), who argues that "vessel" in this context is very likely a euphemism for the sexual organs.

There are 226 uses of **skeuos** in the LXX (most of them refer to literal vessels but some are figurative)- Gen. 24:53; 27:3; 31:37; 45:20; Exod. 3:22; 11:2; 12:35; 22:7; 25:9, 39; 27:3; 30:27, 28; 31:8; 35:13, 14, 16, 22; 37:16; 38:3, 30; 39:32, 33, 36, 38, 40; 40:9, 10; Lev. 6:28; 8:10; 11:32, 33; 13:49, 52, 53, 57, 58, 59; 14:50; 15:4, 6, 12, 22, 23, 26; Nu 1:50; 3:8, 31, 36; 4:10, 12, 14, 15, 26, 32; 7:1, 85; 18:3; 19:15, 17, 18; 31:6, 20, 50, 51; 35:16, 18, 20, 22; Deut. 1:41; 22:5; Jos. 7:11; Jdg. 9:54; 18:11, 16; Ruth 2:9; 1 Sam. 6:8, 15; 8:12; 10:22; 13:20, 21; 14:1, 6, 7, 12ff, 17; 16:21; 17:54; 20:40; 21:5, 8; 25:13; 30:24; 31:4ff, 9f; 2 Sam. 1:27; 8:8, 10; 17:28; 18:15; 23:37; 24:22; 1 Ki. 6:7; 7:45, 48, 51; 8:4; 10:21, 25; 15:15; 19:21; 2 Ki. 4:3f, 6; 7:15; 11:8, 11; 12:13; 14:14; 20:13; 23:4; 24:13; 25:14, 16; 1 Chr. 9:28f; 10:4f, 9f; 11:39; 12:33, 37; 18:8, 10; 22:19; 23:26; 28:13; 2 Chr. 4:11, 16, 18f; 5:1, 5; 9:20, 24; 15:18; 20:25; 23:7; 24:14; 25:24; 28:24; 29:18f; 32:27; 36:7, 10, 18f; Ezr. 1:6f, 10f; 5:14f; 6:5; 7:19; 8:25ff, 30, 33; Neh. 10:39; 13:5, 8f; Job 28:17; Ps. 2:9; 7:13; 31:12; 71:22; Eccl. 9:18; Is 10:28; 39:2; 52:11; 54:16f; 65:4; Jer. 22:28; 27:16, 19; 28:3, 6; 46:19; 48:12; 49:29; 50:25; 51:20, 34; 52:18; Ezek. 9:1; 12:3f, 7; 15:3; 16:17, 39; 23:26; 27:13; 40:42; Dan. 1:2; 5:2f, 23; 11:8; Hos. 8:8 (refers to Israel as "a useless vessel"); Ho 13:15; Jon. 1:5; Nah. 2:9; Zech. 11:15;

Here are the 22 NT uses of **skeuos** translated as article(2), container(1), goods(2), instrument(1), jar(1), object (3), property(2), sea anchor(1), vessel(4), vessels(6).

Matthew 12:29 "Or how can anyone enter the strong man's house and carry off his **property**, unless he first binds the strong man? And then he will plunder his house.

Mark 3:27 "But no one can enter the strong man's house and plunder his **property** unless he first binds the strong man, and then he will plunder his house.

Mark 11:16 and He would not permit anyone to carry **goods** through the temple.

Luke 8:16 "Now no one after lighting a lamp covers it over with a **container**, or puts it under a bed; but he puts it on a lampstand, in order that those who come in may see the light.

Luke 17:31 "On that day, let not the one who is on the housetop and whose **goods** are in the house go down to take them away; and likewise let not the one who is in the field turn back.

John 19:29 A **jar** full of sour wine was standing there; so they put a sponge full of the sour wine upon a branch of hyssop, and brought it up to His mouth.

Acts 9:15 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen **instrument** of Mine, to bear My name before the

Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel;

Acts 10:11 and he beheld the sky opened up, and a certain **object** like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground,

Acts 10:16 And this happened three times; and immediately the **object** was taken up into the sky.

Acts 11:5 "I was in the city of Joppa praying; and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain **object** coming down like a great sheet lowered by four corners from the sky; and it came right down to me,

Acts 27:17 And after they had hoisted it up, they used supporting cables in undergirding the ship; and fearing that they might run aground on the shallows of Syrtis, they let down the sea **anchor**, and so let themselves be driven along.

There are 23 uses of **skeuos** in the NT Matt. 12:29; Mk. 3:27; 11:16; Lk. 8:16; 17:31; Jn. 19:29; Acts 9:15; 10:11, 16; 11:5; 27:17; Ro 9:21-note, Ro 9:22-note, Ro 9:23; 2Co 4:7; 1Th 4:4; 2Ti 2:20, 2Ti 2:21; Heb 9:21-note; 1Pe 3:7; The **NAS** translate **skeuos** as article(2), container(1), goods(2), instrument(1), jar(1), object (3), property(2), sea anchor(1), vessel(4), vessels(6).

Romans 9:21-note Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one **vessel** for honorable use, and another for common use? 22-note What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much patience **vessels** of wrath prepared for destruction? 23-note And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon **vessels** of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory,

2 Corinthians 4:7 But we have this treasure in earthen **vessels**, that the surpassing greatness of the power may be of God and not from ourselves;

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

2 Timothy 2:20 (note) Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also **vessels** of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. **21** (note) Therefore, if a man cleanses himself from these things, he will be a **vessel** for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.

Hebrews 9:21 (note) And in the same way he sprinkled both the tabernacle and all the **vessels** of the ministry with the blood.

1 Peter 3:7 (note) You husbands likewise, live with your wives in an understanding way, as with a weaker **vessel**, since she is a woman; and grant her honor as a fellow heir of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Revelation 2:27 (note) and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the **vessels** of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father;

Revelation 18:12 (note) cargoes of gold and silver and precious stones and pearls and fine linen and purple and silk and scarlet, and every kind of citron wood and every **article** of ivory and every **article** made from very costly wood and bronze and iron and marble

The meaning of **vessel** in 1Thessalonians 4:3 has traditionally been interpreted figuratively in one of two ways...

(1) The wife which one acquires. Those who favor this interpretation make mention of a similar use in Ruth 4:10 - In the this verse reads "*Moreover, I have acquired Ruth the Moabitess*" which the Greek of the Septuagint (LXX) translates as "*ten gunaika... kektmai*"= "*the wife... I have acquired*" which is ktaomai, the same verb used here in 1Thes 4:4)

(2) The body which one possesses. This is the view which these notes favor. Recall however that if we are married, we are **one flesh** and in that sense what a **husband** does with his **body** affects his **wife**.

