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

Sexual Purity, Part 2

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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Well, thank you, Kent, very much for ministering to us this morning from the heart. That was a great blessing. I like that...Great is Thy faithfulness...to another melody. You know, in past history, if you get any old hymnals from Scotland or Ireland or England, you don't find any tunes in them at all, they're just words. And at the bottom it will give you a number that indicates a tune and a lot of hymns were sung to many, many different tunes anyway, so we can have a little bit of freedom there.

We've been talking about this issue of sexual purity and started on Wednesday and I want to draw you back to 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 this morning and just kind of work our way through this a little bit. As I said last time, I'm very limited in what I'm able to do. I know that, I've known that all through my life. I can only help you understand what the Word of God says. That's all. I have no power. I have no cleverness. I have no particular insights that are going to change your life. I can't move you to another place. Spiritually I can't contribute to your holiness. I can't do anything to change your life, your behavior, your thought patterns. I understand my limitations. All I can do is tell you what the Word of God says.

And one of the things I'm so grateful for when I teach the Word of God, and obviously I've been doing this a long time, but one of the things I'm so grateful for is that the Bible is not ambiguous. I find myself today, nowadays, using the word ambiguous a lot. I've never lived in a time when evangelicalism was as ambiguous as it is now. It's really hard to figure out what anybody is saying. It's hard to figure out what the gospel is. Hard to figure out what the Christian life is about. Hard to figure out what anybody's theology about anything is. The ambiguity that is being spread in the name of Jesus Christ today is just astonishing. And in some cases it even gets beyond ambiguity and becomes basically betrayal of biblical truth. I guess, in one sense, I feel the divine mandate in the direction of precision when it comes to the Word of God, to be diligent and study, to show myself approved unto God, a workman not needing to be ashamed. I think to be ambiguous about the Scripture, to misrepresent the Scripture, misinterpret the Scripture or just sort of lightly toe dance around with selected portions of Bible verses and thus to proliferate ambiguity and in many cases compromise and in some cases distortion and in other cases heresy is to bring upon oneself shame. The Bible is not ambiguous. It is not unclear. It is a very clear message. And in the realm of morality, it is absolutely precise.

And we see a little bit of that precision in 1 Thessalonians 4:3, "This is the will of God, your sanctification, that is that you have abstained from sexual immorality." Abstinence is biblical. Total abstinence is biblical and that is the command. It is God's will that you be sanctified, that is separated, separated from sin. Meaning that you abstain from sexual immorality.

It's kind of an interesting thing to get a big picture here. Starting in chapter 4 of 1 Thessalonians verse 3 and running all the way to the benediction at the end of chapter 5, that entire section is about how we are to conduct ourselves. The whole thing is about how we are to live within the will of God, to what God wants from us and how we are to respond to that. And it's launched here in verse 3. The whole section is launched here with this call for separation and the first thing that he brings up is that you abstain from sexual immorality. It's very much a parallel to the statements that are given in 1 Timothy and Titus with regard to the qualifications for a pastor or an elder, an overseer in the church. It says they are to be blameless, that's the sort of generic description. And the first thing it said is a one woman man, that is to say not someone who is unfaithful to his wife. It's as if immorality leads the parade in qualifying us with regard to what it means to be sanctified. God knows that this is obviously an issue.

It was an issue, as I told you last time, in New Testament times. First Thessalonians is one of the earliest books written in the New Testament, probably written before most of the gospels was written. So you're talking about a letter to people who are at the very beginnings of Christianity. They didn't come from Christian families. Didn't have any Christians parents and grandparents. They weren't raised in a Christian environment. They weren't raised in a church. There was no such thing as a church before one was planted in Thessalonica. This is the first church. This is first generation believers. They're all young in the faith. They're all new. They all have come out of a life of paganism. They've all come out of a corrupt perverse sexually deviant culture, which we described to you a little bit on Wednesday. The Greek language, as I pointed out, has immense concern about immorality and it shows up in the vast number of words that are used to describe the various kinds of immoral behavior. That was a part of their culture. It was so bad that there was a functioning in the Greek and Roman world, a law called "The Patria Potestus(??)" and that law simply meant that the father had the right of life or death over his child. At any point with no recourse by the society, a father could kill his child. That's how base that society was. And we talked about all the other areas of sexual misconduct that were characteristic of the world in which the New Testament landed. That, to me, is, of course, one that is just beyond understanding and yet a father had the right to kill his children and most of the time kill girl babies and let boy children live. It was a very vile world. There were no Christian schools. There were no Christian institutions, Christian organizations. There was no library of Christian books. They didn't have the New Testament yet. You can imagine how excited they must have been when the early books of the New Testament began to show up and they could read exactly what God wanted them to know, inspired by the Holy Spirit. It was a very difficult world. And

they had all come out of this, it was a no-shame culture, it didn't really matter what you did, it didn't matter how you lived There wasn't any shame. You could kill your children.

