

HOW TO TAKE A WIFE IN PURITY

10/2/2011

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

INTRO: Today I want to take you to a passage of Scripture I believe speaks specifically to Gentiles on how to take a wife in purity. I said before in these messages that as I see it, the Bible does not set out any method such as betrothal or dating or courting for taking a wife. However, what it does do is set out general principles so that no matter what method is used, it will be safe. And it is my view that the apostle Paul does this with that very purpose in mind that we are concerned about in a very specific passage, and that is 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 and so, let us read it (read).

Now, whether Paul wrote this passage with the topic in view that I say it has is debated. When I was in my third year of Greek classes, the teacher divided 1 Thessalonians up into numerous pieces or pericopes and we all got one to work on. We had to translate every word of our passage from Greek into English, outline it, and then defend our conclusions before the class. I was given this passage to exegete in the Greek language. I took a view of this passage that the teacher of the class disagreed with. He was a good teacher and he understood that I was not alone in my interpretation of this passage. This teacher, though he disagreed with my position gave me a very high grade.

As I began to prepare for this message I took out my file of the work I did some 24 years ago and checked it for information. I will give the very same outline I used back then. You see, what is in view in this passage, as I interpret it, is this: How to take a wife in purity as a Gentile. And in this passage, written to a place that would have been mostly Gentiles, Paul instructs them, and ultimately us, in this very important matter.

Now I will be covering verses 3-8, the same passage I did some 24 years ago. Only I want to add a few thoughts from verses 1-2. You see, what exactly Paul is dealing with is not easily discerned. For example, verse 6 says, "that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter..." Martin Luther translates the words 'this matter' as 'im handel'. That is commerce or business dealings. But that, in no wise, is the subject of this passage in its context.

So in verse 1 Paul instructs them to walk in the manner that they had earlier 'received' from him as to how they were to walk. What they had received from him earlier, they know, but we are not told what it was. I believe it will have had to do with this matter of how they, the Gentiles among them, were to take a wife in purity. Then in verse 2 he says, "for you know what commandments we gave to you through the Lord Jesus." So, while Paul was there, he has revealed to them the will of the Lord Jesus in this matter. But because Paul addresses the matter of abstaining from fornication (wrongly translated as sexual immorality in the NKJV), we therefore begin to understand what he had instructed them in earlier, by what he is talking about in this passage. I conclude that what they had received from him before, and the commandments he had given them, was regarding the manner in which they, as Gentiles, were to take a wife. What Paul is doing in verses 3-8 is instructing them again on this matter of which they had received instruction earlier already.

So, let's go to Acts 17 for a little history on the beginning of this church to see the Gentile involvement. Turn with me to Acts 17 (read 1-3). There was a synagogue in Thessalonica and there were Jews. Paul reasoned with them for three Sabbaths from the Scriptures and expounding to them the resurrection of Christ. Now notice verse 4-5 (read). There were some Jews who were persuaded, but it is evident that a good number of Gentiles got saved, for it says, "a great multitude of devout Greeks, and of the chief women, not a few", turned to God. Now go with me to 1 Thessalonians 1 (read 9-10). There is other evidence as well that these letters to the Thessalonians are largely written to a Gentile audience. Furthermore, I believe the subject matter of 4:3-8 is that of taking a life-partner in a grossly immoral culture, where physical promiscuity was rampant as it was in most of the Roman world. So, I believe the passage before us deals with how the Gentiles were to take a wife in purity.

You will probably be wondering how I have come to the conclusion that this passage speaks of taking a wife. The key issue is found in verse 4. Paul says, "...that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor..." When you check the versions, that is a common translation. However, it has been translated in another way. Listen to the Weymouth

translation, " that each man among you shall know how to procure a wife who shall be his own in purity and honour". The RSV translates it like this, " that each one of you know how to take a wife for himself in holiness and honor".

In my notes, when I wrote on this in Bible School, I said this in my conclusion to this passage, "The word 'to aquire' (or to possess or procure) is a present infinitive. It cannot without damage be translated 'to possess.' (See Liddel and Scott, BAG., A.T. Robertson, Kenneth Wuest, and Meyers commentary on the N.T. etc..) If this verb is to mean 'possess' it must be in the perfect tense. The word vessel can have one of two meanings. It is either 'body' or 'wife.' Since the word 'ktasthai' is in the present tense, it must mean 'to acquire' and thus 'vessel' must mean 'wife', for no one can acquire or gain his own body. (It would be possible to translate it 'to gain control over his own body' but verse 5 rules out this possibility)" end quote. So I believe the translation 'to acquire a wife' is the better translation here. For this reason I have given the title to this passage that I did.

And so, with that, we are going to look at the concern of God's will in this matter. We will look at three points under this topic. The first point is the concern of God's will in the matter of Gentiles taking a wife is that they should know how to take a wife in sanctification. And in this first point we have three further sub-points. The first sub point is that they should know how to acquire a wife in sanctification. The second is the aim of God's will in this matter; and the third, the rejection of God's will by some in this matter. So, we begin with the first concern and that is that they acquire a wife in sanctification.

