

1 Thessalonians 3:11-4:8 — The Sanctity Of Sex

April 14, 2024

Good morning, CrossWinds! I hope you like the chairs. They haven't even been in the building for 24 hours. They were delivered yesterday. They are about as fresh as you can get.

One of our goals, when we switched from pews to chairs, was that the old pews would find a new home. Thankfully, all of them did. Some pews went north. A woman used them for her outdoor wedding then they ended up at a fairgrounds. Other pews were taken by people in the church. Some pews became Catholic and went to a Catholic Church. Other pews went south. A woman in Humboldt will use them for her outdoor wedding then they will become a permanent part of a wedding venue in that area.



The best story is the pews that went to our extension site in Minnesota. We share the building with a Hispanic congregation that owns the

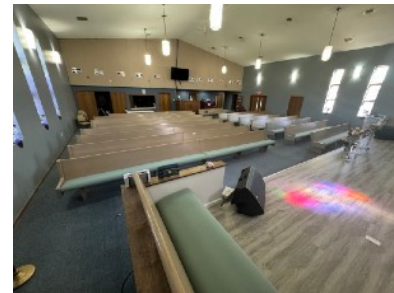
facility. They sold their old pews on Facebook and

replaced them with our old pews. They are

extremely grateful to have the pews. It is great to be a blessing!

The chairs showed up on a semi-truck yesterday at 11:00. Thanks to the army of over 30 of you, we unloaded the truck and unpacked the chairs. You set things up yesterday afternoon for this morning. You guys are amazing!

This morning, we are back to 1 Thessalonians. We have a message that will keep you on the edge of your new seat. We will be talking about sex, which is



a topic that gets people's attention. Take out your outlines. We will start at the top under the heading "Background."

Background

If you have been with us for earlier studies in 1 Thessalonians, you know the book of 1 Thessalonians is broken into two parts. In 1 Thessalonians 1, Paul greets the Thessalonians and celebrates their genuine faith. After that, we have part one of the book, chapters 2 and 3. In those chapters, Paul speaks about his love for the Thessalonians. He also spends time defending himself against the false accusations made by the Jews against him. They claimed proof that Paul didn't care about them was that he had not returned to see them. Paul explained that was not true. He desperately wanted to return, but since the government banned him from the city, he could not return.

In the second half of the letter, chapters 4 and 5, Paul moves from greeting the Thessalonians and assuring them of his love for them to getting very practical. These are the primary topics Paul wants to talk about in this letter. He covers the topics of sex, the end times, and loving one another.

Our text for this morning is 1 Thessalonians 3:12-4:8. We will finish the first half of the letter and begin the second. You will notice the sudden shift in tone as we study it. The final verses of chapter 3 are a brief transitional prayer. It is the hinge of the book. As soon as he begins chapter 4, he hits the topic of sex with both barrels. We will spend most of our time on that topic. Let's read the text before we study it.

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for

all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. 1 Thessalonians 3:11–4:8 (ESV)

The Transitional Prayer

As Paul closes the introductory section of the first half of the letter, where he assures the Thessalonians of his love for them and explains why he couldn't visit them, he gives this brief prayer before he gets into the meat and potatoes of what he wants to teach us. There are actually two prayers. They are not pointless prayers with empty words. There are carefully crafted strategic prayers. The first one looks back on the first half of the letter. The second one looks forward and anticipates the topics he will discuss in the letter's second half.

First Prayer — Looking Backward

Now may our God and Father himself, and our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you, 1 Thessalonians 3:11 (ESV)

While I am thankful for our English translations, one of the challenges of any translation is you give up a bit of meaning from the original language. That happens in all translations. That happens here. In Greek, the underlined part of this verse literally reads this way.

...clear the road for us to come to you.

That is bad English. What road is blocked? Why does God have to clear it? It introduces all types of questions, so the translators don't translate these words literally. What is important to notice that the Greek word used here is the same one used in an earlier part of the book. It is an intentional echo.

