



SEXTING AND CHRISTIAN TEENS: The Meaning of 1 Thessalonians 4:3- 5 on Self-Sanctification

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Abstract

This article discusses the phenomenon of sexting among Christian youth, highlighting the meaning of 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 on sanctification. The primary objective of this study is to understand the impact of sexting on the lives of Christian youth and how Biblical teachings, particularly from 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, can guide them in maintaining personal purity in the digital age. The background of this research is driven by the increasing cases of sexting among adolescents, which can lead to negative psychological and spiritual consequences. In this context, understanding Biblical teachings is highly relevant to help Christian youth realize the importance of maintaining purity in their relationships. The method employed in this study is a qualitative approach with hermeneutic analysis. The qualitative approach allows for exploring the experiences and perspectives of Christian youth related to sexting, while the hermeneutic approach is used to interpret the theological meaning of Biblical passages concerning purity in the digital world. The findings of this research are expected to provide insights for parents, pastors, and church leaders in guiding Christian youth to uphold personal purity amid the challenges of the modern world.

Article History:

Received: August 16, 2025

Accepted: August 21, 2025

Published: September 6, 2025

Keywords:

Sexting

Christian youth

Sanctification

1 Thessalonians 4:3-5.

INTRODUCTION

In today's digital age, communication is no longer limited to face-to-face meetings, but is also done nonverbally through technological media. One such medium is the mobile phone or smartphone. Nowadays, almost everyone, including teenagers in Indonesia, owns a cell phone. With the rapid advancement of technology, teenagers can easily access various information from around the world. In addition, they can also communicate with other people from different parts of the world with just a touch of a finger on the phone screen. This kind of communication

sometimes involves sexual content, known as sexting.¹ The term may be less well known, but without realizing it, sexting has become a common habit among dating couples. The increasing use of chat applications allows couples to do this activity more easily.²

Oksiana Jatiningsih states that sexting refers to sending, receiving, or forwarding messages, photos, or videos that contain sexual content, via the internet. This activity can be done through websites, social media, conversation apps, online games, or dating apps.³ According to Maulidya sexting is the act of sending sexual images of oneself, or the 'creation', sharing, and dissemination of nude or nearly nude images of a sexual nature via cell phone or internet.³ a similar thing is stated by Henri that sexting is the activity of sending or receiving images, videos or words of a sexual nature between one or more individuals.⁴ Thus sexting is the activity of sending, receiving, or distributing sexual content, such as messages, photos, or videos, via the internet or mobile phones, which can be done through various digital platforms.

As believers, we are to keep ourselves holy and avoid sexual immorality because that is what God wants (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Sanctification means that we are called to live in holiness, avoid sin, and live a life that reflects the nature of God.⁵ However, there are still many individuals who still commit this sexting act without realizing the impact of this sexting behavior. Sexting has an impact on adolescents which can lead to deviant behavior with indications of aggressive intentions.⁶ Therefore, an understanding of sexting in adolescence is essential given the risks that arise during this age period. These risks include physical and psychological aspects of puberty, such as identity formation through social comparison with peers and adults, acceptance of body image, and exploration of sexuality. The phenomenon of sexting, which has a major negative impact in the digital age, is a serious problem for children and adolescents who have not been able

¹ Mahdar Syahrudin and others, *Fenomena Komunikasi Di Era Virtualitas*, ed. by Komarudin (Yogyakarta: CV Green Publisher, 2022), p. 40.

² Marriage Diary, *Towards Halal*, 1st edn (Jakarta: PT Elex Media Komputindo, 2018). 77.

³ Oktiana Jatiningsih, *Gender and Education* (Yogyakarta: cv Budi Utama, 2024). 77.

³ Maulidya Ulfa, *Digital Parenting How Parents Protect Children from Digital Dangers*, ed. by Nur Hamzah, 1st edn (West Java: Edu Publisher, 2020). 15.