BDAG comments that...

1 Thessalonians 4:4 from antiquity has been interpreted to mean one's own **body** (Theodoret, Calvin, Milligan, Schlatter, M Dibelius; Knox, NRSV) or one's own **wife** (Theodore of Mopsuestia, Schmiedel, Dobschütz, Frame, Oepke; Vogel, RSV).

In favor of the interpretation as one's **body** (the interpretation favored by this site) are the following points...

(1) The vessel in 1Pe 3:7 is used in a comparative sense ("weaker vessel") referring to vessel in terms of general humanity not femaleness. The point is that if she is the "weaker" vessel, by comparison he is the "weak" vessel, and thus both are considered as vessels. F F Bruce adds that

There is no NT parallel for calling a man's wife his *skeuos*, which implies (as Lightfoot says) a low sensual view of the marriage relation' and 'depreciatory estimate of the woman's position,' as though her *raison d'être* were to provide a means by which her husband might satisfy his sexual appetite without infringing the divine law.'

(2) Being married does not guarantee sexual purity. Furthermore, undoubtedly some of the believers he addressed in Thessalonica were not yet married and yet they were still faced with the temptation to sexual immorality in their culture where "In those days... everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25)

(3) Paul would be contradicting what he taught in 1Corinthians 7 about the superlative state of singleness (cf. 1Cor 7:8,9)...

1Cor 7:8 But I say to the unmarried and to widows that it is good for them if they remain even as I. 9 But if they do not have self-control, let them marry; for it is better to marry than to burn.

(4) If taken in the sense of "acquiring a wife" Paul would be talking to men only and ignoring how women were to stay pure and/or they were not tempted to commit sexual immorality. Further, if "vessel" here means wife, then Paul in this verse would be forbidding celibacy altogether. **Wiersbe** comments " I prefer the first interpretation, for Paul wrote to all Christians, not just the married ones."

(5) According to Michael Martin (1, 2 Thessalonians. The New American Commentary Series: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995) the use of **skeuos** or **vessel** to describe one's body is more common in Greek writings. Elsewhere Paul never used **skeuos** to describe a wife but *gune*, "woman." In fairness it should be noted that Martin also states that *skeuos* is used to describe a woman or wife more commonly in Jewish writings.

Hiebert adds that...

The view that Paul means the body is consistent with a recognized New Testament usage of the term vessel. Thus Paul speaks of having "this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4:7, NASB), and in 2 Timothy 2:21 he refers to the man who purges himself from impurity as being "a vessel for honor" (NASB). And in Acts 9:15 God's directive to Ananias designated the newly converted Saul as "a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles" (KJV). The use of the word vessel as a reference to the body would be familiar to Old Testament readers from 1 Samuel 21:5, "The vessels of the young men were holy" (NASB). Paul's Greek readers would be quite familiar with the thought of the body as the vessel or instrument of the soul. If the reference is to the body, vv. 4 and 5 enjoin a fundamental duty that applies to every believer, whether man or woman, married or unmarried. We accept Paul's expression as a reference to one's own body. ([Ibid](#))

MacDonald writes...

If we allow the context to decide, then vessel means the man's wife. The teaching is that each man should treat his wife honorably and decently, never stooping to any form of marital unfaithfulness. This reinforces monogamy as God's will for mankind (see 1 Cor 7:2).

Matthew Henry writes...

Whereas the contrary will be a great dishonour. And his reproach shall not be wiped away, Pr 6:33. The body is here called the vessel of the soul, which dwells therein (so 1Sa 21:5), and it must be kept pure from defiling lusts. Every one should be careful in this matter, as he values his own honour and will not be contemptible on this account, that his inferior appetites and passions gain not the ascendant, tyrannizing over his reason and conscience, and enslaving the superior faculties of his soul. What can be more dishonourable than for a rational soul to be enslaved by bodily affections and brutal appetites?

Warren Wiersbe writes that...

Possess his vessel in 1 Thessalonians 4:4 probably means "control his body," for our bodies are the vessels of God (see 2Cor 4:7; see notes 2 Timothy 2:20; 21). But it can also mean "learn to live with his own wife," for the wife is called "the weaker vessel" (see note 1 Peter 3:7). I prefer the first interpretation, for Paul wrote to all Christians, not just the married ones. The Christian who commits sexual sin is sinning against his own body

(1Cor. 6:19-20), and he is robbing God of the glory He should receive through a believer's way of life. This explains why God gives such demanding requirements for spiritual leadership in the church (1Ti 3). If spiritual leaders cannot rule in their own homes, how can they lead the church? If we glorify God in our bodies, then we can glorify Him in the body which is the church.

John Gill writes that...

Jewish writers (use the phrase) **the vessel of his body**; so then, for a man to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour, is to keep under his **body** and bring it into subjection, and preserve it in purity and chastity; as the **eyes** from unchaste looks, the **tongue** from unchaste words, and the **other members** from unchaste actions; and to use it in an honourable way, not in fornication, adultery, and sodomy; for, by fornication, a man sins against his own body; and by adultery he gets a wound, and a dishonour, and a reproach that will not be wiped away; and by sodomy, and such like unnatural lusts, men dishonour their own bodies between themselves: particularly by "his vessel", as Gataker thinks, may be meant the "membrum virile", or the genital parts, which, by an euphemism, may be so called; see 1Sa 21:5

Barnes writes that **skeuos**...

probably refers to the **body**. When it is so used, it is either because the **body** is frail and feeble, like an earthen vessel, easily broken 2Cor 4:7, or because it is that which contains the soul, or in which the soul is lodged. Lucret. Lib. iii. 441. The word **vessel** also (Greek **skeuos**) was used by the latter Hebrews to denote a **wife**, as the vessel of her husband. Schoettg. Hor. Heb. p. 827. Compare Wetstein in loc. Many, as Augustine, Wetstein, Schoettgen, Koppe, Robinson (Lex.), and others, have supposed that this is the reference here; compare 1Pe 3:7.

The word **body**, however, accords more naturally with the usual signification of the word, and **as the apostle was giving directions to the whole church, embracing both sexes, it is hardly probable that he confined his direction to those who had wives**. It was the duty of females, and of the unmarried among the males, as well as of married men, to observe this command. The injunction then is, that we should preserve the body pure; see the notes on 1Cor 6:18-20. (Barnes NT Notes) (Bolding added)

In the area of **sexual immorality**, where is the weakness - is it in the **wife** or is in the fallen **body** that will one day be redeemed? Study the following cross references that discuss the **body** and its relationship to **sanctification** or **holiness**...

