

A Plea For Sexual Holiness

Non Series - 1 Thessalonians

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Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

Preached on: Sunday, June 10, 2012

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1 Thessalonians is where we are going to be tonight, chapter four. We are going to read beginning with verse one down to verse eight.

Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to live 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

Let's ask the Lord's blessing on our time in his Word tonight.

Lord, we do give you thanks and praise for the many expressions of your grace to us that we have seen this day. We thank you, Lord, for new believers. We thank you for the testimony of faith in your Son through baptism. We thank you for the musical talents that you have placed in this congregation that are expressed through singing and playing of instruments in a way that is meant to honor you and to express love for you. We thank you for the fellowship that we have with each other and the fellowship that we have around your Word. And we ask that tonight as we open your Word together you would be our teacher, you would apply our Word to our hearts and minds in a powerful way, in a way that leaves us, Lord, not unchanged, but changed forever, in a way that leads to our ongoing sanctification, perhaps, Lord, in the case of someone here tonight who is yet to be saved, who is not your child, that even tonight it might lead to salvation. We ask for

¹ 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8.

these things tonight in the name of Jesus our Lord and Savior and King. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Well, tonight I want to deal with a specific issue and I have a specific goal. The issue is sexual purity and the goal is that our church will embrace it. Not a part of our church, not some of our church, but that all of our church, every member of this church would embrace God's Word when it comes to sexual purity.

This happens to tie into our study of 2 Thessalonica, because, as I told you, the second letter was written just a few months after the first. So what we read in the first letter still represents the context in which these believers were living in 2 Thessalonians.

The fact of the matter is sexual sin was a specific temptation and battle that the Thessalonian believers had to overcome and not just the believers in Thessalonica, but all believers in the Greco Roman world. It was an immoral world that they lived in. They had to overcome it and, as we see in our text, in a general way, they were overcoming it. They were living like believers in their culture.

But this specific passage was on my mind this week not because it ties in to our study of 2 Thessalonians, but because I believe we need it in our own situation. And if you were to ask why, I want to give you three reasons. First of all, because what we have just read is the will of God. To live a life that is sexually pure, to live in sexual holiness is the will of God. It pleases God. And that is enough reason for me to talk to you about it tonight. We want to learn and to know that which pleases God. Whatever is the will of God is to be the will of his people. Whatever is the will of God is to be the desire of his people.

And so before we go any further I would just ask you. Is it your desire, whether you are single or married to live the rest of your life in such a way that your life would be pleasing to God in the sexual realm.

But there is a second reason why this is on my mind this week. My heart is especially burdened. And that is because sexual immorality is devastating lives. People all around us, people I know about, people I care about, lives are being devastated by sexual sin. And I would like to be able to say that that is just true with the younger generation, that it is a battle which just the younger generation is fighting. But that wouldn't be true. I can point to specific cases within our own church over the 14 years that I have been here and tell you that this battle involves almost every age group. And there would be people probably here tonight who would, if given the opportunity, stand before you and tell you that sexual immorality is not only deceptive. It is devastating. If we love one another, if we love the Lord's Church, if we love his people, we don't want to see lives devastated by sexual sin.

There is a third reason this is especially on my mind and that is because of a departure in our churches. That is, within our churches there are people who are ignoring God's Word in this area. There are people within our churches who are rejecting God's Word when it speaks to the need for sexual purity. In fact, I have witnessed and I have seen it. It defies

logic. It defies Scripture. But there are people who believe that they can ignore God's Word about sexual holiness and imagine at the same time that they love God and that they are pursuing God.

I want you to be clear. I am not talking about someone who has stumbled into sin and they are heartbroken and they are repenting and they are turning from it. No. I am talking about the kind of person who knows that what they are doing doesn't line up with what the Word of God teaches about sexual purity and yet they continue to show up Sunday after Sunday imagining that they are worshipping God, imagining that they love God, that they are pursuing God while they hard heartedly, stubbornly persist in sexual sin. And in the last few years I have been surprised and astounded as people who are living in rebellion against God's standards in this area show up at our church and imagine that they are worshipping. And perhaps even more astounding as I have seen it when they leave our church because we confront their sin and then they find churches willing to affirm them while they live this way.

