Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

A Plea for Purity, Part 2
Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4:4-8
Code: 90-204

Two Sunday nights ago we began to address the theme of sexual purity, a plea for sexual purity and I want to continue that tonight. I would invite you to turn in your Bible to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, there are a number of texts and Scripture that could be selected for this particular subject, but this one is particularly comprehensive on the one hand and pointed on the other.

1 Thessalonians chapter 4, let me read you from verse 3 down through verse 8, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification that is that you abstain from sexual immorality. That each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion like the Gentiles who do not know God 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. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity but in sanctification, consequently, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you."

In their book entitled, The AIDS Epidemic, two medical doctors Glenn Wood and John Dietrich have written the following paragraph and I quote, "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 even 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."

They're right, daily in our society we are brought to the place where we are asked to bow to these gods. We are bombarded with this encroaching sexual idolatry in particular. Recently I looked through a particular day's edition of the Los Angeles Times and I noted a scantily clad girl advertising the body beautiful on every page of the first section. That is the god of this culture and that god uses these advertisings and everything else to seduce us into the worship of that false idol.

The sexual revolution of course has been successful, successful in the sense that the rebels have totally overthrown traditional Christian values and morals, and they've brought this nation down into a new theology, and it is the theology of the God of sexual immorality. The basic tenets of that theology can probably be summed up something like this, since people are basically good they will use sex as a way to please others. However that's not true, the misuse of sex doesn't do good to others it destroys.

Secondly, they philosophy since sex is only a biological function like eating, or drinking, or sleeping, it's a necessity therefore that must be satisfied and restrictions are foolish because this is instinctive. The fact of the matter is that sex run rampant like that is only to be justified if there is no God and there is no law.

Thirdly, they might suggest philosophizing about it that since casual sex is merely a form of entertainment or a way to have fun or pleasure, it should be enjoyed recreationally with anybody any time, and of course the truth is we know it leads to exploitation, guilt, shallowness, loneliness and the dissolution of all meaningful relationships.

Further, they might suggest, these who are the high priests of the new theology of the god of sexual immorality that fulfilling sexual desire is the goal of life. The average married person, according to the latest reports that I've read, the average married person engages in sexual activity three times a week for a total of eight minutes. You better have something more in your relationship, eight minutes isn't very long.

Fifthly, these people might say that instant pleasure is to be desired over delayed gratification. You need to take your moment of pleasure because that's probably all you're going to get so live for the moment like an existentialist.

Number six, good sexual relationships mean you have a good relationship, so let's just live together, enjoying our sexual relationship because that is the relationship, and when we don't enjoy that anymore we won't have to get a divorce.

Then the suggestion comes to us more recently, have safe sex so you don't get a disease or a baby, and if you do kill the baby. Sex is our god and we will kill for him, and of course we know the result of this, and I don't want to go on because it's not even very edifying to talk about it, but the result of all of this is a totally destroyed family, a totally destroyed society, a totally devastated people, this is such a devastating sin that God required the death penalty for its committal. Originally God said if anybody does this, if anybody sins in the sexual realm whether it's fornication, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, they need to die. Sadly today not only is the culture engulfed in this and willingly so, but the church is tragically unwilling to deal with it even when it occurs in the church, the church has bought some of the lies of the culture.

The church is tolerant of this, doesn't want to deal with it, doesn't want to discipline. We have embraced the *Eros*of our time with tolerance and that is tragic because if the church isn't the conscience of culture, what is?

Our culture has been shaped to this way. I don't want to get too bogged down in philosophy and history but when I was in college I was fascinated by human thinking and so I had the opportunity to take some advanced philosophy courses to try to see if I could sort out the depravity of the human mind a little better. I found that the influence of Charles Darwin and Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud and Fredric Niechy and Bertrand Russell and in more modern times Margaret Sanger who is the founder of Planned Parenthood, Earnest Hemingway, Havloc Ellis, Margaret Meade, Alfred King, Masters & Johnson, Hugh Hefner, and all the rest have succeeded in producing an atheistic, hedonistic, pleasure mad, anti-family, homosexual, pornographic, perverted society and mix in some drugs and alcohol and you get the modern culture.

The church has, as I said, just gotten very comfortable with this. It isn't willing to deal with it. Oh we might preach against it but we really don't deal with it. I think our church is very unusual in that we enact church discipline, straight forwardly and publicly, very often for sins like these.