I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in **sanctification (hagiasmos)**. (see **note** Romans 6:19) (**Comment:** The **flesh** is the human faculty influenced by **Sin** (the Sin principle or propensity inherited from Adam), and as long as believers remain in their **mortal bodies**, **Sin** still has a beachhead or a place to launch its attacks, in the present context, those attacks that tempt us to commit sexual immorality in our vessels or bodies.)

For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my **flesh**; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not. (see **note** Romans 7:18) (**Comment:** Here Paul is not using flesh of not literal physical or material flesh, but the principle of **Sin** that expresses itself through one's mind and body.)

for if you are living according to the flesh, you must die; but if by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the **body**, you will live. (see **note** Romans 8:13) (**Comment:** **Wuest** writes that "*The individual who lives habitually under the dominion of the evil nature is an unsaved person. That one is on the way to final death in the Lake of Fire. But the person who by the Holy Spirit habitually puts to death the deeds of the body, will live. That person is a saved person.*" As long as we as believers are in this earthly **body**, we will be subject to the perils of the flesh and will need to keep putting the sins of the body to death. Only in heaven will our need for **practical** or **progressive sanctification** end. Until then, all believers are admonished to put sin to death and to live in and for their new Sovereign, the Lord Jesus Christ)

And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our **body**. (see **note** Romans 8:23) (**Comment:** Why do believers **groan**, a word that means with grief, describing an internal squeezing of a person in distress. The pain we feel now because we still live in bodies that harbor sin and are "prone to wander", to still stumble and to grieve the Holy Spirit. So our remaining sinfulness in these bodies is especially painful to those who know that they have been shown great mercy and have manifold grace to live victoriously for His glory.)

I urge you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your **bodies** a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed (present imperative with negative = stop an action already in process) to this world, but be transformed (present imperative = as your lifestyle, habitually, continually) by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (see **notes Romans 12:1; 12:2**)

Do you not know that your **bodies** are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be! (1Cor 6:15) (**Comment:** Our spirituality and our sexuality are mysteriously intertwined for our bodies are members of Christ Himself. When we become Christians, we're joined in spirit with Jesus Christ. He comes to live in us, and whatever we do with our body implicates our resident Lord Jesus. When a believer commits immorality, he or she is dragging the union with Christ into the illicit relationship! This should give any reasonable person pause to consider his or her actions! D. S. Bailey describes sexual intercourse as "*an act which by reason of its very nature engages and expresses the whole personality in such a way as to constitute a unique mode of self-disclosure and self-commitment.*" There is no such thing as casual sex or inconsequential sex or recreational sex.)

John MacArthur on the other hand writes...

Paul was admonishing the Thessalonians to control their bodies, the unredeemed human **flesh** that is the beachhead for sin and immorality (cf. Ro 7:18; 8:5-8, 23). For that reason, Paul urged believers to kill the flesh (cf. Rom. 13:14; 2 Cor. 7:1), live by the Spirit (Ro 8:13), and dedicate their bodies to God and allow His Spirit to renew their minds so that the body would not control them (Ro 12:1-2). As in today's culture, the culture of Paul's day operated largely according to physical appetites and impulsive, superficial emotions. (The words of the slogan "If it feels right, do it" are of contemporary origin, but the philosophy they express is not.)

Keener comments that...

Vessel (KJV, NASB) was commonly used as a metaphor for one's "body" (NIV, NRSV) in Greek and Diaspora Jewish literature; it was occasionally applied to one's wife (in some Jewish texts and, on one interpretation, in 1 Pet 3:7). It probably means "body" here, although the matter is not beyond dispute. (Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press)

Paul wrote...

Food is for the stomach, and the stomach is for food; but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord; and the Lord is for the body. Now God has not only raised the Lord, but will also raise us up through His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? May it never be! (1Cor 6:13-15)

Commenting on 1Corinthians 6, **MacArthur** notes...

The statement regarding "food" and "the stomach" was likely a proverbial saying that called all physical gratification natural and normal, and viewed sex, like eating, as purely biological. Apparently some of the Corinthians used that analogy to justify their sexual immorality. But sexual sin is not a servant; it is a powerful master. Therefore, the apostle warned the Corinthians, as he had the Thessalonians, that believers must not allow that sin to control them. Instead, all Christians must know the importance of disciplining their bodies so they will honor God (cf. 1 Cor. 9:27).

Leon Morris notes

A few early commentators like Theodore of Mopsuestia and Augustine held that the word means **wife** and a good number of modern writers follow them. The strongest argument for this view appears to be that there are a few passages (Grimm-Thayer cite two in the Septuagint and one in Xenophon) where the combination of this noun and verb means "to marry." This is said to be supported by the reference to the wife as "the weaker vessel" in 1 Pet. 3:7. This latter point must, however, be discounted, for the wife is not spoken of as the husband's "vessel" at all. Both are "vessels" of the Holy Ghost, the wife being the weaker. Thus the passage does not really bear on our problem. Among the Rabbis the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek word here is used of the wife, and this may have influenced Paul.

It is not easy to decide the point, but it does seem to me that it would not be very natural for a Greek writer to speak of a wife as a **vessel**. And in this case it would be the less likely since Paul is inculcating a high view of

marriage, and it is a very low view that thinks of the wife as no more than a vessel for gratifying the husband's sexual desires. This ... inclines me to the view that "body" is meant. Paul then is exhorting his Thessalonian friends to keep their bodies pure. (The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians. The New International Commentary on the New Testament [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989], 123–24)

John Piper comments that...

The issue here is not just behavior but also sexual desires that dominate your life in ways they should not. For our day I think we could include here desires that lead to the use of pornography, and desires that lead to a fantasy life and the masturbation that is so often imbedded in it – for men and women.

I have reports on all hands that this issue is huge, and that the easy access to internet pornography and cable TV is capturing many men and women and making slaves out of them. The positive alternative to this is described in verses 1, 3, and 7. Verse 1: "How you ought to walk and please God." Verse 3: "This is the will of God, your sanctification [or holiness]." Verse 7: "God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification [or holiness]."

When God calls you to himself, he justifies you freely by faith in Christ on the basis of Christ's blood and righteousness, and he calls you to a life of holiness, which in this context refers explicitly to sexual purity. This is the practical fruit of justification by faith. ([1Thessalonians 4:1-8](#))

Paul made it crystal clear that in order to **control the body**, believers **must** rely on the Holy Spirit...

Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh (Gal. 5:16)

Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. (Gal 5:24,25)

in order that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. (Ro 8:4)

The key to **walking in the Spirit** is being filled with the Spirit

So then do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit (Eph 5:17-18)

The **key to continually being filled with the Spirit** is for believers to let God's Word dwell within them

Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Col. 3:16)

Word Dwelling Within

▼

Filled with Spirit

▼

Walking in Spirit

IN SANCTIFICATION AND HONOR: en hagiois kai time:

- Philippians 4:8; Hebrews 13:4

Every believer must learn how to bring his body under full control, to gain continuous mastery over it in a way that is holy and honorable.

Character is revealed by what you do in secret, when no one else is around to see.

In sanctification and honor - Hiebert comments that...

These two terms are linked together under one preposition. This mastery over the body is to be achieved in the sphere of personal consecration, in the realization that the body must be set apart for the service of God. Such a sanctifying use of the body excludes sexual and other forms of impurity; the use of the body in immoral ways dishonors and degrades the body (Ro 1:24-note). To use the body as a sacred instrument devoted to the service of the Lord is to give it true honor. ([Ibid](#))

Sanctification (holiness) (38) (**hagiasmos** see notes on 1Thessalonians 4:3) means to be set apart from sin to God, for the purpose of living a pure and holy life.

Remember the historical context, which helps us understand why Paul hones in on abstention from sexual immorality as so crucial to our **sanctification** process. For example, **Cicero**, a leading Roman politician and philosopher of the first century wrote

Mind you, if there is anyone who thinks that young men ought not to visit prostitutes, he is certainly narrow-minded (no doubt about it), and completely out of step with our present liberal thinking. In fact, he has nothing in common with the customs and behaviour of previous generations, who were quite broadminded on the subject.

Another **Roman** author wrote

Provided you keep away from married women, virgins, young innocents, and children of respectable families, love anyone you want.

To have sexual relations with a prostitute was so common in Corinth that the practice came to be called "Corinthianizing." Many believers had formerly been involved in such immorality, and it was hard for them to break with the old ways and easy to fall back into them. Houses of prostitution were widespread in the Greco-Roman world and were generally looked upon as a social necessity. The venerable Roman leader **Cato** was supposed to have congratulated a young man he saw departing from a brothel. When your sexual passions are strong, he told the young man, it is better to have sex with a prostitute than another man's wife.

Like much of 21st century paganism that affirms that men's and women's sexual activity should be based upon personal choice and inalienable rights and that argues that their **bodies** (vessels) are their own private property, so also most ancient pagans did not correlate the satisfaction of bodily sexual appetites with a view of divine ownership of their bodies. For the most part neither ancient religions nor ancient philosophies affirmed anything like the Biblical view that the divine creation of mankind (with its sensual appetites) placed mankind's sexual expressions and activities under divine authority and legislation. The Biblical view simply stated is that mankind is, was, and will always be creation and will never evolve into the status of the Creator. As such, the creations of God are subject to God's laws and his divine ordering of creation. Humans are never wise enough or holy enough to guide their own steps.

Remember that Paul's charge that sexual immorality is unacceptable was addressed to those who had a choice about the matter. Keep in mind that a large numbers of boys and girls and men and women, especially those who were slaves, had little choice about their sexual involvement.

The Roman author **Seneca the Elder** once commented that...

Losing sexual purity was a crime if you were a freeborn.

Losing sexual purity was a necessity if you were a slave.

Losing sexual purity was a duty if you were a freedman.

Regarding the continual need to pursue sanctification the Puritan **John Owen** warned that sin

is never less quiet than when it seems to be most quiet, and its waters are for the most part deep when they are still. Satan is likely to attack when a believer is most satisfied with his spiritual life. That is when pride, the chief of sins, easily sneaks into our lives unnoticed and lead us to believe that contentment with ourselves is contentment in God.

Ray Stedman has the following comments on **sanctification** writing...

I am sorry that the word **sanctification** appears here because I find a lot of people have very confused ideas as to what constitutes sanctification.

Some think it is a kind of a religious sheep dip that they are put through; an experience of cleansing and commitment entered into once for all. Once they have been dipped, they feel, everything is fine. Others think that **sanctification** is an extraction process. God uses a kind of sin magnet to extract all the sin and then from then on they can live to please him. Some people actually think they have not sinned for years. Obviously, nobody has told them the truth yet. A little deeper investigation would reveal how wrong they are. Actually, the word **sanctification** is really almost the same as the word that is translated **holiness** in this passage. It comes from the same root. But again, I find that many are confused about **holiness**.

When I was younger, most people thought of **holiness** as grimness. I did not like "holy" people. They looked like they had been soaked in embalming fluid. They were grim and dull; they frowned on anything that was fun

or pleasurable. But that is not holiness. I like the good English word wholeness, which also derives from the same root. Everybody wants to be a whole person. The Old Testament speaks about "the beauty of holiness" {1 Chr 16:29, 2 Chr 20:21, Ps 29:2, 96:9}, the inner attractiveness that is apparent when someone begins to function inwardly as he or she was intended.

What this says is that God is designing beautiful people! That is what he wants. And not merely outwardly beautiful people like those we see on television, but inwardly beautiful people. He is more interested in inward beauty, in making admirable, trustworthy, strong, loving, compassionate people -- having all the qualities which make for inner beauty. That is what God calls wholeness, and that is his will for you. Isn't it exciting that God wants to make you a whole person?

The second thing Paul says about such wholeness is that it includes moral purity. "... abstain from immorality," says the apostle in the very next sentence. Moral purity is part of wholeness. You cannot be a whole person if you indulge in sexual immorality. We need to be very clear about these words. Words like immorality do not seem to register with many people. Let us put it plainly:

Immorality means no sexual wrongdoing;

No pre-marital sex; no making out in the back seat of the car with somebody you hope to marry someday, or maybe not; no pre-marital sex (no fornication);

No extra-marital sex (no messing around with someone else's wife or being faithless to your own husband or wife);

No homosexual sex (that is very clear in Scripture in many places);

No pornography (no standing in the news section at the airport and flipping through Penthouse or Playboy magazine and getting yourself turned on by looking at the pictures; that is sexual fantasy and that is wrong, too, as Jesus pointed out).

So to "flee immorality" means to have none of those things going on in your life.

The reason is, it destroys the wholeness that both you and God want. There is nothing more beautiful than a young person who has his or her life in order. At times I have been saddened to watch beautiful young men and women, who have been raised in godly homes, who reflect moral beauty in their lives, but they begin to let their standards go when they get out into the world. Watch them a year or two later and you will see the hardness in their faces, the slovenly habits that they have picked up. Things have begun to drift. There is a downward slant to life. They are beginning to lose the beauty of wholeness that God has in mind.

