

A Walk Pleasing to God

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8
Preached on: Sunday, February 21, 2016

It is my great honor and joy to be able to minister the word of God to you again this morning and we are in 1 Thessalonians 4. I would invite you to turn there with me. 1 Thessalonians 4 as we continue to look at this great epistle verse by verse, and I have entitled my discourse to you, "A Walk Pleasing to God," and I hope it is your great priority as you come here this morning to not only glorify God for all that he has done for you, but also to have a willingness to humble yourself before the word of God, to examine your heart before the word of God, so that you can understand what he desires to do in you. This was certainly the Apostle Paul's passion for these ancient believers. These were new, shall we say, baby Christians in Thessalonica and we find as we come to chapter 4, that the Apostle Paul is transitioning from declaration to exhortation; from matters pertaining to the past and the present in the first three chapters, to now focusing on issues pertaining to the present and the future in these last two chapters. And his great concern for them as is my great concern for you and for myself, is the simple issue of pleasing God; the matter of sanctification, especially in the realm of sexual purity.

Now, typically these are issues that are a matter of the heart. Most of what happens with respect to sexual immorality is done in private. It is secret, secret sins of the heart, and then eventually they manifest themselves. This was Paul's great concern for these people. It's a great concern for every pastor and every church. Sexual sin is a form of idolatry. It assumes that somehow you can find real life and joy and satisfaction in life through sexual immorality rather than finding that solely in Christ, and as a result we have young women that want to be sexy, thinking that somehow there's life in being sexy. And there are young men that live in a fantasy world of pornography. And, of course, we live in a world where men in particular use women for their own gratification. We live in a culture that is absolutely saturated with sexual immorality and unfortunately when Christians live out that type of wickedness, Christ is dishonored and lives are ruined.

I have divided this into three basic sections with a couple of subheadings. We are going to see that Paul begins with an introductory call to obedience in verses 1 and 2, and then he will move from there to give three instructions regarding sexual fidelity: that we must master our body; live counter culturally; and live with integrity. Then he will give three reasons for sexual fidelity: because of God's chastening love; because of God's purpose for our life; and because of the Spirit's indwelling work in our life. Now, this text is going to speak very practically and, frankly, even explicitly to each one of us. Some of these things are going to be hard to hear and it's typically because we are hard of hearing when it comes to matters of our own heart and of our flesh. So let's look at what he says here in 1 Thessalonians 4, beginning in verse 1 through verse 8.

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1 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. 2 For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. 7 For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. 8 So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

Now, may I offer some foundations theologically to what we are about to examine? As we look at the word of God, we see that there are three distinguishable phases of what we call sanctification and each member of the Triune Godhead is involved in these three stages in unique ways. There is, first of all, what we would call positional sanctification which occurs at the moment of salvation. This is when a man is set apart from sin and set aside unto God when he receives Christ as Savior and Lord. In other words, at that moment of our rebirth, we are positioned in Christ therefore God views us as holy because of our position in Christ. For example, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:11 that believers have been washed. He goes on to say we have been sanctified and justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. But secondly, there is what we would call progressive sanctification where the indwelling Holy Spirit gradually conforms our character into the likeness of Christ. Even though the believer has been declared righteous because of his position in Christ, he lives his earthly life in a fallen earthly body which still tends toward sin but the indwelling Spirit empowers every believer to gain control over the flesh, to choose to live righteously, to choose a holy life, but even in the midst of all that we are still tempted by our flesh to sin and we do so quite often. Then finally, thirdly, there is what we would call perfected sanctification which we will experience at the consummation of the process of sanctification when we enter into the presence of God and we are once and for all set apart from all sin and wickedness and so forth.

Now, Paul is dealing with the second aspect of sanctification in this passage: progressive sanctification. Beloved, I want you to bear in mind if you know Christ, the Spirit of God dwells within you and it is his great ministry and purpose to conform us into the image of Christ. He wants to be our helper and he is our helper, to transform us into the likeness of Christ. And according to Scripture, we know that by his power we are being transformed

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into the same image from one degree to another of glory, one degree of glory to another just as from the Lord, the Spirit, Paul tells us. In fact, Jesus said in John 15:26 that he, referring to the helper, the Holy Spirit, "will bear witness of Me." And here's the reason why, he goes on to say, "and you will bear witness also." So he's going to bear witness of me and he is going to dwell within you so that you can bear witness of me.