Now lest you think that this is purely an American phenomenon I want to take you back to 1 Thessalonians because I want you to know that it wasn't any different in Paul's day. If anything, the world in Paul's day might have been worse, prostitutes, concubines, mistresses, homosexuals, pedophiles, transvestites, temple harlots, adulterers, adulteresses, they were everywhere. The Word of God to the church in Thessalonica and to all the churches in Paul's day and in our day makes it very clear how God feels about this.

Paul expresses it so clearly in the text I just read to you. A little bit of background, they were new Christians in Thessalonica; obviously, they had been saved out of a perverse and godless lifestyle. As Paul begins a section here in this Epistle, a section of exhortations, he starts it in chapter 4, verse 3 he starts it with this dominating idolatry of his day which was the same, sexual immorality.

In fact, in Paul's day there was no shame associated with it, no shame associated with sexual conduct. These new Christians had come out of a very acceptable form of immorality, very acceptable kind of lifestyle, there was no public shame, so Paul needs to deal with the issue and he needs to deal with it on God's terms.

Three simple questions we're going to address here. Question number one is the what question, what is the command? Verse 3 and this is briefly reviewing, for this is the will of God, your sanctification, your separation from sin. What I mean by that is that you abstain from sexual immorality. That is the general overall command that overshadows all the rest of what he is going to say in this section. You must be sanctified, this is God's will. Sanctified means separated, set apart from this kind of sin, sexual immorality. There are a lot of other things you need to be separated from and he covers those all the way down to verse 28 as he ends this Epistle in chapter 5.

It is possible for Christians to commit sins of immorality, we know that. Definitely it is possible for true Christians to commit sins of immorality. The Corinthians did and they were believers. I thank my God, 1 Corinthians 1:4, "Always concerning you for the Grace of God which was given you in Christ Jesus and in everything you were enriched in Him in all speech and all knowledge," and yet later in the book he speaks strongly to them about sexual immorality.

Chapter 5 is a rather blistering indictment against the immorality that is among you, it is actually reported there is immorality among you and such immorality does not even exist among the Gentiles, the pagans.

Chapter 6 he talks to them about being involved with a prostitute. Chapter 10 he warns them about the people of Israel who because of their adultery suffered the chastening of God, so the basic command here is to believers in Thessalonica as it was in Corinth; you need to abstain from sexual immorality. It wouldn't do any good to say that to a non-believer, it wouldn't do any good for God to will the sanctification of people who weren't justified; it wouldn't do any good for God to command unbelievers to act in a fashion that is absolutely impossible for them. He's talking to believers here.

You say well I thought fornicators and adulterers and homosexuals, sodomites and people like that couldn't enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Yes that's true if that's their habitual life pattern. 1 Corinthians 6 makes that abundantly clear that if your habitual life pattern is in that kind of conduct you are not a member of God's Kingdom because neither fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate or homosexuals, etc., shall inherit the Kingdom of God.

Galatians 5 essentially says the same thing, different words, but the Apostle Paul says, "The deeds of the flesh are evident, immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, etc., etc., envyings, drunkenness, carousing, and I have forewarned you those who practice as a pattern those things do not inherit the Kingdom of God. In fact you come to the end of the book of Revelation in chapter 21 and as you have the last word from God and God says, "The cowardly, the unbelieving, the abominable, the murderers, and immoral persons will have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone." Chapter 22, the very last chapter in the Bible, verse 15, "Outside of the Holy City, outside of the new heavens and the new earth are the dogs and the sorcerers, and the immoral persons, and the liars." If that is the habitual pattern of your life you're not a member of God's Kingdom. That doesn't mean that Christians can't, on occasion, fall into those sins. The basic command is total abstinence. Sex is designed for a man and a woman in a marriage, period. Sexual relations were designed for a man and a woman in a marriage. Total abstinence outside of that is God's will.

Now that's the what question, what is the command? The immediate question that comes is the how question. How can I obey that command? We're living in a corrupt world with all of its evil influences and so were they. You say, well I was converted out of a life pattern, in our church we have people

who have come to Christ and they've come out of a very wicked sexual pattern prior to their conversion. How can I deal with that? We are being incessantly bombarded by the culture, we are living with people who expect to engage in sexual activity, we live in a sex crazed culture that literally worships immorality and exalts it and mocks marriage and faithfulness. Furthermore, not only do I have to fight that, not only does it come to me through all the media forms of music and movies, and television and whatever, and now of course the dreaded internet, but it comes to me through my own memories recycling the iniquities of the past.