IV. THE PASSAGE REGARDING ACQUIRING A WIFE

A. The Concern Of God's Will In This Matter (3-6)

1. That They Acquire A Wife In Sanctification (3a)

We find this first concern of God's will in this matter expressed in verse 3. We begin then with the first part of verse 3, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification..." In verses 1-2 Paul exhorts them to abound more and more in walking in such a way as would

please God, "For", he says in verse 2, "...you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus." These commandments would be related to our subject, for Paul goes on in verse 3 like this, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification."

The whole process of taking a wife is to be 'in sanctification'. That is in holiness. I have mentioned earlier that the Bible does not set out any method such as the betrothal system, courting or dating. It says, as I see it, "No matter what method you use, it must be done in sanctification." There, parents and young people, is the overriding principle in taking a wife. It must be done in sanctification. It must be done in holiness! Determine what is holy and what is unholy, and you have your guidelines.

Now I want to advise parents here. You have charted the turbulent waters to land by experience. You know the dangerous shoals. You know when to instruct to hold off and wait. You know what you faced. Maybe from experience, you can mostly give guidelines from negative experience. But draw from your experience and guide your young people. Oh how deceptive is the flesh in this time period. How many a marriage is the devil not able to cause to shipwreck before it even starts. So Paul will show us both negatively and positively how this is done.

You see, this is the will of God; even your sanctification. This is true in all of life but it is also true in finding a life partner. In our past culture we became fatalistic in this matter. We did not know how to acquire a wife in sanctification and we did not instruct our own young people in it. We have received in our culture the idea that young people are young only once and there are some sins they will fall into but in the end they will get married and it will all be OK. But it is not OK. It is possible to take a wife in sanctification. That is why some have turned

back to courtship. They want to have a hand in helping their young people find a life partner, and rightly so.

2. That They Acquire A Wife Free From Fornication (3b)

The second concern of God's will is that they acquire a wife free from fornication. Now look at the last part of verse 3 (read). Paul's concern here is that the Gentiles should abstain from physical impurity. The NKJV translates this as 'sexual immorality'. It is that, but it is a more restricted term. The KJV translates it as fornication, which we hold to as physical immorality on the part of the unmarried. It is clear from this that the major concern God has in this matter of taking a wife is physical purity. Every married person here, and some unmarried, know this is the major concern. How can one safely reach land in these turbulent waters without shipwrecking physically?

So let me tell you something about man's physical drive to reproduce. It is not dirty. It is good and designed by God. God wanted man to reproduce. He instructed man to fill the earth and endowed man with that ability. It is a divine ability, pleasing to God and man. It is one of the most powerful drives in man and needs greater guidelines and help than most other drives. So God has given us the principle of sanctification to oversee this very important stage in life. There are some very difficult matters to deal with in this whole area and it deserves our utmost attention. God gives us the principles, and mankind must work those out in every culture and learn how to acquire a wife in sanctification, and avoiding fornication.

3. That They Know The Process Of Acquiring A Wife (4)

Now, the third, concern of God's will is found in verse 4 (read). The will of God

is that they should know the process of acquiring a wife in purity. In this section Paul will specify the manner of acquiring a wife in purity, and then the reasons why that should be done. We begin with the manner.

a. The manner of acquiring a wife in this way

1) Positively (4a)

So we begin with the positive in 4a (read). When Paul instructs the Thessalonians on how to take a wife, he will set it out negatively and positively. He gives two positive points, and these are that it is to take place in holiness and it is to take place in honor. And he gives one negative point, it is not to be done in lustful desire.

So we look at the two positive things first, and that is that a wife is to be acquired in holiness or in sanctification. We saw earlier that the overriding principle was holiness or sanctification. How do you take a wife in holiness? Well, let me set out a few danger zones. The amount of closeness to each other young people experience in their relationship contributes to danger. The closer they are together, and the more touching the more dangerous. Sitting close together, touching or the lady laying her head on his shoulder or such like things contribute to the danger. Being out alone in the dark, or late, or watching certain videos together or listening to some types of music can all contribute to danger. The very next thing you know, you are in the Cape Horn rollers. Careful, careful, careful.

I encourage young couples to note any things that are danger zones and then talk about it together and then agree to not enter the danger zones. Parents, gain a relationship with your young people and tell them the danger points. And young people, listen to godly advice and set godly standards yourselves. Now if I am correct as to the subject matter of this passage, and I believe I am, the instruction in taking a wife in sanctification is given to the person taking a wife. Young people, do not despise the advice of your parents or older people. And then set standards yourselves and when you near the island, remember to consider those.

