

Lighthouse Bible Church

May 31st, 2015

1st Thessalonians 4: 3 – 8 *Scripture Reading: 1st Corinthians 6: 12 -20*
‘Abstain from Sexual Immorality’ Pt.#1

Stand – Read – Pray

Well, it has been a while since we have been in the book of 1st Thessalonians, so I want to take just a few minutes to review what brings us to our passage here this morning and then just introduce the passage.

You remember that according to **Acts 17: 1 – 9** that Paul and Silas and Timothy had gone to Thessalonica and entered the local synagogue and reasoned with them from the Scriptures about Jesus being the Messiah and about His prophesied death, burial and resurrection. As a result of them sharing the gospel, Acts 17 said, many people believed and followed them.

Then the unbelieving Jews and Gentiles forced them out of the city and Paul became concerned for their spiritual and physical well-being. So he sends Timothy back there to minister to them and to report on how these new believers in this new church at Thessalonica were doing.

To Paul’s great joy, they were doing very well. We saw in Chapter One how they experienced much affliction as a new church and yet they stayed strong and even became the example church for others to follow. They shared their faith from Macedonia to Achaia, they turned from idols to serve the living God and they were waiting for the return of Jesus.

After Paul hears of this good report, he feels compelled to defend his ministry to them because some had been telling these new believers some false things about Paul and his ministry.

Paul keep telling them, as you know, we were gentle among you as a nursing mother, we comforted you as a father does his children and all because we gave our lives to you laboring night and day for you and being the example of behaving blamelessly before you.

Paul said we wanted to come back and see you but Satan hindered us and when we couldn't endure it any long, Chapter 3 said, I sent Timothy to find out how you were doing. And when he gave us the good report, we were comforted by you and that gave us the strength to go through our own afflictions.

Paul said, until we see you again, we will be praying for you that God would remove any hindrance that would make that possible. He said we will pray that your love will abound more and more and that you will never be satisfied with where you are at spiritually and that you would be established blameless in holiness before God and Christ.

You remember that he just finished telling them in Verses 1 and 2 that they are to abound more and more in how they ought to walk to please God. And part of that walk, that conduct of their life that he wants to encourage them in that will please God, is their walk in sexual purity and holiness; and that is where we want to pick it up this morning.

You might think it strange that he would suddenly change his subject matter from hearing how well they were doing as a church, and how he was encouraging them to abound in love to all, in Chapter 3, to talking about sexual immorality in Chapter 4.

Well, you get a hint of the direction he is heading when he said back in chapter 3 and verse 13 that he wanted their hearts, their minds, their thoughts, that govern their actions, to be blameless, especially when it comes to holiness or holy living.

And then he tells them in Chapter 4 verses 1 and 2 that they are to abound more and more in their daily walk, their daily conduct, in such a way that they will please God. And then he gets very specific in verses 3 – 8 with how they are to walk in purity and holiness and sanctification and it is by abstaining from sexual immorality.

What brings him to the place where he wants to talk with them about sexual immorality and the need for living in holiness? Well, much like sexual immorality abounds in our day, it also did in the day of the Apostle Paul was writing, *from Corinth*, this letter to the new believers in Thessalonica.

Remember, these are new believers in Christ that are still living in a culture, in a city, in a society that does not know about moral purity, and holiness. These new believers, as we saw in Chapter 1 and verse 9 had **turned from idols to serve the living God.**

They were saved out of paganism and idolatry and sexual immorality, but they still had to live amongst them and because they were still new in their faith, the potential to reverting back to old pagan practices was a real concern for Paul as were the temptations and openness of the immorality of the time.

They had been raised all of their lives in a culture where sexual immorality was rampant, they knew nothing about virtue and holiness and moral standards. Divorce in that day was easy for a man and more difficult for a woman and was happening all the time.