In this day in which we live I know that probably many of you are thinking that it is too late for you; you already have messed up your lives. But the glory of the gospel is that the word is not that we must never do this; rather the word is, "Do it no longer." That is what you find all through these passages. Let us live no longer for ourselves but for "Him who loved us" and "gave himself for us," {Ro 8:37, Titus 2:14}. All of us have messed up our lives in one way or another; we have destroyed the wholeness already. But the glory of the good news is that in coming to Jesus, through his work on the cross on our behalf and his raising again from the dead, he can actually give us a new start. All the past is wiped out and forgiven. We are restored. As Paul wrote in Second Corinthians, "I have espoused you [I have betrothed you] as a chaste virgin unto Christ," {2 Cor 11:2 KJV}. The Corinthians had already messed up their lives in many sexual ways, yet Paul declares that because they had come to Christ they were now a chaste virgin.

If, even as a Christian, we have messed up, the Word of God makes very clear that we can be restored. If we acknowledge that we have done wrong, and accept God's forgiveness through Christ, we are a chaste virgin again in Christ. What glorious good news that is!

Honor ([5092](#)) (time from **tío** = pay honor, respect) is basically, the worth ascribed to a person or the value ascribed to a thing. It refers to the worth or merit of some object, event, or state. It is a valuing by which the price is fixed, an estimation of the value of a thing. It is an attitude towards person or thing commensurate with its value.

And **honor** means respect. In other words, your body is to be so holy that it is worthy of respect toward the God who owns it, toward the God who dwells in it, toward the God whom it represents, toward the church of which it is a part. You're to live your life not asking how far can I go, but how far can I stay away and be utterly set apart from sin and bringing honor to my body which is God's which should be used for the glory of Christ.

Plummer - Honour for the human body as something sacred is to a large extent a Christian idea. Heathen philosophers often

regarded it with contempt.

Honor in context is the result of separation from sin. The believers would honor their bodies as **temples** of the Spirit and instruments of service to Christ.

If any man destroys the **temple of God**, God will destroy him, for the **temple of God** is holy, and that is what you are. (1Cor 3:17)

Or do you not know that your **body** is a **temple of the Holy Spirit** Who is in you, Whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a **price** (time): therefore glorify God in your body. (1Cor 6:19-20)

Or what agreement has the **temple of God** with idols? For **we are the temple** of the living God; just as God said, "I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. (1 Cor 6:16).

John MacArthur - The goal is positive pursue separation and virtue with all one's heart. No Christian should ever ask how far his or her moral behavior can depart from God's standard and still avoid sin.

See these excellent related resources from **John Piper**:

- [Strategies for Fighting Sexual Sin](#)
- [Battling the Unbelief of Lust](#)
- [Satan Uses Sexual Desire](#)
- [Sex and the Single Person](#)
- [Sexual Relations in Marriage](#)
- [Sex and the Supremacy of Christ, Part 1](#)
- [Sex and the Supremacy of Christ, Part 2](#)
- [ANTHEM - Strategies for Fighting Lusts](#)
- [Avoiding Sexual Sin, Part 1](#)
- [Avoiding Sexual Sin, Part 2](#)
- [Avoiding Sexual Sin](#)
- [How to Deal with the Guilt of Sexual Failure](#)
- [Christian Hedonists or Religious Prudes? The Puritans on Sex](#)
- [The Will of God for You: That You Abstain from Sexual Immorality](#)
- [Missions and Masturbation](#)

1Thessalonians 4:5 not in **lustful passion**, **like** the **Gentiles** who do not **know God** (**NASB: Lockman**)

Greek: [me en pathei epithumias kathaper kai ta ethne ta me eidota](#) ([RAPNPN](#)) [ton theon](#)

Amplified: Not [to be used] in the passion of lust like the heathen, who are ignorant of the true God and have no knowledge of His will, ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

NLT: not in lustful passion as the pagans do, in their ignorance of God and his ways. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

Phillips: and never regarding it as an instrument for self-gratification, as do pagans with no knowledge of God. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

Wuest: not in the passion of an inordinate desire even as also the Gentiles do who do not know God, ([Eerdmans](#))

Young's Literal: not in the affection of desire, as also the nations that were not knowing God,

NOT IN LUSTFUL PASSION: me en pathei epithumias:

- Romans 1:24,26; Colossians 3:5

MacDonald comments that...

The Christian view of marriage is in sharp contrast to that of the ungodly. As one commentator said, "When Jesus laid His hands on the woman in Luke 13:13, she was made straight. When pagan man touches a woman, she is made crooked." The Gentiles think of sex as a means of gratifying the passion of lust. To them chastity is a weakness, and marriage a means of making sin legal. By their filthy conversation and their obscene writings on public walls, they glory in their shame. (cp Ho 4:7, Phil 3:9-note) ([MacDonald, W & Farstad, A. Believer's Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelsons](#))

Not in lustful passion - Literally, **not in passion of desire** or **not in passion of lust**. Paul presents a stark contrast with the pagan worldview. The point is that combining these two words (see below) in the phrase **passion of lust** conveys an exceedingly strong expression, emphasizing the strength of unbridled desire. Such behavior is a benchmark of heathenism. Paul is plainly stating that the sexual conduct of believers should be different than the prevailing pagan permissiveness that abounded in every quarter. Self control is a characteristic of a Spirit filled, Spirit led life (cf. Gal. 5:23-note). Christians must allow the Holy Spirit to control them and not allow their desires to dominate them and make them the slaves of passion.

Sow a thought, reap an action
Sow an action, reap a habit
Sow a habit, reap a character
Sow a character, reap a destiny

Passion (3806)(**pathos** from **pascho** = suffer, basic meaning is "to experience something that comes from outside, at first usually bad, idea of suffering evil remains) primarily denotes whatever one suffers or experiences in any way. That which is endured or experienced. Experience of a strong desire. Hence, an affection of the mind, a passionate desire. It is a drive or force that does not rest until satisfied. Used by Greeks of either good or bad desires.

Pathos denotes not so much the violence of the feeling as its ungovernable nature. Note the derivation from the verb **pascho** to suffer which expresses the lustful feeling the individual suffers.

Pathos describes an inward emotion aroused by some external object; in this case by an impure object prompting unchastity. It is a desire that does not rest until it is satisfied. There is a kind of person who is the slave of his or her **passions** and who is driven by his or her **desires (epithumia)** for the wrong things.