Now, in 1 Thessalonians, Paul is exhorting the believers to continue growing in holiness, to continue walking or living in a way that pleases God which in turn brings that soul satisfying joy that only he can give, but sadly because of the deceptions of the world and because of our flesh, we tend to try to find in other places and ultimately all that is idolatry that brings misery to our life. Now, by nature we all know that we are very committed to our own happiness. I don't think any of you would argue that. Even as believers, we have a natural bent towards pleasing ourselves. If I can put it this way: we wake up in the morning and without even realizing it, we're thinking to ourselves, "What is going to make me happy today?" We're not necessarily consumed with what is going to be pleasing to God. That's just our nature. If you don't believe it, go into our nursery and you'll see that "what pleases me" lived out. And sometimes you look at our lives and we're not much different than the little ones that we laugh at at times. So the priorities of our lives typically revolves around who we are and what's going to bring us satisfaction.

Now, unbelievers biblically are slaves to their lusts; they are slaves to their flesh. But believers have been freed from the slavery of sin. It is no longer our master unless we choose, as we do at times even perhaps unwittingly, to yield ourselves once again to the desires of our flesh. I want to talk about the desires of our flesh for a moment as a bit of an introduction to what Paul is telling the saints at Thessalonica, and by extension to each of us. In Galatians 5:16, Paul exhorts the believers "to walk by the Spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." In other words, "I want you to habitually surrender to the truth and will of God that the indwelling Spirit of God illumines for you, helps you to understand, and apply to your life; that he empowers you to obey, and when this happens, you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." He says, "For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please." So he's talking about this great battle that goes on in the heart of every believer. In Romans 13:14, he speaks of this as well and he says, "But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts." In other words, starve your flesh. Thankfully, through the power of the Spirit who is the source of all holy living, we can gain victory over the flesh that is constantly asserting its way and its will over us. And how do you do that? Well, we are commanded to walk by the Spirit. In other words, choose to submit to the Spirit's convicting work. The Holy Spirit is the source of our power to do so but we are also commanded to exercise our will and commit ourselves to obedience and if you don't, Paul

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warns that what will characterize your life is that you will be carrying out the desire of the flesh. In other words, your life will be under the controlling influence of your sinful passions; the remnants of your unredeemed humanness that renders us morally and spiritually weak.

He goes on to give an example of this in Galatians 5:19, "Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery," which, by the way, in the original also speaks of drug abuse, "enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God." In other words, if this is the characterization of a person's life, they are unregenerate, they don't know Christ regardless of what profession they may have made. But if we walk by the Spirit, he goes on to describe the fruits of Christ's likeness, something that looks very different. Remember he says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control." You walk by the Spirit and that's where you'll find real-life. The flesh says, "No, I can find life over here." It's not there and eventually you'll learn that, many times the hard way.

So this is his passion and very often we see the opposite of the fruits of the Spirit even in Christian people, even in the church. We see it in marriages at times, in families. I deal with this, frankly, on a daily basis. Instead of love, we see angry intolerance. Instead of kindness, we can see turmoil of mind and spirit. Instead of patience, we see selfishness. Instead of kindness, we see rudeness. Instead of goodness, we see indifference. Instead of faithfulness, we'll see things like betrayal. Instead of gentleness, we'll see vengeance. Instead of self-control, we will see just unrestrained, unbridled lust and self-will. So this was Paul's concern for the saints at Thessalonica and for each of us.

Now, although he praised them for numerous things, remember in the first three chapters, numerous things that they were doing that really gave evidence of their election as he said, he wanted them to, and I love this, excel still more. A great phrase to keep in mind, excel still more. When I was with my dad and some others watching the Kentucky basketball team practice, we had gotten to know the coach there and he takes us down to the private place and watching them practice, it was really interesting to see how all of a sudden he would stop everything and he would say, "You know, you're really doing good with this thing or that thing or whatever, but you can do better, and here's how you do it." And he'd give them a pat and he wants them to excel still more. That's what Paul is saying, okay? That's what we need to hear. Never be satisfied, dear friends, with your spirituality. Always be suspect of it. Never come to a place where you think, "Oh, now I have arrived," but constantly strive to live lives that are pleasing to God rather than just

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living for yourself, and this is my challenge to you today as we look at this text. You want to ask yourself: am I truly living a life that is pleasing to God or do I just live for myself?