...because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. 1 Thessalonians 2:18 (ESV)

When we studied this verse, I told you the word hindered in Greek is a military term used to describe what a defeated army would do when they retreated from a pursuing army. They would put deep cuts in the road and blow up bridges to hinder the army that was following them from making progress. Paul says this is what Satan has done to him. He tried to return to Thessalonica, but Satan put cuts in the road. He hindered the gospel's progress, which is why Paul could not return.

What was Paul's prayer? He prayed that God would clear the road because Satan blocked it. God answered that prayer. Eventually, the ban that kept Paul from the city was lifted. In the book of Acts, he returned to Thessalonica on his third missionary journey.

God answered Paul's prayer but didn't answer it as fast as Paul would have liked. It was a long time. Isn't that the way it often works? Answers in prayer always seem to a long time to come. They also usually come in ways we don't expect. Yet, God is always perfect in his timing. If you are praying about something, realize God's answers to your prayers may not be as fast as you want and it probably won't come in the way you want, but God answers prayer.

Second Prayer

...and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. 1 Thessalonians 3:12–13 (ESV)

While the first little prayer looked back to the first half of the letter. The second prayer looks forward, anticipating topics he will cover in the second half of the letter.

1. *May the Lord men you increase and abound in love for one another.* In 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12, he will teach us about Christian love in the church.
2. *May he establish your hearts blameless in holiness before God the Father.* Paul is about to discuss this in 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, which is about holiness in our sex lives.
3. *At the coming of the Lord with all his saints.* Paul will have two lengthy discussions about the return of Christ. The first is in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, which tells us what happens to those who died before Christ's return. The second is 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11, which tells us what will happen to those who are alive when Jesus returns.

This transitional prayer is very strategic. It looks backward and forward.

That leads us to the book's second half and 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8, the section everyone wants to hear. Remember the context. Timothy just returned from Thessalonica. He told Paul things were well with the young church, but there were some topics Paul needed to address with the church. One of those is the topic of sex. This is no surprise. While there were some Jews in the church, there were many Gentiles in the church. All of them were only weeks only in

Christ, and they came from a background where sex was out of control in their lives.

At this point, I would typically begin by looking at sex in our culture and comparing it to sex in the ancient world. In the interest of time, and because all of us have a firm grasp of the obvious, I will not spend much time telling you how out-of-control sexuality is in modern American culture. We have premarital sex, extramarital sex, homosexual sex, lesbian sex, transvestites and transgender. It is all marketed to us and shoved down our throats through the media and woke culture. Everything we watch seems to have a sexual agenda, even Disney. For me to go through all this would be pointless. It would be like trying to sell ice to Eskimos. You just don't need it. You already have it.

What may be new to you is the depth to which our modern sex-saturated culture has penetrated the church. Even in conservative churches. At CrossWinds, the majority of Christian couples who come for premarital counseling are already living together, and they see nothing wrong with it.

Not in CrossWinds, but at a previous church I pastored, after teaching on a passage in the Bible that spoke about sexual purity and saving sex for marriage, after the service, a young man in his twenties came up to me to tell me I was wrong. He went to church his entire life, and he never heard that sex before marriage was wrong. He didn't believe it was true. I showed him passage after passage in the Bible that disagreed with his conclusion, but he still wouldn't believe it. Two years later, when he grew enough in his faith, he returned and apologized. He now understood the Bible and realized I was right, not wrong.

What rocked my world was that this young man did not just grow up in the church, but he was the son of a former elder of the church, yet he never knew this. This shows us how deeply the culture of the world penetrated that church.