Being lived out in our time are the words of 1 Peter chapter four verses one through five. Listen to what they say.

Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves with the same way of thinking, for whoever has suffered in the flesh has ceased from sin, so as to live for the rest of the time in the flesh no longer for human passions but for the will of God. The time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do...²

Let me just make that really practical. He is saying to us, "Listen. You have had enough time to live for is when you were lost." He goes on to say:

...living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead.³

I mean we are living in a time right now I this time when believers obey the Lord and choose to live like believers and no longer live like pagans. We are living in a time when that is thought to be surprising, when it is strange, when, in fact, you will be maligned for it. And, unfortunately, there are some who are not maligned for it because they join in with the culture. They claim to love Christ, but they live like pagans and are surprised when the Church confronts it, when the Church will to abide with it. And go other places and all of the sudden there are churches willing to either not ask the questions that need to be asked, or affirm them as they live sinful lives before the Lord.

So tonight I want to make ea plea. I want to plead with my church. I want to plead with

² 1 Peter 4:1-3.

³ 1 Peter 4:3-5.

the church where I worship, my brothers and sisters, who I have the privilege to serve. I want to plead with you tonight for sexual holiness.

There are five things I want to point out. The first one would be this. A plea for sexual holiness is appropriate for any congregation. That is to say, whether you are currently faithful in this area or otherwise. You don't make a plea like this simply because you know there are problems. You can make a plea like this, you should make a plea like this even when the track record is one of faithfulness. That is what he is doing here.

Notice this is a statement made to brothers. Verse one:

“Finally, then, brothers...”⁴

Right? This is not just a plea made to people to be saved and therefore depart from sexual immorality. No. This is a plea that you make to Christians. And, notice, this is a statement made in the Lord Jesus.

“Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you...”⁵

You see, these are the two parts of making a plea like this. I am asking you to do something and I am urging you to do some thing. This is what Paul is doing with the Thessalonians. He is asking and he is urging and then he is doing this in the Lord Jesus. It is in the context of a relationship with Christ that this kind of a plea is made and it is with respect to what is true in Christ. You see, the world may scoff at what I have to say tonight, but those who know Jesus must not scoff at it. The world might make light of what we are going to talk about tonight, but those who know the Lord Jesus Christ should recognize the importance of it, the truthfulness of it. And so the appeal is made to brothers and it is made in the Lord Jesus.

Notice this is also a plea that is made with reference to previous instruction.

“Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us...”⁶

You see, in the past there has already been instruction. When Paul was there in Thessalonica there was instruction about what it meant to follow Christ. It would mean saying goodbye to your old way of life and hello to a new way of life.

“...you received from us how you ought to live and to please God.”⁷

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 4:1.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

You see, this is instruction regarding a Christian obligation. There is a way we ought to live as believers. There is a way we ought to live. That is what he is writing about here, how you ought to live. It is Christian behavior.

“...and to please God.”⁸

You see, there is a way of living that pleases God and there is a way of living that doesn't please him. So it is a statement made to brothers, made in the Lord Jesus, made with reference to something he has taught them before. Just because you know these things it doesn't mean I shouldn't plead with you about these things. Yeah, you have been taught about this. But now I am pleading with you to listen and to obey it.

And then notice something else about this. It is about something they were already doing.

“...how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing.”⁹

He is not writing this because they are not doing it. He is writing this to people who, in general terms, are doing it. I trust that the vast majority of this congregation is living in an obedient fashion when it comes to your sexual life. There may be those associated with us who are not, but probably the vast majority of you are. That doesn't mean you don't need this. That doesn't mean you don't need to listen.

So that what he is doing here is he is calling upon them to excel.

“...just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.”¹⁰

Continue in sexual purity and if possible even take greater steps so as to ensure that you live sexually pure lives. I mean work at this. I mean make this a point of concentration. I mean excel at it. Strive for purity.

So the first point I would make tonight is a plea for sexual holiness is appropriate for any church. It is appropriate for this church. This church needs to hear this this evening.

