

I THESSALONIANS 4:1-8
WALK IN HOLINESS!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to I Thessalonians chapter 4 as we continue our study through Paul's letter to the church in Thessalonica. Now these first three chapters of this letter deal with; ***HOW THE CHURCH WAS BORN, HOW THE CHURCH GREW, and HOW THE CHURCH WAS ESTABLISHED!***

As we move into I Thessalonians chapters 4 and 5 Paul is going to move onto something a little different, it is where the rubber meets the road you might say. What I mean by that is that Paul is going to share ***HOW THE CHURCH IS TO WALK***, and how important that is today.

Paul does that many times in his letters. For example, in Romans Paul spends 11 chapters dealing with doctrine and then, beginning in Romans chapter 12 and to the end of the letter, Paul speaks of our Christian walk.

Paul opens up Romans 12 by saying, **“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.”** Romans 12:1-2.

We see in this section how we are to walk with God, with those in our society we live in, with those who are leaders over us, including the President of the United States, how we are to treat our neighbors, not using the liberty we have in Christ to hurt others, and-so-on!

Again, this is important because if we just have the right information and we don't apply it to our lives, it is meaningless, it is worthless!

In Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus we also see this. Paul spends 3 chapters telling us all that we have in Christ and then, in Ephesians 4:1 he tells us, "**I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called.**"

Yes, Paul showed us our identity in Christ in Ephesians chapters 1-3 and now he shows our response, how we are to live or walk in Ephesians chapters 4-6. Paul tells us that we are to walk in unity, walk in purity, walk in harmony and we are to walk in victory!

Practical lessons that we need to learn and apply to our lives. We need to **WALK** in these things! One writer put it like this. He wrote,

The Ten Commandments have a prologue that is God's statement to the Israelites (and to us): "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery" (Exodus 20:2). This is the indicative. It is a statement of fact. It is a statement of what God had done. Only the Lord God could have brought them out of Egypt and out of slavery. That was the basis of their identity. The Lord then said, "You shall have no other gods before me" (v.3). That is the imperative. It is a command. It is what God had called them to do. The indicative, the act of God, always precedes the imperative, the command of God. This is the basic gospel structure of the Bible.

One of the greatest struggles in the Christian life is a failure to understand this basic pattern regarding Biblical obedience. Since we do not understand what God has done, we are constantly struggling to obey. If we do not understand the indicative, that act of God, the cross of Jesus Christ, it is impossible for us to Joyfully obey the imperatives, the commands of God. The gospel is so powerful that God has already transformed us. We have already been changed. As God's people, we have received all spiritual blessings in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3), and we are seated with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). We have been called, regenerated, forgiven, and adopted. The Biblical ethic is that we are now called to live like that. In other words, we are called to become what we already are in Christ.

- James H. Grant Jr., 1 & 2 Thessalonians, p. 90

Now you may be thinking, "Hey, I am not in Egypt and I am certainly not a slave!" Keep in mind that Egypt is a type of the world and thus, when we came to Christ, when we repented of our sins and asked Jesus to be Lord and Savior of our lives, we were taken out of this world you might say, out of Egypt.

And as you look at the children of Israel, it only took them really one day to get out of Egypt, but it took them 40 years for Egypt to get out of them! In other words, they kept going back to the world's philosophies, ideas, gods!

And in regard to being a slave, if you continue in sin you are a slave to sin, it has you in bondage and the only way to break those chains is coming to Jesus!

You see, there is a battle going on and we have seen all that God has done for us and now, since He has done all this for us, He wants us to live accordingly or to have that walk according to the high calling by which we have been called!

Here in I Thessalonians we see that same format or outline. Paul has spent 3 chapters with doctrine, information and now he is telling us how we are to live out our faith, how we are to apply these things in our lives. It is very practical information that breaks down like this:

We are to walk . . .

In Holiness – I Thessalonians 4:1-8

In Love – I Thessalonians 4:9-10

In Honesty – I Thessalonians 4:11-12

In Hope – I Thessalonians 4:13-18

In Light – I Thessalonians 5:1-11

In Gratitude – I Thessalonians 5:12-13

In Obedience – I Thessalonians 5:14-28

People today have a hard time with this. “You are not going to tell me what I can and can’t do!” In fact, with this whole idea of holiness, which we will be looking at this morning, people don’t want to talk about **HOLINESS** but **HAPPINESS!**

“As long as I am happy, everything is good!” No, it is not, not necessarily. “Do what makes you happy,” we’re told. “You’ve got to make sure you’re happy.” “Your happiness is the most important thing!”