How do I abstain and maintain the sanctification that God asks? I'm going to give you several principles, here they come, number one. Don't let your body control you, don't let your body control you. This is what Paul says in verse 4, "Each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor. Each one of you," talking to believers, "Needs to know how to possess." The right translation of that or the best translation of it is to gain mastery over, to control. What is it that we need to get control of? His own vessel, his own vessel for purposes of sanctification and honor to God. You need to know that's , and it is often used, that Greek verb, in reference to knowing how that is to having the knowledge and the skill necessary to accomplish a desired goal. Have enough knowledge of yourself so that you are skilled in gaining mastery over your own vessel.

Now some have suggested that vessel means wife but that doesn't really make any sense because what does gaining control over your wife have to do with sexual purity? They make that connection because the same term is , used for vessel in 1 Peter 3:7, there 1 Peter 3:7 says, "You husbands live with your wives in an understanding way as with a weaker vessel." But that is not a necessary parallel just because the same word is used in another passage doesn't necessarily mean that that's the interpretative key and its really not an accurate parallel because this is not just an issue for men to control their wives, this is an issue for women as well. Whatever needs to be controlled here is for all Christians.

To see a woman as simply an instrument to be controlled which would be what this text would be implying if you interpret it that way, that the whole idea of married life is to get control and master your wife as if she were a tool, is demeaning to women, making her simply some kind of tool for a man's gratification.

It would make nonsense out of verse 5, "Not in lustful passion." I mean if it's talking about your marriage why not. Nothing wrong with having some kind of desire and passion for your wife, you're not supposed to be passionless, it just makes no sense to take the word and use it of women. It is used of all kinds of things; it's sort of a generalized word for tools and utensils and metaphorically for people.

It's used that way in Acts 9, 2 Timothy 2, 2 Corinthians 4:7, but here I think it can only be referred to one thing and that is your body, and that's the way it was used in some Rabbinic sources. The

discussion here is not about marriage and how one is to manage his wife, it's about sexual purity, and everybody needs to know how to take of his body, controlling his body for holiness. That's the essential issue here. Know yourself well enough to know what is necessary for you to maintain mastery over your own body so that it is used in matters of sanctification and honor, that's the issue and it goes both ways.

If you're going to make , meaning the wife, then in this passage it's not limited to her and it could be reversed and it would say that a woman needs to gain mastery over her husband. It can't mean that, that would be contrary to the headship principles of Scripture. It's a simple concept; I don't know why people get confused, it simply means know how to handle your body. Get control of it, you know yourself; you know what you can expose yourself and what you cannot expose yourself too. You know where to go and with whom to be and what imbibe in order to make life more difficult. You know, I trust you know how to avoid devastating temptation.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 6, verse 12, "All things are lawful for me," says Paul, "But not all things are profitable, all things are lawful for me but I will not be mastered by anything. I don't want to ever lose control." Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:27, "I buffet my body," it's the same spelling as buffet but it's a different idea, some of you are buffeting your body, that's not what this means. I buffet, that's one of those quirky English words that can mean two utterly differently things, one means to indulge your body the other means to beat it. "I buffet my body and make it my slave." Why? Because if I don't do that I might end up disqualified by sin.

So the first principle, and it's so very basic, is don't let your body control you. You exercise from your mind the control. Now you say well how do I do that? Well let me take you through a very simple explanation of that. Self control is the issue here. Developing self control is critical, an undisciplined person in general is going to have a hard time getting their spiritual life under control, but you have to do that. Romans 6:12, "Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body that you should obey its lusts. Do not go on presenting the members of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness but present yourselves to God as though alive from the dead and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." I think it starts there.

I think it starts with the recognition that everything about me spiritually and physically belongs to whom? To God. It is that affirmation, I am not my own, I have been bought with a price, my soul and spirit and body are God's. I cannot, therefore, take the members of my body and let sin reign over them so that they are presented as instruments of unrighteousness. I belong to God, everything I am belongs to God, and I must obey my King.

In chapter 7, verse 5, "While we were in the flesh," Paul says in Romans 7, "The sinful passions which were aroused by the law were at work in the members of our body to bear fruit for death." Before you were a Christian, sinful passion ran your life and if you're not a Christian now it runs your

life now. I'm not shocked at the way the world is going, I mean that's the way we would expect it to go because these people in the flesh, in an unredeemed condition, driven by sinful passions are simply doing what their sin dictates and bearing fruit that kills. But we have died and risen to new life, and with that new life came a new Lord and a new master. It starts with the recognition that I am not my own, I am bought with a price, I belong to God.