Many of us think that modern American culture is one of the most sexually depraved cultures, and nothing is worse than our country. That is not true. While we are in a steep sexual decline, in the big scheme of history, when it comes to sexual depravity, we are doing better than many other modern and historic cultures. One culture that was far worse than ours when it came to sexual depravity was the first-century culture when the Bible was written. In the first century, one of the most sexually depraved places you could go was the city of Thessalonica. Remember that Thessalonica was a major stop on the Via Egnatia highway to Rome. It was also a port city for sailors. Prostitution was a huge business in Thessalonica. It was the Las Vegas of the day. Their motto was, "What happens in Thessalonica, stays in Thessalonica." Thessalonica wasn't the only sexual A-list city in the ancient world. There were others, such as Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome. If you wanted to go full-tilt in sexual sin, Rome, Corinth, Ephesus, or Thessalonica were the places you wanted to be.

Remember the young church in Thessalonica was filled with new Christians who just came to Christ out of that sex-saturated world. Before Christ, it was acceptable for them to visit prostitutes and engage in homosexual sex. In first-century culture, sex with young boys was prized and sought after. There was no shame attached to it. Some men emasculated themselves and dressed up as women. Transgender was part of the ancient world, not just our modern one.

Every form of sexual sin imaginable took place in Thessalonica, as well as some forms of sexual sin that you can't even imagine. That was the lifestyle many of the new Christians in Thessalonica left behind. Paul knows old habits die hard, especially old sexual habits, which is why he talks about this with them.

To help you better understand what sexuality was like in the ancient world, I need to teach you a little Greek. This will not be hard, but it will be helpful. The Greek language has detailed words to describe specific heterosexual sexual choices. Knowing they had words to describe these things gives us a window into what sex was like in this pre-Christian world. I will leave out specific Greek words describing homosexuality, pedophilia, and other sins. We will just look at a few heterosexual sins.

- **Porneia** — This literally means the purchasable one. It was the woman you bought, the prostitute. In the first century, prostitution was legal. It was rampant, especially in Thessalonica and other seaport cities. It was big business. It was culturally accepted and expected that men would visit the prostitutes. There was no shame in this. It was as common for men to visit prostitutes as it was to go to a baseball game.
- **Porneum** — This was the business of prostitution. A *porneum* business was run by a pimp. This is not an individual woman who bought and sold herself but a person with an entire stable of women he/she bought and sold. This was big business in Thessalonica, and those who worked in this business were rich.
- **Pallakai** — This is Greek for concubine. A concubine was a slave you purchased for sex. You purchased this woman and added her to the other

women you used this way. Their sole purpose in life was your sexual pleasure. They were literally sex slaves. This was completely legal. So you have the woman you purchased for one-time sex and the woman you purchased as a slave for sex. This was considered normal and acceptable in first-century culture. We must remember that there were no pre-Christian values influencing the culture like we have today.

- **Potneia** — This is a mistress. You didn't buy this woman. She was a friend for intellectual stimulation and sexual fulfillment. This was a woman you chose. Both men and women had friends of the opposite sex they used for this purpose outside of their marriages in the ancient world. It was considered completely normal. Marriages in the first century were typically arranged between a man in his twenties and a girl barely in her teens. Your wife was to cook, clean the house, wash your clothes, and bear your children. She was not considered your primary sexual partner since she was assigned to you, not chosen by you.
- **Moichos** — This is an adulterer or an adulteress. This is having sex with someone else's spouse. While this was the least acceptable way to express yourself sexually, it was still common practice in places like Thessalonica, where husbands were gone on business trips for months at a time.
- **Temple Prostitutes** — While it is an overstatement to say all religious temples employed prostitutes in the ancient world, most of them did. In Corinth, one temple employed 3,000 temple prostitutes that were both men and women. The

idea was that having sex with the prostitute connected you with the God of that temple.

To give you a better understanding of how rampant this was, there were around a dozen Roman emperors in a row who were either bi-sexual or homosexual. When I was researching for my doctorate, I ran across an ancient inscription that mocked the Roman emperor Nero. He was called every man's woman and every woman's man. He was an out-of-control bisexual.

