

Good Shepherd, Beaver Dam, WI  
1 Thessalonians 4:3,7

*It is God's will that you should be sanctified; for God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.*

It was a sad day when Adam and Eve threw away their spiritual freedom and became the slaves of Satan when they fell into sin. But God loved us and put a plan into operation that would make perfection with God possible again. That awesome plan included God's Son living a perfect life for us and then giving up His life to pay for the sins of all people for all time. Now we look forward to being with our Lord forever. "Christ crucified for us" is our victory cry as we tell others about the amazing grace of God.

But what happens next? Paul tells us: It is God's will that you should be sanctified; for God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. The word "sanctified" used here refers to the new life that the Holy Spirit empowers Christians to live in response to God's love.

People talk about the "good old days" as being better than the days now. It was a simpler life. But people are as sinful now as they were 60 years ago. Sin is more open now than it was 60 years ago.

God's Law is like a mirror, it shows us what we look like, and what God sees is not a pretty sight. Consider Handsome Harrison: no church, drinking is his god, makes fun of Christians, loves to gossip, hates his neighbor, cheats on his taxes, grumbles about everything. Then there is Beautiful Bonita. Bonita is a member of Good Shepherd and curses a lot, hates all authority, lives with a man outside of marriage, loves to gossip, and says really bad things to refs at basketball games.

Actually **Handsome Harrison** and **Beautiful Bonita** seem to be "good" people: they have friends, own dogs, are involved in the community, and give to various causes. Yet in the eyes of God, they are both sin-ugly. Both are on the road to hell.

Look at this balloon. It looks nice, doesn't it? Pretend this is **Handsome Harrison** or **Beautiful Bonita**. They have their faults, but people think they are good people. Most people agree they are good enough for heaven. But one sin makes Harrison and Bonita – dead in sin!

What does God say about sinners? The soul who sins is the one who will die. Sin produces sinful lives. As you think about **Handsome Harrison** and **Beautiful Bonita** compare them with they way we act. Do we grumble and complain? Do we despise anyone? Do we have sinful thoughts? Do we love money or what money can buy? Do we gossip? Do we drink too much or use illicit drugs? Is it hard for us to go to church? See, sin is in us and at times it really shows!

But the Holy Spirit creates faith in us and gives us a new heart and a sense of direction. The Holy Spirit enables Christians to lead new and different lives through faith in Jesus. This is called Sanctification.

Because of sin we are dead in sin, but the Holy Spirit makes us alive and changes us from being the enemies of God into the Children of God eager to do God's will.

Let's use **Handsome Harrison** and **Beautiful Bonita** as examples again. One of you spoke to Handsome Harrison and he is taking adult instruction at Good Shepherd and will soon become a member. He no longer drinks to get drunk. He attends church faithfully, and comes to Bible Study, too. Harry helps his neighbors, works hard, and no longer cheats on his taxes. He doesn't grumble and complain anymore because he knows that God will take care of him.

Beautiful Bonita has always been a member of Good Shepherd, but now her faith is alive – because one of you spoke to her. She no longer goes to basketball games because she knows if she does, she will probably dishonor God and shame herself. Bonita no longer lives in sin with her boy friend – she told the jerk to get out. She doesn't gossip and she encourages other Christians. She is content with what God gives her.

Both **Handsome Harrison** and **Beautiful Bonita** are living their lives as sanctified Christians. Since they have active faiths, good works are now evident in their lives. Their love for God and others was flamed into action by God's love for them.

Have you ever seen the wildflowers blooming in the desert of the Southwest? What a glorious sight: the blue lupins and the yellow poppies cover the hills. But in the Summer it is different. The temperatures on the desert floor reach 160 degrees. No flowers grow. Even the cacti are droopy and dying. But when the rains come, the wildflowers bloom and the hills

explode with awesome color!

In a similar way, the Holy Spirit uses the life-giving gospel to grow faith in the hearts of spiritually dead people. Nourished by the gospel, faith grows and produces works of love that glorify God and help others.

- Take away the rain from the desert and there will be no beautiful wildflowers.
- Take away the gospel from a Christian and there will be no faith and no works of love.

God wants us to live God-pleasing lives. In fact Jesus said, Let your light shine before men that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

King David didn't let his faith shine forth when he committed adultery and murder, did he? Yet, we thank God that David repented of his sin. Pastors love to encourage people to live a godly life out of love for God who has loved us so much more! Christians sin, Jesus showed us that in the Gospel. We need clean hearts. The Holy Spirit works to clean our sinful hearts and then strengthens us through the Word and Sacraments.

If a person is alive, there are signs of life: a pulse, blood pressure, and a beating heart. Our attendance at worship services, at the Lord's Supper, and our offerings for the Lord's work are some of the basic signs of faith alive in us. How about lives filled with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

Christians are not perfect. We will have to wait for the life to come for that. However, as a Christian matures in faith, there will be growth in the level of our new life. But in order to grow in faith, we need the Word and Sacraments.

Jesus lived a perfect life and then gave up His life for us. We are forgiven! That's certain! Because of our Savior, we will be in heaven one day! That too is certain!

God has done everything to make it possible for us to live with Him eternally! The plan of salvation was drawn up by God. Jesus carried out the plan. The Holy Spirit created faith in us so we believe that Jesus is our Savior! God did it all!

Let's show our thanks by the way we love God and our fellow human beings. Amen

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