⁴ Hendri Julius, *Not All Sex is Dirty* (Jakarta: PT Elex Media Komputindo, 2019). 216.

⁵ Slifendi J. Ballo, *Keep Working on Safety*, ed. by Ummu Tasya Arsyah, 1st edn (West Java: PT Adab Indonesia, 2024). 198.

⁶ Adriana Sainafat and Herry Jotlely, 'The Relationship between Sexting Motivation and Dating Violence among Adolescents in Ambon City', *Ners Journal*, 8 (2024), 2032-36 (p. 2033).

to use technology wisely.⁷

As Christian teenagers, we must keep ourselves holy, because our bodies are the temple of God, so let us keep ourselves holy (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). In 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8, Paul exhorts the believers to pursue holiness, which characterizes the Christian life, as a distinction between them and the Gentiles who live according to their lusts and do not know God.⁸ Paul again emphasizes the difference between the behavior of Christians who prioritize holiness and the behavior of those who live in habits of sin and worldly desires including this sexting behavior.

RESEARCH METHOD

In writing this article, the author uses a qualitative research method with a *Library Search* approach. Therefore, the procedure taken by the author starts from collecting library data, both in the form of journal articles related to the object of research, as well as other sources such as printed books or books in PDF format related to the object of research. Furthermore, the literature data is read, selected, and recorded important information to be quoted in this paper. The author also collaborates by using the hermeneutic method to examine the meaning of 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 regarding the meaning of self-holiness.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Meaning of Sanctification in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5

Some Christians have a certain understanding of sanctification, where they assume that sanctification is a process assisted by Christ. They believe that even if they are not holy, they will become holy with the help of Christ. In 4:7, Paul states that God has called us to a life of sanctification. We may think that we already understand the meaning of sanctification, but in reality, we may not fully grasp its true meaning. Here, Paul is not saying that God has called us in "holiness", but in "sanctification". There is a significant difference between holiness and sanctification.

The term "holy" literally means "set apart, privileged, set apart, and devoted to" something.

⁷ Titin Zubaidiatik, *Gerimis Midnight*, 1st edn (Yogyakarta: CV Ananta Vidya, 2023). 152.

⁸ Deri Susanto, *Theological Methods*, ed. by Bincar Nasution, 1st edn (Yogyakarta: PT Inovasi Pratama International, 2022). 40.

Something that is "holy" is considered to be in a different category or type. God is Holy, and everyone who is called by Him is also made holy.⁹ The term "holy" in Hebrew, *qadosy*, and in Greek, *hagios*, is sometimes translated as "holy." The difference between the words "holy" and "holy" is not always clear. The word "holy" emphasizes more on the essential qualities of God and man, while "holy" highlights more on the effect or result of an attitude that leads to holiness. *Qadosy* can mean "separated" (set apart) or "cut off from," which is used to describe the state of a person or thing that is set apart for God's use, thus indicating the state of the person or thing that has been set apart.¹⁰ According to the Bible, through the Holy Spirit, God set them apart and made them His own in Jesus Christ. This is what the church is (1 Peter 1:2). This process is called sanctification. In this process, the Holy Spirit works to restore and renew man in the image and likeness of God, making him someone who fully believes in the Lord Jesus Christ and the grace of God, and obeys Him.

In Revelation 4:8, "holiness" is described as the most appropriate description of God's true character and nature. God is holy, reflecting His glory and omnipotent nature. He is completely separate from everything sinful and finite.¹¹ Romans 15:16 reveals that believers in Christ are sanctified by the Holy Spirit in order to please God, especially Gentile believers, who are more common. All born again and growing believers need to have their dispositions sanctified through the elements of Christ's resurrection life that they have received through spiritual feeding, so that they are sanctified with God's holy nature (2 Peter 1:4) and can become holy to God (Ephesians 1:4). The sanctification spoken of in Romans 6:19 and 22 refers to this type of sanctification. Our fallen and corrupt nature needs to be addressed and corrected in God's sanctification, so that our disposition is restored and strengthened with His holy nature.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, the admonition against uncleanness, which is directly related to sanctification or holy living, is delivered earnestly because of its importance to the life of the believer. This warning tells us to abstain from sexual immorality (verse 3), which includes all

⁹ Marde Christian Stenly Mawikere, 'A Reformed Theological View of the Doctrine of Sanctification and Its Relevance Today', *Jaffray Journal*, 14.2 (2016), 199 (p. 208).