Now let me also say this because some would come to the conclusion that if I want to be holy then I have to be miserable! That is very wrong. What I am saying is that you can never be truly happy, fulfilled, satisfied until you dwell in holiness, you strive after the things of God!

In Psalm 37:3-4 we are told, “**Trust in the Lord, and do good; Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness. Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.**”

He will give us the desires of our heart because His desires have become our desires as we walk with Him!

In Isaiah 58:13-14 we are told, **“If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, From doing your pleasure on My holy day, And call the Sabbath a delight, The holy day of the Lord honorable, And shall honor Him, not doing your own ways, Nor finding your own pleasure, Nor speaking your own words, Then you shall delight yourself in the Lord; And I will cause you to ride on the high hills of the earth, And feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father. The mouth of the Lord has spoken.”**

The Lord is talking about their empty fasting, that He rejected it. And the chapter closes with the Lord telling them that their Sabbath had become an empty religious observance for the Jewish people of Isaiah’s day. God calls them to take a delight in the heart and in the purpose of the Sabbath - to honor Him, not doing your own thing.

Now what we see here, the rebuke here by the Lord is that many were doing their own thing on the Sabbath, enjoying themselves with other activities, satisfying their own desires instead of worshiping the Lord, as I have said. And God is saying that should not be the case. You should delight coming before Him and worshiping Him as a body of believers.

Too often self does get in the way, and we would go through all kinds of difficulties to get to a sporting event, watch a television show, go to the movies, or whatever, but when it comes to worshiping the Lord, if there is a snowflake in the sky, it is much too dangerous to go out, or too cold, or too hot, or whatever. And God is saying that we need to put Him first, make Him the priority in our life. He deserves it, for He is King of kings and Lord of lords!

The conclusion in verse 14 is that God wants us to honor him in truth, according to His Word, and not according to our man-made ideas of what worship and a relationship with Him is all about. If we do, God says that He will lift us up so high in the Spirit that it will be like being on a mountain top. The focus though is a relationship with God and not just empty rituals, which God won't accept.

You see, in obedience, in walking in holiness there are the blessings and we are happy as we serve the Lord, our joy is full, it is overflowing! To delight yourself in the Lord is the most precious treasure in the world and it opens everything else up to us.

Because the Word of God is living, because it is powerful, because it can change lives, we feel the conviction of God upon us and let's face it, we don't like it. God is cutting that hardness out of our lives and it hurts.

Thus, what the church has done is they canceled the surgery that God wants to do on your heart and replaced it with things that you want to hear, make you feel good, tickle your ears. But the problem remains and unless heart surgery is done, you are in trouble!

Now I know that some don't like what I do as I teach the Word of God. They don't like to hear of the dangers that are out there with false doctrine, with sin. They want a happy message without the conviction!

Sorry, not going to happen. You need to be warned, you need to know these things because there is a danger in what is being spoken or not spoken today! "Here he goes again!" some of you are thinking.

If you feel that way, you are wrong. Sorry about that. Maybe some of you remember the story a few years back about the family from Nebraska that went to vacation at Disney World in Florida.

They were at one of the Disney hotels and it was movie night, so Dad, mom and their two-year-old son were down by the beach of the hotel getting ready for the movie to show. The two-year-old, being a two-year-old saw the pond and was walking in the water, which was very shallow where he was playing.

One minute he was there and the next he was gone! What happened to him? An alligator came up and took him down into the water, killing him!

Where there warning signs? You bet, but all they said was, “No Swimming!” If you are from Nebraska or Wisconsin, you are not thinking of alligators in a pond, and thus they didn’t. The warning was vague, it didn’t speak of the danger that lurked in that water. Yes, if you are from Florida, you would probably be thinking alligators, they are even found in some swimming pools of people’s homes! But not from Nebraska and because of the danger that was before them not being spoken, a little boy lost his life and the parents are left with the loss! I am sure if there was a sign that said, “No Swimming – Alligators in the Pond!” they would have not let their little boy in the pond, they probably would not have even been at that beach area!

