

Abstaining from Sexual Sin, Part 2

1 Thessalonians 4:4-8

52-15

We come now to that high privilege of the study of the Word of God and I would ask you, if you will, to look with me at 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 as we continue our study in verses 3 through 8 on the subject, abstaining from sexual sin; 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 verses 3 through 8 is our text.

A new book crossed my desk this week. The title of it is *The AIDS Epidemic*. It was written by a couple of medical doctors, Glen Wood and John Dietrich. And in that book there were several very helpful paragraphs. One of them goes like this, "A society spends the most time and energy once the basic necessities of life are satisfied on what it deems most important. In ancient Hebrew and American Puritan writings one can hardly read a single paragraph without encountering a reference to God Almighty. What items have replaced God in our communications media? Only sex, money, and self-love satisfy the time and energy requirements for what is sacred in our culture. These are the gods of a new age," end quote.

Obviously we are very much aware that daily we are bombarded with this encroaching sexual idolatry. Recently I noted as I was going through the first section of the L.A. Times a half-dressed girl advertising the body beautiful on every single page of the first section of the L.A. Times except the first three pages. That is the god of this culture. And all of that body beautiful is somehow related to that sexual idolatry. Sexual revolution has obviously been successful. The rebels have totally overthrown traditional Christian values and morals and they've come up with the new theology of the god of immorality.

Now to help you understand this theology of the god of immorality, let me just see if I can't give you some of the basic tenets of this particular theology. Here's one: Since people are basically good everything they do is basically good, and their sexual activity is just a way to please others. That's one of the basic tenets of sexual theology. Obviously it's a lie. The truth is immorality destroys instead of pleasing and helping others.

The second in their theological statement might go like this: Since immorality or sexual activity is only a biological function like eating, it is a necessity that must be satisfied without restrictions. In other words, we're simply biological creatures, we're simply...we're simply the last step at least for now in the evolutionary chain, and we ought to function in accord with whatever instincts are operating within us.

A third premise in their doctrinal statement might go like this: Since casual sex, whatever in the world that is, is just a form of fun and pleasure it should be enjoyed recreationally with anyone anytime who agrees.

A fourth rule, a standard by which they live is: Fulfilling sexual desire is the goal of life, rather than making meaningful relationships.

It should be brought to somebody's attention that the latest statistics indicate that the average married couple has a sexual relationship three times a week, the average length of which is eight minutes. That leaves you with a lot more time to do something else that must rise or fall, dependent upon the quality or lack of in the relationship.

And the theology of the new idol god, the new god, sex, would also have another principle that might go like this: Instant pleasure is much more important than delayed gratification. Grab it now, get it immediately.

Another one of their tenets might say something like this: Good sex relations mean a good relationship, so start every relationship with sex and if it's good it will lead to a good relationship. Live together to determine sexual compatibility, then you can decide whether you want to get married.

Statistics clearly show that people who live together have a far higher rate of divorce than people who don't. That doesn't seem to deter their perspective.

And then one other principle of this new theology of immorality might go like this: Have safe sex so you don't get a disease or a baby. But if you get a baby just kill it.

Now this is the theology of the new idolatry. And there might be more that could be said. We understand all of that. Paul understood all of that because if anything in Thessalonica it might have been worse than it is in our culture. You see, there were absolutely no Christian traditions anywhere in the fabric of Thessalonica because Christianity hadn't even arrived there yet. At least in America we have something we can go back to that is still found at points in the fabric of our laws and how we live.

Our society is fast being devastated. The result of all of these kinds of things is a destroyed family, and the result of destroyed families is destroyed society. I guess the thing that disturbs me most is that the church appears to be so deceived by this new idolatry as to have fallen victim to it.