¹⁰ Arman Waruwu, *Reformed Theology of the Perseverance of the Saints*, ed. by Yayuk Umaya, 1st edn (Malang: CV Multimedia Edukasi, 2021). 5.

¹¹ Randy Clark, *The Power of Holiness and Evangelism* (Yogyakarta: Andi Offset, 2004).

forms of impurity and fornication.¹² All other forms of uncleanness are also forbidden, even if they are often practiced in secret, because they are contrary to purity in heart, word, and deed, as well as to God's commands in His law. There are several reasons for this warning. This sanctification is the will of God (verse 3), who wants us to live holy as He is holy, because we are called to salvation by the Holy Spirit. God desires purity in our hearts and bodies. The body that is dedicated to God must be kept clean and pure for His service. Purity is part of the sanctification that God commands in His law and affects the work of His grace in the life of every true believer.

Holiness will be a great honor to us, as is clearly implied in verse 4. Conversely, anything that is contrary to holiness will be a great disgrace, and the resulting shame will be indelible (Proverbs 6:33). In this regard, the body is likened to a vessel for the soul that dwells in it (as implied in 1 Samuel 21:5) and must be kept clean from impure passions.¹³ Everyone should be careful in this regard, because of course everyone values his honor and does not want to be disgraced, lest lust and lowly desires take over his mind and conscience and degrade the dignity of his noble soul.

Sexting in the Context of Christian Teens

The changing times that continue to develop continuously will certainly have an impact, especially among Christian teenagers. They will face various challenges that are present in their lives. Adolescence is a challenging period, with many influences coming from the environment, both negative and positive. At the age of adolescence, they are in a phase of thought formation that is greatly influenced by their surroundings.¹⁴

Nowadays, technology and smartphones are growing rapidly, along with the rapid growth of social media. Teenagers in the current era tend to be very dependent on social media. They are very attached to smartphones that are used almost all day to interact in cyberspace. Coupled with the ease of accessing platforms such as Facebook or Twitter, which can be done anytime and anywhere. Research conducted by Roy Damanik states that Internet use among adolescents in

¹² Matthew Henry, *The Epistles of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, ed. by Salomon Yo (Surabaya: Momentum, 2015). 469.

¹³ Henry, *The Epistles of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*. 469.

¹⁴ Tita Langi, 'The Influence of Social Media on the Shifting Lifestyle of Christian Teenagers in Mogoyunggung', *Voice*, 3.1 (2023), p. 8.

Indonesia reaches 64%.¹⁵ this extensive use of technology also brings negative impacts, one of which is sexting behavior. Research on sexting behavior is now increasingly attracting the attention of researchers and practitioners because it involves adolescents as perpetrators and victims, as well as the negative impact it has on adolescent social functions. These negative impacts include addictive behavior, fantasies, and excessive sexual arousal, which can interfere with the brain's ability to think rationally.¹⁶ Paramita Puspita Sari et al, stated that adolescents should be given guidance on correct sexuality information, because if not, they tend to seek information themselves from various sources, such as social media and the internet. This can make them read, hear, and even try things related to sex without sufficient understanding. As a result, teenagers may fall into unhealthy sexual behavior.¹⁷ With the development of technology, today's Christian teenagers face both internal and external challenges. Internal challenges are challenges that can indirectly disrupt the lives of Christian teenagers, because without realizing it, these challenges can develop into habits and become ingrained in them. For example, although Christian teenagers enjoy the development of technology, especially in terms of communication technology, they often find it difficult to manage their time well, resulting in a lot of wasted time.¹⁸ Not only that, this technological development can also lead to sexting behavior. The biggest external challenge is how to stay wise in using social media and improve digital literacy without getting caught up in the negative side of technological advancement. Christian teenagers also face a special challenge in this regard, namely the ability to selectively choose friends both in cyberspace and real-world relationships. They must be good at carrying themselves so that they do not fall into the trap of cyber socialization which is often called the world of deception.¹⁹ Christian teenagers also need to remain themselves and not be influenced by other people's habits. In addition, they must be able to manage their time wisely in utilizing the sophistication of technology in this digital era.