So they were asked to live in a situation that was immensely difficult. They had come out of idolatry. They had come out of patterns of worship which involved sexual immorality, temple priestesses in which somehow they believed contact was made with the deity by getting involved in an orgy, a drunken orgy. It was a really base culture. I only say all that to let you know that you're not the first people who lived in tough times. I know we have a difficult time because of media blitz of these things. It wasn't just media. They weren't looking at this kind of stuff on a flat screen somewhere, this was their life. They lived it. And to come out of that and then try to direct your life toward sanctification, separation, holiness, purity...tremendous challenge. Their flesh had been pandered to and indulged all their lives until this point. And now the will of God is not ambiguous, abstain from immorality, sexual immorality, stay away from it. A very hard thing to do.

He goes on, and I'll pick up where we left off on Wednesday, to give you three principles that will help you implement this. Three things you need to know. Number one, we started with last time, verse 4, "Each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor." Every one of you needs to know how to possess...it's a word that means to gain control of, to gain the mastery over his own vessel, *skeuos*body in sanctification. The first principle is get control of your body...get control of your vessel. That is critical. You cannot just follow all the impulses. You cannot even feed them. Paul says your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit so glorify God with your body and your spirit, which are God's. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:27, "I beat my body into submission, lest in my preaching to others I myself become *akokimos*, tested and found unqualified. It really is about that old thing called self-control, harnessing your flesh. The key to self-control is to walk in the Spirit. Galatians 5, if you walk in the Spirit you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh. That's a pretty good guarantee, isn't it? If you walk in the Spirit, you will not fulfill the lust of the flesh.

Somebody says, "How do you avoid sexual sin?" You walk in the Spirit. Now that may sound a little bit mysterious to you. What does it mean to walk in the Spirit? Pretty simple, the key to walking in the Spirit is being filled with the Spirit. Ephesians 5:17 says, "Be not drunk with wine which is excess but be being kept filled with the Spirit." If I'm going to walk in the Spirit, in other words, if I'm going to go down the path the Spirit wants me to go down, then I need to be energized by the Spirit. He knows that path and if I'm energized by the Spirit, if I'm fueled by the Spirit, then He'll take me where I need to go. But what does that mean? What does it mean to be filled with the Spirit? Well, the key to being filled with the Spirit is to let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly. Ephesians 5 says, "Being kept filled with the Spirit." The parallel, Colossians 3:16 says, "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly." Those are identical realities. If you compare the two passages in Ephesians 5 and Colossians 3, I won't take time to do that, you see that those are absolutely parallel passages.

So what does it mean to walk in the Spirit? It means to be filled or fueled by the Holy Spirit. What does that mean? That means to let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly, absolutely parallel. To be fueled by the Spirit, to be energized by the Spirit is to be directed by that which the Spirit has revealed and disclosed in the Word of God. It's not just to know the Word of God, but to let it dwell, let it dominate you in all its richness. I mean, we're right back to where we always come, aren't we? We're all back to the point of letting the Word of God into our minds and our hearts as the controlling factor.

And what drives that? Well I think the thing that drives that is loving the Lord. The first and great commandment is to love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength. Because I love the Lord, because I long to love the Lord even more, I want His Word. Because I love Him, if you love Me, He says, you keep My commandments, if you love Me you love My Word, and if I really love Him, love His Word and I want His Word and when I take in His Word because I want to know His will, then the Spirit of God begins to take control of my life because my mind is controlled by what the Spirit has revealed. I mean, that's the positive side of it, taking in the Word of God. And you have to be very careful about that, you know, you can get very used to hearing the Word of God and doing nothing about it and train yourself right in to disaster. The same sun that melts the wax hardens the clay, just a different process. And the Word which will shape you into Christ's likeness can also harden you into a kind of fixed resistance to the purposes of God. Don't ever train yourself to be indifferent toward Scripture. Don't train yourself to be disobedient, that is a deadly process.

