

INTRODUCTION

- Two weeks ago we considered the **exhortation to holiness** as a general introduction to this section
- The **will of God** is the **sanctification** of His people – Paul relates that to **three specific areas** (1.) sexual immorality, (2.) brotherly love and (3.) diligence in one’s calling; we will seek to cover these taking one a week
- Because of the subject this week, I am particularly aware of the fact that I have an **mixed audience** of ages, backgrounds and marital status
- I want to avoid **two potential pitfalls**
 - To speak **with clarity** what God has spoken (so as not to end up saying nothing, are being so vague and general that it is unhelpful)
 - To speak so as to avoid **unnecessary titillation** (which would actually defile the minds of some)

EXPOSITION

I. THE GENERAL DIRECTION – v.3b

- The will of God for His people is explicitly **that you should abstain from sexual immorality**
 - The direction concerns our **sexuality**, that which is a **God given gift** of the Lord given for enjoyment and pleasure as well as for the purpose of having babies and creating families and societies
 - Paul does not mince words or speak with vagueness, because this is such a dangerous an **eternally serious** issue – Mt5:27-30 (Jesus’ particular connection w/lust and hell)
 - The direction concerns sexual immorality, and is the Greek word **porneia** from which we derive our word “pornography”
 - This word covers a **wide range** of things, and to make it simple is anything that perverts the sexual union of a one man/one woman covenantal relationship
 - **Illustration**: Rather than listing all of the examples, think of a **circle** drawn in which this relationship exists; this immorality is everything imaginable outside of that circle
- Paul’s states about those things outside of the circle to be **abstained from**, meaning to be distant, avoid, or keep free of
 - the **assumption** is that in salvation, by the help of the Holy Spirit, that this is something which **can and ought** to be done
 - no one can say “**I just can’t help it**”, but is directed by the Lord to abstain from it

II. THE SPECIFIC DIRECTION – vv.4-5

- Paul gives the primary way in which this is to be fought, **that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel**
 - There are **two major interpretations** that I read in studying out this verse, and is a case in which an interpretation I have held for many years has been overturned
- 1.) Paul is referring to a man keeping **his own body** in control and in purity
 - This interpretation is driven by the understanding of a man’s body as his own vessel - 2Cor4:7 2Tim2:21
 - This is the interpretation to **which I have** held for several years, and is what is understood by most modern translations
 - While the truth understood in this view is certainly true (that someone must have control of their own body in order to have sexual purity), there is another contender as to what Paul meant
 - 2.) Paul is referring to the ordinary way of purity being the **gaining of a wife**
 - This interpretation is based on three major arguments for me
 - **First**, the use of the word **posses** most translations translate as the previous view
Posses his own vessel (NKJV, NAS & HCS) Posses himself of his own vessel (ASV) Control his own body (ESV & NIV) Give dignity to your own body (The Message)
 - the Greek word here (Gk. ktaomai) means to acquire, gain, and usually speaks of getting something you don’t already have
 - an example of this in Acts 22:28 (citizenship by birth vs. purchase)
 - **Second**, vessel is used not only for own body, but also of **a wife** - 1Peter3:7
 - What Paul is not saying is that a wife is merely a piece of property; rather we can think of it as her being, as a vessel, that into which we pour our love and service - notice also that it is singular, pointed to one wife
 - **Third**, the vessel is to be kept in “in sanctification and honor”; both of these words are used in Scripture in relation to the marriage relationship, and especially to a wife
 - **sanctification** in this way is found in 1Cor7:14 (they sanctify one another) and Eph5:26 (he sanctifies her)
 - **honor** is used in how the husband is to relate to the wife in 1Pet3:7
 - this means with **dignity and respect**, not as a sexual object to be used in any way
 - I am moving on with the assumption of this second interpretation for these reasons
 - If this is the correct interpretation (not denying the truthfulness of the first one), then Paul is urging that the major way in which to keep oneself from sexual immorality in a corrupt age is **through the blessing of marriage**
 - it is essentially the same things found in 1Cor7:9

