

“Sexual Purity”  
1 Thessalonians 4:3-8  
(Preached at Trinity, September 22, 2019)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In the final verses of **Chapter 3** Paul’s focus was upon God’s work of grace in the life of the believer. The Thessalonian Christians were pressing on because of God’s grace in them. Sanctification is a glorious work of God’s grace where He works in us ever increasing holiness.  
“may the Lord cause you to increase and abound . . .”  
"so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness"
2. As we enter **Chapter 4** Paul begins a new section. It was characteristic for Paul to conclude his letters with practical exhortations. This letter follows this format. Paul directs our attention to the human aspect of our sanctification. As he prayed that God would establish their hearts in holiness so that they would be found without blame at the coming of Christ, he now exhorts the Thessalonians to strive towards this end—to live sanctified lives. Paul’s exhortation extends from **Verses 1-12** and then continues in **Chapter 5**.
3. Paul opens this chapter with “we request and exhort you” He is both imploring them and encouraging them. There is both the command of authority as well as the tender encouragement of a shepherd. He is imploring them that as they had received his instruction of how to “walk and please God,” it was essential that they apply it to their life. Paul declares in **Verse 3** that it is the will of God that we apply the Biblical instruction to our life. This is the essence of our sanctification.
4. Beginning with the second half of **Verse 3** Paul gives practical application to how they should live in holiness.
  - A. As I pointed out before holiness is more than morality. Holiness is a life separated and devoted to God. As God becomes more and more glorious in our sight, our desire for obedience increases.  
Although holiness is not just morality, holiness does have a moral aspect. The question is, what is the root of our morality? What fuels our morality?  
Too many major on the Law but know nothing of the Gospel. In their hyper legalism they are critical and condemning of others. They are void of mercy & pity.

- B. Holiness is an inner disposition of love towards Christ that leads us to delight in obeying Him. Holiness is a disposition of joy in God's presence.  
**Walter Marshall** wrote in his 17<sup>th</sup> Century work, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*- "Sanctification consists not only in external works of piety and charity, but in the holy thoughts, imaginations, and affections of the soul, and chiefly in love; from whence all other good works must flow, or else they are not acceptable to God; not only in refraining the execution of sinful lusts, but in longing and delighting to do the will of God, and in a cheerful obedience to God, without repining, fretting, grudging, and any duty, as if it were a grievous yoke and burden to you."<sup>1</sup>
5. Paul now turns our attention to the importance of sexual morality. Paul puts it in Gospel context. How can the sinner abstain from sexual immorality? Only by the power of Christ in him. Only when Jesus becomes more glorious to him than his immorality.
6. The Bible has much to say to us regarding sexual morality. This is because when you mix the passions of the flesh with lawlessness it results in terrible immorality.
- A. Paul was preaching to a generation characterized by wide-spread promiscuity. The cities of Thessalonica, Ephesus, Corinth, etc. were pagan cities. Individuals gave themselves to every sensual fulfillment imaginable knowing no law but self-desire. In this context Paul did not hesitate to set before them God's demand for sexual purity.
- B. It is a subject that needs to be taught clearly in our generation. We too are in the midst of a very pagan culture that knows little of sexual purity. Christians need to be reminded of our radical break with the paganism of our culture.
7. Some are uncomfortable about addressing the subject, but we should not be ashamed of the Biblical view of our sexuality. One reading of the Song of Solomon quickly reveals that God is not opposed to romance between a husband and wife.  
 Philip Ryken – "Although God's Word is never pornographic, it is unashamedly erotic. If this comes as an embarrassment to some Christians, it is only because we are more prudish than God is."<sup>2</sup>
8. Sex is a wonderful gift from God meant as an expression of love between a husband and wife and for the procreation of the human race – But as sinful man has perverted everything that is good, we have also perverted this.  
 Paul links it as an essential aspect of our sanctification:  
**1 Thessalonians 4:3 NAU** - "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality*"
9. Paul links our sanctification with keeping the Law. This should silence the antinomian voices of today.  
**1 Thessalonians 4:2-3 NAU** - "For you know what commandments we gave you . . . that you abstain from sexual immorality;"

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<sup>1</sup> Walter Marshall, *The Gospel Mystery of Sanctification*, (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013), Page 1.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Ryken, *Preaching the Word, Exodus*, (Wheaton, Crossway Books, 2005), Page 629.