There's a second thing. Not only do I have to be aware of my new identity and to whom I belong, but I need to understand the power of the Holy Spirit in my life. Galatians 5:16, "This I say walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, the Spirit against the flesh, these are in opposition to one another so that you may not do the things that you please." That's what Paul was saying in Romans 7 when he said, "I do what I don't want to do and don't do what I want to do." "But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law; you've been literally liberated from the consequence of the law and the power of sin." He is saying, "Walk by the Spirit. Conduct your life in line with the Holy Spirit." The key to self control then is to understand to whom I belong and to yield the control of my life to the Holy Spirit. We don't have time to get into all the nuances of that. It's sufficient to say when you're a Christian the Holy Spirit takes up residence in your heart, you become the temple of the Spirit of God, He is yours, God plants Him in your life as it were, He is there, that is the work of Christ and the wonderful work of baptizing you into the body of Christ, at the same time the Spirit of God takes up residence in your life and He becomes the Divine agent that produces Godliness and sanctification in your life, and the key is to walk, that's a word of daily conduct consistently with the Spirit of God.

Now the question comes up how do I do that? How do I know what the Spirit wants? He doesn't talk to me, He doesn't say anything to me, how do I walk in line with the Spirit? Well the Spirit will give you the power to do what you otherwise could not do, but in order for the Spirit to do that there's a companion passage to Galatians 5 and it's in Colossians 3, it's also a companion to Ephesians 5, but let me just read it to you it says Colossians 3:16, "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you." Now if you compare that with Ephesians where it says, "Be filled with the Spirit," this becomes a parallel statement. We know that because it says in Ephesians 5, "Be filled with the Spirit and if you do that you will admonish one another, you will sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, you'll be thankful and wives will behave as they should, and husbands as they should, and children as they should, and parents as they should, and servants or slaves as they should, and so forth and so on, and masters the same."

You have the same sequence of application in Ephesians 5, only the statement is be filled with the spirit, here the statement is, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." Those then are parallel truths; being controlled by the Spirit is the same as having the word dwelling in you richly." The difference is this; you must know the truth because the truth is the will of the Spirit. The truth is the mind of the Spirit as it is the mind of Christ, the mind of God, and than knowing the truth, being convinced of the truth, being committed to the truth, the Spirit provides the power for you to obey the truth.

I'll tell you really honestly, there is no way in your Christian life that you will be able to fulfill this command unless you understand that you must exercise control over your body and your body not exercise control over you. You cannot respond simply to every whim of the flesh, no matter how excited the flesh may become by the environment you're in. In order to do that you must gain control, in order to gain control you have to change your thinking. In order to change your thinking, you have to fill your mind with first of all the reality that you're not your own, you belong to God, He is your King, and your body and every part of your body is to be used as an instrument of righteousness. You must realize that to continue to think like that you must fill your mind with the truth of the Word of God so that that controls your thinking and in that controlling your thinking you literally free the Spirit of God to empower you from within to live according to the Word of God.

You can gain control, you're expected too, but it flows out of a knowledge of who you belong too and that every part of you is for the instrumentation of righteousness. It flows out of the reality that you know the Word of God and it controls how you think, and than the Spirit of God is released to empower you in the triumph over temptation, but it starts with having your mind and heart dominated by the great spiritual truths.

I think there's something else I need to throw in here. Having said all of that, you need to be smart enough to avoid those kinds of people, those kinds of places, those kinds of experiences which can culminate in sexual sin. It doesn't do you any good to know all of these right patterns on the positive side, and than to expose yourselves to all kinds of input that corrupts your thinking. Don't play with your desires, don't play with those emotions. Once you have begun to feel the things that God has designed, to culminate in sexual activity you are out of control. I'll say that again; once you have begun to feel the things that God has designed to culminate in sexual relations in a marriage you are out of control.

It's the undisciplined life, it's when you let your body tell you what you'll do and what you'll think. You can't feed it, you can't pamper it. I wish we had the time, and maybe we can do that next week, Proverbs chapter 2, Proverbs chapter 5, Proverbs chapter 7 warns the young man to stay out of the way of those who will put him in a position of severe temptation. Stay away from whatever plays with your sexual emotions. Whatever starts you down the path which God designed to culminate in the intimacy of marriage, whatever moves you on that path is beyond where God wants you to go.

The capper on the thought here, back to 1 Thessalonians, is that you are to conduct yourself in sanctification, separation that means, and honor Holiness and respect, Holiness and respect go together by the way. When you're pure you honor your body as God's instrument. You honor your body as a vessel of righteousness. You honor the Lord who is your King. You honor the church of whom you are a member. When you are sanctified you are honorable. Control your body so that it is holy and brings respect to the Lord, to His church.