Again Wood and Dietrich have some good insight. They say this regarding the church, "Although few Christians accept the basic goodness of man, we do worse and accept the basic goodness of ourselves. We are vulnerable to the sins of the flesh as we have seen repeatedly among Christian leaders and laity alike. We compete with the world's hyper-sexuality, saying that good sex will make a good marriage when it is commitment, communication and sacrifice that come first. By implying that sex is the key to marriage, we teach our unmarried youth to focus on the physical in their relationships with the opposite gender. We encourage technique instead of commitment. And we prepare all for disappointment in marriage because sex is not meant to be the ultimate satisfaction." And I like this. They say, "Marriage is two lumpish people joining together with all their faults. How can we expect total bliss from that? We have embraced *eros* instead of *agape* love. And no Greek word could better describe the sexual revolution than *eros*. The advocates of this sexual freedom would unashamedly agree. This is the heart of the problem because *eros* is love that desires to have or possess and so is basically self-centered. A person controlled by *eros* enters a relationship, if there is a relationship at all, to seize what he desires. The Christian version of this is the adoption of

self-actualizing psychology which demands self-fulfillment in marriage in place of sacrifice," end quote.

The church has literally imbibed this. And when you go back and look at the roots of it all, you really could start with Charles Darwin. Once the thinking of Charles Darwin, which I believe was certainly spawned by Satan, invaded the world and said, "We are not the creatures of God, we are simply the products of chance," then all morality was questionable. If we are nothing but the result of a collection of atoms that occurred sometime in the past or something that crawled out of some primeval ooze somewhere, then there is no real morality. Charles Darwin influenced people like Karl Marx, who took Darwinian evolution to its logical extreme politically and he influenced people like Sigmund Freud who took Darwinian evolution to its extreme in terms of psychology and personal behavior. They influenced people like Friedrich Nietzsche, who decided that really there was no God, God was dead, family life was unimportant. All that was important was pleasure and fulfillment.

They influenced philosophers like Bertrand Russell who mocked all Christian values and along came people influenced by them: Margaret Sanger who founded Planned Parenthood, Ernest Hemingway, probably the most classically famous hedonist in western culture. Havelock Ellis, Margaret Mead, Alfred Kinsey, Masters and Johnson, Hugh Hefner, and they all flow out of that same basic line of philosophical thinking. What you have is a sexual revolution produced by atheistic, hedonistic, pleasure-mad, anti-family, homosexual, pornographic, perverted people. It starts, as it were, supposedly in the environs of science and philosophy, it ends up in behavior. Mix that kind of behavior with alcohol and drugs and you have the American culture. And what is so frightening about it is that the church doesn't seem to be aware of what's happening and it jumps on the self-fulfilling, feeling-good bandwagon, unwittingly capitulating to the philosophy of atheists and evolutionists.

And I guess we would have to say that in Paul's time the kind of behavior that existed there would have been as bad, and as I said earlier maybe worse. There was no shame attached to immoral behavior at all in Paul's time. No shame attached to any sexual conduct at all. There was, in that society, a plethora of prostitutes, concubines, mistresses, homosexuals, pedophiles, transvestites, temple harlots, adulterers, and adulteresses and they abounded in that culture. In fact, it was from that very mass of people that the churches were plucked. Paul says to the Corinthians, "And such were some of you." What? "Fornicators, adulterers, homosexuals, effeminate."

Now keep in mind that as Paul is writing back to the Thessalonians, he's writing to some people who have only been Christians a few months. They're in every sense baby Christians. He spent but a few weeks there in the...in the Jewish synagogue, a few weeks more, no doubt, evangelizing Gentiles. He's been gone a few months and now writing back deeply concerned that these people are not falling victim to the pull of their old habits and the pressure of that ungodly, immoral culture. When he finally then in chapter 4 gets to what he really wants to say, the first thing on his list is this matter of immorality. The dominating idolatry of their day was sexual immorality, as it is of our day.

Now what is Paul's word to a people who are in the muck of that kind of society? Last week we looked at the first. I told you there were three simple questions: What, how and why. And we looked at the what last time: What is the command? Go to verse 3 and I'll just review briefly. What is the command he gives? "For this is the will of God, your sanctification." By the way, that statement overarches the entire remainder of this letter. Everything he's going to say fits into the will of God, even your sanctification, your holiness, your purity.