10. The Seventh Commandment forbids every form of sexual misconduct as well as improper thoughts and words.  
 Spurgeon's Catechism:  
*Question 58: What is forbidden in the seventh commandment?*  
*Answer: The seventh commandment forbids all unchaste thoughts, words, and actions." The seventh commandment sets any form of sexual behavior outside of marriage. It demands faithfulness to the marriage covenant. The seventh commandment condemns lustful thoughts and desires.*
11. Breaking some of the commandments of God are more heinous than others. For example, although covetousness is a terrible assault upon the goodness of God and is equated with idolatry, it is less heinous than murder. Adultery is a high crime because it tears apart the union God has created in marriage. It was a capital crime—punishable by death.  
**Matthew 19:6** – “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”  
 R.L. Dabney - "The sin of adultery is scarcely less enormous than that of murder. The later destroys man's temporal existence, and the former destroys all that makes existence a boon. Were all to make the license of the adulterer men would in due time be reduced to the degradation of wild beasts."<sup>3</sup>
12. Sexual sins have a great spiritual impact upon us. Most people today see sex as a purely physical and recreational, but the Bible puts a high spiritual emphasis upon it. Married couples become one flesh, placing a high spiritual dimension upon it.  
 Peter wrote:  
**1 Peter 2:11 NAU** - "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul."  
 Paul wrote:  
**1 Corinthians 6:18-19 NAU** - "Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body. <sup>19</sup> 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?"  
 - the idea is it affects the entire human being, both body and soul.
13. Few in our generation consider sexual immorality sin. The entertainment industry flaunts it. Advertising flaunts it.  
 Few today consider the seriousness of this sin. It is a sin that is vast and wide.
- It includes not only adultery but all sex outside marriage.
  - It includes pornography. The words, “sexual immorality” are from a single word in the Greek - πορνεία
  - It also includes homosexuality.
14. It doesn't matter how lax the moral code of our society becomes, this sin will permanently tarnish the reputation. For a young person, once virginity is lost it can never be regained.
15. Paul's words are of the strongest sort. He doesn't call for moderation, he calls for absolute abstention.  
**1 Thessalonians 4:3 NAU** - "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality;"
16. What else does Paul have to say about this important topic?

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<sup>3</sup> A.W. Pink, *The Ten Commandments*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), Page 49.

- I. First, Paul stresses the importance of marriage.
- A. "that each of you know how to possess his own vessel "
1. "Vessel" can refer to one's own body – we must know how to govern ourselves and our own passions.
  2. "Vessel" can also refer to our own wife or spouse – this was Augustine's position. The word "possess" can be translated "acquire."  
**1 Peter 3:7 NAS** - "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."
  3. We must be content and thankful with the mate God has given us.  
**Proverbs 5:15-19 NAU** - "Drink water from your own cistern And fresh water from your own well. <sup>16</sup> Should your springs be dispersed abroad, Streams of water in the streets? <sup>17</sup> Let them be yours alone And not for strangers with you. <sup>18</sup> Let your fountain be blessed, And rejoice in the wife of your youth. <sup>19</sup> As a loving hind and a graceful doe, Let her breasts satisfy you at all times; Be exhilarated always with her love."
  4. To take someone else's mate is robbery – it is taking what does not belong to us.  
**1 Thessalonians 4:6 NAU** - "*and* that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is *the* avenger in all these thing"  
    - a. We read of David  
**2 Samuel 11:3-4 NAU** - "So David sent and inquired about the woman. And one said, "Is this not Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" <sup>4</sup> David sent messengers and took her"
    - b. Although our brother or sister may never find out, God knows. He is the avenger.  
**2 Samuel 11:27 NAU** - "But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD."
- B. From the beginning God purposed for men and women to come together in marriage.  
**Genesis 2:18 NAU** - "Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."  
**Genesis 2:24 NAU** - "For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and be joined to his wife; and they shall become one flesh."  
**Matthew 19:4-6 NAS** - "And He answered and said, "Have you not read, that He who created *them* from the beginning made them male and female, <sup>5</sup> and said, 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh' ?  
<sup>6</sup> "Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."
1. The purpose of marriage is to unite a man and woman together spiritually, emotionally, and physically in a covenant relationship. God uses marriage to direct us closer to Himself.