Therefore, I warn you of the dangers that are out there, the false doctrine and false teachers because you need to be aware. I am not going to say there is a book out there by an author that is not good, don’t read it! How is that going to warn you? I am going to tell you the book and the author so you are prepared, you are warned and you can take a stand against it!

The same with sin folk’s. We have watered it down so much that now we have churches that accept homosexual marriages, even their leaders are gay! We have some who see nothing wrong with mind-altering drugs, they are natural! Divorce, “Well, you know, it was not really God’s will for us to get married in the first place!”

Let me say this, if you married that person, it is now God's will for you and divorce is not an option! In fact, there are really only a few reasons that God allows for divorce and the only reason He allows it is because of the hardness of a person's heart. And adultery is one of the reasons, the other is if your spouse leaves you! But don't make their life so bad that they want to go!

And when it comes to sin, we are so good at justifying our sin. It is like God has given that person some kind of special dispensation so they can sin but for everyone else, not so much!

We have that mentality in the world, and it has been brought into the church, "Don't worry, be happy!" If you are living in sin, if you have not repented and asked Jesus to be Lord and Savior of your life, then you should worry!

Jesus said, "**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.**" Matthew 4:17.

One more thing that will bring us to the verses we will be looking at this morning. Listen to the warning and the solution. We are told,

Homes in North Texas are built on silt clay. Now if you don't know anything about silt clay, let me put it this way: It's great for growing cotton, but terrible for building houses. The stuff is like a natural sponge. It expands when wet and shrinks when dry. And in North Texas it's either all one or the other. If you aren't baking, you're flooding. This means unless you build a house with piers drilled all the way down to the bedrock, the foundation of your home is going to sink or swim. Yes, it'll usually take a few years, but eventually you'll begin seeing the sure signs of slippage: cracks in the walls, doors sticking, floors dipping, even pipes leaking. If you don't do some foundation repair, your home will slowly continue to deteriorate.

Since its inception, the church was built to be a stronghold of personal holiness. Against the shifting sands of popular opinions, the household of God is called to remain committed to moral purity. But one of the most disturbing signs of a deteriorating church is its compromise of biblical moral foundations. When this foundation begins to sag with loosening standards, crack under cultural pressures, or wash away with the flow, the moral fortitude of Christians is weakened, purity polluted, and innocence lost.

How do we do moral foundation work when the cultural ground keeps shifting? We need to return consciously and constantly to the clear, unmistakable foundation of God's Word. A great starting place for strengthening our standards of moral purity is in 4:1-8.

- Charles R. Swindoll, Living Insights New Testament Commentary 1 & 2 Thessalonians, pp. 49-50

And not only these first 8 verses here in I Thessalonians chapter 4, but the rest of the book will be dealing with our Christian walk, how we are to live out our faith. It is truly where the rubber meets the road!

With that as our background and introduction to this section, and don't be afraid with this being the introduction, let's begin reading in I Thessalonians chapter 4 beginning in verse 1 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we look at this topic of ***WALKING IN HOLINESS!***

I THESSALONIANS 4

VERSES 1-2

Paul opens up this chapter with the word, “**Finally.**” And when we read that we think of a conclusion, Paul is going to end his letter to the Thessalonians. That is not what Paul is saying. This Greek word carries with it the idea of changing the subject, and as we have seen with our introduction, that is exactly what he is doing.

Paul is moving to the application of Godly principles, how we are to walk. And this walk conveys the idea of practical Christian living!

Now I like the picture that Paul is painting here. Think about your child when they began to walk. They held onto things, looked like Frankenstein with their arms outstretched, but they were learning.

Now let me ask you this. Today, when we walk, are we thinking, “Right foot, left foot, right foot, left foot, right foot, left foot”? Of course not. Then how do we walk if we are not thinking about it? Because it is a natural response to go from point A to point B. We just do it because it is engrained in us!

Now apply this to your spiritual walk. You may have been a little shaky when you first got saved but as you grew in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ the things you do, the things you say flow from your life, you don’t have to think about it too much because it is a natural part of your life, at least it should be. I am not saying we don’t struggle, but we should be growing!