The first thing covered is this: That you abstain from sexual immorality. That's his first command, his first exhortation. That's the "what." That's what he wants to say. Now remember last time I told you that people who habitually live in sexual immorality will not enter heaven. They'll go to hell forever. First Corinthians 6 says they don't enter the kingdom. Galatians 5 says they don't enter the kingdom. Revelation 21:8 and 22:15 says they're outside heaven. People who have this kind of habitual behavior go to hell. They're consigned to an eternal hell of damnation. Yet Christians can do these things. We're not exempt from them. As long as the new creation exists incarcerated in unredeemed human flesh there is the capability for us to commit those sins. I do not believe we will live in an unbroken pattern of that. People who live in an unbroken pattern of immorality end up in hell. That's what the Bible says. But Christians can commit those sins. Very clearly the Scripture indicates that. It may have been such sins that were on the mind of the apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 10 when he says, "How in the world can you come to the Lord's Table when you've just been at the table of demons?" Maybe he's saying, "How in the world can you come and take the bread and cup when you've just had a relationship with a temple prostitute to worship a false god?"

It is obviously true of Christians that we can commit these sins. So the basic command comes to us and assumes that capability and says "abstain from sexual immorality." What is he asking for? Total abstinence. Somebody will always say, "Well it says stay away from sex sin, how far away?" Far enough away to do the will of God, far enough away to be sanctified, set apart, pure and holy, untainted and unstained. Stay away from sin, so far away that you are unstained. That was the command; we went through that in detail last time, total abstinence from sexual sin.

Now for this morning let's ask the second question: How? How can I keep that command? We are incessantly bombarded with this stuff. We live in a society that worships immorality. It is rampant in our world. Our flesh is temptable. We are over exposed to all of this. We might say we are over-exposed to being under-exposed. We are in a situation in our culture where we get over-exposed to the immorality but under-exposed to the divine implications of it. So I want to see if I can't bring a little balance to that. How can I protect myself? How can I live a pure life in an impure society? How can I not be stained when my flesh is weak?

Three principles, three principles Paul gives. Very basic, very direct. Principle number one: Don't let your body control you. Don't let your body control you. Look at verse 4, "That each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor." That "each one of you" means all of us as Christians, every one of you individually.

Now what is he saying there? He's saying that this is something that you must do. It would be nice to think that I could have some kind of accountability relationship to somebody who could control my body for me. It can't be done. That each one of you must know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor. The verb "know" here, *eidenai*, is often used to mean "to know how" and that's its meaning here. The knowledge or the skill necessary to accomplish a desired goal is the idea. So every individual Christian is to know how — now note this little verb "to possess" — it means to gain mastery over. Every individual Christian is to know how to gain mastery over what? His own, something very personal, vessel; the word is *skeuos*. It means utensil, implement, vessel.

Now some say the word vessel means "wife." In fact I read probably twenty commentaries this week to see what they said about this and the majority of them said it means "wife." I don't know how they can conclude that, to be honest with you. Why would he say that in the middle of a context about sexual immorality? Each one of you know how to gain mastery over your wife. What is he saying?

That she is a tool for your sexual gratification and what you've got to do is get mastery over her so she succumbs? Is she a tool? Is she an instrument or an implement? Those who hold that view will endeavor to make a parallel between this and 1 Peter 3:7 where it says, "The woman is the weaker vessel." But that is an inadequate parallel because in 1 Peter 3:7 the woman is called *skeuos*. She is the weaker *skeuos*. But the man therefore by comparative is a weak *skeuos*. So, both of them are vessels there. The Bible does not see the man as the power and the sovereignty and the woman as a tool in his hand for his own gratification. No, no comparison with 1 Peter 3:7 works because there the woman is a weaker vessel, the man by comparative is a weak vessel. She is not the vessel of the man; they are both the vessels of God.