Sexual sin in the ancient world was common and tolerated. Why is this important? When Paul went to Thessalonica and preached the gospel, then founded a church, the church was rescuing people from this sex-saturated culture. Christians were not to live this way. Paul knows the sexual temptations in that society were strong. The pull of those old habits and old friends was real, so even though Paul had already taught them about sexual purity when he was there, he wanted to remind them about it and encourage them to excel in it.

Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 1 Thessalonians 4:1–2 (ESV)

Paul has already taught them about sexual purity, but he wants them to keep pursuing sexual purity. He wants them to excel in purity. He doesn't want them to become content in their walk with Jesus. He wants them to continually work on improving their walk with Jesus, especially in this area of sexual purity.

This should not be a shock to us. Every athlete knows they must continue to improve their game. They never get to the point where they have learned enough, they have practiced enough, and they are good enough. As soon as

they stop improving, their game is over. It is the same with Christians. As soon as we say, we know enough, we are good enough, we love Jesus enough, we are living a life that is sexually pure enough, we are playing a losing game. We must keep improving.

In verses 3 to 8, Paul discusses sexual purity and how we can always be improving. He answers three questions.

1. What does God require of my sexuality?
2. How can I fulfill it?
3. Why should I follow it?

1. What does God require of my sexuality?

For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 1 Thessalonians 4:3 (ESV)

Paul begins by saying, “This is the will of God.” Many people tell me they want to know God’s will for their life. They are looking for God’s secret will. The name of the person they should marry or the name of the school they should choose for college. That is God’s secret will. He usually doesn’t tell us those things directly. He does tell us his revealed will. That is right here. Do you want to please God? Focus on your sanctification. That is God’s will for you!

What does the word sanctification mean? In Greek, it is the word *hagiosmos*, from which we get the word holy. It means set apart, different, and not like other people. God’s will for our lives is that we are separate and different. Jesus doesn’t want us to act like everybody else. His will is that we don’t fit in with the crowd. We are to be different.

In what way are we to be holy, set apart, and different from everybody else? We are to abstain from sexual immorality. In Greek, the word *abstain* is very strong. It means to have absolutely nothing to do with something. It means to avoid something at all costs. It means to do everything to steer clear of something being part of your life. What are we to avoid at all costs? Sexual sin. The Greek word for sexual sin is a junk drawer term that means any sexual expression or engagement outside of marriage. It covers all forms of premarital sex, extramarital sex, and pornographic sex. Everybody else is doing those things but we are to be different. We are not to express our sexuality outside of marriage but to keep our sexuality only inside of marriage.

Young people often ask the question, “How far is too far?” How far can I go with my boyfriend or girlfriend and still be ok? Can we hold hands? Can we hug? Can we kiss? Can we touch? Can we do everything besides the one final act? Is it ok to do more things once we are engaged? How far can we go?

Folks, according to this verse, that is the wrong question. The question isn't, “How far can I go?” It is how can I conduct all my relationships with someone of the opposite sex in a way that is completely holy and pure? We shouldn't be asking how far I can go. We should be asking how pure can I be?

One of the problems with starting to arouse yourself sexually in your relationship with a boyfriend or girlfriend is that it triggers all of the emotions and hormones designed to lead you to intercourse. Instead of growing to know there person better as a friend to work on your relationship, you constantly end up

sexually frustrated in your relationship as your vision narrows to only focus on someone sexually and the frustration you experience in that area.

Even if you don't physically commit adultery or premarital sex, we know God wants us to have purity in our hearts. If you are constantly lusting after someone of the opposite sex in your heart, that is also wrong. Lust in our hearts is dangerous because what we role-play in our minds eventually becomes what we will real-play in our lives.

The question Christians are to ask is not, "How far can I go?" But, "How sexually pure can I be?" I don't want to be fornicating like everybody else around me. I am to be different, holy, and pure. I don't just want to scrape by in this area, but I want to excel in purity.