And that takes me down one other level, and I talked about this. Some of you...were some of you at the Resolve Conference we had a few months ago? I talked about the issue of the conscience. Let me take you to that point for just a moment. I don't want to belabor that, but God has given you a device and all of us have it, it's called a conscience. It's...and I suppose for the most part, most Christians have really no idea what it's about. I mean, it was sort of a general, vague idea. But if you study the New Testament and even the Old Testament on some occasions, but primarily the New Testament, and most particularly maybe 1 and 2 Timothy, you will find an awful lot is said by the...about the conscience. The conscience is a mechanism that every human being is given. Romans chapter 2 describes the conscience as that which excuses or accuses you. It is a device, it is a warning device, it is a warning system built into every human being. Now you basically have two warning systems, everybody does. The first one is called pain and the second one is called conscience. Pain is God's way of protecting you from destroying yourself. If you have pain somewhere, you have a problem physically. Most of us think of pain as a bad thing, pain is a gift from God. The best illustration I know of that is Hansen's Disease which is often called leprosy. They used to believe that people who had leprosy had some kind of disease that ate away their extremities, ate their fingers, ate their noses, their ears, their chins, ate away their toes and their feet and their legs. They found out later that leprosy doesn't eat away anything, that form of it called Hansen's Disease doesn't eat anything. What it does is destroy the nerves, you can't feel anything and you rub off all

your extremities and you rub it all the way down. You saw pictured probably sometime in your life of these horrific lepers, nothing was eating them, they just couldn't feel anything. And without the ability to feel the pressure, you literally wear off your nose, your ears, your chin, your forehead, you scratch your head and put big gouges in it without even knowing that you're doing it. It's pain that protects you.

From a spiritual standpoint, conscience does the same thing. Conscience screams to you about a violation of a moral law. Conscience is not the moral law. It is only a mechanism, it is only a warning device. It has to be informed by reality. Listen, Moslems have consciences, but the conscience of a Moslem says, "Kill the infidel." Why? Because that's the law that he has been raised to believe that informs his conscience. And if he doesn't do that, then he's violating his conscience. The conscience of a Mormon we heard about today, dictates to that Mormon that they need to be sure they keep all the ceremonies and rituals of Mormonism in order to earn their salvation. That's not how you get saved. But once the conscience is informed, it reacts as a warning device telling that person whether they are abiding by their moral ought, their moral constraint or whether they're not. It accuses or excuses.

So two things have to happen. One, you've got to listen to your conscience. Two, you have to inform your conscience correctly...correctly. A few years ago MTV did a study of the mortal sins that basically were the major sins developed in medieval history by the church, things like greed and lust and anger, and they had a whole list of them. So they interviewed a whole lot of people in the MTV generation, people like Ice T, Queen Latifa, you know, great theologians. They interviewed all these people and they said, "What do you think about this? And what do you think about that?" It was amazing. They even interviewed Michael Douglas, the actor, because he had just made a movie about greed and his basic character in the movie says greed is good, it's what drives all of businesses in the world. And they asked about immorality. And they turned morality completely on its head. As Isaiah 5 says, they substituted sweet for bitter and good for bad and right for wrong.

And you have a whole generation of people now whose conscience can't function. Their conscience cannot function as a conscience should function because it's so ill-informed. They've bought into it damning morality and all the conscience can do is react. Conscience is not the Law of God, it only reacts to whatever your law is, whatever your moral structure is your conscience will react to. So it's amazing to think of this, but it is really possible that a person is going to feel guilty if they don't engage in sin. A person is going to feel guilty if they don't do what is contrary to Scripture but is consistent with what they think is a true value system, or moral system. So the terrorists who kill people are doing what their conscience tells them to do because it's so ill informed.

