

My family and I have lived here in Central Oregon for 18 years now. ... We certainly had a lot to learn when we first got here... and we are still learning! ... I remember cutting down several trees on the property we had just bought... in order to build our home. ... I decided to handle the debris... in the same manner that I had seen others do. ... We dug a big hole and filled it with some of the branches and tree trunks from the many piles we now had... Of course none of these fresh cuttings would burn without “*proper encouragement*”... so I poured diesel fuel on it – Um... a lot!... Then I lit the match and threw it on.

Have you ever wished you could have one or two seconds of your life back...because of a reckless decision you made and executed? ... I remember instantly thinking “*Boy I wish I hadn’t done that!*”

Boom! Flames shot sky-high... almost as tall as some of the ponderosas that we left standing. ... Eventually the flames came down to about 20 or 30 feet over my head... and I was trying to douse “my inferno” with my garden hose... as fast as I could.... By the time that the fire truck arrived... who my neighbors must have called... (and rightfully so...) ... it was just black smoke.

I learned a lot from that *near disaster*.... If I burn any yard debris... I will do it in a much more responsible manner... My heart was still pounding out of my chest for days afterward.

Today-our passage deals with a different kind of blazing fire... that believers recklessly play with... on a regular basis... even though its consequences can EASILY be more devastating...than those I almost encountered with my diesel-induced firestorm.... My hope is that those who

are playing with such fire... will stop pretending that everything is OK... and stop fantasizing that it is *“really no big deal.” ... It’s OK. ... I am better than most people. It’s such a small thing!”* ... It is time to stop such wrongful thinking that: *“I can handle it...”* My prayer is that anyone who is playing with such fire will be convicted by God’s Holy Spirit and jump into immediate action.

- PRAY -

Now... before we get to our passage this morning... I want to give proper credit to my friend - Dr. Jim Cecy... and Jaron Ministries. Jim teaches the principles that I about to preach on... from 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8... all over the world. ... He wrote his doctoral dissertation on it and asked me to join him when he presented it to the seminary faculty and fellow doctoral candidates. And he has since written a book called *“The Purity War”* which you can order from Amazon.

This message is based largely on the material of Dr. Cecy’s *“Personal Purity Seminars”*... which he has asked me on multiple occasions (the last being 9 years ago) if I would be willing to teach... on behalf of JARON Ministries. ... The seminar focuses on 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 (which is the passage we come to today... in our study through 1 Thessalonians.

Let’s read the passage right now in it’s entirety... and then we will go back and take it section by section.

1 Thes 4:1-8

The initial points that I would like to make are based on verses 1 and 2. ... If you are thinking to yourself.. *“I am OK... Others need this message. – not so much me... I am better than most people... when it comes to personal*

purity...” - carefully consider how verse one says that this message ***is*** still for you. ... You have a lot more personal purity and personal holiness that God wants for your life.... Our church... and every church needs a lot more holiness – because: **AN UNHOLY WORLD WILL NEVER BE WON BY AN UNHOLY CHURCH.**

We all have a lot more personal purity and holiness that **God wants** in our lives.

1 Thes 4:1

Excel even more with your walking in personal purity! ... Strive for even greater purity... and do this to **please God**.

And then verse 2 reminds us that we already know this stuff. The Thessalonians had already been taught these truths... and I doubt that I will be teaching you anything NEW here today... I only hope to say it a little differently... and boldly... so that it will motivate us all to DO what we already know needs to be done!

Here is the value of my reminding you of what you already know. I am going to challenge you to use your understanding to be **PRO**-active... instead of **RE**-active.

The story is told of an old man... back in the days when churches normally had a mid-week prayer meeting.... Every Wednesday evening (at this church) a certain man would faithfully come... and just as faithfully... he would bring the same prayer request for himself.... With hands lifted high... and his head looking up... he would shout... “*O Lord... clean out the cobwebs from my life!*” It was quite a routine. He was regular to do this week-in and week-out. “*O Lord... clean out the cobwebs from my life!*”

(Of course) we all know what he meant... He was asking God to take away all the temptations that entangled him throughout the week.

One particular week... however... after he went through his predictable supplication: *“O Lord... clean out the cobwebs from my life!”* ... a young man who had heard this long enough... shouted... *“Don’t do it, Lord! ... Kill the spider!”*

A lot of believers know these truths from our passage... and they are a lot like that old man... they constantly go before the throne of God and ask Him to “Clean away the cobwebs...” But today... in light of what you already know... I am going to ask you to finally kill the spider. Let's stop merely being **RE**-active to the temptations that we allow in our lives... and start being **PRO**-active.