And Paul is encouraging these believers in Thessalonica to continue to grow, to continue to walk worthy of that high calling by which they have been called!

Now for some, they are satisfied where they are at in their Christian walk. If you are satisfied that just tells me you are stagnant in your walk, you are backsliding, you are not growing.

That may seem harsh, but it is true. On this side of heaven, we will or should be growing every day, moving forward, maturing in the faith. Paul is urging these believers and us to super-abound in our walk with the Lord.

And if you are confused about how to walk, Paul reminds us and them on “**how you out to walk and to please God.**” Our walk, our lives should be lived out in order to please God. Not for salvation but for our identification with Him, with Jesus!

Think of the things you have done this morning, this past week, have they pleased God? “Well I don’t know. I feel good about them!” That is not the question, it is not about how you feel. The issue is what you have done, what you have said, is it pleasing to God?

“Well, I don’t know!” I think you do but you are hiding behind ignorance and that won’t work. You see, Paul said, “**for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.**”

And that Greek word for “**commandments**” speaks of a military order from an officer to a subordinate and Paul is saying that these orders came from Jesus and not from Paul himself. So, they knew what they were to do, how they were to live, what they should say because the Word of God told them and it tells us!

Our lives need to line up with the Word of God and as we do, our lives will please the Lord. Let me show you what I mean with this illustration by Charles Stanley. We are told:

There is an island in the Bahamas called Inagua. And from that island they export salt. There is a harbor that has been dredged out and is large enough for big ships to dock and get the salt. The water is not very deep, so the ship captains have to be careful once they come inside the reef to stay inside the channels.

I was photographing in the area and noticed a very interesting phenomenon. On the mainland behind the harbor on this particular island was a large pole. About forty yards behind that one, farther inland, was another. Another was positioned in alignment in the distance. I figured this had something to do with the ships' navigation but wasn't sure how it worked. I asked a man standing nearby to explain their function. He said, "Well, those are channel markers."

I responded, "Channel markers are usually in the channel. These are on the island. So how does this work?"

He responded, "What happens is, as a ship approaches the island, the captain of the ship can see these three poles. He has to keep maneuvering his ship so that all three poles line up. And once they are aligned he knows he is in the channel and can approach the island safely."

- Charles F. Stanley

God has given to us His Word and as we line up our life with God's Word – which is what the Father, Son and Holy Spirit desire of us, we will walk in a way that is pleasing to God.

Paul likens this life like that of a prize fighter and in I Corinthians 9:24-27, where Paul tells us, **“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.”**

Since Paul likens these battles of life that we are in to a prize fighter, let me ask you this. When does a fighter get knocked down? He gets knocked down when he lets his guard down, when he is not paying attention or he thinks too highly of himself and pride brings him down!

I have seen this with these ultimate fighting matches. In this one, this guy comes out full of pride. He is doing front flips, back flips, jumping up and down like he is something. The other fighter, it is all business with him and he is not distracted by all these silly things.

And as the fight starts he is still acting like he is the best, no one can touch him, until his opponent lands a punch and this guy is out, flat on his back. Oh, he is still doing back flips, front flips but now, only in his dreams because he is out for the count!

This can happen to us as Christians as well. We can be knocked down by the enemy as we fall into sin, when we let our guard down and don't fight to win, or we think we can handle it, it is not a problem for us.

Pride will bring us down, not might. And for many, when they fall into sin they can become disqualified for service unto the Lord! Be careful and be wise!

The Lord is exhorting us and urging us to abound more and more in holiness in our walk with Him because we know what we are to do, the Word of God tells us, but then we must take what we know and apply it to our lives, we must walk accordingly and a walk that is in step with God is a walk that pleases God!

Now here is a question that most people ask, “What is God’s will for my life?” Paul tells us as we read on. The problem, as you will see, is that many won’t like what Paul is saying but again, if you want to please God then obey His will for your life!

VERSES 3-6

Remember from verse 2, this is an order from our Commander and Chief, Jesus Christ and His will for us is our **SANCTIFICATION!** What that means is to be set apart and God wants us set apart from a godless culture and their sexual immortality. We are to be set apart from sin and unto God.

Specifically, Paul speaks of sexual purity, that we are to abstain or stay completely away from any thought or behavior that goes against God’s Word in regard to sexual sin.