It's important to do two things then. First of all, it's important to inform your conscience accurately so you don't put yourself in a position to be living under guilt for not doing evil, or living under guilt for not following heresy. Critical...but once the conscience is rightly informed, as it is by the Word of God, then you must respond to that conscience because it's a God-given warning device to keep you from disaster. When Paul was being accused of a secret-hidden life of shame by the Corinthians who had been subject to the false teachers, he wrote the letter 2 Corinthians and this is what he said in 2 Corinthians 1:12 and it's so basic, he said, "Look, my testimony is the testimony of our conscience." You can accuse me of anything you want, but the testimony of my conscience is that in holiness and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but in the grace of God we have conducted ourselves in the world and especially toward you. You can accuse me of anything you want and I will say my conscience is clear...my conscience is clear." That's the way I want to live. I don't want to live with an accusing conscience. David said in Psalm 51 and Psalm 32, he was bearing terrible guilt before he confessed his sin, he said, "My life juices are drying up." It was affecting his blood flow, it was affecting his saliva, it was affecting his nervous system. Literally he was in physical collapse over the anxiety that was ripping and tearing at him because he had hidden sin in his life. You want to keep that conscience clear, that well-informed conscience and the...you've been blessed to have a conscience that's rightly informed, you want to make sure you don't deny what it says. You don't want to train yourself to ignore it. It's good to feel guilt. It's good to feel shame. It's good to feel remorse and to feel it strongly because that's God's gift to you so you don't destroy your soul.

In 1 Timothy 1:5, the goal of our instruction, Paul says, this is what I'm after is love from a pure heart and a good conscience. I want your conscience to be noble. I want your conscience to be affirming you. That's where the battle is fought. Down in verse 19 he says, "Keep faith, keep the faith, the content of truth and a good conscience. Some have rejected that and suffered shipwreck." You want to wreck your life? Then misinform or ignore your conscience. Again in chapter 3 of 1 Timothy he says, "Hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience." Chapter 4 verse 2 he describes false teachers as being seared in their conscience, their conscience isn't functioning, it's like scar tissue, it doesn't sense anything anymore. You don't ever want to get your conscience like that. And repeatedly rejecting your conscience gets you there.

I told a story at the Resolve Conference about an aircraft of an Avianca Jet in Europe, flew straight into a mountain with 200-plus passengers, everybody dead instantaneously. And when they recovered the Black Box they wanted to hear what was said and what happened before the crash, the tape said this, the computer warning device went off as they got close to the mountain because radar was giving them reality. Reality was, you're flying right into a mountain. And the computer box said, "Pull up, pull up, pull up, pull up, pull up, which you'll hear in any airplane, any jetplane today, that device. Sometimes when you're getting ready to take off you'll hear it from the cockpit because they're testing the system, "Pull up, pull up, pull up." Inexplicably the pilot says, "Shut up, Gringo," flipped off the switch and within minutes they hit the mountain. Conscience says, "Pull up, pull up, pull up," and conscience for you as a Christian is well informed, it knows reality. And if you say, "Shut up,

Gringo," you're going to make shipwreck or plane wreck out of your life.

That's where the battle has to be won, people. And I know that because that's where I have to win the battle. As I told you last time, you can be surrounded by all kinds of people who want to hold you accountable, you win or lose that battle where no one knows. Do you know this is a challenge to think about, your conscience fights all alone...all alone...all alone. But you lose a battle in there and eventually it will show up on the outside, your sins will find you out. Keep that conscience sensitive. Respond to the first impulse of that conscience. Don't train your conscience to ignore reality. Titus 1, "To the pure all things are pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, both their mind and their conscience are defiled." That's the world. They're going down the path to hell on a grease slide because their mind, that is what they believe, their system of belief is corrupt and their conscience is also corrupt. The world misinforms and then it tells you don't feel guilty, I'm free I can do what I want, it's me...this is the new buzz now...it's me, hey, this is me, you've got to take me as I am, this is me, I'm being true to myself. What nobility. But we're not like that. Our minds are informed by the Word of God. In fact, if I can take it even deeper, you have the mind of...whom?...Christ. And your conscience is sensitive, you don't ever want to do anything to silence it. So, first of all, let's go back to our text, it is imperative that we get control from the inside out.

Just quickly, I'll give you two other points here that he makes. Two, don't act like the godless, pagans. Verse 5, "Don't operate in lustful passion like the pagans who don't know God." They don't set your standard for you. Your...you're the very opposite of that. You know, we're called to holiness, I don't know how we can get this message across to what is called evangelicalism today, you would think that all we need in life is satisfaction, fulfillment, purpose, whatever. We're called to holiness. We're absolutely called to holiness. I just don't hear that. We're not to act like the world acts, not in the lustful pathos, the excited emotion of our evil desires, *epithumia*, lustful passions. Don't act like non-Christians. We act in an opposite fashion.

I'm going to give you a third point. Verse 6, and this is really critical, "And that no man, or no one, transgress and defraud his brother in the matter." What is that? Three simple things, control your body, don't act like the godless world, three, don't take advantage of other people. Do not transgress, step over the line and defraud someone in the matter of sexual conduct.

