

1 Thessalonians

I. Introduction

A. **1 Thessalonians 4:3-8** . . . For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you **abstain** from sexual immorality (*to abstain means to refrain voluntarily, and especially from an indulgence of the passions or appetites*); [4] that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, [5] not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; [6] and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. [7] For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. [8] So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

B. Last Sunday we talked about God's will in relation to our sanctification, and specifically in relation to sexual immorality. We talked about how rampant immorality is in the church, and how that ought not to be. We talked about some of the harm immorality does – to the individual, the family, the community, and the church. And I urged you to believe that God, himself, is enough to satisfy your longings for pleasure, for belonging, and for love, and to choose to live by that belief long enough to become convinced that it's true – for the reality is, in God's presence is fullness of joy and at His right hand are pleasures forever.

C. Pray

II. Moral purity is God's will and requires self-discipline on our part.

A. Why does God take such a strong stand for moral purity and against immorality? In OT Israel, God decreed that some forms of immorality were punishable by public stoning. In NT Christianity, God says that those who practice certain forms of immorality will not inherit the kingdom of God. In **1 Thess. 4:6**, God says He will avenge any husband or wife who is cheated out of what is rightfully theirs through an act of adultery or some other form of immorality. And here in **1 Thess. 4:3**, God says it is His will, or His demand, that those who belong to Him are to be sanctified – and this sanctification is to include the area of sexual morality. But why? How can something so pleasurable or something that makes you feel like you belong and are loved be so wrong?

1. When unbelievers and Christians ask this question, they are only looking at what to them seems to be the harmless or self-gratifying side of immorality. And yet they too set limits on immorality, just like God. But their limits are self-serving and based on what meets their needs or makes them feel good. God's limits are based on what is best for each individual, everyone in the home, and for the community as a whole.
 2. You see, God's limits protect love. They protect your character and values. They protect women and children from misuse and abuse. They protect the family, and the moral well-being of the community.
 3. Those who don't like God's limits are willing to forsake love for selfishness. They are willing to use and abuse men and boys, women and girls for their own pleasure or sense of fulfillment. And they are willing to break up families to gain the happiness they seek.
 4. And though such things as movies, music, advertising, and social media try to make the forms of immorality they want to enjoy seem right and good, immorality in any form is harmful and ultimately destructive. Like all other sin, immorality grows and grows into heinous monsters – such as incest, pedophilia, date rape, sex-trafficking, and the universal dehumanizing and abuse of women and girls. Then there are groups like ISIS who abduct women and girls to gratify their own personal pleasures. And these are only representative of many evils that come from immorality.
 5. So why does God take such a strong stand against immorality and for moral purity? Because like lying, one act of immorality leads to another and another, which leads to increasingly destructive forms of immorality. In addition, all immorality is the enemy of love. And immorality feeds selfishness, justifies sin, promotes unfaithfulness, damages relationships, breaks up marriages, separates families, feeds anger, dulls the conscience, hardens the heart, increases irrational thinking, perpetuates deception, and uses or abuses others to gratify its own desires and felt-needs.
 6. These are some of the reasons God takes such a strong stand against immorality and for moral purity. And as I hope you can see, these are some of the reasons why we, as Christians, ought to refrain from immorality in any form.
- B. Paul continues on in vs 4 . . . that each of you know how (*and if you don't know how, ask to be taught so that you learn how*) to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,

1. Most likely the word “vessel” refers to the entire body, since immorality includes more than the private parts of the human body. For example, according to scripture, immorality includes the heart, the mind, the eyes, and the hands.
 2. Jesus speaks of the involvement of the heart, eyes, and hands in **Matthew 5:27-30**, “You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; [28] but I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his **heart**. [29] [Therefore,] If your right **eye** makes you stumble, tear it out and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. [30] If your right **hand** makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.”
 3. In **1 Corinthians 6:18-20**, Paul presents another reason why Christians are to abstain from immorality. “Flee immorality. Every other sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. [19] Or do you not know that **your (physical) body is a temple of the Holy Spirit** who is **in** you, whom you have from God, and that **you are not your own (possibly an allusion to marriage)**? [20] For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body.”
 4. Hebrews adds the sanctity of marriage as a reason in **Hebrews 13:4**, “Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled.”
 5. Knowledge and good reasons are important helps for doing what we ought to do. But we also need God’s help and empowerment, the inward working of the the Holy Spirit, and the word of God. Yet even those are not enough if we do not pursue sanctification and discipline ourselves away from immorality and toward godliness and love.
- C. [5a] not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God;
1. Paul states here that the reason unbelievers don’t override their passions, control their bodies, and live sanctified, moral lives is because they do not know God.
 2. Of course, we know from other portions of scripture that it isn’t that unbelievers do not know **about** God or are **unable** to know God, but that they don’t want to know God. They prefer to ignore God or

