

Get Sanctified! (A Footnote)

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Code: B101119

First of all, we're sorry for the week between posts. There have been a lot of good things preoccupying us here at Grace to You, but we're ready to go at it again.

In our last post, John narrowed the scope of his comments to sanctification in the sexual arena. The most immediate reason for his focus is because that's the subject of the text he was preaching, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 . . . and for good reason.

Sexual sin has a certain *fundamentalness* to it. Sexual sin goes to the core of our being and seems to be the quintessential expression of the sin nature.

That's why Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 6, "Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body" (1 Corinthians 6:18). That's why lists of sinful practices that deny entrance into heaven always include sexual sin (1 Corinthians 6:9-10; Galatians 5:19-21; Revelation 21:8).

And that's why God's judicial wrath shows up in the form of sexual sin (Romans 1:1-32). Whether at an individual or a cultural level, when people exchange God for idols, embracing lies and suppressing truth, God allows the exchanging to continue. He hands them over to subverting forms of sexual sin.

You see the judgment underway when men and women exchange pure, wholesome sexual expression within marriage for impure lusts that dishonor the body outside of marriage—e.g., autoeroticism, fornication, and adultery (cf. Romans 1:24-25). When that judgment fails to bring repentance, God hands people over to the degrading passions of homosexuality—men with men, women with women, committing shameless acts with one another (cf. Romans 1:26-27).

Those who want to worship the creature rather than the Creator receive the full measure of that exchange, which is the due penalty for their error (Romans 1:27). In their hearts, they exchange the true God for idols, so God gives over their bodies to exchange the pure for the impure. That's a clear mark of God's judgment—using the visible, particular sin of sexual immorality in the body to chasten the hidden, general sin of idolatry in the heart.

So, the specific case of sexual immorality John MacArthur covered in 1 Thessalonians 4 is really a call for us to make a *universal commitment* to sanctification. Getting sanctified is more than dealing with sexual sin (though it isn't less). Getting sanctified means we pursue a holiness that invades every crack and crevice of our lives.

The Puritan John Owen mined some extremely helpful principles out of Scripture on sanctification. If you don't own a copy of *The Works of John Owen, Volume 6: Temptation and Sin*, take a break from this article and [order it right now](#). Reading John Owen can be challenging (which is why I've taken

the liberty of “updating” his wording below), but extremely profitable; he’s a theologian with the heart of a shepherd. Okay, enough commercial...

John Owen wrote, “Without sincerity and diligence in a universality of obedience, there is no mortification of any one perplexing lust to be obtained.” That is to say, you’ll never find victory in mortifying any particular sin (like sexual sin) if you’re not committed to mortifying *all* sin in your life. Here’s John Owen again,

Someone who has a “running sore” upon him, arising from an ill habit of body, contracted by intemperance and ill diet, let him apply himself with what diligence and skill he can to *the cure of his sore*. [But] if he leave *the general habit of his body* under distempers [i.e., illness or disease], his labour and travail will be in vain. So will his attempts be that shall endeavour to stop a bloody issue of sin and filth in his soul, and is not equally careful of his universal spiritual temperature and constitution.

What would motivate you to address only the particular, “running sore” that troubled you and neglect the more profound spiritual condition of your soul? Owen suggests, “It disquiets you, it has taken away your peace, it fills your heart with sorrow, and trouble, and fear; you have no rest because of it.” That is to say, you’re bothered, so you pay attention and address it.

Trying to mortify one transgression in particular while you neglect to hate sin as sin, while you fail to make every effort to remove *all* the leaven from your life (cf. Deuteronomy 16:3-4), can be inherently selfish. It might show you’re still focused more on the creature (you) than the will of the Creator. Owen continues,

Yea; but, friend, you have neglected prayer or reading; you have been vain and loose in your conversation in other things, [things] that have not been of the same nature with that lust with which you are perplexed. These are no less sins and evils than those under which you groan. Jesus Christ bled for them also. Why do you not set yourself against them also?

One more quote from Pastor Owen: “Hatred of sin as sin (not only as galling or disquieting), [and] a sense of the love of Christ in the cross, lie at the bottom of all true spiritual mortification.”

Whether it’s freedom from some particular sin, like the sexual immorality so prevalent in our day, or the more fundamental greed and idolatry that drives all sin (Colossians 3:5), God wants to sanctify you from *all of it* (1 Thessalonians 4:3). In fact, Jesus prayed for your sanctification (John 17:17) and wants to see it through (Philippians 1:6). God wants you free from sin, holy as He is holy, and happy in divine joy.

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Like I said, that’s just a footnote. Now, back to our regularly scheduled series...

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