Now let’s start with this word, “**vessel**” because some commentators say that the word “**vessel**” speaks of a wife and thus, we are to control our wives.

Folks, with men this is impossible! Sorry, just kidding! But that is not what this is saying, not at all.

And if you just read what Paul says, it would make sense to what he is saying. He says, “**that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel . . .**” The context here speaks of our own bodies, we are to know how to control them, care for them, possess them!

To give you an idea how bad things were in Paul's day, how messed up their thinking was, listen to what the ancient writer Demosthenes said in regard to their view of sex: "We keep prostitutes for pleasure; we keep mistresses for the day to day needs of the body; we keep wives for the faithful guardianship of our homes."

So, sexual immorality was just a way of life for them, it was normal, and thus, Paul says as Christians we are not to travel down that road for we are not controlled by our lustful passions, but by the Spirit of God!

Make no mistake about it, before we were saved our body appetites controlled our actions, our lustful passions controlled us. And like a wild animal, we do whatever with whomever we want so our lustful appetites will be fulfilled. And they never are and the sexual perversion grows sicker and sicker!

I am sure you have heard people say, and even some so-called Christians say in regard to the homosexual lifestyle, "God made me this way!" No, He didn't! That was a choice on your part to go down that path.

And if that is the rationale you are using for homosexual relations, what about adultery, "God made me this way!" No, He didn't! But you can place any sin in there and blame God for it but I have news for you. When you stand before God, the One you are blaming, you will not be able to blame Him.

God is holy, He is righteous, He is just and there is ***NO DARKNESS*** in Him at ***ALL!*** So, sexual sin, all sin is a choice we make!

But we, as Christians, are a new creation in Christ and thus, we no longer are controlled by our body appetites, but by our spirit, which is in tune with the Spirit of God!

Yes, Paul did say in I Thessalonians 5:23, **“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”** God is working in us, but there is our part also, we have a responsibility to walk in the Spirit, as the Spirit leads us, to purpose in our heart not to go down that path!

The problem I see today is that we don't know how to possess this vessel, this body that God has given to us. Sexual sin within the church seems to be equal with those outside the church.

Listen to this article and you will see what I mean. We are told,

John (not his real name) was a 25-year veteran missionary. The call to serve God came early in Bible College. By his mid-twenties he and his wife Judy were living out their passion, their calling, and dream to serve God in Nicaragua. They planted churches and discipled converts. The work was demanding but rewarding.

Early in his fifth term on the mission field John developed a nurturing relationship with Gloria, a 19-year-old Nicaraguan. She was bright, mature for her age, and passionate about learning more about Jesus. Increasingly, John spent more time investing in the spiritual life of his young devotee. She spent hours in the couple's home and became a close friend to Judy. Judy, however, was growing more and more concerned about her husband spending a disproportionate amount of time calling, emailing, and talking with such a young attractive female.

Her suspicions, and eventual accusations, were quickly rebuffed with strong rebukes for her immaturity, her petty jealousy, and her lack of commitment to the ministry. When Judy found text messages on John's cell phone that indicated the extent of his physical relationship with Gloria, she had the evidence to confront his sexual sin and seek the assistance of their field director.

When confronted, John admitted to a 5-year affair. With his reputation destroyed, his missionary career finished, his wife shattered, and the field director left to pick up the pieces, the couple returned home to seek counseling and spiritual restoration. Incredibly, in the middle of all this chaos, John continued his relationship with the young woman via email. He rationalized his behavior by saying that he needed to continue his ministry to her.

[Listen to some of the things this writer had to deal with in his over 2,000 counseling sessions]

Driven by lust and sexual fantasy, a pastor and his wife engage in threesome sex with their 20-year-old nanny. The pastor rationalizes his behavior by citing the multiple wives of biblical characters.

For years a young man corrupts his mind with sexual fantasies. He eventually has sexual relations with three underage girls and goes to prison.

A father of three, married for 19 years, has a 17-year affair with his secretary, who is his wife's best friend. For years they vowed to God and to each other to end the relationship before it destroyed everyone in their lives.

A young wife leaves her husband and two children to work in a strip club.

The pastor who is caught with Internet pornography on his office computer.