It's as if to say that when you engage yourself in sexual sin you not only dishonor your body which is to be an instrument of righteousness, you would dishonor the body of Christ because you bring your pollution into that inseparable, indivisible, spiritual unity. Most of all you dishonor the Lord like David after his adultery said "Against thee, the only have I sinned," Psalm 51.

So the question is never this, and you have to tell this to people all the time. The question is never what can I do and get away with it? What can I do and not go "all the way"? How far can I go? That's not the question. The question is how can I honor my body so that it honors the Lord and it honors His redeemed church? That's a completely different question. You should never be asking the question how close can I get without getting burned? How far can I go without getting caught? How far can I go and not totally lose it, lose control? That's not the question, the question is how can I separate from sin so totally that I bring upon this vessel which is an instrument of righteousness honor? That I bring to the church of Jesus Christ with whom I am indivisibly connected, honor, and that most of all that I bring to the dear Lord of the church? Honor.

So the first principle; very simple, don't let your body control you. It's a matter of self disciple. You can't do it in a vacuum, it happens when you understand and you have the conviction that you're not your own, and that your body and every part of your body is designed by God to be an instrument of righteousness and when that is the dominating thought in your mind and heart, and when your thinking is controlled by the knowledge of the Word of God, you've hid it in your heart that you might not sin, and therefore you have given the Spirit of God the opportunity to energize that virtue and that Holiness.

Self control; I don't think this - it may start with a sort of a monumental sort of cataclysmic decision that you make somewhere in your life, but I think in order to maintain that it is the constant faithful participation and the truth of God's Word, it is the constant day in, day out, Sunday in, Sunday out saturation of God's Divine truth being poured into your mind and poured into your heart so that your thinking is literally controlled by the Word of God and your body is in submission to the truth you know, and therefore to the Spirit of God who is energizing that truth in your life.

So again I say the question is not how far can I go and get away with it? How close can I get and not get burned? The question is how can I master my body so that it is separated from sin and brings honor to itself as an instrument of righteousness to the church to which it is connected and to the Lord of the church which it represents?

Second principle; control your body is number one, number two don't act like pagans, don't act like pagans. This is the old "everybody's doing it" thing, not you. Verse 5, "Not in lustful passions like the pagans," the , the Gentiles who don't know God, the rampant uncontrolled desire, the passion for sexual gratification on any terms and on every terms, belongs to paganism.

Now those people knew exactly what Paul was saying, exactly. The Roman Emperor at that time we are told in many historical sources that people had wives to do the laundry and cook, they had concubines for sexual gratification; in addition to that there were prostitutes in the street. In addition to that the temples of false gods were filled with prostitutes; it was a great way to attract a crowd. The idea was that when you engage in sexual relationship with a high priestess, which was what those temple prostitutes were, you therefore are literally engaging the deity himself, the idea that you touched as it were the god through drunkenness, you touched the god through sexual immorality, you touched the god through the orgies that occurred in those terrible pagan temples.

You're different he says, the rampant uncontrolled desire and passion for sexual gratification that belongs to the unregenerate shouldn't be controlling your life, "Not in lustful passion." The word passion here is *pathos*, its excited emotion, its desire that has taken over and is driving behavior, an overwhelming, compelling feeling. *Pathos*can be good; I mean we can feel *pathos*for someone who is suffering where we're literally excited emotionally and uncontrollably fall into emotions about their sad condition, but here He's talking about lustful *pathos*where passion has taken over the control, where emotion is dictating. It's used here in a bad sense as it is in Romans chapter 1, verse 26 and Colossians 3:5.

Then the word *epithumia*, lustful, that is a word that really means out of control craving. Lust that feeds the passion, totally out of control, this is pagan. You can't do that, you can't follow the physical desire and wild uncontrollable passion that the pagans engage in. Its unthinkable Paul says to the these believers in Thessalonica; I don't care what your past life was like.

Galatians 5:24, "Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passion and desires." You can't act like a non-Christian; they act that way because they don't have a choice. It's true; well don't they have immoral choices, yeah but they can only choose one kind of sin or another. Even their good is bad good, because it's motivated by something less then the glory of God. It is by ignorance that the unregenerate heathens sink so eagerly to such sins so that those who know God should never fall to such a shameful level. This is an immense grief. I think to anybody who has any love for the church and love for the things of God, to see Christian people behaving like unregenerate people, like non-Christians, like unbelievers is a shame, it is a shame to Christ whose name you bear.