If you want a standard for relationships with the opposite sex, it is found in 1 Timothy 5:2. Paul writes to Timothy, who was a young man with all the sexual desires young men have. He writes this.

...treat older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity. 1 Timothy 5:2 (ESV)

If you wouldn't do it with your sister, you don't do it with your girlfriend. Would you make out with your sister? Absolutely not! Would you let your mind sexually dream about your sister? Yuck! Absolutely not! Do you love your sister, laugh with your sister, and enjoy spending time with your sister? Of course, you do! That is how a man treats a young woman of the opposite sex..

Don't underestimate how revolutionary Paul's words were in comparison to the sexual standards of that day. Paul's words completely fly in the face of the

ancient culture, just as Christian morality and sexual purity fly in the face of modern culture.

By the way, God is not against sex. He is pro-sex. He created it. He gave you your sex drive. He gave it to you as a wonderful gift. He wants you to enjoy sex. He wants you to be a sexual blessing to your spouse and to be sexually blessed by your spouse. But God knows that sex is so powerful and so sacred that the only safe place to express the powerful gift of our sexual desires is between one man and one woman who have committed themselves to an exclusive relationship with one another through the bond of marriage for life. In marriage, sex is one of the best blessings in life. Outside of marriage, sex will lead to some of your greatest pain in life. God loves you! Everything he says about saving sex for marriage is so your sexual desires would be a blessing in your life, not a curse.

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. Hebrews 13:4 (ESV)

Sex in the marriage bed is good. Sex between a husband and wife is good. On the other hand, God promises to judge those who express their sexuality outside of marriage with another person, either premaritally, extramaritally, or pornographically.

But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Ephesians 5:3 (ESV)

When Paul writes to the church in Ephesus, which was another sex-saturated city. He said three things were not to be even named among Christians. Christians were to have absolutely no association with these things in their life.

Sexual immorality — That is the same junk drawer term that means any form of sexual expression outside of marriage.

All impurity — This means moral filth. It means lewdness. This can refer to dressing or acting to inflame the sexual passions of others. Ladies, this can refer to how you dress. Women know they can dress to be the center of attention by what they wear and how they act. It can be a woman acting to portray herself as a sexual object. Paul says that kind of lewdness and moral dirtiness should never be named among Christian women.

Covetousness — May people miss the purpose of this word in the context of this sentence. In this context, it is not speaking about covetousness in general, such as your neighbor's new boat. It is speaking about sexual covetousness. This is a man coveting a woman who is another man's wife instead of focusing on contentment with his own wife. This is a man on the Internet lusting over other women instead of focusing his energy on loving the woman God gave him as his wife. Coveting another man's wife instead of practicing contentment with your own shouldn't even be named among Christians.

The command is very clear. It is total abstinence from any sexual relationship or expression outside of marriage. While the world pursues this. As Christians, we are to be separate. We are to be different. We are to be set apart for God in this. I promise you that this is not because God wants to make you unhappy. He says this because he loves you. He says this to make your marriage and your sexual relationship with your spouse the absolute best it can be.

Nobody goes to the altar with the man or the woman they love wishing they were sexually active with other people before their wedding night. When God tells us to have absolutely nothing to do with expressing our sexuality outside of marriage, it is so our sexuality has maximum stickiness inside of marriage. God says this because he loves you and wants what is best for us.

2. How can I keep this command?

In a society where sexual immorality is rampant, acceptable, and considered normal, how do we keep this command when we are constantly overexposed to sexual sin? As Paul continues, he tells us how.

A. Learn to control your body.

...that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor,
1 Thessalonians 4:4 (ESV)

He says every Christian must learn how to control his or her own body to live a life of holiness and honor. It is nice to think that if we just had an accountability partner, the accountability partner enable us to control our bodies. It doesn't work that way. Paul says each of us must learn how to control our bodies. Nobody else can control our bodies for us. We need to learn to control ourselves. The word control in Greek carries the idea of possessing the knowledge or skill necessary to accomplish a goal. If my goal is to pursue a sexually pure life. I need to gain the knowledge and skill needed to control myself better so I can achieve my goal.