Holiness for Christian teens means living according to God's teachings and guarding

¹⁵ Roy Danamik, 'Social Media Use Education for Christian Teenagers', *Caraka*, 1407.April (2022), 147-58 (p. 155).

¹⁶ Firda Dwi Anjani, Santoso Tri Raharjo, and Muhammad Fedryansyah, 'Individual Factors and Social Environment as Causes of Sexting Behavior Among Adolescents', *Share: Social Work Journal*, 12.1 (2022), 12 (p. 13).

¹⁷ Paramitha Purwita Sari, Syahrudin, and Abdul Sarlan Menungsa, 'The Effect of Social Media Use on Sexting Behavior among Adolescents in Kendari City', *Scientific Journal of Social Science and Education*, 1.1 (2023), 01-07 (p. 3).

¹⁸ Maria Patricia Tjasmadi, *Non Multa Sed Multum*, ed. by Maria Patricia Tjasmadi, 1st edn (Yogyakarta: ANDI, 2022). 327.

¹⁹ Patricia Tjasmadi. 328.

themselves from sin, whether in thought, word, or deed. As a developing young generation, Christian teenagers are faced with many challenges, such as social pressure, technological developments, and social influences. Therefore, maintaining holiness becomes very important so that they can live pleasing to God and be an example to others.

The Apostle Paul also emphasized that sanctification relates to the moral and spiritual changes experienced by believers who have been justified, born again, and received new life from our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess 4:3). The Bible teaches that we should strive for holiness because without holiness, no one can see God (Heb 12:14). Achieving holiness requires effort, sacrifice, self-denial, and cooperation with the Holy Spirit who will constantly sanctify us.²⁰ For Christian teenagers, this is especially relevant, as they are in a period of character and identity formation. In a world full of temptations and challenges, such as social pressures, relationships, and technological advancements, Christian teenagers are faced with the choice to live in holiness. They must try to guard their hearts and minds from influences that are not in accordance with God's teachings.

Living in holiness for Christian teenagers means struggling not to get caught up in lifestyles that are contrary to faith, such as negative behaviors online or in daily relationships. They need to learn to choose constructive friends, avoid bad habits, and prioritize Christian values in all aspects of their lives. In addition, they should always cooperate with the Holy Spirit, who provides strength and guidance in every decision they make, to continue to grow in holiness and be an example to others.

Principles of Sanctification that Christian Teens Can Apply

Every Christian should understand that all believers, without exception, are called to live in holiness and attain the perfection of love. The call to holiness is addressed to all believers, which is based on the sacrifice of Christ.²¹ Holiness is one of the essential attributes of God's nature that His people must possess. Holiness can also be understood as "sanctification" or "godliness." In Hebrew, the word for "holy" refers to that which has been "consecrated" or "set apart" for faithful service to God.

²⁰ Tim Penulsi STTB, *Seri PA Kelompok Kecil Remaja Bintang*, ed. by Tan Giok Lie, 1st edn (Jakarta: PT Suluh Cendekia, 2023). 13-14.

²¹ Brian Rivan Assa and Yonatan Alex Arifianto, 'The Role of Christian Religious Education towards the Principle of Maintaining Purity in 1 Peter 1:16 in the Era of Disruption', *Journal of Christian Religious Education (JUPAK)*, 3.1 (2022), 63-79 (p. 71). ²³ Watchman Nee, *Do Not Love the World* (Yasperin).