We expect pagans to sink. We expect them to go the path of Romans 1. We expect them to know God and glorify Him not as God, we expect Him to become vain in their imaginations, empty in their thinking. We expect them to consider themselves wise when they're really fools. We expect them to create their own gods and than bow down to them. We expect them to sink to sexual immorality, Romans 1:24, "Homosexual immorality," Romans 1:26, "Reprobate mind," Romans 1:28. We expect them to act like the people on the Jerry Springer show or any one of those, we expect that. We're not shocked. That's what was going on in Thessalonica, that's what was going on in Corinth. The

unsaved don't have any capacity to stop the slide. They're in ignorance. Some of them admittedly are restrained to one degree or another, I'm not saying they're all the same but they're restrained to one degree or another by a conscience that's been informed perhaps by religion or by morality. Even Muslims are a little hesitant to commit certain immoral sins because they fear that Allah may send them to hell.

There are certain restraints but that doesn't change the passions. The unconverted people are driven by their bodily passion, driven by their evil desires. But we know God, we have been transformed, we have become new creations, we're not like them. 1 Corinthians 6:15, "Your bodies are members of Christ. Shall I take away the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot?" That's unthinkable. Pagans have no thought of virtue and holy conduct and really truly glorifying God unless it's some false deity or some false conception of God. They're rather driven by their passions right into hell. You can't act like that. You who are Christ bride cannot be a harlot, cannot shame the name of Christ and spurn His love and grace. You can't act like the world acts. That is such a dishonor to God and to Christ, to His Kingdom.

Well thirdly, don't let your body control you. Secondly, don't act like the godless pagans, thirdly this is really important, don't take advantage of others. Verse 6, "That no man transgress," that's go over the line, "Cross the line and defraud his brother in the matter." Don't go over the line, who set the line? Guess; God set the line and He set in His law. "Don't exceed the limits," if you are using that Greek term in an athletic way you'd say don't go out of bounds, don't go too far, don't go where you're forbidden to go. What do you mean by that? Even defrauding his brother in the matter; defraud is a very interesting word. It means to selfishly, greedily gain something at another's expense, that's exactly what it means. It means to selfishly, greedily gain something at another's expense, . It means to take advantage of someone for personal gain and personal fulfillment.

The matter, what's the matter here? What does he mean? Don't defraud his brother in the matter; well what's the matter that He's talking about? What subject is His subject? Sexual sin; what does He mean? Don't take advantage of someone else for your own sexual fulfillment. Don't use someone.

Young people you need to be aware of the fact, and it's sad to think about, but there are Christian young people who would use you on occasion for their own gratification. If a young man says he loves you and therefore he wants to fulfill himself at your expense that's not love that's robbery, that's plunder, that's lust, that's defrauding, that's greedily gaining something at your expense. That goes on all the time. This is very straight forward and practical truth here. Don't ever let anybody take advantage of you and don't you ever take advantage of someone else.

I'll tell you how serious this is, Matthew 18. Matthew 18 verse 6 says, "If you're thinking of leading one of these little ones who believe in Me," that's a believer, "Into sin you'd be better off with a millstone or hang it around your neck and you will drown in the sea." Next time you go out with a young person on

a date and you become tempted to defraud, to plunder, to rob his or her purity, remember the words of Jesus, "You would be better off drowned then to lead one of these little ones who believe in Me into sin."

Married people having affairs with other married people that is plunder, as the Old Testament says, when the Prophet confronted the sin that's taking some other man's sheep. That's stealing for sexual gratification from another person. That's unthinkable that you would do that to one of Christ's own, that you would do that to a brother, meaning a brother or a sister, in the family of God. Don't take advantage of somebody else. Don't plunder somebody's purity. Don't rob their virtue; don't take someone else's wife or husband.

Well, this is pretty insightful. This is what happens. So, the command is clear and so is the instruction as to how. Number one, don't let your body control you and I showed you the ways to gain that triumph. Number two; don't act like godless pagans driven by lustful passion. Number three, don't advantage of others.

"If you look not on your own things, but the things of others, if you consider other better than yourself." Boy, that would be - now gals, if you're looking for a husband, that's the kind of guy you want. Guys if you're looking for a wife, the kind you want is one who wouldn't ever take any advantage for self gratification, but would only desire what is loftiest and purest for you.

Well at this point one question remains in this text, and this is the why question. What is the command? How? We gave you the principles. Why? Somebody's going to say, well that's fine why should I obey this? Three compelling reasons. Reason number one, because of God's vengeance.