So he begins with an introductory call to obedience in the first two verses. Now, bear in mind he is basing all of this on a report that he has received from young pastor, Timothy. Verse 1, "Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more." Notice he's speaking to the brethren here. We request, this speaks of a humble, loving, gentle suggestion from a fellow brother and he says, "We exhort you." The terms mean, "We are coming alongside you. We want to encourage you. We're not trying to beat you up. We're not trying to be overbearing or demanding but we are encouraging you in the Lord Jesus, in the Master." In other words, on his behalf. He's saying, "This is urgent." Then he's also telling them, "I'm not telling you anything new." He says, "that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk)." I'm not telling you anything new as to how to nurture your new nature so that you will live a life that is pleasing to God.

Now, it's interesting he uses the metaphor here of walking. You've got to do something to please God. This speaks of a decisive commitment to choose to obey God, to know his word, to know his will, which results in knowing him and the more you know Christ, the more you will love him and the more you love him, the more you will want to be with him and serve him, and the more you will live for his glory in a joy, the staggering benefits of being in relationship with the living God. So when you do this, he's saying that you're going to gladly and steadily move down this path of sanctification, constantly striving for spiritual excellence.

Now, this was at the heart of what Paul is saying now basically for the rest of 1 Thessalonians. In fact, at the end of 1 Thessalonians in chapter 5, verse 19, he says this to them, "Do not quench the Spirit." The idea there is: do not douse the fire of the Spirit's work within you as he endeavors to conform you into the image of Christ. Don't do that by disobedience and indifference but rather or he goes on to say, "and do not despise prophetic utterances." In other words, the preaching of the word. Some of you will sit here week in and week out and hear the same things and never change anything. He's saying don't do that. You'll douse the fire of the Spirit in your life. But he says, "examine everything carefully, hold fast to that which is good, abstain from every form of evil," and then he says, "now may the God of peace himself sanctify you entirely."

Now, according to verse 1, Paul had given them instructions pertaining to their sanctification in the past. He had already given them, shall we say, the fundamentals of

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the faith. If I could summarize some of the things that he said, he has told them that you've got to be saved; you've got to be sanctified; you've got to submit, serve and suffer. I mean, these are the things that validate genuine saving faith. And to give you an example more specifically, he has already told them that that they need to confess their sins regularly; that they need to walk by the Spirit, not by the flesh; that they need to maintain a habit of prayer; that they need to pursue humility. He has given them all the one anotherings: we need to forgive one another, admonish one another, pray for one another, prefer one another in love, pursue the things that make for peace in the building up of one another and so forth. He has told them that they need to be obedient to the word and to the will of God, to be willing to suffer for his name. He has told them things like you need to be zealous for evangelism. You need to celebrate the Lord's table. You need to be good stewards of your time and your talents and your treasure. You need to honor God in your marriage. You need to use your spiritual gifts for the glory of Christ. Those types of things, alright? I've already told you these things. These things will help you walk and please God, but I want you to excel still more. Then in verse 2, "For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord," the Lord, the Master. So obedience isn't an option here.

Now, unfortunately I often encounter professing Christians whose lives are an absolute disaster. People in the church at times whose marriages and families are just a perpetual train wreck in slow motion. It's like there are relational corpses for miles when you look at the history of their life. And many times I will ask them, "You know, let's pause for a second. What is it that you believe God would have you do right now in your life that would be pleasing to him?" It's so fascinating to realize that many times they're just not sure and I will ask them, "What do you think God's will is for your life? God's will for your life right now even in the midst of all of your misery?" And many times they just don't really know and that's when you have to gently come alongside somebody and say, "Dear brother, dear sister, do you not know that God has revealed the vast majority of his will for your life right here in the word? Do you not realize that? So let's find those areas where you're obedient and those areas where you're disobedient and let's deal with those things and where you're obedient, let's excel still more, alright?" And that's basically what's going on here.

We want to bear in mind just as a footnote that the Gospel of Jesus Christ encompasses far more than telling us what we need to believe to be saved. It also tells us how we are to conduct our lives so that what we do is pleasing to God. Now, bear in mind we don't obey to earn our salvation, we obey to enjoy our salvation. And we don't live to please God, he's already pleased with us. He is already pleased with us because we have been hidden in his beloved Son, but we strive to please God because we love him, because we have a zeal for his glory, because we want to see men and woman come to a saving knowledge

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of Christ, and because we are learning by the power of the Spirit and by his illuminating work that there is no life anywhere else apart from Christ.