- reject God or claim there is no God rather than live morally restricted lives as prescribed by God and His word.
3. And though Christians, or so-called Christians who participate in one or more forms of immorality do not see themselves as ignoring or rejecting God, they are purposefully rejecting those parts of God's word that condemn their immoral choices and behavior. However, can we purposefully ignore or reject those parts of God's word that condemn our sinful behavior and still claim to know God?
 4. There are two portions of scripture that I want to read at this time because they affirm what we are talking about.
 - a. **Ephesians 4:17-19**, "So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that **you walk no longer** just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind, [18] being 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; [19] and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness."
 - b. **1 John 3:7-10**, "Little children, make sure no one deceives you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as [God] is righteous; [8] the one who practices sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The Son of God appeared for this purpose, to destroy the works of the devil. [9] No one who is born of God practices sin, because [God's] seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God. [10] By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother."
 5. At this point I want to caution all of us, for it is too easy to think more highly of ourselves than we ought regarding knowing God and living a sanctified life.
 - a. You see, if we judge the proof of our knowing God only on the basis of our morality, we can think we are in good spiritual shape and in good standing with God.
 - b. However, there is a second equally important area of sanctified living that the scripture connects to knowing God, and that area is love. We read this in **1 John 4:7-8**, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love."

- c. The point here is that there are at least two identifiable and measurable areas of behavior that reveal **if** or **how well** we know God – morality and love.
 - d. Therefore, let us take the words of **1 Peter 1:14-16** seriously, and measure the current condition of our spirituality according to what it says: “As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, [15] but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in **all** your behavior; [16] because it is written, ‘You shall be holy, for I am holy.’”
- D. [6] and [let] no man **transgress** (*that is, go beyond the limits of what is right so as to sin against*) and **defraud** (*cheat out of what is rightfully his*) his brother in the **matter** (*of morality*) because the Lord is the avenger in all **these things** (*all these things refers to any act of immorality with someone else’s spouse*), just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you.
1. If being morally pure for the love of God, the honor of God in the world, and the love of those around you is not enough to deter you from forms of adultery, then pursue moral purity out of fear that God will punish you for taking moral liberties with another person’s spouse.
 2. The writer of Hebrews affirms this in **Hebrews 13:4**, “Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.”
 3. And if you think your moral indiscretions aren’t bad enough to deserve God’s punishment, or if you think you only need to confess your repeated sins of immorality to be free of any negative response from God, think again – for though you may not experience God’s punishment, you will certainly experience His discipline. You can read about this in **Hebrews 12:5-11**.
 4. However, neither God’s punishment nor His discipline will have their intended effect on you if you are intent on going your own way. Consider, how many of us **know** we are involved in some form of immorality yet **never consider** that the troubles or the bad things that have or are happening to us are the result of God’s discipline or punishment in response to our repeated sinfulness – or our repeated acts of immorality?
 5. Sadly, too many Christians see these kinds of troubles, sickness, or sufferings as God’s failure to protect them rather than His love

seeking to correct and transform them for their good and the good of those around them.

6. Therefore, I urge any of us who knows you are involved in some form of immorality to take heed, learn what God is teaching you through His discipline or punishment, change your ways, abandon the sin, and pursue sanctification.
- E. After saying, “that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter,” Paul goes on to give three reasons why we Christians ought to be holy in this area of life in spite of how the rest of the world lives.
1. **First, (vs 6b)** we ought to be holy because God is the avenger of any immorality on our part that includes someone else’s spouse.
 2. **Second, (vs 7)** we ought to be holy because God has not called us and freed us from the penalty of sin so that we could continue living morally sinful lives without fear of punishment or eternal damnation. The reality is, God has called us and saved us for the purpose of being sanctified and living a godly life.
 3. **Third, (vs 8)** if we reject what God says in these verses about morality, we are not rejecting someone’s opinion, we are rejecting God, himself, who gives us His Holy Spirit.
- F. We will finish today’s teaching with a closer look at vs 8, “So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.”
1. Any deliberate rejection of what God says is a deliberate rejection of God himself.
 2. Any overlooking or reading past a statement or portion of scripture because it seems too hard or too demanding or too restrictive is to look past God to what you want so you can go your own way.
 3. Any knowing what God says but not doing it because you are unwilling to put in the hard work of following God’s prescription for godliness – such as denying self, disciplining your feelings, emotions, passions, and ungodly desires, and fighting off temptation – is not just a rejection of God’s prescription, it is also a rejection of God’s involvement and empowerment for living a godly life. And to reject God’s involvement and participation is to reject God, himself.
 4. And finally, to reject what God says about how to live – including the area of immorality – is to ignore the indwelling presence and resist the work of the Holy Spirit in you and with you.

5. To live a morally pure life, we need God. We need the promises of God. We need the help and empowerment of God. We need God's protection against temptations greater than our ability to resist. We need the word of God. We need the work of the Holy Spirit within. And we need to abstain – willfully, purposefully, and deliberately – from any and every form of immorality.
6. Do not be deceived, immorality has the power to take hold of your life and draw you further and further down its path of destruction just like prescription pain killers, cocaine, and heroin. But God has made a way for us to escape its clutches and live a sane, sensible, contented, satisfied godly life. It is my prayer that we have, or we've begun, or we will take it.

III. Conclusion

- A. The sin we have focused on today is immorality. Yet much of what has been said applies to sin of any kind or amount. And so I urge you to look for the principles of spiritual growth in today's teaching and apply them wherever you have given sin a foothold in your life – for God has called us to live a sanctified, holy life.