The wife who feels lonely and abandoned finds comfort in the arms of another man.

We, as Christians can rationalize away our sin but it does not change the fact that it is still a sin. Did you know that it has been estimated that 86% of teenagers claim to be Christian but only one-third describe themselves as “absolutely committed” to their Christianity! I think the numbers are on the high side here, but what are the facts, what are we seeing? Listen carefully,

2,739 teenagers get pregnant every day in America. That’s one every 31 seconds!

8,219 teenagers get an STD every day in America. That’s one every 11 seconds!

There are over 25 significant STDs today!

One out of every four sexually active teenagers have an STD!

Now if 86% of American teenagers claim to be Christian, then why in the world do we have statistics like this? Again, listen carefully, one-third of teenagers feel “most adult Christians are hypocrites.”

You see, they hear us say one thing and do another. How important is God to you? You see, your actions, how you spend your time, what distracts you from God, what keeps you from church, what keeps you from serving, will tell your kids a lot about how serious your faith is and they are watching!

Also, the other dominant influences on the spiritual views of young people are their friends, the music they listen to, the things they watch, the games they play. As parents, you have control over these areas, at least you should!

Peter admonishes us in I Peter 2:11-12, **“Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul, having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by your good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.”**

You see, don't put yourself in situations that will cause you to sin. Don't have a prayer partner that is of the opposite sex unless it is your spouse, that is a dangerous thing to do.

Don't go out alone for lunch with a person of the opposite sex, that is dangerous.

Don't be at home alone with your boyfriend or girlfriend, that is a dangerous thing to do!

For me, I will not counsel a woman alone, I take my wife with me, because it is dangerous thing to do. Think about it, a woman who is struggling with her husband because he is a bozo, he never listens to her. And what do I do, I listen! And as pure, as good as the motives might have started out, it can deteriorate into sin! Be wise!

Also, our exposure to these temptations *will* lower our resistance, not *might*, it will, and it will diminish one's disdain or hate for sin and as you do your spiritual resolve will weaken, your virtue will disappear. Thus, these things, don't dwell upon them, flee them, resist them in the faith!

I think we give in far too easily to sexual sin today, we make all kinds of excuses for it but it is still a sin and if you are involved in it you need to repent before God. Yes, those passions are there, but our spirit can control them if we don't compromise, if we don't put ourselves in situation where we can fall! May we be like the ermine. Listen to the determination of this creature. We are told,

In the forests of northern Europe and Asia lives a little animal called the ermine, known for his snow-white fur in winter. He instinctively protects his white coat against anything that would soil it.

Fur hunters take advantage of this unusual trait of the ermine. They don't set a snare to catch him, but instead they find his home, which is usually a cleft in a rock or a hollow in an old tree.

They smear the entrance and interior with grime. Then the hunters set their dogs loose to find and chase the ermine. The frightened animal flees toward home but doesn't enter because of the filth.

Rather than soil his white coat, he is trapped by the dogs and captured while preserving his purity. For the ermine, purity is more precious than life.

- Our Daily Bread, April 27, 1997

That sounds so cruel, doesn't it? It is but make no mistake about it, Satan is just as cruel and we must be aware. Can we resist temptation, sin at any cost? We need to! Paul said in Hebrews 12:4, "**You have not yet resisted to bloodshed, striving against sin.**" May we know *how to possess our own vessel!*

Now some may say that today in America we are not as bad as it was in Paul's day but we surely don't have anything to boast about, we are gaining ground quickly in this area. Ever since the sexual revolution of the late 1960's and the early 1970's we have been hearing the expression "Free love!" Folks, love is never free, it always takes from us either in a good way or a bad way.

In Hebrews 13:4 Paul tells us, "**Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge.**" Within the bounds of marriage sex is good, God has given it to us to enjoy, and in that intimacy, you give a part of yourself to your spouse.

Satan, the master of perversion, the one who has come to destroy lives tries to discourage sex within marriage, why? Because they will then look for sex outside of marriage! Sex is never free and outside of marriage, it is a sin and God will judge it!

Listen to the witness of these Thessalonian believers. Paul tells us, **“so that you became examples to all in Macedonia and Achaia who believe. For from you the word of the Lord has sounded forth, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place. Your faith toward God has gone out, so that we do not need to say anything. For they themselves declare concerning us what manner of entry we had to you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come.”** I Thessalonians 1:7-10.