A **passion** is a drive or force that does not rest until satisfied. These are internal desires (emanating from our fallen sin nature) that cause the victim to suffer and that have to be satisfied or they drive you crazy. A **passion** describes intense emotion compelling action; intense, driving, or overmastering feeling or conviction; ardent affection; sexual desire or an emotion that is deeply stirring or ungovernable.

The **passions** of the old nature (see **flesh**) rise up and say "*give me, give me, give me*" but believers don't have to give in to them. Believers can now say "no". Is this abstinence a reflection of self-denial apart from Christ? No. This is operating, not in our strength but based on the truth that believers have died and our life is hidden with Christ. Therefore we have the inherent power to put aside any sexual activity that is not God permitted and God glorifying (see notes on **walking in the Spirit**)

TDNT notes that **pathos** means...

"experience," then "misfortune" etc., then "mood," "emotion," "passion," "impulse," also "change," "process," "attribute," and, in rhetoric, "pathos."

Pathos means excited emotion, uncontrollable desire, compelling feelings, overpowering urges. Although there could be legitimate passion for the right thing (e.g., a passion for God), all 3 NT uses of **pathos** are in a bad sense.

Romans 1:26 For this reason God gave them over to degrading **passions**; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,

Colossians 3:5 Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, **passion**, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

1Thessalonians 4:5 not in lustful **passion**, like the Gentiles who do not know God;

Trench compares **passion** to the diseased condition of the soul and lust to the active disease that springs out of that condition. The combination of the two terms (passion and lust) indicates the surrender of an individual to his passions so that he is overwhelmed and carried away by them.

Calvin rightly reasoned that...

When men allow themselves to whet their desires, there are no bounds to their lustful emotions.

Fausset comments that **passion**...

implies that such a one is unconsciously the passive slave of lust.

Lustful (1939) (**epithumia**) from **epi** = at, toward {the preposition "epi-" in the compound is directive conveying the picture of "having one's passion toward" } + **thumos** = passion. The root verb **epithumeo** = set heart upon) is a neutral term denoting the presence of strong desires or impulses, longings or passionate craving (whether it is good or evil is determined by the **context**) directed toward an object. ([Click](#) article in ISBE)

Earlier Paul had used **epithumia** in a positive sense...

we (Paul, Silas, Timothy), brethren, having been bereft of you for a short while-- in person, not in spirit-- were all the more eager with great **desire** (epithumia) to see your face." (1Thes 2:17)

Most often **epithumia** in the NT describes strong desires which are perverted and unrestrained and which originate from our SIN (flesh) nature, which is corrupt and fallen.

Hiebert has an interesting note that the

"degeneration in the meaning of the term (epithumia from God given desires to perverted desires) is a revealing commentary on human nature. Left to himself, instead of gaining mastery over his base desires and steadfastly adhering to the good, the individual is characteristically overcome by his evil cravings, so that they become the dominating force of his life." (Hiebert, D. Edmond: 1 Peter. Moody)

W. E. Vine summarizes **epithumia** as follows:

epithumia denotes "strong desire" of any kind, the various kinds being frequently specified by some adjective (see below). The word is used of a good desire only in Lu 22:15; Phil 1:23 [note]; 1Thes 2:17 [note]. Everywhere else it has a bad sense. In Ro 6:12 [note] the injunction against letting sin reign in our mortal body to obey the "lust" thereof, refers to those evil desires which are ready to express themselves in bodily activity. They are equally the "lusts" of the flesh, Ro 13:14 [note]; Gal 5:16 [note], Gal 5:24 [note]; Eph 2:3 [note]; 2Pe 2:18 [note]; 1Jn 2:16, a phrase which describes the emotions of the soul, the natural tendency towards things evil. Such "lusts" are not necessarily base and immoral, they may be refined in character, but are evil if inconsistent with the will of God.

Other descriptions besides those already mentioned are: "of the mind," Ephesians 2:3 [note]; "evil (desire)," Colossians 3:5 [note]; "the passion of," 1Thessalonians 4:5 [note], RV; "foolish and hurtful," 1Ti 6:9; "youthful," 2Ti 2:22 [note]; "divers," 2Ti 3:6 [note]; Titus 3:3 [note]; "their own," 2Ti 4:3 [note]; 2Pe 3:3 [note]; Jude 1:16; "worldly," [Titus 2:12](#) [note]; "his own," Jas 1:14 [note]; "your former," 1P 1:14 [note], RV; "fleshly," 1Pe 2:11 [note]; "of men," 1Pe 4:2 [note]; "of defilement," 2Pe 2:10 [note]; "of the eyes," 1Jn 2:16; of the world ("thereof"), 1Jn 2:17; "their own ungodly," Jude 1:18. In Re 18:14 [note] "(the fruits) which thy soul lusted after" is, lit., "of thy soul's lust." ([Vine, W E: Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words. 1996. Nelson](#))

This represents an exceedingly strong expression, emphasizing the strength of unbridled desire. Do you see what that implies about the root of lust? Not knowing God is the root cause of lust. Paul doesn't mean that mere head knowledge about God overcomes lust. In Mk 1:24 Jesus is about to cast a demon out of a man when the unclean spirit cries out, "I know who you are, the Holy One of God!" In other words, Satan and his hosts have some very accurate knowledge of God and Jesus, but that is not the kind of knowledge Paul has in mind here. The knowledge he has in mind here is knowledge of God described in 2Cor 4:6 -- "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (Gal 4:8; 1Co 2:14; 2Pe 1:3, 4). It's the knowledge of God's greatness and worth and glory and grace and power. It's knowledge that stuns you, and humbles you. It's knowledge wins you and holds you (2Pe 3:11,12, 14, 17)

It's the kind of knowledge that you don't have when you say ho-hum during the Hallelujah Chorus or grumble on the rim of the Grand Canyon. Hearing they do not hear and seeing they do not see. It's not that kind of knowledge. It comes like it did for Lydia when the Lord opened the eyes of her heart. At one moment you think you will burst with its fullness and suddenly there is a chasm of longing for more. It's the knowledge we call faith -- the assurance of things hoped for the conviction of things not seen.

It's a knowledge that is so real, so precious, so satisfying to your soul that any thought any attitude any emotion any addiction which threatens to hinder this knowledge will be attacked with all the spiritual zeal of a threatened life. This is the fight of faith that rages in

the godly soul when lust lures the mind away from God.