The second thing I see is in verse two and that would be this. A plea for sexual holiness is authoritative and it is Christian. Verse two.

“For you know what instructions....”¹¹

παραγγελια (par-ang-gel-ee'-ah) is the word. It is a word that carries with it the idea even of authority, commandment. In fact, some translations have commandment.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ 1 Thessalonians 4:2.

“For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.”¹²

You see, what I am doing in telling you what Paul said I am pleading with God’s people for the sake of their sexual purity and in doing so I am expressing to God’s people what God’s will is for their behavior. What I am preaching tonight is not some moral code that I came up with. What I am preaching tonight doesn’t represent some human standard for morality. No, he says in verse two:

“For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus.”¹³

What I gave you did not come from me. What I gave you came from Christ. We are talking about the will of the one whom you say is your Savior. Right? You name his name. You claim him as Redeemer. Well, he has a will when it comes to what you do with your body. And that is what we are declaring in these verses, the will of God, the will of Christ for his people, not a human standard, a divine standard, a standard that has come from God. We need to hear it that way, don’t we?

This is what the Thessalonians did when they heard the Word of God. They received it for what it was, not the word of men, but the Word of God. Will you hear this instruction that way tonight? Will you hear this as the will of God?

I want to say it plainly. To say that Jesus is your Lord is to believe that he is the Lord of your body and of your mind. You can sin sexually, not just with your body, but by disobeying the Lord with respect to how you think and what you allow into your mind.

I warned us all that the internet can be not only used for great good. It can be a great doorway for evil. And when you say that Jesus is your Lord, this means he is to be the Lord of what you do with your body and he is to be the Lord of what you allow into your mind. And your body and your mind are not to be given to sexual immorality. And if Jesus is not the Lord of your sexual life, if he is not the Lord of your body then he is not your Lord.

It is interesting and important in the New Testament that when you talk about sexual immorality, it is not just seen as forsaking God and is, it is also seen to be an adoption of a moral standard that characterized people who are immersed in idolatry. When you choose to live in sexual immorality in a brazen fashion, it doesn't break your heart. You don’t repent. You don't turn from it. You go on in it. You are living a life that says that you are walking away from the Lord and you are adopting a mindset that belongs to people who are idolaters.

Richard, can you show me that?

Oh, yeah. Look at Romans chapter one. And look at verse 21. Paul writes:

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie.¹⁴

Do you see this, folks? You don't walk into immorality without walking away from the true God.

“...because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.”¹⁵

What do you call it when you worship anything other than God? What is that called? It is idolatry. So this is the lifestyle of forsaking God and pursuing idols. What does it look like? Verse 26.

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. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.¹⁶

It is much broader than just sexual immorality, isn't it? When you turn away from God and his Word, you walk into all manner of impurity. It shows up in all areas of one's life. And notice the brazenness that begins to come into a life because the next verse says:

“Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”¹⁷

Does that not frighten? So thought number one: this plea is appropriate for any congregation, faithful or otherwise. And, second, this plea carries with it the authority of God. It is Christian. It is come from the Lord. It is not a human standard. It expresses his will. It expresses the will of your Savior and Lord. And if he is not the Lord of your body and your mind and your sexual life, he is not your Lord.

¹⁴ Romans 1:21-25.

¹⁵ Romans 1:25.

¹⁶ Romans 1:26-31.

¹⁷ Romans 1:32.

Third observation if you will look back at our text, 1 Thessalonians chapter four. Third, a plea for sexual holiness is a call for sanctified behavior.

What I want to stress here is the fact that loving God is not just a matter of sentiment. I have seen it in so many cases. It breaks your heart that you can talk to people about what it means to be a believer, what it means to follow Christ and they live in this self imposed deception in many cases. I am talking about people who don't know Christ, but they think they know Christ. Because what they examine is the feeling that they have in their heart when they think about God, the feeling they have in their heart when they think about Jesus, the feeling they have in their heart when they talk about Christianity. And what they ignore is the fruit of their choices. They say they love Jesus with their lips, but they are living in a way that is directly contrary to what they claim. To love the Lord Jesus Christ is not to have good feelings about him. To love the Lord Jesus Christ is to listen to his words when he says:

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?”¹⁸

To love Christ is to obey him. To love Christ is to live for him. Do you notice the stress on behavior in these verses? Verse one.

“Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to live...”¹⁹

And the word there is translated sometimes walk, because that is the word for walking, how you are to live your life, you see? He is not talking about a feeling. He is talking about a lifestyle. How you ought to live 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.²⁰

And on he writes.

What is he talking about? He is talking about how you live. He is talking about what you engage in with your body. He is talking about your behavior.

When I plead with you tonight to live sexually pure, I am talking about behaving in a way different than this world, behaving in a way, this in accordance with God's will. I am talking about what you do with your body. We are to be set apart to the Lord not just with our feelings, but with our whole self.

¹⁸ Luke 6:46.

¹⁹ 1 Thessalonians 4:1.

²⁰ 1 Thessalonians 4:1-4.

Romans 12:1. You know it well.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.²¹

Allow the Lord to so transform your thinking in an ongoing fashion that you are able to judge and discern what is his will according to his Word so that you set your approval on that which he approves of.

What part of your life belongs to the Lord? Every part of your life. That gets to your behavior. Your sexual life should say that you are a Christian. Your behavior should say that you know Jesus.

I want you to look at 1 Corinthians chapter six. And ask yourself as you read these verses whether or not our behavior matters. Verse nine:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.²²

Well, I guess that means that now that you are forgiven you are forgiven. Anything goes, right? I mean he died for all your sins, not just your past sin, not just your present sins, but even your future sins.

Is that the way a believer thinks? Look at the next verse.

“All things are lawful for me.”²³

He doesn't mean by that those things that are clearly unlawful according to Scripture. He is talking about questionable things.

“‘All things are lawful for me,’ but not all things are helpful. ‘All things are lawful for me,’ but I will not be enslaved by anything.”²⁴

²¹ Romans 12:1-2.

²² 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

²³ 1 Corinthians 6:12.

²⁴ Ibid.

I mean even things that are neutral in nature, not clearly sin if you engage in it. Nothing should control your life, but the lord.

“Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food.”²⁵

He is just parroting one of the sayings that was common there in Corinth.

“Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food”—and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body. And God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by his power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, “The two will become one flesh.” But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.²⁶

Do you know that? Do you know that you are not your own? Do you know your body has been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ? It is not yours to do with as you please, not if he is your Lord.

So a plea for sexual holiness is a call for sanctified or holy behavior. Knowing Christ changes the way we actually live, behave. God is concerned about our behavior. Look back at our text.

There is a fourth thing I want to point out, 1 Thessalonians chapter four. The fourth part of this plea is this. A plea for sexual holiness—this ties in with what I just read—it is about a stewardship of your body. The Lord has purchased us. That includes our body. Now we are responsible to conduct ourselves in the body in a way that agrees with the one who purchased it. We are to be a good steward of our bodies. Verse three.

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.²⁷

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 9:13.

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 9:13-20.

²⁷ 1 Thessalonians 4:3-6.

Now there are several things I want you to notice as we walk through the text. First of all, he begins with a general declaration about God's will. The first statement is a general one in verse three.

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification.”²⁸

Just stop there. Know this tonight. This is God's will for you, believer, that you live a holy life. This is God's will, your holiness, your progressive ongoing way, being set apart from the world unto him. In every realm, your thoughts, your speech, your attitudes, your behavior, everything. God's will for you is holiness. Within that context of this general will of God for us, now there is this specific declaration about sexual sin.

“...that you abstain from sexual immorality.”²⁹

And that is the word πορνεία (por-ni'-ah). It is a broad term. So it includes in it any kind, every kind of sexual immorality. God's will for us is that we abstain from any kind, every kind of sexual immorality. What is included in that? Well, a sexual relationship before marriage is included in that. What is a sexual relationship before marriage? It is fornication. It is a sin. And, church, I trust you do not listen to the world at this point, but I want to exhort you with all of my heart. Do not listen to the lie that says that virginity is not possible until marriage. It is a lie. The Lord who saved us will give us the power to live lives that obey him. And a sexual relationship before marriage is sin.