Yes, prior to their salvation they were controlled by the flesh, by the world and by the Devil. But now their lives were turned right side up as they are living for the Lord, as they are walking according to the high calling by which they have been called. And their lives were a witness of what God has done and is doing in them.

Folks, as Christians, we are not like animals that are controlled by our lusts, our body appetites. We are controlled by the Spirit of God who speaks to our spirit and thus, we should be able to control our bodies, not succumb to the fleshly impulses!

And whoever goes down that path, transgresses the will of God, there are consequences to their actions because they are taking advantage, taking something greedily for their own personal gain.

That is what Paul says here in verse 6, **“that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified.”** I Thessalonians 4:6.

You see, the adulterer takes advantage or defrauds his spouse and children. The fornicator defrauds his future spouse and children. I don't believe you hear this too often in the church, but as Christians we are to take charge of our bodies, of our holiness. We must also walk in holiness, purpose in our heart that we will not go down that path!

It is as Paul said in I Corinthians 6:18-20, **“Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.”**

God has His role and then we can resist the work of the Holy Spirit or submit to the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives, but it is our choice!

And the consequences for the unbeliever is an eternity in Hell apart from God. But for the believer who goes down this path and refuses to repent and return to God, there will be severe chastening and sometimes even death! God is not mocked, what He says is what He means!

VERSES 7-8

Does this mean that the Thessalonian believers were involved in sexual sin? I don't believe so, but since this lifestyle was all around them, since it was considered a normal part of their life before they were saved, it was a warning to them to flee these things, to stay away from them, to walk in holiness and not immorality! What a great warning to us as sexual sin today is thought of as a normal part of our life. We see it on television, at the movies, on billboards, magazines and even among family and friends who are involved in these things and thus, we are to ***walk in holiness*** and not to succumb to this sin!

Now here is the mentality of many today. Several years ago, ex-quarterback and ESPN commentator Joe Theismann, allegedly explaining to his soon-to-be-ex second wife why he had an affair: “God wants Joe Theismann to be happy.”

Here is the problem! I think many Christians feel the same way, “God wants me to be happy so this can’t be wrong, I’m happy!”

But if what I am doing is contrary to what the Word of God has said, then what I am doing is wrong. There are no special dispensations here! Notice what Paul said, “**For God did not call us to uncleanness but in holiness.**” I Thessalonians 4:7.

God wants us to be a holy people and I truly believe, like I have said, if we obey the Lord we will be happy and if we don’t, we will try to find that happiness here and there and it will escape our grasps because apart from the Lord, nothing will fill that void in your heart!

I can’t tell you the number of people who call and ask if I would marry them, people outside the church, and I ask these Christians if they are living together and it is very rare that they say, “No.” So I won’t marry them unless they separate until after the wedding!

Here is the thing. If you violate the will of God, if you are involved in sexual sin, you are turning your back on God. This is not a suggestion and I don’t care how you try to rationalize it, if you are involved in this you are in sin. God has called us to a higher standard to live by, don’t lower the standard so you can justify your sin.

Peter tells us, “**Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’**” I Peter 1:13-16.

Please don't lower the bar so you can include your sin. The bar is raised; God has set the standard, so walk accordingly. You see, a life of impurity is inconsistent with God's high calling for us, as Paul told us in Ephesians 4:1, and this is from The Amplified Bible, "**I THEREFORE, the prisoner for the Lord, appeal to and beg you to walk (lead a life) worthy of the [divine] calling to which you have been called [with behavior that is a credit to the summons to God's service.]**"

We tend to separate our salvation many times from our sanctification but they go hand-in-hand. Once you are saved, immediately the sanctification process begins in our lives as God is molding and shaping us, as He is purging out the garbage from our lives and that process will continue on until we go and be with Him, when we are received up into glory! And so, God's purpose in our salvation is to produce a holy people, that is the sanctification process.

Yes, we are washed clean by the blood of Christ, that is our position in Christ, as white as snow. But on a practical level, on a day-by-day level, God is still dealing with issues in our life, not for salvation, but sanctification! You see, we are saved by grace through faith, not of our own works, that is the bottom line. But we are also to allow God to make us like Him! I like what that great man of God, Jonathan Edwards said regarding holiness. He said, "Resolved, never to do anything which I would be afraid to do if it were the last hour of my life." May we not only remember that but also apply it to our lives!