- a. Far too many enter into marriage with self-centered expectations seeking to have their mate meet *their* romantic and emotional needs.
- b. Instead God has ordained that man and woman would each give of themselves in service to one another to His glory—that together their marriage might be an instrument to glorify Him together.
- 2. God also ordained that marriage would provide the platform through which human beings would fulfill God’s command to multiply and fill the earth  
**Genesis 1:28** – “And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish (fill) the earth”
- 3. Through marriage, strong families would provide the strength for the human society. Historically, when the family is weakened society as a whole is weakened.  
 Our own society is coming apart because the family is dying.
- C. Marriage is also the only platform through which human sexuality might be practiced.  
**1 Corinthians 7:2 NAS** - "But because of immoralities (πορνεία), let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband."  
 1. The seventh commandment states clearly that sexuality outside marriage is strictly forbidden – “Thou shalt not commit adultery”  
 2. This is repeated over and over in Scripture  
 God will judge any who defile the sacred vow of marriage  
**Hebrews 13:4 NAU** - "Marriage *is to be held* in honor among all, and the *marriage bed is to be undefiled*; for fornicators and adulterers God will judge."

## II. This is a sin that we must all guard ourselves against

- A. All of us are in danger
  - 1. Perhaps you boldly declare, I would never do that.  
 Perhaps you think this way with all of God’s commands – I would never.
  - 2. That is pride speaking.  
**1 Corinthians 10:12 NAU** - "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall."
- B. As with all the commandments obedience is a matter of the heart.
  - 1. The 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment prohibits lusts in our heart toward anyone with whom we are not married. It begins in the heart.  
**Matthew 5:27-28 NAU** - "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; <sup>28</sup> 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."
  - 2. This means we must continually guard our heart. If someone becomes flirtatious we must quickly douse the flames.  
**1 Corinthians 6:18 NAU** - " Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body."  
    - a. The word for “flee” is φεύγω which means “to flee” or “run away”
    - b. Immorality is the same word we see here in **Verse 3** - πορνεία

3. Peter writes:  
**1 Peter 2:11 NAU** - "Beloved, I urge you as aliens and strangers to abstain from fleshly lusts which wage war against the soul."
- C. If at all possible we should avoid situations where we might be tempted. This sounds so prudish today.
  1. This was the problem with Joseph – he was left alone with Potiphar’s wife  
**Genesis 39:11-12 NAU** - "Now it happened one day that he went into the house to do his work, and none of the men of the household was there inside. <sup>12</sup> She caught him by his garment, saying, "Lie with me!" And he left his garment in her hand and fled, and went outside."
  2. This was the problem with King David  
**2 Samuel 11:2 NAU** - "Now when evening came David arose from his bed and walked around on the roof of the king's house, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful in appearance."

### Conclusion

1. We are to flee any possibility of this sin  
 We need to understand our weakness  
**1 Thessalonians 4:3-4 NAU** - "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; *that is*, that you abstain from sexual immorality; <sup>4</sup> that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,"  
**1 Corinthians 10:12 NAU** - "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall."
2. Paul puts a high priority on the relationship of sexual purity and our sanctification. We have been delivered from sins of uncleanness, but we must still maintain vigilance.  
**1 Corinthians 6:9-11 NAU** - "Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, <sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor *the* covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>11</sup> Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."
3. G.K. Beale writes: "Those who do not break off from their former pagan ways of living should not be considered truly Christian and should certainly not be given assurance that their faith is genuine. Such people who confess to be Christians but live like Gentiles will be judged like unbelieving Gentiles."<sup>4</sup>
4. Does the mean a Christian can never commit these kinds of sins. If this was true Paul would have no reason to write. We must always maintain vigilance. Sin is always crouching at the door. We must keep our eyes fixed on Christ. We must never forget our calling. God has called us unto holiness.  
**1 Thessalonians 4:7-8 NAU** - "For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. <sup>8</sup> So, he who rejects *this* is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you."

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<sup>4</sup> G. K. Beale, *1–2 Thessalonians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 122.