In his first letter, John wrote, "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world" (1 John 2:16). This statement clearly reflects the temptation that Eve experienced (Gen 3:6). John uses this to describe the world and everything in it. All that belongs to the lusts or desires of the flesh, what fuels greed and ambition, and the things that foster pride or the temptation to worldly living are all part of the system influenced by Satan.²³ As John explains, the world is filled with the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, which can tempt anyone, including teenagers. In adolescence, when self-identity is being formed, there are many temptations that can undermine faith and morality, such as the desire to follow worldly trends, seek popularity, or engage in behaviors that are not in line with the teachings of Christ.

Relevance of 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 for Christian Teens

1. Living in Holiness is God's Will

Living in holiness is God's will which is strongly emphasized in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5. For Christian teenagers, this means that they are called to live according to the moral and spiritual principles established by God. Adolescence is a time of identity formation and life values, so it is important for Christian teens to understand that maintaining holiness is not only an obligation, but also a way to honor God. Holiness is not only limited to physical actions, but also includes thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. In a world full of temptations, such as the use of technology that can lead to behaviors like sexting, Christian teens are invited to stay away from things that can damage their holiness. By living in holiness, Christian teens will be better able to live a life that is pleasing to God and avoid negative influences that can damage their faith.

2. Avoiding Sexual Immorality and Immoral Behavior

Avoiding fornication and immoral behavior is an important message in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, which is particularly relevant for Christian teenagers. In adolescence, individuals tend to face a lot of social and emotional pressures that can lead to behaviors that are not in line with biblical teachings, such as sexting or sexual relationships outside of marriage. Paul reminds us that living in holiness requires us to stay away from sexual immorality, which damages our bodies and our relationship with God. Christian teens need to understand that immoral behaviors not only harm themselves but also destroy relationships that should be respected, both with God and with others. By avoiding this kind of behavior, Christian teens can preserve their

holiness, maintain healthy relationships, and live in accordance with God's will, which underlies their call to live holy and honorable lives.

3. Guarding the Body with Honor

Keeping the body with reverence is an important teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5, which reminds us to control the body in holiness and reverence to God. For Christian teens, the body is not their own, but rather a temple of the Holy Spirit that must be honored and guarded. This includes not only physical care, but also keeping the mind and feelings clean from temptations that can undermine holiness. Christian teenagers are faced with great challenges, such as pressure to engage in sexual behavior or consumption of immoral content in the digital world. By taking care of their bodies, Christian teens show respect for God and themselves, avoiding any form of behavior that could undermine physical and spiritual purity. This principle teaches the importance of self-control and living in integrity, both in the real and virtual worlds, to keep the body in honor of God.

4. The Importance of Self-Control

The importance of self-control is strongly emphasized in 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5, which teaches Christian teens to rule over their bodies in holiness and reverence. Self-control is key to maintaining holiness, especially amidst the temptations that exist in the digital and social world. Teenagers often face pressure to follow trends or engage in behaviors that are not in line with biblical values, such as sexting or sexual relationships outside of marriage. Without self-control, they can fall into behaviors that damage their bodies and their relationship with God. In addition, Galatians 5:22-23 also reminds us of the importance of the fruit of the Spirit, which includes self-control. This verse states, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law." Self-control is a sign of spiritual maturity that directs teens to live according to God's will and keep themselves away from the temptations of the world that can corrupt their holiness.²²

5. Relevance in a Digital World

The relevance of 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 in the digital world is very important, especially for Christian teenagers living in the age of technology and social media. In these verses,

²² Henry, *Epistles of Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*.

