

1 Thessalonians 4:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.

Analysis

For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness—ou gar ekalesen hēmas ho Theos epi akatharsia alla en hagiasmō (οὐ γὰρ ἐκάλεσεν ἡμᾶς ὁ Θεὸς ἐπὶ ἀκαθαρσία ἀλλὰ ἐν ἁγιασμῷ). This verse grounds sexual ethics in soteriology: God's calling determines lifestyle. Akatharsia (ἀκαθαρσία, 'uncleanness/impurity') encompasses moral filth, especially sexual immorality. The preposition epi (ἐπί, 'unto/for') indicates purpose—God didn't call us for the purpose of uncleanness. Rather, en hagiasmō (ἐν ἁγιασμῷ, 'in holiness/sanctification') indicates the sphere and goal of calling: God calls believers into holiness and toward progressive sanctification.

This theological foundation refutes antinomianism: grace doesn't permit sin but empowers holiness (Titus 2:11-12). God's calling includes both justification (declaration of righteousness) and sanctification (transformation unto righteousness). Those truly called by God will pursue holiness, not excuse immorality. This doesn't mean sinless perfection but directional movement: genuine believers increasingly mortify sin and vivify righteousness. Persistent, unrepentant immorality questions conversion's authenticity (1 John 3:6-9).

Historical Context

Some Thessalonians apparently struggled with sexual temptation, perhaps arguing that God's grace permitted occasional immorality or that physical acts didn't affect spiritual status. Paul decisively refutes this by grounding sexual ethics in God's

calling itself—salvation includes sanctification; justified people are being sanctified. This same error plagued later churches (Corinth had worse sexual sin, 1 Cor 5-6), requiring repeated apostolic correction. Contemporary 'cheap grace' teaching continuing this error must be refuted with Paul's clear connection between calling and holiness.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. How does understanding holiness as integral to God's calling (not optional extra) affect your pursuit of sanctification?
2. What evidence demonstrates that your life is marked by progressive holiness rather than persistent, unrepentant immorality?
3. How do you distinguish between perfectionism (expecting sinlessness) and authentic sanctification (directional growth in holiness)?

Interlinear Text

οὐ	γὰρ	ἐκάλεσεν	ἡμᾶς	ὁ	θεὸς	ἐπὶ	ἀκαθαρσίᾳ	ἀλλ'
not	For	called	us	G3588	God	unto	uncleanness	but
G3756	G1063	G2564	G2248		G2316	G1909	G167	G235

ἐν	ἁγιασμῷ
unto	holiness
G1722	G38

Additional Cross-References

Leviticus 11:44 (Holy): For I am the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I am holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

Ephesians 1:4 (Holy): According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

Leviticus 19:2 (Holy): Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.

2 Timothy 1:9 (Holy): Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,

2 Peter 2:10 (Parallel theme): But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities.

Galatians 5:19 (Parallel theme): Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness,

1 Thessalonians 2:3 (Parallel theme): For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile:

Hebrews 12:14 (Holy): Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord:

Ephesians 4:1 (Parallel theme): I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,

Ephesians 4:19 (Parallel theme): Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.