Second, Paul says the one taking a wife is to do it in honor. This word honor comes from the Greek word, *timee*. The name Timothy comes from this word. It is a value. The first one we should honor in taking a wife is God. He created this young lady. The young man should treat her as a person created in the image of God. Not even a prostitute should be treated like there is no value, never mind a young lady who may never have been touched before. Young men, honor God who made that young lady!

Second, the parents of the young lady need to be honored. They have spent much time and effort in bringing this young lady to this age. This young lady belongs to them, not to you. Do not treat her like she belongs to you. Even when you get engaged, she does not belong to you yet. Only after you get married does she belong to you. Treat her like that.

Third, young men should honor the young lady herself. Treat her with

honor. She was created by God in His image. Honor her as a person. She is not someone to conquer. She is someone to be treated with respect and care. I hear some of the stories of parties and beer and girls and how some of the young men in the community talk about their exploits, and I could weep! It is so incredibly dishonoring. And how do young ladies allow for this? Well, there is huge parental responsibility here that cannot be overlooked. But, I believe one of the major reasons for this dishonoring is that alcohol is so often involved, and it is condemned neither by parents nor by pastors. Oh yes, they do not wish drunkenness. But that which leads to drunkenness is condoned, and that is alcohol. Now one of the major contributions of alcohol to physical misconduct is the fact that even a little alcohol depresses the inhibitions of the mind. And what happens is that even otherwise descent boys or girls become animals. But the Christian is to take a wife in honor. The Christian should honor God, and he would not act like this. The Christian should honor the parents, and he would not act like this. And, the Christian should honor the young lady, and he would not act like this.

And fourth, when you date or court, you are checking to see if this person is a suitable marriage partner. You may discover that this person is not a suitable partner. Now honor the next person who may see her. Do not rob the next person of her experiences that are meant for only one other person. So, in light of the fact that you may not choose this young lady, be honorable to the one who may take her as a wife later.

And so, young man, let your conduct be honorable. When you treat a young lady lightly, you dishonor God, her parents, the girl herself, and the person who will eventually marry her if it is not yourself. Then let your conduct be honorable to society. You and she are both a part of society. Honor her as such. Set such a high value on God, her parents and on the young lady herself that you keep all your actions holy and honorable.

*Now let me here insert a few thoughts on a question that someone has wished that I mention. It is this: If I dated for fun, and fell into various kinds of experimentation, maybe even led others on in this, or maybe even fell into great sin how can I clean up such sins? Let me recommend to you Ralph Sutura's instructions on restitution and they are available to you in the back. And then secondly, let me advise that you take very great caution before you talk to anyone with whom you have been intimate. That is true whether that other person is already married or not. Furthermore, talk your situation over with someone of your gender you trust. These types of matters are very delicate because maybe the other person involved is already married as well. Find godly advice before you act in such cases. And if you carry such things in your life, go to God and repent before Him if you have not already done so. And then tell Him that if He wants you to go further with this that He clearly let you know. And then ask Him for wisdom in handling that. May God give victory for each person who carries these kinds of burdens. May He show you the way to freedom.

2) Negatively - not in lustful desire
(5)

So, having given the positive ways in which a wife is to be acquired, he now sets out the negative. A wife is not to be acquired in lustful desire or passion of lust as verse 5 says it. I think passion is a good translation here. The word translated 'lust' is the word for desire. Now desires can be good or bad. In the language of the NT the same word is used for both. In English, when the word desire is used in a negative sense, we call it lust.

Now I ask you, how do men take a wife, if they are not Christians? Very seldom is it not in passion of lust. This is the Gentile way. So our text says, "...not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God." Wherever you find Gentiles that are not under the dominion of the Word of God, this is the way it is done. And, sad to say, this is the way it is often done in the church as well, though it may not be to the same degree of sinfulness.

So, positively, a wife is to be taken in sanctification, or holiness and honor. Those are the two key words. No matter what method of taking a wife you use, if you make a priority out of these two things, you will do it right.

CONCL: And so, we conclude this message. Paul wished them to first know the will of God in taking a wife. God's concern is that it would take place in holiness, free from fornication. And then, God's will was that they should know the process of taking a wife in His will. A Christian ought to take a wife in holiness and in honor. In the whole process we ought to be holy before God. Then we ought to do so in honor. We ought to value this part of life greatly. Young men, when you ask a young lady if she would see you

and she does, place a great value on that. Tell her you value that. Then live like you value that. And young ladies, when you see a young man, tell him you value that. Know that he probably shook in his boots before he called. He was afraid you would say no. And maybe he wanted to ask for weeks already and did not know how to go about it. And even if you say no to him, say something like, "I deeply appreciate that you would consider asking me. But I would not be fair to you to say yes." My wife put me off for about 2 nerve wrecking weeks. Now that I know myself a little better, I don't blame her. Oh, treat each other with honor, always in holiness.

And last, do not take a wife like the Gentiles do. So you can scrap all those ideas you got from TV or the movies. Do it God's way, in sanctification and honor!