Furthermore, the context here is not about marriage and wife, it's about body. The view, I think, of *skeuos* here that sees the woman as some kind of tool for a man is very demeaning to women and furthermore makes nonsense out of verse 5, "Possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor and not in lustful passion like the Gentiles who do not know God." If he's talking about your wife, it's fine to have a passion for your wife so why would he even say that? It wouldn't make any sense.

The term *skeuos* is used metaphorically for utensils, for tools, sometimes for people like in Acts 9:15, 2 Timothy 2:21, 2 Corinthians 4:7. And in some Jewish literature in rabbinical sources it is even used of the body. And that is its meaning here. It's not about controlling your wife. Your wife isn't your problem. It's about controlling you. Your body is your problem. It's your unredeemed human flesh that...that is the beachhead to sin. That's why Paul says in Romans 8, "We wait for the redemption (of what?) of the body." It's our body that gets us into trouble. That's why Scripture says you've got to renew your what? Your mind; you've got to renew your mind. Repeatedly does Paul say that in a number of his epistles. Don't let your body control you.

Now we live in a society where the body is in control. The bottom line philosophy is "if it feels good" what? "Do it." You don't use your mind, bury your mind, man, and do whatever your body tells you. Like that great theological statement in "You Light Up My Life" which says, "This can't be wrong because it feels so right." Truth by feeling. We are a society that has literally committed some kind of suicide in terms of thinking and left the body to live and dictate conduct. Our society is totally controlled by bodily feelings. Whatever you feel you do it, you're just an animal, you're at the end of the evolutionary chain, it's an impulse, fulfill it. Don't, says the Scripture, let your body control you.

Look at 1 Corinthians...well just remember 1 Corinthians 6:12. We won't turn to it. Well we better, 1 Corinthians 6:12, because I want to make a couple of points. First Corinthians 6:12, Paul says at the end of the verse, "I will not be mastered by anything," I will not be mastered by anything, I will not become a victim of anything. And then he makes it specific in verse 13 what he's talking about. "Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food." Remember I told you that was sort of a cute little saying that the Corinthians had which was very much like the saying today, "It's only biological." Hey, food for the stomach and the stomach for food. It's just biological. Sex for the body and the body for sex. That was...that was the idea. That was the implication of that little statement.

But he says in verse 13, "The body is not for immorality but for the Lord and the Lord is for the body." That's wrong. The body cannot be allowed to do whatever it wants. The body cannot be allowed to master you. "Do you" verse 15, take... Do you know that your bodies are members of Christ?" Are you going to take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Are you going to let your body call the shots and take the members of Christ and link them with a harlot? No. You cannot do whatever the body tells you to do. You have to control the body.

Look at 1 Corinthians 9:27, this is a very direct statement with regard to this. First Corinthians 9:27, Paul says this, "But I buffet my body," That's buffet, not buffed, same spelling, different concept. "I buffet my body." The verb means to give a black eye, a knock-out punch, a wallop. I hit my body hard and seriously and I make it my slave. What do you mean? The slave to my mind. "Lest possibly after I have preached to others I myself should be (*adokimos*) disqualified." In other words, I will be rendered disqualified for ministry if I don't control my body. By the way, in this day and age when people want to forgive pastors' adultery and let them back in the ministry, nobody seems to be wanting to deal with that verse. If you don't control your body so that it honors God, you're disqualified from ministry. Paul says I have to... I have to give my body a black eye, I have to beat it into submission, I have to make it my slave. The body is the unredeemed beachhead to sin. You cannot... You cannot be controlled by your body, your feelings.

Now the key to controlling your body, now follow me, this is going to be a fast little trip here. The key to controlling your body is the Holy Spirit, walking in the Spirit. If you walk in the Spirit, Galatians 5:16 and 17, you will not fulfill what? The lust of the flesh. So the key to controlling your body is walking in the Spirit. The key to walking in the Spirit is being filled with the Spirit. Ephesians 5:17 and 18: "Being kept filled with the Spirit," not in dissipation but being filled with the Spirit.