What are you talking about defrauding? *Pleonektan(?)*, it means to selfishly, greedily gain something at another's expense, that's what fraud is. It means to take advantage of someone. And the issue here is sexual sin. Do not take advantage of another person for your own sexual fulfillment. Let me tell you something, ladies, if a guy comes along and tells you he loves you and then wants to steal your purity, that's not love, that is defrauding you, that is stepping over the line to defraud you, to take something valuable from you for his own gain. The same with girls. You go over a guy, you tell that guy you love him, you do whatever it takes to get him to some degree committed to you and then you

start to take away his purity, that is fraud, that is fraudulent love. Listen, if a guy really loves you, he is going to hold you up and do everything to sustain your purity. That's what love does, love doesn't defraud, love doesn't rob, love doesn't steal, love doesn't plunder. And I'll tell you this, people say, "Well what's wrong with having a little sex, we're going to get married anyway?" You don't have any guarantee that if he would do that without being married to you that he's not going to do that with somebody else he's not married to because he's already proven that he's willing to defraud.

I understand grace operates in this. But gratification outside God's plan is a kind of fraud. In Matthew 18 Jesus said this, "You'd be better off drowned than to cause one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble." Pretty serious, that's the most serious statement that the Lord Jesus ever said to His church, be careful how you treat My children, if you ever cause one to stumble into sin, which would include this kind of defrauding, you'd be better off if a millstone were put around your neck and you were drowned in the depth of the sea." That's pretty serious. You'd be better off dead than defrauding one of these little ones who believes in Me. He's not talking about babies, He's talking about believers.

Get your body under control by the power of the Word and the Spirit. Keep your conscience clear. Don't act like the world, act the very opposite. And do not defraud one another. Nothing vague about it, nothing ambiguous about it. That's how you abstain.

Now let me close with giving you a reason. Reason number one, verse 6, "Because the Lord is the avenger in all these things just as we told you before and solemnly warned you." That's pretty clear, isn't it? The Lord is...what?...the avenger. I don't know about you but I'd rather have His blessing than His vengeance. The Lord is the avenger. Please notice, the Lord is the avenger in all these things. It's inescapable. What that means is the Lord is the one who exacts judgment. That's the first reason.

Second reason is verse 2...or verse 7, it's a positive reason, "For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity but in sanctification." This is the effectual call to salvation, God didn't save you to be *akatharsia*, filthy. A catharsis is a cleansing, and a-catharsis is something that's filthy. He didn't call you to filthiness, that's, by the way, how it's described, how sexual sin is described by the Bible. But He called you in sanctification. So one, you do this because the Lord is the avenger. You do it because God saved you unto sanctification.

And then finally in verse 8, you obey not only because of God's vengeance and because of God's calling to sanctification, but thirdly, because of God's great gift. "Consequently he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you." I mean, that's a pretty amazing statement. He says, "How good is God to you? He gave you His Holy Spirit. He gave you His Holy Spirit." That is to say the Spirit of Christ. That is to say the Spirit of God. That is to say the Holy One Himself has taken up residence in your life. You have all that God could give, Himself. Will you join

Him to a harlot? Will you dishonor Him?

This is again very clear. You have to deal with the vengeance of God. You have to reject the purpose of God which is to call you into sanctification. And you have to disdain the gift of God, His Holy Spirit who is in you and who desires to produce in you holiness. You are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

I'll close with this. My friend Ralph Keiper(?) many years ago went to St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York City and went over to the shrine, took his friend because his friend was Catholic and his friend went too. He said, "I want to go to the shrine of St. Joseph, my patron saint." He went to St. Joseph's Shrine and he wanted to light some candles to have St. Joseph pray for somebody. And he went up and all the candles were gone and all the lights were out there and there was a sign around St. Joseph's neck and it said, "Do not worship here, shrine is out of order." And Ralph Keiper said, "My friend was very disappointed." But he said, "I walked out of there and wondered to myself if there aren't times in my life when I ought to have a sign hanging around my neck, 'Do not worship here, this shrine is out of order.'" If I am going to be the shrine or the temple of the Spirit of God, then I want to manifest the Spirit and do that in gratitude to the God who has given me His Spirit. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for a great morning. Use us this day for Your glory, we pray. And keep us pure that Christ might be honored, in His name we pray. Amen.

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