- he then **contrasts** the relationship of the husband in wife which is in sanctification and honor as to how men and women in a pagan culture frequently relate to one another sexually: **not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God**
 - **second** of these two words in the text (Gk. epithumia – **longing, desire**) can be either good or bad desires; in a right sense, it is to long or desire something in the right way, and not surprisingly is used in SofS 5:16 (LXX) and Dan10:3 for food - Proverbs 5:18-19 speak in most glowing terms of this desire and satisfaction
 - So the problem isn't the desire (found in the 2nd term), but the previous word
 - This is the word (Gk. pathei = **lustful passions**) indicating that which is explicitly bad, and related to sexual perversion
 - It is found in Rom1:26 (homosexuality) and Col3:5 and is often associated with drunknesses which allows it to be pursued without inhibitions
- This is not only related to those things outside of the circle, but is especially related to the **treatment of the man's wife**
 - The opposite of treating her with sanctification and honor is treating and relating to her **sexually with vial passions**
 - Just because someone is with his own wife doesn't negate the possibility of a **self-centered** and **self-serving** attitude
 - In plain words, not only is the husband (or wife) to legitimately to enjoy his spouse, but it is to be done with sanctification and honor – **remembering the presence of God**, and that his expectation is not that she is to perform like a harlot or porn star, but with **serving the other dignity**
 - One of the most fundamental things here is the connection between the relationship and the sexual union
 - I will never forget the warning from Pastor Martin in the Academy about this connection, and expecting a wife to perform just to give us our jollies, and be indifferent to our present and ongoing relationship, is to treat our wives like a prostitute
- This is the mark of **the Gentiles**, someone who doesn't know God
 - This is one who views sexuality as simply about **my pleasure**
 - What is interesting is that he **distinguishes the Thessalonians** (who are ethically Gentiles) with the culture
 - Those who treat sexuality in this way (sinful pleasures) that they do not know God - with all their religion and worship, they are without the knowledge of the true God (Acts17:23)

III. A FRIGHTENING WARNING – v.6

- This direction for sexual purity is followed by a terrifying warning
- Paul writes that **that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter**
- Again, the commentators are divided into two major groups as to what this refers to
 - 1.) Some say that Paul has moved on to **another subject**, that of fraudulent behavior in business or commercial dealings
 - 2.) Others say that Paul is **continuing in the subject** of sexual immorality, and is applying it to a specific and relevant example
 - Perhaps some of the reason that commentators of the past chose the first was the utter **abhorrent thought** of what the other interpretation implies - **several reasons** why I think that this one is correct
 - **First**, it goes with the **flow of the text**, and there is not an obvious change in the words
 - **Second**, the use of the phrase **in this matter** (singular) seems to be referring to something already being spoken about, not a change of subject
 - **Third**, the phrase **take advantage of** (Gk. huperbaino = step over the boundary, go beyond limit) is specifically related to a brother; it implies stepping over boundaries and the limit of that which was lawful (i.e. marriage)
 - **Fourth**, the term for **defraud** (Gk. pleonecteo = cheat, get the better of, usually motivated by greed), while it could be used of financial dealings, it would also be necessary for a man to pull the wool over the eyes of **another brother**
 - **Fifth**, the **severity of the judgment** seen in **because the Lord is the avenger of all such**
 - In the Roman culture, where marriage was more a social contract and not something easily dealt with in a court system, there wasn't much one could do if his wife had been deceptively stolen from him by another citizen (her going willingly) - going to the civil authorities simply wouldn't give much help
 - Paul reminds them that particularly in Christian marriage (and perhaps others) God has a special interest in protecting, and judging it
 - It is heartbreaking to sit before a man and hear him say “this is much harder than I expected”
 - As horrible as this sin is to even think about, we know that it has happened and is happening in churches from the 1st century until today
 - I have known of Christian men who have had their wives or daughters affections stolen away by men in their own church and even their own pastor
 - This doesn't negate the responsibility of the women in such cases, but the emphasis of Scripture is usually the weight of responsibility on the man
 - The reason that Paul feels so strongly (by the inspiration of the Spirit) is the reality of the husband/wife and Christ/Church paradigm found in Eph5
 - This is such a universal and all pervasive temptation that it is addressed in the **10 Commandments** Ex20:17
 - I cannot but be reminded of the consequences of David's sin against Uriah with his wife Bathsheba
- While we can't know for sure, I suggest that Paul writes this in response to something in **Timothy's report**
- This isn't the first time Paul has addressed them on this issue when he writes **as we also forewarned you and testified**

- **Forewarned** means to have said already, to have predicted, to warn ahead of time of something with dangerous consequences - [Gal5:19-21](#) the forewarning Paul gave to the churches
- **Testified** means declare solemnly, charge under solemn oath, emphatically warn