The key then to controlling your body is walking in the Spirit. The key to walking in the Spirit is being filled by the Spirit. The key to being filled by the Spirit, Colossians 3:16, is letting the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. As the Word saturates your life the Spirit then controls you and you walk in that control. The key to letting the Word of Christ dwell in you richly is hiding the Word in your heart that you might not what? Sin. Not a superficial reading of your daily devotion, but a serious apprehension of, comprehension of, application of, the Word of God in my life allows the Word to dwell in me richly, which yields control to the Spirit of God so that He fills me and I walk in Him. That's the only way you will not fulfill the lust of your body.

Don't ever let your body control you. Don't ever play with sexual emotion. You see, once you begin to feel the impulses of sexual emotion, you are beginning to turn control over to your body. Your mind has yielded it up. God has designed those things to culminate in intercourse and you are out of control.

You say, "All right, I'm not supposed to let my body control me. What does that mean?" That means not only you're not supposed to jump in bed with someone, but long before that you better make sure that you're very careful about what your body sees, what your body hears, what your body touches, what your body feels long before the consummation so that you aren't so far in that control is gone.

Now notice the end of the verse. Here's the degree to which this control is to be exercised. "Know how to control your own body in sanctification and honor." "In sanctification" means to be separated, separated unto God from sin, separated unto holiness, separated unto purity. And honor means respect. In other words, your body is to be so holy that it is worthy of respect toward the God who owns it, toward the God who dwells in it, toward the God whom it represents, toward the church of which it is a part. You're to live your life not asking how far can I go and not go over the line, but how far can I stay away and be utterly set apart from sin and bringing honor to my body which is God's which should be used for the glory of Christ.

No, the question is never, what can I do and get away with it? The question is never, how far can I go? The question is, how can I live so pure, so sanctified, so noble in my Christian living that I honor my body, I honor therefore my Lord and His redeemed church? Don't let your body control you. And we live in a culture where the whole name of the game is get the mind away and let the body go and Christianity is the opposite, absolute opposite.

I have said this so many times when talking to other pastors who have fallen into sin, isn't there some point in time where you say, "Wait a minute, this is my marriage, this is my ministry, this is everything? Stop." And the answer I get is, "You never think about that." Why? Because long before the mind has been eliminated from the process and all that is left is the passion of the body. Don't let your body control you. That means walking in the Spirit, which means being filled by the Spirit, which means letting the Word dwell in your richly, which means putting the Word in.

Principle number two, don't act like the godless pagans. Don't act like the godless pagans. Verse 5, "Control your body in sanctification and honor not in lustful passion like the Gentiles who do not know God." Don't act like the godless pagans. The rampant, uncontrolled desire and passion for sexual gratification that is typical of unregenerate people is not to be characteristic of Christians, plain and simple.

By the way, lustful passion is kind of a strong term. Either one of those words might have worked; both of them together make it very strong. The word "passion," *pathos*, means excited emotion, means uncontrollable desire, means compelling feelings, overpowering urges. It is used here in a bad sense as in Romans 1:26 and Colossians 3:5, though there could be legitimate passion for the right thing, a passion for God. And then he adds the word *epithumia*, that word which means lustful, lusting, craving. It's kind of an out-of-control craving. And again there are a few occasions where that can mean a...a craving for the right thing but usually a bad thing and here it's bad for sure.

So here's a characterization of the unregenerate, right? They don't know God. Consequently they are driven by lustful out-of-control cravings, compelling urges, overpowering desires of the body. That's it. Christians can't live like that, that's how the godless people live. In fact, in Galatians 5:24 Paul says, "Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." We killed that when we died in Christ, to rise and walk in newness of life. What do you want to do, pick up that dead thing and haul it around? Colossians chapter 3, Paul says essentially the same thing, "Consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire." That's the past, that's a dead issue. Don't act — look at this — like the Gentiles, or the pagans, the *ethne*, the unregenerate who do not know God, non-Christians. They are further described, by the way, in 2 Thessalonians 1:8. They're going to receive retribution, the ones who do not know God, and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. You're talking about the ungodly, those who rejected Christ. By ignorance, the unregenerate heathens sink into the depths of immorality. Those who know God should never fall to such a shameful level. We expect it of them.