For example, let's say you are a woman who loves to read romance novels. Those novels involve fantasies that inappropriately spur your imagination in a direction it shouldn't go. Instead of focusing on your relationship with your

husband, you are imagining a relationship with a man that doesn't exist. After hearing today's sermon, you realize romance novels should be off-limits for you. That is good. You are learning to control your body to achieve your goal of sexual purity. The thing to remember is at least half of the people in this room are not struggling with romance novels. That is the men. Most men are still learning to read. They have no interest in romance novels. For men, they are more visual. They have to watch their eyes. For some guys, they look at pornography at night. For them to learn to control their body, they need to turn off the computer at work and refuse to turn it on late at night while they are home. When they are tired, they find their thoughts wandering, and having access to an Internet connection is not wise at those times. For them to control their body, they need to stay away from avenues of temptation, especially at times of loneliness, weakness, and vulnerability. I know other guys with a dumb phone instead of a smartphone because they find their phone is an area of vulnerability, and they use it to look at inappropriate material. For other guys, the smartphone provides no temptation at all. This is why Paul says each one of us must learn what it takes to control our own body. We need to study ourselves and learn what triggers sexual temptation in our lives. There may be certain people we avoid. There may be certain places we can't go. There may be technology or media decisions we need to make. That is all part of learning what it takes to gain control of the sexual desires of our body and be in control of them, not to be mastered by them.

Cindy and I are always trying to exercise and eat right. We go to the YMCA. We exercise and eat right. As part of healthy eating, I tell her, to not buy

Doritos. If they are in the house, when I start into a bag, I can't stop, especially the new sweet BBQ flavor. That one is addictive. The funny part is that Cindy is not wired that way. She is perfectly content to put three chips on her plate with a sandwich for lunch, and she doesn't want any more. I am not that way. Once I start in them, it is hard to stop eating them. That is why, to gain control in that area, we do not have Doritos in the house.

We live in a society that says if it feels good, do it. Paul says the Christian life is the opposite. In the Christian life, instead of doing what our glands tell us they want to do, we learn to control our body. We learn to discipline our body to please Jesus.

“All things are lawful for me,” but not all things are helpful. “All things are lawful for me,” but I will not be dominated by anything.” 1 Corinthians 6:12 (ESV)

There are many things in life that are legal, but they might not be helpful. There are many things in life that are legal, but they can start to control us and gain mastery over us. For example, take alcohol. There is nothing wrong with a Christian of legal age having a drink. If you drink, you have to ask yourself this question. Are these beers helpful for me? Are they helping me be a better husband and father? If not, they are not wise. While drinking a beer is legal, alcohol can gain mastery over us instead of us having mastery over it. If you find yourself having a beer every night after work, beer is likely gaining control of you, instead of you being in control of it. In that case, Paul says we need to break the cycle. As a Christian, I have to be in control of my body, my sex drive and my beer cannot be in control of me.

But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified. 1 Corinthians 9:27 (ESV)

Paul says the Christian life is one of self-discipline. When Paul says he disciplines his body, in Greek, it literally says Paul gave himself a black eye. I work hard to keep my body and its desires under control so that after preaching to others, I will not be disqualified. When it comes to sexual temptation and sexual sin, Paul works hard to discipline himself to stay away from tempting situations, tempting places, and tempting people that would lead him into sin lest he blow his ministry.

Learning to control our body is not just self-discipline and what we avoid. It is also what we choose to pursue. Are we living in step with God's Holy Spirit?

But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.... Galatians 5:16 (ESV)

If we walk by the Holy Spirit, we will not gratify the sinful desires of our flesh. How do you walk by the Spirit? Paul details some of that in Colossians 3:16.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. Colossians 3:16 (ESV)

First, we let the word of God dwell in us richly. That means we read the Bible. We study the Bible. We meditate on the Bible. We memorize important verses in the Bible. We get the Bible in our heads and our hearts.