Middle of verse 5, why should I do this? Because the Lord is what? What does it say? "The Lord is the avenger in all these things." That is one strong statement. Deuteronomy 32:35 established it, "Vengeance is mine, I'll repay." Divine retribution, God punishes sin. "Let marriage," Hebrews 13:4, "Let marriage be honorable, keep it pure, keep that marriage bed undefiled for fornicators and adulterers God will judge," God will judge.

What kind of judgment? I suppose we'll never be able to know in every case. God's got a lot of ways to judge at His disposal and He can use any one that He chooses or any number that He would choose, but the promise is that a Holy God is going to judge.

Could you pray this prayer over your life? This is the prayer of the Psalmist in Psalm 94, "O Lord, God of vengeance, God of vengeance, shine forth! Rise up, O Judge of the earth." Do you feel confident enough that you could pray that prayer and not get hit in the vengeance? Well what would the vengeance be? It could be venereal disease, sexual sins, we well know, 1 Corinthians 6:18 says, "You sin against the body," and probably has reference to that. It could be a devastated marriage

where the physical relationship and the personal relationship and the intimacy is destroyed, it could end up in divorce. It could be temporal chastening by disease, negative circumstances, the absence of blessing, trials, trouble, could be death, could be many things, many things.

He doesn't tell us. God has immense latitude in retaliating against those who defy His law. Remember He's talking to believers here; He's talking to believers here. God is the avenger in all these things. What are these things? The same as the matter that we saw earlier in verse 6, sexual sin, sexual sins. Sexual sin disregards God's law, disregards God's holiness, ignores and spurns His will, defies His commands, rejects His love, flaunts His grace and mercy, it's selfish, it's ungrateful and God is the avenger. Avenger means one who enacts or exacts judgment. The continual pattern of sexual sin will bar a person from heaven and consign his eternal soul to torment in Hell. An occasional sinful act in the life of a believer will bring about the vengeance of God in this life; chastening.

The dynamics of redemptive grace have delivered the Christian from a life of unbroken impurity. We've been washed, we've been sanctified so that sexual sin is unnecessary and it is inconsistent and it is intolerable to God. When it appears, He has every right to act in Holy vengeance.

Listen to Colossians 3:5, "Consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire." There's a good list, just consider the members of your earthly body as dead to those things. Why? Because verse 4 says, "Christ is our life." Those things in verse 5, "Immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, greed, it's on account of these things," verse 6 says, "That the wrath of God will come, and in them you also once walked, when you were living in them, but now you also put them all aside."

That's the past; it's now unnecessary, inconsistent, and intolerable to God. For a believer to commit sexual sin puts him in a place of having to give an account to the avenger. By the way, back to our text Paul says, "This is not a new warning." He says at the end of verse 6, "Just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you." I mean this is an issue folks, it has to be addressed. He's saying, "When I came and started the church there, I told you about this. This isn't something cute. This isn't something flippant. This isn't something shallow. This isn't something to be laughed at. This is something solemn." Paul was trying to get them to focus on a fear deepening reality. Sure he wants you to delight in God, but also to fear God. Don't take your sins lightly, God doesn't. If you do take them lightly, you're more easily led into them. God is the avenger. Poor David felt the vengeance of God, his saliva dried up, his blood flow was restricted, his body was in agony until he repented.

There's a second reason, not only because of God's vengeance, but because of God's purpose, because of God's purpose. Look at verse 7, "For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but for sanctification," or, "But to live in the realm of sanctification." "God has not called us," this is an effectual call to salvation as always in the Epistles. Every time you see call it is the effectual call of God to salvation, and He's simply saying, "God saved us to be pure, not impure. The very nature of

God's calling is that He called us out of sin into righteousness. He justified us and sanctified us and that's a calling to Holy purity. He called us to holiness, He called us to purity, He called us to sinless life.

In fact, we've been joined to Him as one spirit," 1 Corinthians 6:17. "It's not for impurity, uncleanness, filthiness. God didn't call you to be filthy; He called you to be Holy. He called you and brought you into the state of sanctification, into the realm of sanctification, into the sphere of separation." That justification can never be separated from sanctification. The call to salvation can never be separated from the result of that call and that is sanctification, sexual sin is absolutely inconsistent with who we are. So we are to obey because of God's vengeance, we are to obey because of God's calling. Thirdly, we are to obey because of God's Spirit.

We could spend a whole message on this. Verse 8, "Consequently, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you." Somebody's going to say, "I don't like this. I don't like this. This is crowding me. I'm not willing to deal with these issues." But he says in verse 8, "Don't complain to me, call heaven. I didn't invent this. You're not rejecting man, but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you." Again this tells us he's talking to believers.