Go back, for a moment, to Romans chapter 1. Let me show you just a couple of verses, actually three maybe, three or four. Verse 24, in the Fall, when men fell and were alienated from God, it says, "God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity that their bodies might be dishonored among them." It is characteristic of unregenerate people that they operate on a bodily feeling level. That is characteristic of unregenerate life. God gave them over to that.

Verse 26, "For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions, women exchanged the

natural function for that which is unnatural, in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desires toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty of their error." Homosexuality, lesbian kind of conduct, all of that is characteristic of unregenerate people who have been literally abandoned by God to their own bodily lusts.

Verse 28 says it another way, "They didn't see fit to acknowledge God any longer so God gave them over to a depraved mind to do those things which are not proper." They do things that aren't right, they live in lustful passion, they are homosexuals and lesbians and fornicators and adulterers and transvestites and pedophiles and you name it because they don't know God. They have no internal restraint. They don't operate out of a renewed mind. Scripture says you're to have a renewed mind and your mind renewed in Christ dominated by the Word of God, controlled by the Spirit is to control your body, beat it into subjection. The unsaved can't do that. Don't act the way they act.

So don't get caught in their traps. Don't indulge yourself in the idiocy of their philosophy. They are slaves to bodily passion. We said a little earlier how silly it is for the church to buy into this stuff. I was raised in a time where nobody ever had a sexual seminar. I don't think there was ever a Christian book written on Christian sexual relationships in marriage. Everybody seemed to figure it out, children were being born. People seemed happy, marriages stayed together. Now we buy into the world's philosophy. Even Christian bookstores get stuffed with junk that is intended to convey the philosophy that some kind of passion even in marriage is the key to a good relationship.

You can't buy the world's goods. They function only on passion, only on feeling. And as soon as the society condones divorce, marriage will be destroyed because as soon as the feeling runs out they've got to get another feeling with another person. The only thing that restrains it is some kind of cultural compunction. If that's gone there's no way to control it, it's history. We know God. We don't operate on that level. The physical relationship is wonderful. Let marriage be honorable in all, Hebrews 13:4, and the bed is undefiled. God blesses marriage and the relationship, the conjugal relationship of marriage. But we are not reduced to the level of the unregenerate, who do not think but only feel. We know God and in that intimate relationship with Him there is no place for doing what the godless world does. You don't want to think the way they think or not think the way they don't think. You don't want to feel the way they feel. I'll tell you, if you expose yourself to their trash in print and on the media, you will engender the feelings that they feel. You will wind up linking the members of Christ to a harlot as it says in 1 Corinthians 6.

Pagans have no thought for holy conduct. They have no thought for thought. They're driven by lustful passion right into hell. We can't be. We must not act like them. We are God's own bride. Can we shame the name of Christ and spurn His love and grace and bring disrepute upon Him?

Third principle, don't take advantage of others. Don't take advantage of others. Verse 6: "That no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter." Simple, that no man transgress. What does that mean? Go over the line, go beyond the bounds, exceed the limits, go pass the law. Don't go too far. Don't transgress.

What is he talking about? "And defraud his brother." What does that word defraud mean? Very interesting word, it means to selfishly, greedily take something at someone else's expense. It means to take advantage of someone for personal gain, personal pleasure. And "the matter." See that little statement, "the matter," that's sexual sin. So the simple statement is this, don't go beyond the line

that God has drawn and take advantage of another believer in the matter of sexual sin. Don't do that. Don't take advantage of someone else. And that's exactly what you're doing. When you want your sexual pleasure, your physical pleasure and you take advantage of someone else to get it, you violated this.