Let me give you an example of this. Because of my undying love for my children, over the years I have expected them to obey me. Of course, my kids are grown now but I have grandbabies and they know when they are at Poppa's house they have to obey Poppa and Nana. I expect that. We expect that. We've tried to raise them in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. Obedience was always met with celebration. Obedience was met with blessing. Disobedience was always met with discipline and the forfeiture of blessing. Now, as a father, there is absolutely nothing that my children could do to ever make me stop loving them, but there are some things that they could do that would hurt our fellowship; that would grieve my heart; that would cause me to weep over them and even withhold blessing from them. And I would not do that because I did not love them but because I loved them so much. I hope you see the analogy here with our heavenly Father. So this is why the Spirit of God has inspired his apostle to tell the dear folks to live lives that are pleasing to him. This is why he directs our lives into holiness and enables us to walk by the Spirit. By the way, aren't the fruits of the Spirit delicious when you get around people that have them on their mind? I like to think of it that way. They're just delicious. By the same token, you get around somebody that the fruits aren't there and they are just toxic. They kind of leave a bad taste in your mouth.

So Paul is exhorting them to excel still more. The term "excel" means "to perform exceptionally well." Don't be complacent. Continue on. Now, apparently the Thessalonian believers really needed this clarification and encouragement so he deals with what must have been one of the most difficult areas that was confronting that body, the issue of sexual fidelity. Now, young people, many times you are going to be asking the question, "I wonder what God's will is for my life?" Well, as I said earlier, he has it all through Scripture but here's a biggie, alright, so listen up. This is very important, verse 3, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is," and he's going to give an example here, a very important one, "that you abstain from sexual immorality." Now, bear in mind that this is one narrow segment of God's sanctifying will for believers. This is not an all-encompassing list. This happens to be illustrative; it is not exhaustive. And so he's giving an example here of sanctification that was very relevant to the issues at hand in that church. Then he goes on to say in verse 4, "that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter."

Now, you've got to understand the context here. These people lived in a culture that was exceedingly more immoral, if you can believe it, than what we live in. I might also add that this is where we are heading. We are in a moral freefall right now. But they lived in a

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culture where they did things so vile that, in many ways, you don't even want to talk about it, but these things were considered normal, acceptable, enjoyable. It was common, for example, for the citizens of Hellenistic cities to enjoy the casual use of prostitutes. It was like a sport. Sexual activity was a favorite sport. In fact, sexual orgies were very normal, very, very commonplace. Pornographic images were painted all over the walls of the homes. In fact, some of the ruins that you can find today still have those types of pictures and scenes on the walls. Many of the cults that the people belonged to practiced ritual sexual intercourse. Imagine going to church for that purpose. This is the culture they lived in. Sexual activities outside the bounds of marriage were expected. It was common for men to have mistresses and it was perfectly acceptable for a man to use his slaves, both men and women, for his own sexual gratification. In that culture, no one batted an eye at the things that God says are an abomination to him like homosexuality, including pedophilia. That was rampant. Transvestism was rampant where men would dress up like women. And there was just no shame and guilt. Their consciences were completely seared because of their sin.

Now, imagine if you had been in that kind of a culture and all of a sudden you come to Christ and you have to abandon all that and you hear these words, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification." In other words, this is what needs to be a part of your life that is pleasing to God, to be separated from sin and set apart unto God for holiness, that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality. "Abstain" in the original language literally meant "to keep your distance from." Don't get near it or as we would say to our kids, don't even think about it. Okay? That's the idea. I want you to abstain from sexual immorality. Refrain from any thought, refrain from any action that violates God's standard for sexual activity. This is God's will. He has spoken. And "sexual immorality" translates the Greek term "porneia"; we get our word "pornography" from that. And it speaks of any kind of illicit forbidden sexual activity. The term was often used in Judeo-Christian literature to refer to premarital or extramarital intercourse, prostitution, incest and all the other kinds of sexual impropriety.