Paul reminds us to maintain holiness and abstain from immoral acts, such as sexual immorality and wrong desires. In the digital world, the temptation to engage in behaviors such as sexting, pornography, or sharing inappropriate images is great, which can undermine the holiness of the body and degrade the dignity of the self. 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 teaches that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and should be honored. In the digital world, this means using technology wisely, maintaining integrity, and avoiding temptations that can undermine holiness. Christian teens are encouraged not to get caught up in behaviors that damage themselves, both physically and spiritually, and to live according to God's will, despite the many temptations online. Matthew 5:28 also provides a relevant warning: "But I tell you that everyone who looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." This verse reminds us that what we see or consume in the digital world can affect our minds and hearts, which in turn can affect our actions.²³ Therefore, maintaining holiness in the digital world means not only avoiding actions, but also maintaining pure thoughts and feelings.

6. Identity Formation Based on Holiness

Identity formation based on holiness is very important for Christian teenagers, and it is closely related to the teaching in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5. This verse teaches that living in holiness is God's will, which includes avoiding sexual immorality and living with a body that is honored as a temple of the Holy Spirit. Adolescence is a time filled with the search for self-identity, and Christian teens should build their identity based on the principles of holiness found in God's word. Today's world offers many values and norms that often contradict the teachings of the Bible, so Christian teens need to have a solid foundation to form their identity. An identity built on holiness includes respect for the body, mind, and heart. This means that Christian teens not only avoid immoral behavior but also choose to live according to biblical principles that glorify God. Romans 12:1-2 provides relevant guidance for this identity formation: "Therefore, brothers, I urge you by the mercies of God to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect." This verse emphasizes that Christian teenagers are invited not to be influenced by the world, but to form their identity

²³ Matthew Henri's Commentary, *The Gospel of Matthew 1-14* (Surabaya: Momentum, 2007).

based on the principle of holiness that is pleasing before God.²⁴ By building this identity, they will be able to more easily face the temptations and challenges of the times with strong principles.

7. Guidelines for Facing the Challenges of the Age

The guidelines for facing the challenges of the times taught in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 are very relevant for Christian teenagers, especially in facing the increasingly complex temptations and social pressures in the modern era. These verses emphasize the importance of living in holiness, avoiding immoral deeds, and maintaining the body with reverence for God. Amidst the many negative influences from social media, socializing, and popular culture, Christian teenagers need a strong moral foundation to guide them through life. Today's challenges often lead Christian teens to difficult moral decisions, such as the temptation to engage in sexual behavior outside of marriage or to follow trends that are not in line with biblical values. By referring to the teachings of 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, teens are invited to continue to maintain the holiness of their lives, both in personal relationships and the use of technology. In addition, Ephesians 6:10-11 also provides important advice: "Finally, be strong in the Lord, in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you can stand against the wiles of the devil." This verse reminds teenagers to put on the "armor of God," namely the principles of faith, in order to resist the negative influences of the world.²⁵ With this foundation, Christian teens can face the challenges of the times with confidence, live according to God's will, and maintain holiness despite the many temptations around them.

CONCLUSION

The sexting phenomenon that is increasingly prevalent among teenagers can damage their holiness and integrity, which is contrary to God's will as taught in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5. This verse reminds Christian teenagers to keep their bodies in holiness, abstain from immoral behavior, and live with reverence for God. Selfsanctification, which is the calling of every believer, requires them to avoid temptations and behaviors that can damage the sanctity of the body and mind,

²⁴ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary: Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians*, ed. by Johnny Tjia, Barry Van Der Schoot, and Stevy W. Tilaar, 1st edn (Surabaya: Momentum, 2015).

²⁵ Henry, *Epistles of Galatians, Ephesians, Philipians, Colossians, 1 & 2 Thessalonians, 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*.

including through social media or digital communication such as sexting. For Christian teenagers, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 provides clear moral guidelines to live in holiness amidst the challenges of a tempting age. Through self-control and awareness of God's will, Christian teens are expected to guard their bodies as temples of the Holy Spirit and avoid behaviors that degrade their dignity, both in the real world and in the digital world. Thus, living in holiness in accordance with biblical principles is the way to glorify God and maintain the integrity of faith in the midst of cultural currents that often contradict Christian values

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