John Piper writes:

The way to fight lust is to feed faith with the knowledge of an irresistibly glorious God. Do you know God this morning? Are you growing week by week in the knowledge of God's greatness? Do you meditate on his word day and night? Do you ponder the pictures of his Son in the Gospels?... Do you look at everything in your day as his creation? Do you pray for a sensitive heart that can be ravished by the revelation of his glory? I call you to make those commitments now for the sake of your own soul and for the glory of God.

Lusts denote the varied cravings of fallen human nature pursued in the interest of self in self-sufficient independence of God. Oswald Chambers wrote that "Love can wait and worship endlessly; lust says, "I must have it at once.""

In his sermon entitled [Battling the Unbelief of Lust](#) **John Piper** defines **lust** as

a sexual desire that dishonors its object and disregards God. It's the corruption of a good thing by the absence of honorable commitment and by the absence of a supreme regard for God. If your sexual desire is not guided by respect for the honor of others and regard for the holiness of God, it is lust." (As an aside if you are in the grips of "lusts", [click](#) to read Piper's sobering words on a subject that is too easily avoided from the pulpit lest the "comfortable be afflicted"!)(See also [Piper's Strategies for fighting lust](#))

A **Jewish proverb** says

Lust is like rot in the bones.

John Piper defines lust as...

a sexual desire that dishonors its object and disregards God. It's the corruption of a good thing by the absence of honorable commitment and by the absence of a supreme regard for God. If your sexual desire is not guided by respect for the honor of others and regard for the holiness of God, it is lust. ([1Thessalonians 4:1-8: Battling Unbelief of Lust](#))

Vine adds that **lust**

describes the inner motions of the soul, the natural tendency of men in their fallen estate toward things evil and toward things forbidden." Vine adds that the phrase "The lust of the flesh" stands, therefore, for the temptation which proceeds from our corrupt nature, a nature which, owing to sin, stands opposed to the will and commandments of God. ([Vine, W. Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#))

Warren Wiersbe writes that

"these fundamental **desires** of life are the steam in the boiler that makes the machinery go. Turn off the steam and you have no power. Let the steam go its own way and you have destruction. The secret is in constant control. These desires must be our servants and not our masters; and this we can do through Jesus Christ." ([Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor](#))

Barclay has an illustrative note on **epithumia** as it related to the downfall of one of the great minds of the nineteenth century writing that

The word for **desire** is **epithumia** which characteristically means **desire** for the wrong and the forbidden thing. To succumb to that is inevitably to come to disaster. One of the tragedies of the nineteenth century was the career of Oscar Wilde. He had a brilliant mind, and won the highest academic honours; he was a scintillating writer, and won the highest rewards in literature; he had all the charm in the world and was a man whose instinct it was to be kind; yet he fell to temptation and came to prison and disgrace. When he was suffering for his fall, he wrote his book *De Profundis* and in it he said: "The gods had given me almost everything. But I let myself be lured into long spells of senseless and sensual ease. ... Tired of being on the heights I deliberately went to the depths in search for new sensation. What the paradox was to me in the sphere of thought, perversity became to me in the sphere of passion. I grew careless of the lives of others. I took pleasure where it pleased me, and passed on. I forgot that every little action of the common day makes or unmakes character, and that therefore what one has done in the secret chamber, one has some day to cry aloud from the house-top. I ceased to be lord over myself. I was no longer the captain of my soul, and did not know it (Ed note: he was deceived for the only man who is truly captain of his soul is the man who has surrendered his will to Christ). I allowed pleasure to dominate me. I ended in horrible disgrace." (Barclay concludes that) Desire is a bad master, and to be at the mercy of **desire** is to be a slave. And **desire** is not simply a fleshly **thing**; it is the craving for any forbidden thing. (Bolding added) ([Barclay, W: The Daily Study Bible Series. The Westminster](#)

LIKE THE GENTILES WHO DO NOT KNOW GOD: *kathaper kai ta ethne ta me eidota (RAPNPN) ton theon*

- Matthew 6:32; Luke 12:30; Ephesians 4:17, 18, 19; 1 Peter 4:3
- Acts 17:23,30,31; Romans 1:28; 1 Corinthians 1:21; 15:34; Galatians 4:8; Ephesians 2:12; 2 Thessalonians 1:8

LUST AND NOT KNOWING GOD

Mark it down - Not knowing God is the root cause of lust. Those who know God do not live like the heathen. Those **who do not know God** do not have the spiritual resources to walk pure before the Lord and therefore by default live like heathens. How tragic when genuine believers get caught in the web of sexual sin and live like the heathen **who do not know God**! The corollary conclusion is that one of the best "antidotes" for lust is to "know God." For believers who "know Him" by the new birth, they need to fortify and freshen their knowledge of Him by daily spending time in His word, [memorizing](#) and [meditating](#) and allowing the Spirit to change them from glory to glory (2 Cor 3:18-[note](#)).

Gentiles (1484) ([ethnos](#)) refers to non-Jews or the heathen and when preceded by the definite article ("the") in Greek, means "the nations" which is synonymous with the Gentiles a description implying those who practice idolatry and are ignorant of the true and living God.

All of mankind can be divided into **Jew** and **Gentile** and thus **Gentile** is a synonym for anyone who is non-Jew or who is not a member of the "chosen people". The Hebrew word corresponding to Gentile is **goyim**. From Genesis 12 onward the majority of the Scripture deals with Israel and the Jews, with the Gentiles mentioned primarily as they interface with the Jews. The NT does have more mention of the Gentiles after the formation of the Church, but the last book, the book of Revelation is predominantly Jewish with over 200 OT quotes or allusions to OT passages.

Vine notes that...

Inasmuch as man was created, and still is, in the image and likeness of God, Genesis 1:27; 9:6; 1 Corinthians 11:7; James 3:9, he possesses the faculty for knowing God, Romans 1:19. Since, however, men had not thought it worthwhile (dokimazo, as in Ro 2:4), to continue in the knowledge of God, God had given them over to a reprobate mind, with the consequence that they had become abominable in their works, i.e., in their ways and conduct, Romans 1:28, 29, cp. Ephesians 4:18. Denial of the Creator resulted in the degradation of the creature; idolatry and immorality are closely allied, as Israel had learned (see 1 Corinthians 10:7, 8 below). ([Vine, W. Collected writings of W. E. Vine. Nashville: Thomas Nelson](#))

And do not be **idolaters** as some of them were; as it is written, "THE PEOPLE SAT DOWN TO EAT AND DRINK, AND STOOD UP TO PLAY." Nor let us act **immorally**, as some of them did, and twenty-three thousand fell in one day. (1Cor 10:7-8)

Keener writes that...