Now what if you don't agree with what I have said, really what the Lord has said? Listen again to verse 8, "**Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.**" I Thessalonians 4:8.

Paul is saying to the Thessalonian believers that this is not his idea; this did not come from the church, but from the Spirit of God. Folks, the church doesn't make these commands, God does and if you reject this you are rejecting what God is telling you and that is a hard, a cold, a dangerous place to be as this story illustrates for us. We are told,

A story I heard personally from Malcolm Muggeridge (that stirred me then and still does even yet) was his account of a conversation he had with Svetlana Stalin, the daughter of Josef Stalin. She spent some time with Muggeridge in his home in England while they were working together on their BBC production on the life of her father. According to Svetlana, as Stalin lay dying, plagued with terrifying hallucinations, he suddenly sat halfway up in bed, clenched his fist toward the heavens once more, fell back upon his pillow, and was dead.

The incredible irony of his whole life is that at one time Josef Stalin had been a seminary student, preparing for the ministry. Coming of Nietzschean age, he made a decisive break from his belief in God. This dramatic and complete reversal of conviction that resulted in his hatred for all religion is why Lenin had earlier chosen Stalin and positioned him in authority – a choice Lenin too late regretted. (The name Stalin, which means “steel,” was not his real name, but was given to him by his contemporaries who fell under the steel-like determination of his will.) And as Stalin lay dying, his one last gesture was a clenched fist toward God, his heart as cold and hard as steel.

- Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God*, p. 26

Instead of resisting the work of the Holy Spirit in your life, instead of rejecting what the Holy Spirit is saying to you, listen and obey. Paul put it this way in Romans 14:17-18, and once again this is from The Amplified Bible, “**[After all] the kingdom of God is not a matter of [getting the] food and drink [one likes], but instead it is righteousness (that state which makes a person acceptable to God) and [heart] peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. He who serves Christ in this way is acceptable and pleasing to God and is approved by men.**”

If you want peace and joy in your life, if you want to please God, then be obedient to what He is saying to you. In other words, walk in holiness, be obedient to the Holy Spirit, don't grieve Him, don't resist Him, but listen and obey, that should be *our response!*

Now some of you may be thinking, “What's the big deal? I am just having a little fun here. Come on, lighten up Pastor Joe!” Let me share with you this story that will help tie this all together. We are told,

Two theological students were walking along a street in the White Chapel district of London, a section where old and used clothing is sold. “What a fitting illustration all this makes!” said one of the students as he pointed to a suit of clothes hanging on a rack by a window.

A sign on it read: “Slightly Soiled – Greatly Reduced in Price.” “That's it exactly,” he continued. “We get soiled by gazing at a vulgar picture, reading a coarse book, or allowing ourselves a little indulgence in dishonest or lustful thoughts; and so when the time comes for our character to be appraised, we are greatly reduced in value. Our purity, our strength is gone. We are just part and parcel of the general, shopworn stock of the world.”

Yes, continual slight deviations from the path of right may greatly reduce our usefulness to God and to our fellow man. In fact, these little secret sins can weaken our character so that when we face a moral crisis, we cannot stand the test. As a result, we go down in spiritual defeat because we have been careless about little sins.

- Source Unknown

You see, when you open the door to sin, it is hard to close that door. Don't go down that path! And aren't you glad that our heavenly Father warns us not to go down those paths that are dangerous, I am! And as a Christian, I would not want to be any other place.

You see, the world doesn't have the answers, but the Lord does and what joy there is as we serve Him!

As I close this section on *WALKING IN HOLINESS*, listen to what Peter tells us regarding who we are in I Peter 2:9-10, **“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.”**

Here it is, *God's calling for us, WALKING IN HOLINESS!* Won't you listen? Learn how to control your own vessel, your own body by surrendering your will to His will. And the more you train yourself, surrender to the Lord, the easier it is to walk accordingly!

And never forget this because this is God's will for your life, your *SANCTIFICATION!* Thus, remember what Paul said, **“For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.”** I Thessalonians 4:7-8.