It was happening among the Jews because many followed the Old Testament law of **Deuteronomy 24: 1 – 4** where it said **when a man takes a wife and marries her and it happens that she finds no favor in his eyes because he has found some uncleanness in her and he writes her a certificate of divorce and sends her out...**

So they tried to determine what the **some uncleanness in her** was that would allow a man to divorce her. It really boiled down to two opposing opinions of two leading Rabbis, Shammi and Hillel. One was very strict and narrow and said that ‘uncleanness’ referred to adultery. The other, more liberal, said that the ‘uncleanness’ referred to:

- Spoiling the dinner by putting too much salt on the food
- Going about in public with her head uncovered
- Talking with men on the streets
- Speaking disrespectfully of her husband’s parents in his presence
- Raising her voice so it could be heard by the neighbors

Now if someone wanted to get rid of his wife, which one do you think he would side with?

This divorce was also a problem among the Romans in that area as well. As a matter of fact, one Roman leader said ‘women were married to be divorced and divorced to be married’. *Seneca Barclay pg 199*. In the Greek empire also it was a problem. They had a saying “we keep prostitutes for pleasure, we keep mistresses for the day to day needs of the body and we keep wives for the begetting of children and for the faithful guardianship of the homes”.
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And, of course you know how bad Corinth, just 200 miles from Thessalonica where Paul was writing, was.

They had their temple prostitutes and sexual immorality that was so bad that **1st Corinthians 5: 1** Paul says **it is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles, that a man has his father's wife.**

It was to the men and women who were saved out of this kind of immoral environment that Paul is writing this letter in Verses 3 – 8. You see, Christianity was raising the standard, setting down a whole new way for a man to treat a woman and a wife and a whole new way to live and love in a marriage relationship in purity and holiness.

That same standard certainly needs to be reemphasized in our day today as well. When you look at our society today and see all the sexual immorality that pervades every area of our lives; You can hear it in the music, you can read about it in most any book or magazine, you can see it on television or at the movies or on the internet, in an unprecedented influence in our society today. *Covenant Eyes statistics: 1 in 3 men 1 in 8 women*

In our society today, no absolutes, no standards and no rules or accountability for illicit sexual behavior is becoming the norm rather than the exception. It was that way in the time of Paul as well, you can see it in **1st Corinthians 6: 12 – 14** where Paul says **food for the stomach and the stomach for food...**and then he says **now the body is not for sexual immorality but for the Lord and the Lord for the body. And God both raised up the Lord and will raise us up by His power.**

Why does he go from food for the stomach to sexual immorality? Because to the pagan people of that time food for the stomach was a biological function that you just did to satisfy hunger. And you committed sexual immorality because it is a biological function; sex for the body and the body for sex. That is the way they looked at it.

And like food for the stomach and the stomach for food, **God will destroy both it and them** he said, and if He will do that with food, what do you think He will do with sexual immorality when, as **Verses 15 – 18 you commit sexual immorality with someone and joined Christ in that immorality?**

That is why he says in Verse 18 **flee sexual immorality, every sin that a man does is outside the body but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body** because **your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit** and not your own as a born again believer because **you were bought at a price** and called to **glorify God in your body and in your spirit which are God's**.

It was going on in Paul's day in Corinth, in Thessalonica, in Athens in Macedonia, all over, and it involved every kind of sexual immorality and perversion, much like it still goes on today. As a matter of fact you can see in **1st Corinthians 6: 9 – 11** several forms a sexual perversion and immorality that Paul lists. He uses the words **fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, sodomites** among other non-sexual sins also rampant in our time as well.

And then he says in Verses 10 – 11 that **none of these will inherit the kingdom of heaven** if that is there practice and lifestyle. And then he gives these words of hope in Verse 11 **and such WERE some of you but you were sanctified you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of God**. That was the culture of that time that they were saved out of, much like those in the city of Thessalonica were saved out of.

And that doesn't take into account the temple prostitutes both heterosexual and homosexual where sexual immorality could be committed as a way of worshipping Aphrodite or the goddess Diana and it was sanctioned, it was socially acceptable, and tolerated in those communities, much like in our day today.

That is why there are several different words in the Greek language in Scripture to describe different types of sexual immorality. You have the word *pornea*, or *porno*, where we get the word pornography from. It literally means to purchase someone for sexual pleasure and it would describe a prostitute or a harlot. It also came to be used of sex slaves or concubines.