Jewish people viewed nearly all Gentiles as sexually immoral (later rabbis argued that one could not assume the virginity of a Gentile woman over three years and one day old); most Gentile men were immoral. (Keener, C. S., & InterVarsity Press. The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament. Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press)

Fausset remarks that...

Ignorance of true religion is the parent of unchastity... A people's morals are like the objects of their worship (De 7:26; Ps 115:8; see Romans 1:23-note; Romans 1:24-note).

Ps 115:8 Those who make them (idols) will become like them, Everyone who trusts in them.

Paul explains that the unsaved Gentiles are...

darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness. (see **notes** Ephesians 4:18; 4:19)

Gentiles who do not know God - This phrase is quoted from the Septuagint of 2 OT passages...

Psalms 79:6 Pour out Thy wrath upon **the nations** (Lxx = ethne = Gentile nations) **which do not know Thee**, and upon the kingdoms which do not call upon Thy name.

Jeremiah 10:25 Pour out Thy wrath on **the nations** (Lxx = ethne = Gentile nations) **that do not know Thee**, and on the families that do not call Thy name; For they have devoured Jacob; They have devoured him and consumed him, And have laid waste his habitation.

Know (1492) (**oida**) refers to having come to a perception or realization of something. Oida generally means to know intuitively or instinctively. To be acquainted with. To have information about. Oida refers to an absolute, positive, beyond a peradventure of a doubt, knowledge.

The heathen knew gods as licentious as they were themselves. One of the reasons for the revival of neo-paganism, new age, wicca, etc. in modern life is this very fact that men wish to cast off God's inhibitions against licentious behavior. Interestingly Romans 1:21 says the pagans "knew" God (ginosko) but they choose not to honor Him so that God gave them over to their evil, degrading lusts (see note Romans 1:28), their suppression of the truth about God leading to idolatry and idolatry leading to immorality.

As **Hiebert** remarks...

The Gentiles knew gods who were the personification of their own ambitions and lusts but they did not know the true God, the God who is Himself holy and wills the sanctification of His followers... This reference to Gentile ignorance of God is a pointed reminder to the readers. They have just been brought out of the ignorance of paganism and have come to know the true God (note 1Thessalonians 1:9) and His orders for the Christian life (note 1Thessalonians 4:2). With their new knowledge, to fall back into the immoral practices of paganism would be especially reprehensible. ([Hiebert, D. Edmond: 1 & 2 Thessalonians: BMH Book. 1996](#))

MacDonald writes that...

The Christian view of marriage is in sharp contrast to that of the ungodly. As one commentator said, "When Jesus laid His hands on the woman in Luke 13:13, she was made straight. When pagan man touches a woman, she is made crooked." The Gentiles think of sex as a means of gratifying the passion of lust. To them chastity is a weakness, and marriage a means of making sin legal. By their filthy conversation and their obscene writings on public walls, they glory in their shame. ([MacDonald, W & Farstad, A. Believer's Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson](#))

Bible Knowledge Commentary explains that...

A heathen is one who does not know God. Here Paul put his finger on the key to overcoming sexual temptations. A Christian can overcome because he knows God; this makes all the difference! Paul did not say that the heathen do not know about God. The reason they behave as they do is because they do not know God personally, even though they may know about Him. When a person comes to know God by faith in Jesus Christ, not only do his attitudes toward sex change, but he also discovers that God gives him the ability to act toward sexual temptation as he could not before. Knowing God is basic to living a holy life. This is why maintaining a vital relationship with God is essential to maintaining a clean walk before God. ([Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., et al: The Bible Knowledge Commentary. 1985. Victor](#))

Piper writes that...

When you give way to lustful passion (See 1 Peter 1:14-note; Eph 4:22-note; Ro 1:23; 24; 25; 26; 27; 28 notes Ro 1:23; 24; 25; 26; 27; 28), you act like people "who do not know God." Which means: knowing God is the path to sexual purity. If you are struggling with sexual impurity in mind or body, the immediate and long term strategy is **know God, know God!** (from John Piper's sermon on [Sermon on 1Thessalonians 4:1-8](#)) (Click for more extended discussion by Dr Piper)

Keathley explains that the display of **lustful passions**...

is a mark of heathenism. A heathen is one who "does not know God." Here Paul put his finger on the key to overcoming sexual temptations. A Christian can overcome because he knows God; this makes all the difference!

Simply put, believers are never to enter into marriage, as the unbelieving world does, simply because of passionate lust (en pathēi epithumias). "Passionate" is pathos and refers to what one suffers or experiences

as in suffering, like the passion of Christ, or of sexual passion. "Lust" is epithumia, "desire, longing, craving." Sexual desire is God given and is not wrong. One only has to read the Song of Solomon, a love poem of sexual love and passion within marriage, to see God's blessing on sex in marriage. It only becomes wrong when it controls one's life and goes beyond the limits of the marriage relationship in which there is personal commitment to each partner for life.

We should note that Paul did not say the heathen do not know about God. The reason, they behave as they do is because they do not know God personally, even though they may know about Him. When a person comes to know God by faith in Jesus Christ, not only should his attitudes toward sex and marriage drastically change, as he gains a knowledge of the Word, but he also discovers that God gives him the ability to handle sexual temptation as he couldn't before. Knowing God intimately is fundamental to living a life in sanctification and honor. This is why both having relationship with God (through faith in Christ) and maintaining a close walk with Him (through daily intimate fellowship) is vital to having and keeping a pure walk before God. ([Commentary](#))

Believers no longer have to live like the Gentiles who are driven by their **passions of lusts** for sexual gratification...

Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its **passions** (pathema = strong inward emotions and desires especially of a sexual nature) and **desires** (epithumia). (Gal 5:24-note)

Paul says that when believers were crucified with Christ we became separated from the dominion of the sinful nature as a result of our identification with Christ in His death. Crucifixion with Christ means death and brings about separation from the reigning power of the old sinful life and conversely bring freedom to experience the power of the resurrection life of Christ by faith.

In a parallel passage Paul writes that on the basis of what has transpired (read Colossians 1-2 and Col 3:1-4 - note how **doctrine** precedes **duty**) now believers are commanded to...

Therefore (on the basis of what has transpired by virtue of their new birth and union with Christ) **consider** the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, **passion** (pathos), evil **desire** (**epithumia**), and greed, which amounts to idolatry. (see **notes** Colossians 3:5)

Comment: Note that greed equates with idolatry and that here greed is **pleonexia** which is closely related to **defraud** = **pleonekteo** in 1Thessalonians 4:6