Second, we teach and admonish one another. That means we listen to solid Bible teaching. It means we get involved in a Life Group or another kind of Bible study where we open the word of God with other people, not just on our own.

Third, we sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. This simply means we change our playlist. Instead of secular music talking about sex, drugs, and emptiness, we listen to God-honoring music that fixes our eyes on Jesus and what God has done for us through him. The music we listen to matters.

Fourth, we decide to have a thankful heart instead of a grumbling one. We focus on how thankful we are for what Jesus has done for us, not on what the evening news tells us is wrong with everything in the world.

B. Don't act like a godless pagan.

...not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; 1 Thessalonians 4:5 (ESV)

Stop trying to act like the godless pagans in society around you. Show me your friends, and I will show you your future. People who don't know Jesus in the world are living to satisfy their lusts. They are following their uncontrolled sexual desires and passions. If you spend a lot of time with people living to satisfy their lists and call them your best friends, you will start acting like they act and value what they value. Our goal is to please Jesus and live a holy life. The people of this world don't care about Jesus, and they are living to satisfy their fleshly lusts. This is why we should not act like a godless pagan and follow the godless pagans in the world. They are heading in a different direction.

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, Romans 1:24 (ESV)

The result of a life far from God is a life dominated by lust. If life is about satisfying your sexual desires, you are not heading in the same direction as a Christian.

For this reason God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. Romans 1:26–27 (ESV)

Homosexuality, lesbianism, and all of the rest are characteristic of unregenerate people who have literally been abandoned by God to their own bodily lusts. All of that comes from a life separate from God. Jesus changes that. When you are born again by Jesus, he gives us a heart that desires sexual purity, a heart that desires to be set apart and holy to God.

If we are going to break with that kind of lifestyle, we need to break from exposing ourselves to and following the pattern of godless pagans who live in it. If we don't break from them, over time, we will start acting like them.

C. Don't take advantage of other people.

...that no one transgress and wrong his brother (or sister) in this matter,... 1 Thessalonians 4:6a (ESV)

I do not like the ESV's translation of the word *transgress*. I like the older word some older translations use, which is *defraud*. Defraud means to steal something that isn't yours to take. When we are not pursuing a life of sexual purity that saves sexual expression for marriage, when we involve ourselves premaritally, extramaritally, or pornographically, we are stealing intimacies that should be reserved for our spouse alone. Don't be a thief! When we begin to get sexually involved with someone premaritally, we are stealing from them sexual intimacies that should be reserved for their spouse alone. We are stealing sexual intimacy from our own future spouse. Nobody goes to the altar in marriage

wishing they were sexually intimate with people before their spouse. They only regret they hadn't saved themselves for their spouse.

When someone begins flirting with someone of the opposite sex at work, how would your spouse feel about it? Even if nothing physical happened, you are stealing from them and giving to another person intimacies that are to be reserved for them alone. If your spouse finds you acting too friendly with someone of the opposite sex at work, they would be furious, and rightfully so. You are stealing from them by sharing a level of intimacy that should be reserved for them alone.

Let's summarize the practical steps Paul gave us on how to live a sexually pure life in a sex-saturated world. 1. Learn to control your body. Discipline yourself to avoid tempting situations, people, and places leading to sin. These are different for everyone. You need to learn what makes you vulnerable and avoid it. 2. Don't act like a godless pagan. Be careful about who you have as your friends. Friends who don't know Christ don't know how to do anything but live for their lusts. That is completely different from the Christian life. Have solid Christian friends, and be careful about how close you become and how much you follow the godless pagans around you. 3. Commit to not taking advantage of others. Know that when we begin to become sexually or romantically involved with someone outside of marriage, we are stealing intimacies that should be reserved for their future spouse or our future spouse alone. Don't be a thief.