I tell young people all the time, if a guy comes to you and maybe you're dating and he says to you, "You know I really love you, I really care about you," and he wants to take your purity and he wants to take your virginity, guess again, he doesn't care about you, he doesn't love you, he lusts for you. If he loved you, love would seek your highest good, love would seek the noblest treatment of your purity. Guess again what you've got. Don't marry that guy because if all he had going for you was lust, somebody else will attract that same thing in him in the future.

And if you're married and somebody comes along and says, "You know, I really want to have a relationship with you," and you fall into that and you violate your marriage and you fall prey to that, you have been defrauded, you have been robbed, you have been plundered, you have been raped. That's not love, that's lust. When a married person steals another married person for personal gratification, that's defrauding a brother or sister.

So Paul says, look, number one: Don't let your body control you. Number two: Don't act like the godless heathen. Don't see what they see, hear what they hear, feel what they feel. Don't get in that trap, that process. And number three: Don't take advantage of another person. And if you don't do that then that will restrain you. And if the church won't allow itself to be taken advantage of, that can be thwarted. Such a simple truth. In the matter of sexual sin don't you dare defraud someone else, don't you dare implicate them in your sin, don't suck them in to the fulfillment of your own lustful pleasure. Don't use people.

By the way, that is so serious that in Matthew 18 verse 6 it says, "If anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in Me," that's a Christian. Little ones, what little ones? The little ones who believe in Me, not little babies but Christians, "Causes them to stumble into sin, better if a millstone were hanged around his neck and he were drowned in the depths of the sea." And what Jesus is saying there is, before you cause another Christian to sin you'd be better off dead. You'd be better off drowned. Don't you defraud someone else. You'd be better off dead, that's how serious it is to God.

The command then, totally abstain from sexual sin. That's, what? How? Don't let your body control you, don't act like godless pagans and don't take advantage of others. Last question, why? That's what the kids always say, why? Why? Why keep the command? Three reasons, very rapidly, very important. Reason number one: Because of God's vengeance, because of God's vengeance. The middle of verse 6, "Because the Lord is the avenger in all these things just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you." Because of God's vengeance, He is the avenger. What does that mean? The one who exacts judgment. That's a strong reminder of Deuteronomy 32:35, "Vengeance is Mine and retribution, I will repay." Hebrews 13:4, "Let marriage be honorable in all and the bed undefiled but fornicators and adulterers God will judge."

How will He judge? How will He wreak vengeance if we violate this? Could be in an unfulfilling sexual life and marriage, could be in a miserable marriage, could be in a divorce, could be in temporal chastening, could be through venereal disease, could be any other disease, could be negative circumstances, the absence of blessing, trials, trouble, even death, it certainly will be the loss of eternal reward in some measure. God can do anything He wants to avenge it but He will. So if you

need to reason not to do it, God is the avenger, because of God's vengeance in all these things. None of them escape Him. In all sexual sins God is the avenger. And He reminds them that this isn't something new, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. He had told them when he was there about this which is a good indication that he gave them not only the full understanding of the gospel, but he taught them to observe all things whatsoever Jesus had commanded too while he was there. He had done a full orbbed job of evangelizing.

Sexual sin disregards God, it ignores His holiness. It spurns His will, it defies His commands, it rejects His love, it flaunts His grace and mercy. It abuses it. It is disobedient, it is selfish, it is ingratitude and God will avenge it. He will avenge it.

Second reason: Because of God's purpose, because of God's purpose, not only because of God's vengeance but because of God's purpose. Verse 7: "For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification." You see, the effectual call of salvation was a call to holiness, not unholiness. God has not called us for the purpose of impurity. It isn't grace so that sin may abound. Paul's point is that the very nature of God's calling and justification is a calling to sanctification. He called us to Himself for the purpose of sanctifying us, making us holy, making us pure, making us sinless. You have a holy, pure, and sinless God who brings salvation through His holy, pure, and sinless Son, who then applies that salvation through His holy, pure, and sinless Spirit in order to produce a people who are holy, sinless, and pure. Thus the heart of the Apostle is to present the church without blemish and without spot, holy before God.