In addition, a sexual relationship once you are married outside of your marriage is sin. What is that called in Scripture? Adultery. It is designated. It is identified by God as sin, adultery. God's will is one man having a sexual relationship with one woman in marriage for a lifetime. Any violation of that picture is sin.

But this also includes every kind of unnatural sexual activity. That includes homosexuality. Folks, get ready for it. I warn us. Unless the Lord is gracious and turns the ship we are headed toward a culture where for us to say what the Bible says about homosexuality will be considered hate speech. And it may even mean very real persecution on the part of the people who tell the truth about that sin. The Word of God rules out any kind, every kind of sexual immorality for his people: fornication, adultery, homosexuality, bestiality, any kind, every kind of sexual immorality.

Something else I want you to notice though in this context is as he is doing this, this general declaration about holiness and this specific declaration about sexual holiness, now he does something else. He gives a specific declaration about sexual self control and responsibility. This is the stewardship I am talking about. Verse four.

“...that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor.”³⁰

²⁸ 1 Thessalonians 4:3.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ 1 Thessalonians 4:4.

Now he states it positively first. The word for control there is a word that means to take possession of. And the word for body, σκευος (skyoo'-os) is the word, and it speaks of a vessel.

There has been debate about this. Is he talking about a wife or is he talking about the body? Is he saying to the believers, "Let everyone take a wife and in that way live sexually pure, each man takes a wife." Or is he saying that each one is to control his body. And I think having looked at it, it is clear to my mind that he is talking about the body, just as the ESV has, the New American Standard has it. Each one is to learn how to take possession of his body. And what that means is this. That there are two words that should always be true for what you do with your body: holiness and honor. And if what you are doing in your body cannot be described as being set apart unto the Lord, holiness, and if it cannot be described in terms of honorable, then you lack self control. One of the fruits of the Spirit is self control. The Lord will give us the ability if we will yield to his Spirit, be submitted to his Word, walk in the Spirit, we will not carry out the desires of the flesh and we will be characterized by, not perfectly in any realm, but characterized by self control. And his people are called to control their own bodies so that what we engage in could be called holy and it could be called honorable.

But now he states it negatively. He says:

"...not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother..."³¹

Stop there. To state it negatively, here is what this stewardship of your body is going to mean. It means that you are not driven by your passions. It means that lust does not control you. It means that we don't use our bodies in the way that people do who don't know the Lord. He says:

"...not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God."³²

I said it earlier. I will say it again. Does your sexual life speak of salvation? If we examine how you have been living in this realm, does it say that you are born again? Are you living like people who don't know the Lord at all? But also this stewardship means we don't live selfishly, because that is what sexual sin is. It is selfishness. Do you notice he says in verse six:

"... that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter"³³

The first word transgress, to step across. The idea is you sin against someone. Sexual sin is a sin against the person that you engage in it with. You are sinning against them. It is not the will of God for them. It is not the will of God for you. So you are transgressing

³¹ 1 Thessalonians 4:5-6.

³² 1 Thessalonians 4:5.

³³ 1 Thessalonians 4:6.

against them. But the second word when he says not to wrong his brother means to take advantage of him. When you enter a sexual sin you not only sin against the person, you are using them for your own interests. You are wronging them. You are taking advantage of them. And it doesn't matter whether they are willing to be taken advantage of or not. You claim Christ. It is a great sin. It is not a small sin, which is why the last way he expresses it negatively would be to say this. You are not to use your body in a way that is fearless. You are not to live your life in a way that says you don't fear the Lord, because he says in verse six:

“...the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.”³⁴

This is what Paul did with the Thessalonians. He warned them that to go on living like the pagans is to live a life that invites the judgment of God.

I ask you tonight. Does God hate sexual sin? What do you say, church? He does, doesn't he? And so when we in a brazen fashion pursue that which we know God hates, now we are in Romans chapter one, aren't we? Who knowing the decrees of God about these things we go on anyway and we applaud others who go on in it.

How often does the New Testament warn us about this? 1 Corinthians 6:9 we read earlier:

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.³⁵

Romans 1:32.

“Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”³⁶

Romans 2:2.

“We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who do such things.”³⁷

Romans 2:3.

“Do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape the judgment of God?”³⁸

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ 1 Corinthians 6:9-10.

³⁶ Romans 1:32.

³⁷ Romans 2:2.

Galatians 5:19.

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.³⁹

It doesn't mean that someone who stumbles into one of these sins is lost, if they have been saved that they lose salvation. He is saying that people who live these lifestyle give evidence they don't know Christ. They will not inherit the kingdom of God.

Let's get to the last point we see in our text, the fifth thing that makes up this plea and that is a plea for sexual holiness is a plea to recognize the authority and purpose of God. That is what I am pleading with us about tonight. I am pleading with you to recognize God's authority in your life and to recognize what his purpose is for you. Do you see it here in verse seven?

“For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.”⁴⁰

Called us. What does that mean for God to call you? Isn't that speaking of your salvation? Isn't that speaking of that effectual call of God? God has called you to himself. Now what did he call you to himself for? Did he save you for the purpose of impurity? Or did he save you to make for himself his own people who take on his own likeness? If God hates sexual impurity, shouldn't his people? If God is a God of holiness, are we not to be holy as he is holy? And while we all recognize that we could never possibly be saved by our adherence to that standard, we stumble in many ways, is it not to be the desire of the hearts of God's people to strive for the holiness that pleases the Lord? In fact, doesn't he tell us that without holiness no one will see him?

What has he called us for? Not impurity, but for holiness. What has he called us to? to pursue holiness.

You see, this is why he gave us his Spirit. Verse seven:

“For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God.”⁴¹

If tonight you walk out of here and you disregard me, if you disregard what we have shared tonight in 1 Thessalonians. If you walk out of here scoffing and thinking to yourself, I will live the way I have been living, I want to ask you. Who have you

³⁸ Romans 2:3.

³⁹ Galatians 5:19-21.

⁴⁰ 1 Thessalonians 4:7.

⁴¹ 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8.

disregarded? You have not disregarded me. You have disregarded God. And you are actually telling story about yourself when you do that, because he ends the verse by saying:

“...who gives his Holy Spirit to you.”⁴²

God gave his Spirit to his people that the Holy Spirit might teach his people holiness, that the Holy Spirit might lead his people in holiness. For you to love him purely and say you have the Holy Spirit is an outright, on its face, contradiction.

I want to wrap it up tonight just with three questions and I am done. Now I repeat myself in some of this, but that is ok. It is good to hear it again. What is encompassed in this call? What does this bring into the picture of our discussion tonight? Answer: Any kind of sexual immorality, any kind, any kid of sexual immorality. I say to you as believers, stop it. Abstain from it. Anything that departs from God’s plan of sexual enjoyment and faithfulness—and I want to say that. It is the Lord who gave us the sexual gift, but it is to be enjoyed in faithfulness. It is to be enjoyed in marriage.

What is prohibited by this call? Any attempt to pursue these sins and then baptize them into your Christian profession.

Richard, do people really do that? I mean, do they pursue these sins and then try to somehow make it ok?

Every day. They can do it either in the form of presumption. Well, I know the Lord will forgive this. Meaning he will forgive it today or meaning he will forgive it one day when they decide to turn from this and the pursue him. Well, I know I am not with him right now, but the Lord is a forgiving Lord. God is a forgiving God. And one day when I decide to follow him, oh, I know there will be forgiveness there.

I just warn you. That is not how believers think. But another way that people do this is by twisting the Word of God, attempting to justify their behavior. And I want to get very specific about something. I want you to hear me carefully. I want to talk to you about divorce and remarriage. And if anyone is in any doubt about what we believe about that, we have done a 12 part series. You can get it. From start to finish I go over the Word of God about what we believe concerning this. I encourage you to listen to it with your Bible open and test it by the Word of God.

But hear me. There are faithful believers, expositors of God’s Word who disagree with us on this issue. And I know they love the Lord and I know they are faithful to Scripture to the best of all of our ability to be faithful to Scripture. And I am telling you there are people attempting to justify their sinful sexual behavior with the idea that we hold a two restrictive position on divorce and remarriage.