3. Why keep this command?

A. Jesus promises to avenge sexual sin.

...because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. 1 Thessalonians 4:6b (ESV)

This is not just the Lord. This is a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not just our savior but he is also our judge. Jesus promises to carry out vengeance on those who commit sexual sin against another person.

...for it is written, "Vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord." Romans 12:19b (ESV)

How does Jesus carry out judgment against sexual sin? He can do this in several ways. He can give someone an unfulfilling marriage. He may have their marriage end in divorce. He can allow someone to contract a venereal disease. They can face trials, sickness, or even death. If they are Christians, the Bible tells us God promises to discipline those he loves and correct his children that go astray. As Christians, we want Jesus to save us, not correct us from sin.

This past week, I talked with a person at church about something that happened in our community about a year ago. It was kept out of the news because of the nature of the investigation. A group of guys in a van where traveling across the country. They abducted a local 16-year-old girl and sexually traumatized her inside the van for days. They raped her and forced her to perform sexual acts against her will. They eventually released her. The FBI was involved. They caught the men, but not before they uploaded videos of their sexual trauma to a porn site on the Internet. Later that year, the 16-year-old girl, who was so young and innocent, committed suicide. She couldn't get over the nightmares of what was done to her.

That girl was not just a young woman. She was a daddy's little girl. I am sure her father was furious about what some sick, perverted men did when they sexually assaulted his little girl.

That was not just an earthly father's little girl. That was our heavenly father's little girl. If an earthly father was furious when those men sexually stole what wasn't theirs to take, you know God the Father was also furious when they stole what wasn't theirs to take. Remember, Jesus promises to avenge sexual sin. Look what Jesus says in Mark 9.

["Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him if a great millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea."](#) Mark 9:42 (ESV)

Jesus forgives us when we confess our sins to him because he died for sin, but for those who do not have Jesus as their savior, he will be their judge, and he judges sexual sin harshly when anyone sexually steals what is not theirs to take. Paul says, as Christians, we do not want any part of that.

B. God the Father saved us for purity.

[For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.](#) 1 Thessalonians 4:7 (ESV)

God saved us to live a holy life, not an impure one. We aren't forgiven of our sin so we can continue in sin. We are forgiven and given a new heart to break free from sin. Will we do this perfectly? Of course not. While we will never achieve perfection, there should be a decisive change in our lives as Christians. God's purpose is to make you holy, sinless, and pure, not to follow the sins of a sexually depraved society.

C. The Holy Spirit empowers us for purity.

Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. 1 Thessalonians 4:8 (ESV)

Paul says, if you disregard this, it is not me you are disregarding. You aren't rejecting your pastor. You are rejecting God. He gave you the Holy Spirit to make you pure. As we looked at earlier, walk by the Holy Spirit, and we will not gratify the desire of the flesh. God gave you His Holy Spirit to give you a new heart, mind, and life.

Conclusion

We live in a sex-saturated world that is pressuring us to follow our sexual urges and every sexual desire dangled in front of our faces. As Christians, God has not called us to live that way. We are to abstain from every form of sexual immorality. We are to not express ourselves outside of marriage in any sexual way. That is premarital sex, extramarital sex, and all the lusts of the flesh. We are to excel in pursuing absolute sexual purity.

How do we do this? 1. We learn to control our body. We don't put ourselves in places or with people that lean into our weaknesses. 2. We don't act like godless pagans, and we keep a guard on the depth of our friendship with those who don't know Christ. 3. We refuse to take sexual advantage of others. Any other person we are with, other than our spouse, either literally or virtually, is someone else's spouse and we are stealing from them intimacies to be saved for their spouse.

Why must we listen to this? 1. Jesus promises to avenge sexual sin. Engaging in sexuality outside of marriage damages someone else. 2. God the Father saved us for purity. 3. God the Holy Spirit empowers us for purity.

I gave you a lot to chew on this morning, which should create some interesting discussion in your Life groups.



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