You also have the word *moichia* or *moichos*, and it is the word used for an adulterer or someone engaged in sexual activity with a person not their spouse.

And it is in a backdrop like this to which Paul writes chapter 4 of 1st Thessalonians and calls the born again believers there, who came out of this kind of background, to sexual purity in their lives.

You remember back in Chapter 4 Verses 1 – 2 how Paul had urged and exhorted the new converts to abound more and more in how they ought to walk and to please God. Paul said you received from us how to do that because we gave you the commandments, the Word of God and by the authority of Christ on how to walk to please God. So he starts out in Verse 3 by saying.

Verse 3: for this is the will of God, your sanctification that you should abstain from sexual immorality.

One thing that is very clear here is the absolute **will of God** that is commanded of everyone who is a born again believer. And as we are going to see, it is His will that you live a sanctified life and that you abstain from sexual immorality.

There is nothing obscure about this verse or about the command of this verse and the need for obeying it, because it is very clear that this is ‘the will of God’ and it leaves no wiggle room for interpretation.

And, by the way, in this verse Paul is answering, directly, a question that many Christians have, even today, and that is; what is God’s will for my life? If I just knew what God wanted me to do or not to do; Well, born again believers should always strive to make God’s will the practice of their lives; Nothing more, nothing less and nothing else.

We know that the entire Word of God is God’s will for us and as we read or hear the commands or precepts or principles in it, we are called to obey them, to follow them, to start doing them.

But there are some very specific verses that tells us very specifically what God’s will is, and if you just started with these you would be well on your way to a walk that is pleasing to God as Paul said in Verse 2 of Chapter 4. And, by the way, there is a prerequisite to knowing God’s will and it is found in that passage read earlier in **Romans 12: 1 – 2**. **I beseech you therefore brethren by the mercies of God that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service, or spiritual act of worship, and do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind THAT you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.**

First of all it is God’s will that you be saved. **1st Timothy 2: 3 – 4** says **for this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.** And you remember what **2nd Peter 3: 9** says **He is not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.** So first of all His will is for you to be saved.

Secondly, it is God's will that you be Spirit filled and controlled. **Ephesians 5: 17 – 18 do not be unwise but understand what the will of the Lord is and do not be drunk with wine in which is dissipation but be filled with the Spirit.** And it will show itself in the way you speak and worship and have a thankful heart together.

Thirdly, it is God's will that you be submissive to the government and its laws. **1st Peter 2: 13 – 17 Read.** Unless they ask you to do something the Scriptures tell you not to or not to do something the Scriptures tell you to do.

Fourthly, it is God's will that you have a thankful heart in everything. **1st Thessalonians 5: 17 says in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.**

Fifthly, it is God's will that sometimes you may have to suffer. **1st Peter 3: 17 and 4: 19 says for it is better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil...and then.. therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good as to a faithful Creator.**

And, by the way, when we pray according to His will we can have confidence in His hearing and answering of prayer. **1st John 4: 14 – 15 says now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything, according to His will, He hears us and if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him.**

There is one other very specific command that is the will of God that must be obeyed and that is the one found in our passage here and it too is very clear; **for this is the will of God, your sanctification; that you should abstain from sexual immorality.** And that is where we will pick it up next time

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Introduction and Review:

Acts 17: 1 – 9

The Cultural of Sexual Immorality:

Deuteronomy 24: 1 – 4

1st Corinthians 5: 1

1st Corinthians 6: 12 – 20

1st Corinthians 6: 9 – 11

Verse 3:

Romans 12: 1 – 2

The Will of God:

1st Timothy 2: 3 – 4, 2nd Peter 3: 9

Ephesians 5: 17 – 18

1st Peter 2: 13 – 17

1st Thessalonians 5: 17

1st Peter 3: 17, 1st Peter 4: 19

1st John 4: 14 – 15

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1st Timothy 2: 3 – 4, 2nd Peter 3: 9

Ephesians 5: 17 – 18

1st Peter 2: 13 – 17

1st Thessalonians 5: 17

1st Peter 3: 17, 1st Peter 4: 19

1st John 4: 14 - 15