This is introducing a conclusion. There's a Greek word used here, , which introduces a conclusion. It's used only here in Hebrews 12:1. The conclusion is if you reject if you nullify, if you make void, if you annul, if you disregard, if you despise this, you don't have an argument with a human teacher folks. You don't have an argument with a religious system you are having an argument with God. "It is God who gives," that verb is a timeless Greek idea. God is the giver of a timeless gift the Holy Spirit, and He gave you the Holy Spirit and He put the Holy Spirit in you.

1 Corinthians 6 says it as well as it's said anywhere in Scripture, "Do you not know your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you're not your own? You have been bought with a price therefore glorify God in your body." To sin is to grieve the Holy Spirit; to sin is to quench the Holy Spirit; to sin is to do despite to the Holy Spirit. To live in sexual sin while being the temple of the Spirit of God is unthinkable. Sexual sin violates the Spirit's work, it violates the Son's work and it violates the Father's work. Not only did God call you to sanctification, but He gave you His Holy Spirit for the purpose of producing through obedience to the Word Holiness and sexual sin ignores and rebels against the Holy Spirit.

Well what is the command? Purity. Sex was designed for a man and a woman in a marriage. How do we do that? By gaining the mastery over our bodies so that they always pursue what is separate from sin and bring honor to that instrument of righteousness to the church, and to Christ Himself.

Secondly, we do not behave driven by lustful passion like pagans who do not know God and who will be judged for not knowing God. As 2 Thessalonians 1:8 says, "Retribution from heaven on those who

don't know God."

Thirdly we don't defraud one another. That is, plundering, robbing, and raping their purity for our own fulfillment. These are the things that restrain us.

What motivates that? The Lord is the avenger. The purpose of God is very different, very opposite of that, for which purpose He has given us His Holy Spirit. What a great passage and you see how Paul just pulls it all together here.

This is a challenge, but you can't go before God and say, "God, you don't understand. I live in America in the 1990's." Yeah well God going to say, "I've got a few spirits of just men made perfect hanging around Me right now who used to live in Corinth and a few others who lived in Thessalonica." There's a lot of people who are going to occupy heaven who were saved out of a life of prostitution and a life of sexual immorality and a life of sodomy and homosexuality and they're going to be some transformed and changed pedophiles and transvestites and adulterers and fornicators, and that's how it is in the church of Jesus Christ everywhere. When the Lord justifies, the Lord gives the grace to sanctify doesn't He? He calls us to the standard of holiness.

We're here as a church to help. I think a lot of churches don't help because they don't teach the Word of God with power and conviction, because they don't create an environment in which we take seriously the truth of God, because they don't bring lives against other lives to produce accountability and care and mutual concern and stimulation to godliness. We're here to help. We're here to help you to deal with those issues in your life, to confront those issues, to gain triumph and victory by feeding you the Word of God, by providing every resource we can, by providing relationships that stimulate the right things in your life and lead you down the right path. But in the end, it's your own heart and whether or not the Word dwells richly there so that the Spirit is turned loose to empower you to fulfill that Word to bring that sanctification and honor which God desires. Join me in prayer.

Father, much more could be and probably should be said about this, but we understand Your Word. The issue probably is not that we need more information even though we could say much more. It's not a matter of more information; You have given us what we need, even in this passage. Lord the issue is our own hearts. May we guard our hearts for out of it are the issues of life. May we have as the driving passion of our hearts to fulfill Your will which is our sanctification and holiness. Make Your will, our will, and as we mature in the knowledge of Christ and as we grow stronger in Your grace, may we become more and more fixed on wanting what You want until our evil desires are overcome by the weight of the longing for holy things. We need forgiveness for our failures, for our sins, for our impurities, we know that that is in Christ, granted to us.

Give us victory over sin, give us penitent hearts. Help us when we fail, to run back to the path of virtue. Give us a deepening love for Your truth and may we feast on it every day so that it dominates

our thinking, so that we view everything around us through Your eyes and Your mind, the mind of Christ which is ours because we've been given the Word, and lead us in the path of righteousness for Your own glory. We are, Father, Your children, we want what pleases You, we are in need of Your grace and Your mercy and Your forgiveness and Your strength and we know all of that is at our disposal if we are but obedient. Help us to pursue the truth, choose the right people, avoid the wrong experiences, and fulfill Your will even our sanctification and You will receive all the glory and the praise in Your Son's name, Amen.

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