There's no place in that for impurity. The purpose of God was to make a holy people, a people who would walk in a manner worthy of the God who called them into His kingdom and glory as he said back in chapter 2, verse 12. That little phrase "in sanctification" indicates the state resulting from the calling. The whole of the Christian life is in separation from sin, in holiness, in sanctification. The call to salvation then can never be separated from holy living. It can never be separated from the result, which is sanctification. Sexual sin is utterly inconsistent.

Why obey? Because of God's vengeance, because of God's calling or purpose. Thirdly, because of God's Spirit. Verse 8, "Consequently," that introduces a conclusion, "he who rejects this," he who nullifies this makes it void, cancels it, disregards it, despises it, "is not rejecting man." This isn't Paul you're rejecting, this isn't some church group you're rejecting, this isn't the elders, this isn't John MacArthur, "But the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you." You're rejecting God. This is God's standard and God, who gave you His Holy Spirit to make you pure and to enable you to be pure. By the way, that verb there, "the God who gives His Holy Spirit," marvelous. It's a timeless Greek idea, characterizes God as the unceasing giver of the timeless gift of the Holy Spirit. And here in the Greek, the Spirit is "the Spirit of Him, the Holy One." How can you enter into sexual sin without knowing you're rejecting the God who gave you the Spirit of Himself who is the Holy One?

Not only did He call believers to salvation but He called them to sanctification and continually breathes His Spirit into them for the purpose of producing holiness. And then to sin is to grieve the Spirit and quench the Spirit. That's why Paul says, "What?" First Corinthians 6, talking about sexual immorality in Corinth, "Don't you know your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which you have of God, you're not your own, you're bought with a price, so glorify God in your body."

To live in sexual sin is to literally reject God, who gave His Spirit, to reject Christ, who gave us justification to sanctification, and to reject God, who is the avenger. Sexual sin violates the Father,

the Son, the Holy Spirit and the work of each. So may God help us to be faithful to the command through the means that God has given us with the fear of His recourse should we fail. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, we thank You again this morning for the Word and the reminder of this call to sexual purity. Lord, help us to know what should be obvious to all of us that if we are obedient You will bless us, You will bless our marriages, You will bless our physical relationships with all the goodness that You intend. Father, we would pray that if there are young people here who are sinning in this area, who are going together, dating, or whatever and they're engaging in fornication, Lord, please may they come to grips this morning with the seriousness of that sin, may they receive the solemn warning of this scripture, may they know what they're doing, and may they be separated from it. If there are couples that are engaged, anticipating marriage and feeling because the commitment is set in place and the marriage is to come that they are free to commit fornication, Lord, may they know that is not true, may they immediately cease from this sin. If there are married people committing adultery, Lord God, may they repent immediately. We know You have every right to bring chastening, to enact Your vengeance and retribution, for they have literally rejected You, they have spurned the grace of salvation which leads to holiness. They have quenched and grieved the Spirit of God who is in them. You have every right to chasten. And, Lord, we would ask that You be merciful in such and that having led them to holiness through the chastening you would grant them grace.

For those here who have committed these sins in the past, Lord, may they enjoy the forgiveness that is theirs in Christ, knowing full well that what has been forgiven has been removed as far as the east is from the west, buried in the depths of the sea and is remembered no more. And may they rejoice in such abounding grace. Oh God, give us pure relationships that we might know the fullness of blessing and that we might be the kind of people that You want us to be, who in the power of the Word and the Spirit control our bodies, who do not act like the godless pagans act, who do not take advantage of other people for selfish pleasure, who do not put ourselves in a place to receive retribution from a vengeful God, but, oh God, may we be the faithful and the obedient who know the fullness of Your blessing. To that end we do pray for Jesus' sake. Amen.

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