IV. A CLOSING WARNING – v.7-8

- Paul reminds them that this kind of behavior is **contrary to the very calling of the Gospel**
 - The Gospel doesn't allow for these things to be excused and merely forgiven, but rather that they would be fought against and victory demonstrated
- **For God did not call us to uncleanness** (Gk. akatharsia = filthiness, rottenness) **but in holiness** (Gk. consecration, dedication)
 - This is contrary to any kind of **monastic vows** of special consecration; it is a holy and consecrated thing to be dedicated to one's spouse
 - Sexuality is **not filthy**, unclean, or shameful; it is sexuality exercised outside of God's created bounds
 - Our response to the filth of immorality must **not to be ashamed** of what God has given us for our enjoyment and His glory
 - Sexual relationships between husbands/wives are themselves holy, and an act of **holy worship**
 - Everything outside of that is shameful and unclean
- **Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God,**
 - Paul closes this part of his exhortation by sealing it with the **authority of God**; to reject this as foolish counsel, to reject it as mere human convention (as our culture is doing) is not the rejection of man's authority or rules or desires, but God's
 - The present day pushes to **legalize homosexual marriage**, to propagate **sexual promiscuity** in the name of fun or “trying before you buy”, the eventual push for **polygamy** (it will come), **exploitation of children sexually** and the multitude of other vile passions is to reject the authority of the living God who created us and before whom we will stand in judgment
- He closes this argument by reminding them that God **has also given us His Holy Spirit**
 - The world by and large **doesn't care**, or if they do care have no absolute **moral anchor**, but Paul reminds us of how this is to resonate within us as Christian
 - Illustration: a child's answer to why as “because”
 - Those who have been purchased by the precious blood of Christ and regenerated by the Spirit of God have in them the Holy Spirit, **the spirit of holiness** - and as such there is a working power of holiness, unless that Spirit is absent

APPLICATION

- Sometimes speak as if our culture is the **most decadent** in history
 - I say as nicely as I can that, while we are certainly decadent, we have a lot **further down** we can go
 - The decadence of the culture of the Roman empire is **hard to overstate**
 - The Thessalonians had not been by and large good Jewish people raised in the equivalent of a godly environment, but rather those **immersed** in the perversions of their world
 - **Pagan religion** did not demand sexual purity of its devotees, the gods and goddesses themselves being grossly immoral - priestesses were in the temples for the service of men who came
 - These things were **acceptable and promoted**
 - By and large this is still something that, in connection with religion, is thought of as shameful and something done in secret and scandalous (remember politicians and evangelists exposed through the years)
 - In our world, there are **still such things as scandal**, things which excite show that they haven't become common place
 - A people **become like their gods** - In a secularized (i.e. non spiritual) culture we have parallel to the “gods” and “goddesses” (sports figures, entertainers, politicians)
 - Our environment is charged with sexual immorality, and there are those that are pressing the constantly pushing boundaries

Once you decide to titillate instead of illuminate...you create a climate of expectation that requires a higher and higher level of intensity. (Bill Moyers)

- the greatest things we can do is to use the “off” button on our TV's; keep walking past the racks; become accountable of our Internet use (one of the greatest blessings and banes of our culture)
- 1.) **The good news**: the Gospel gives us all we need to fight and be victors; it is warfare, and a battleground, but if the Gospel was sufficient in the day of the Thessalonians, it continues to be effective for us
 - Paul expected the Gospel to help them in their day, and enable them to swim against a raging river of sexual perversions
 - If they could be helped in their day, then surely the Gospel is what we need in our own
 - 2.) In light of the weightiness of this issue, the atmosphere of the culture in which we live, **we must take this sin very seriously**
 - To take any sin seriously, we must **dig down deep** and kill its root

Sin aims always at the utmost; every time it rises up to tempt or entice, might it have its own course, it would go out the utmost sin in that kind. (Owen, Vol.6, p.12)

- Our great folly is thinking that we can **control it**, that it won't happen to us, that we know where to draw the line and when we get there we will be able to stop
 - There is a **deceptive and powerful momentum** that is built up in the process of indulgence of sin
 - Often, too often, instead of doing this and keeping from, we will indulge ourselves to see **how far we can go** before violating something explicit
 - We are like the **foolish young man** in the book of Proverbs, going back and forth and repeatedly exposing himself to the danger until it is given into (Prov7:8-9)

 - Some of you need to determine right now that this thing you have been fighting will be dealt a large blow
 - You are feeding bit by bit a monster through the Internet, and you need to escalate the accountability through a regular meeting with someone to ask the hard questions; to install software that will send reports to partners
- 3.) There may be those who are very aware of the **vileness of the past**, and for some perhaps the recent past in this area
In that day a fountain shall be opened...for sin and uncleanness. (Zechariah 13:1)
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. (Psalms 51:7)
- 1Corinthians 6:9-11 reminds us of the power of the Gospel; such were some of you...
- 4.) As our culture continues to degenerate, and as we pray that God would save those around us, we will have to be ready to **receive in those who have committed deep sins**
- We must extend the hope of the Gospel to them, that Jesus is really so great a Savior as that He will not for a moment justify or coddle us in our sins, He will cleanse us completely from them
- 5.) Abstaining for most **singles** is a chosen and purposeful act of suffering; it is the way of holiness; but the suffering endured there is nothing compared to the suffering that will result in sinning in this way, so continue to guard yourself, and walk with Christ