⁴² 1 Thessalonians 4:8.

Now listen to me. Here is what I am going to tell you. Many of the people trying to justify their behavior with that line of thinking, if they went to John MacArthur who takes a different position than we do and told him their story, all the things we know about what is going on in their life and then ask him, would he put his blessing on what they are doing? That man who holds a different position than we do would tell them, "You are wrong."

Do you understand what I am saying to you?

Let me take a step back and explain something. According to the other position on divorce and remarriage, you are free to remarry after you have been divorced if there has been sexual unfaithfulness on the part of the person you were married to and you were not sexually unfaithful. They were unfaithful. You were not. In addition—and I know John MacArthur teaches this. I have heard him with my own ears. In addition, it is to just one failure. It would be ongoing, hard hearted, unrepentant, in your face adultery. So you are doing everything you can to rescue your marriage, praying for the person, living out a witness before them, forgiving them from your heart. And then after it is just in your face, will not depart from it, unrepentant, then you can claim that you have done all that you can do, walk away from the marriage and be free to remarry according to that position.

Or, again, some one abandons you. They don't want to live with you because they are an unbeliever. You are a believer. They leave you and they are not converted. How do you know a man whether you will save your wife? How do you know? So they are not converted. So they are not converted. And the you are free, according to that position to be remarried.

Here is what I am saying in our churches in these days. No one even asks why a person got divorced. They don't ask. They treat the issue like this, that no matter why you got a divorce you are free to be remarried. No matter how many times you have been divorced you are free to be remarried.

Now I am saying to you tonight that even if you don't hold our position on divorce and remarriage, you hold the other position, that is not what they believe. John MacArthur doesn't believe you can be divorced for any reason and remarried for any reason. There is a standards found in Scripture and I don't care if it is me or John or anybody else. If we don't hold to the Word of God, let them not be listened to. What does the Bible say? You see? That is the issue. And there are scores of people in our churches living sexually immoral lives in the name of, well, I am free because, you know, the Bible doesn't preclude people who have been divorced from being remarried.

They are not being honest with God's Word.

Last thought. What we he heard tonight, what will it require of us? It will not just require the obedience of individuals. It requires the obedience of a congregation. And here is what I am saying to you, that where there is known sexual immorality in this church we

must be faithful to confront it humbly, lovingly, gently, restoratively, redemptively, one on one. And we pray, we hope to win our brother. If they won't listen, what do we do, church? We go two or more. How do we go? Humbly, lovingly, gently, restoratively, prayerfully. Right? If they won't listen, what do we do? We tell it to the church. What must the church say? Repent. How does the church say it? Humbly, lovingly, gently, redemptively, restoratively. If they will not listen to the church, what do you do? They must be put out of fellowship of the church, because leaven, a little leaven leavens the whole lump. And the Lord wants his Church to be pure.

So I am saying to you it cannot just be a call heard by individuals. It has to be a call heard by a congregation so that we in unison say to our brothers and sisters, "You cannot serve the Lord and live in immorality." And while we issue that call to one another, we had better watch for ourselves. Amen?

This is going to require a brutal kind of self-honesty and evaluation. You cannot stir up your flesh and think that you are going to be able to tell it to sit down when you want it to. I am saying to you, church. We live in a culture immersed in immorality. We had better start watching over what goes into our eye gate, what goes into our ear gate, what conversations we have with one another. I am saying to us that this is a sin that has to be dealt with faithfully, regularly, radically.

If your eye offends you, pluck it out. If your hand offends you, cut it off. And so if that means for you turning your television off, turn it off. If it means disconnecting the internet for you, disconnect it. I am saying that this is a sin deceptive, devastating, powerful. And the Lord pleads with us that we would abstain from it and recognize we were bought with a price. Glorify God with your whole self, body and mind.

Let's pray together.

Lord, thank you for the challenge of your Word. I pray that we would hear it and receive it and obey it. I pray for anyone in this room who doesn't know your Son. Oh Lord, grant them repentance and true faith in him. We ask in Jesus' name. Amen.