So with this introduction, he's going to give them three instructions regarding sexual fidelity beginning in verse 3, and the first one I have labeled very simply: master your body. He says, "For this is the will of God," verse 3, "your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality," here's the first one, "that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor." Notice he uses the word "know, that each of you know." In the original language, that is a term that speaks of developing great knowledge and wisdom and skill to be able to do something important. And what is that? To possess his own vessel. "Possess" means "to gain mastery over it; to gain control over your own vessel." Here I believe it's referring to our body; our unredeemed humanness that seeks to rule us according to our physical appetites and our impulses and our

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emotions consistent with what the culture does; those things that try to gain mastery over us. He's basically saying, "You need to know how to master your sex drives. This is God's will for you and you need to do this in sanctification and honor," he says. In other words, your sexual thoughts because that's really where it begins, in the thought life, in the imagination, in the heart. Your sexual thoughts and practices need to be characterized by holiness which is the fruit of sanctification. That's what he's saying.

Now, you want to ask yourself: am I ruled by my sexual impulses or do I rule them? Who is the master, you or your body? Do you know your weaknesses? Do you know those things you need to run away from? How do you think and act and look immoral? Do you know the kinds of sexual temptations that seek to destroy you? Do you pray as Jesus asked you to pray, "Lead me not into temptation but deliver me from evil"? Is that a part of your prayer life? In Romans 8:13, Paul says, "if you are living by the Spirit you are putting to death the deeds of the body." Friends, please hear this: you cannot domesticate sin, you've got to kill it. You have to starve it out and this is an ongoing lifelong process whereby the Holy Spirit illumines our minds so that we can understand the word of God and empowers our will so that we can obey the word of God and then as we do that, we begin to enjoy the presence of God and live for his glory and gradually as we become more like Christ, that's where we find life and the wickedness becomes exceedingly more repulsive to us.

If I can speak very practically, some of you men need to cancel your internet subscription. You need to get rid of your televisions because you are simply too morally weak and spiritually immature to master your sexual appetites. You don't know how to possess your own vessel in sanctification and honor. In fact, a man who professes Christ but is addicted to pornography and is constantly on the prowl for sexual gratification is not only what we might call a lowlife, he really has no basis to claim that he truly knows Christ. This isn't how Christians live. If you're genuinely born again, however, you will be convicted over this, maybe even today, and you will repent of this wickedness, this pornographic obsession that so many men deal with, and you will abstain from sexual immorality. You're going to keep your distance from it. You're going to starve your flesh and it will die.

In 1 Corinthians, let me give you an example of what Paul said because he was dealing with the same types of things even in his life and in the lives of the saints in Corinth. In 1 Corinthians 9, Paul uses the analogies of a runner and of a boxer to illustrate the importance of disciplined training that produces self-control which is a virtue that, frankly, is so delusive for so many Christians. And in that passage beginning in verse 24, he says, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize?" So he says this, "Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in

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the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I," catch this, "discipline my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified." Paul uses in that passage the term "discipline," which in the original language means "to strike under the eye or to give a black eye." So what Paul is saying here is, "This is very important. This is how you discipline." In other words, the usage of that term "discipline" emphasizes the intensity with which he battled the fleshly impulses of his own body. So understand it this way: by combining the metaphors of running and boxing, he's basically saying, "I am committed to winning the race of personal godliness and winning others for the glory of Christ. I'm committed to this. There is no greater priority in my life. And in order to do this, I know I've got to exercise self-control in every area of my life. So I cannot waste my time beating the air like a shadow boxer, but rather I must aggressively land blows upon my own body and force it to be in subjection to my mind lest I be disqualified by sin, especially moral failure." And how many times do we see that happening in the church? This is the kind of training and discipline required for godliness. And beloved, I challenge you to look at this closely in your own life. God has commanded us to strive to abstain from sexual immorality and to honor our bodies which belong to him. We are a temple of the Holy Spirit, right?

Now, bear in mind that you don't do this by sheer willpower. Alright, we've already kind of gone over that but may I remind you again you do this by walking by the Spirit. You do this by being filled with the Spirit. And the key to being filled with the Spirit is for the word of God to dwell within you richly, Colossians 3:16. There are so many passages that speak about this. In other words, if you want to gain mastery over this, here's what you've got to do: you've got to humble your heart, ask the Spirit of God to help you know the word, apply the word, and live the word, and he will answer that and as you discipline your life because your heart and your mind is saturated with the word of God, because of that, you will begin to automatically bear the fruits of the Spirit, one of which is self-control.

So he begins and he says, "You need to master your body." Secondly, you need to live counter culturally. Notice what he says, again, where he says know how to master your body in sanctification and honor, verse 5, "not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God." Lustful passion, fascinating in the original language. We could translate it this way: it means unbridled libido. It means uncontrollable desires for immoral sexual activities. Now, bear in mind Paul is not saying, we don't see this anywhere in Scripture, he's not saying that sexual desire itself is evil. God is not commanding us to destroy sexual desire, he wants it to be sanctified, set apart unto him to be used appropriately in

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the context of marriage. He wants us to get it under control otherwise you end up living like, he says, "the Gentiles who do not know God."

So what is Paul saying practically? Simply this, "Folks in Thessalonica, folks at Calvary Bible Church, do not mimic worldly people that do not know God; that are spiritually dead; that hate Christ and all who belong to him; who are slaves of their," as he says, "lustful passions." Don't mimic those people. This is not God's will for you. He's not going to bless that kind of behavior. Galatians 5:24, Paul says for "those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires."

May I get very practical here? I cringe when I see young women who claim to love the Lord Jesus Christ wearing the popular Victoria's Secret logo "Love Pink." Really? Is that what you love? Clothing designed to seduce men? I mean, seriously, do you really want to be identified with that element of our culture that flaunts immodesty and promotes sexual morality? "Oh, come on, pastor. It's just a label." No, Oshkosh is a label. "Oh, come on, pastor. It's just a fashion." Yeah, it's a fashion statement and many times it's written across a young woman's rear end. Now, come on, how naïve are you? It's so sad. And think who comes up with these fashions, people who are absolutely controlled by their lusts. As Paul says, they have unbridled libidos and they do not know God so you end up making a fashion statement that basically says, "Look at me, I'm sexy. I'm part of the sexy crowd. This is where I find life," and by implication you're saying, "I don't find life in Christ." And sadly you continue down that road and you will find out the tragic end thereof. I remember a number of years ago trying to be very careful but forthright in telling some of our parents with some of their young woman, I remember going into some rooms in several different homes and I see these pictures of Hannah Montana everywhere and I remember saying from this pulpit and it offended some people that all that is is a Britney Spears starter set and if you look at what has happened, you see that that is the truth because, friends, that's what happens with people that don't know God, that don't live to please him but live just simply to please their lusts, to satisfy their sexual cravings.

I remember the first time I went to train pastors in Russia. A dear pastor said to me, "Pastor, we're embarrassed to take you to a lot of the places we go because almost every other store is a lingerie shop." They are very pornographic. They're just everywhere. In fact, many of the women dressed that way in public and it's no wonder that Russia has the highest rate of abortions in all of the world. The average Russian woman has had six abortions. The pastors, by the way, there told me that they think it's 11. You know, it's common in our immoral society. People think this way, "Well, come on, everybody does it. Everybody thinks that. Everybody wears that. Everybody goes there. Everybody believes that's okay." And even Christian young people say that. Well, of course,

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A Walk Pleasing to God

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8
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everybody does this because everybody is ruled by their lustful passions. They crave illegitimate sexual pleasure and they don't know God, but you, dear young people, you people at Calvary Bible Church, you belong to Christ. You have been purchased by his precious blood. Your body is the very temple of the Holy Spirit so you are called to be holy as he is holy. You are called to not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. You are to be salt and light. Your life should not conform to the culture, it should confront it for the glory of God and the salvation of men because, once again, please hear this: nothing else will bring real lasting satisfying joy in life.

This was Paul's message. He says, "For this is the will of God, abstain from immorality. Know how to possess your own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God." In other words live counter culturally. Then thirdly, he tells them to live with integrity. Notice verse 6, he says, "that no man transgress," that is sin against or take advantage of, "and defraud his brother in the matter," referring to the matter of sexual relationships. Defraud speaks of obtaining something illegally from someone through deception; to cheat someone; to violate someone's trust. And in this context, what he's saying is a person that claims to know Christ and wants to live a life that is honoring to him and pleasing to him, wants to live a sanctified life, must never derive sexual pleasure from another believer who is not your spouse. That is exploiting that person. It's violating the trust of that person's spouse and so forth. Now, evidently, this was going on in the church. I mean, you think about it, these believers were used to being sexually involved with all kinds of people in their community. A lot of them had come to know Christ and now they're in the church and so he's basically saying, "Look, folks, the rules have changed here. This is what God would have you do. Don't live like the world. Never use other people for your own sexual gratification."

Then he gives three reasons for sexual fidelity, the reasons why we should abstain from sexual immorality and the first one, I would just say it's because of God's chastening love. Notice the end of verse 6, "because the Lord is the avenger," in other words, the one who punishes, "in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you." In other words he's saying, "Folks, this is serious. God judges sin. He even discipline's believers." In fact, pertaining to the matter of sexual sin, the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 13:4, "the marriage bed is to be undefiled for fornicators and adulterers God will judge." And my, have I seen how God disciplines even believers when they ignore these truths: unwanted pregnancies, even the murder of unborn children in abortion, orphaned children, sexually transmitted diseases. Do you know how hard it is to sit down with a 20-year-old person that just got back from the doctor that's been messing around on spring break and they have found out that they've got a disease that is incurable? That's heartbreaking, folks. You know, anything that smacks of a soap opera absolutely

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sickens me because I have had to deal with this most all of my life in counseling. Sin grieves and quenches the Holy Spirit's work in a person's life. Divine blessing is withheld. There is public shame. Financial ruin. Devastated ministries. And often you see people afflicted with an unusually high number of trials and difficulties in their life and the sexual dysfunction that comes out of all of that chaos and the sexual abuse, and then the children repeat the sins of their fathers. I've seen it lead to untimely deaths even in believers, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 10:8, and certainly there is the forfeiture of divine reward, eternal reward. Beloved, God disciplines those that he loves. He says in Hebrews 12:10, he disciplines us for our good that we may share his holiness. So indeed the Lord is the avenger in all these things.

You know, if this is the pattern of your life, this kind of sexual immorality, there is every indication that you've never been born again regardless of what you say. Paul speaks of this in 1 Corinthians 6:9, "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God." But then he says this, "Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified," you were set apart, "you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."

So we are to abstain from sexual immorality not only because of God's chastening love but, secondly, because of God's purpose for our life. Notice verse 7, "God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification." God has called you and me to be holy, to be set apart from sin unto him. Not for the purpose of impurity. And when we walk in a manner that is worthy of our calling, God is glorified and we are just blessed beyond measure. If you truly belong to Christ, God's purpose in your life is to change you into the likeness of Christ and bless you accordingly.

Then finally we abstain because of the Spirit's indwelling work in our life. Verse 8, "So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you." Folks, real practically here's what he's saying: you've heard your pastor speaking to you, you've heard him explain what the Spirit of God has said to his inspired apostle and through the apostle through his servant, your pastor. He's saying if you hear all of this and you disregard this, you are not just rejecting your pastor or the church, that's not the issue, you are rejecting God himself, the very one who has given you the permanent indwelling Holy Spirit that can empower you to live a holy life so that you will bear the delicious, soul-satisfying fruits of the Holy Spirit in your life, so that you will become like Christ. What an insult it would be for you to hear all of this and still indulge in sexual immorality. What an insult to the Holy Spirit.

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So, beloved, I close with this, this is "how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that won't you endeavor to excel still more," Paul says. "For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality." I hope that rings in your ears, especially you young people. Young ladies, remember this the next time you adorn yourself with some skimpy bathing suit designed to expose as much of your body as you possibly can and seduce men to look at you, men who are driven by unbridled sexual passions who do not know God, and do you know what will happen? You will attract them. You will end up marrying them and they will use you for their purposes and when they're finished with you, they will go on the prowl for another woman. And young men, remember this the next time you feel the urge to entertain immoral thoughts in your mind and in your imagination, the next time you address some attractive woman in your mind as she walks by, or use some young woman for your sexual gratification. Oh, what wickedness this is.

Dear Christian, this is the will of God, this is your sanctification that you please God and one way we do it is abstaining from this. So master your body. Live counter culturally. Live with integrity. Why? Because of God's chastening love. Because of God's purpose for your life. And because of the Spirit's indwelling work in your life. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through him to God the Father.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for just the clarity of your word and I pray as your servant that by the power of your Spirit you will cause it to penetrate even the most rebellious heart this day, and as a result, bless those who claim to love you and who perhaps really do love you so that they can enjoy all that is theirs in Christ Jesus. Lord, may we be a morally pure church that others might see the transforming work and power of Christ in us, that they too might be saved and live to the praise of your glory for it is in Christ's name that we pray.

We pray you have been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.

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