One of the lessons that I learned from my diesel-induced inferno... is that it is a lot easier to be preventative... or **PRO**-active... than **RE**-active... when it comes to blazing infernos. ... Let's use what we already know.

1 Thes 4:2

Now the remainder of our passage this morning will present for us three commands... and then three **reasons** for those commands. ... Our culture does not like commands. We simply do not want anyone else telling us that we **MUST** do something – even if it is God! ... Modern-day Americans want suggestions... not directions. ... But wouldn't you agree with me that our Creator **HAS THE RIGHT TO COMMAND HIS CREATION...?**

He created us and He knows best how we operate... according to the way we are designed.

Those of you who know a lot more about engine mechanics than I do... would affirm... that a car engine would be destroyed... if we dumped a bunch of sand into the gas tank.... Because of the way it is designed... the engine would be ruined. It isn't a matter of it being your right to dump sand in your own car's gas tank. The consequence (if you do) will be destruction.

But let me ask you a question. ... "What if I simply dropped one little grain of sand in the gas tank... Would that destroy my engine...?... No...? ... Alright... what if I dropped another little grain of sand in the fuel tank the next day...? ... Well... The engine would probably still run fine....

So... just imagine with me now... that everyday...I continued to drop just one little grain of sand in the fuel tank of my car... Wouldn't you agree that (eventually)... I would be looking for an alternative form of transportation...? The accumulation will eventually ultimately destroy my vehicle... because the way an engine is designed... is that it needs clean fuel. What's the point?

Some of you have been dropping a little grain of sand in your fuel tank-for years! ... You spend just a little time each day... or maybe even every other day fantasizing about an inappropriate relationship... and in many cases... engaged in pornographic thought. ... The truth is: it has been accumulating for a long time... and you may be... just one more grain of sand... away from total destruction. ... [P A U S E] ...

God is not being a killjoy! He knows how you are designed... and He is commanding you to stop putting sand in your fuel tank!

The first of the commands is in verse 3. Paul leads us to it with these words... *“For this is the will of God... (what?)... **your sanctification!**”*

Please do not misread this... It says this **IS** the will of God. It does not read: *“This **MIGHT BE** the will of God...” or “This **should be** the will of God...” or even this **could be** the will of God for you...”*

Now... the Greek word for “sanctification” (hagios) is the same word for holiness. *“...This is the will of God for you – that you be holy!... that you be pure... NOT that you be better than most folks. No! It is that you be holy.*

So...

- It is God’s Will that you be holy. It is not up for debate.
- It is God’s will that I be pure. Even if it is not my desire. It **is** God’s!
- It is God’s will that I be pure. It is not just His wish!
- It is God’s will that I be pure. A vessel of honor... sanctified... useful to Him for winning an unholy world!

Three commands that we come to (now)... **enable** us to be pure. Here is the first one... It is found in the second part of verse three... Look at it with me.

1 Thessalonians 4:3b

Command #1 – **STOP YOUR IMMORALITY**... immediately!

Paul uses the word “abstain” with a dramatic Greek tense... By using them together the Holy Spirit (through the Apostle Paul) is most literally saying: *“Stop what you are already doing! – Now!... (You see) the assumption that the Apostle Paul makes... is that every one of his readers is struggling to one degree or another... with immorality. “Stop – Now!”*

Maybe you are simply putting a little grain of sand in your tank... each and everyday... by allowing lustful thoughts. Maybe you have been justifying it... by telling yourself: “*Well... at least I am not **acting it out!***” Yes. That is a good thing. But not good enough. (*What* is God’s will?)

What “little compromise” – (what seemingly insignificant thing)... are you allowing. ... You know... before I moved to Central Oregon... I did **not** do a lot of thinking about snow. ... And one of the things that I never thought about as I watched a tiny little snowflake fall from the sky in the early evening... is what I would wake up to... after many of them had accumulated. Pushing and shoveling all those pretty little flakes is back-breaking. It takes a snowplow to move a tiny little snowflake... that is cooperating with several others.

Command #1. Stop the snowfall. Stop your immorality. Immediately.

Command #2. –

1 Thes 4:4-5

Command #2. – (It says here in verses 4-5) KNOW HOW TO ACQUIRE AND POSSES A MATE.

Huh? What version of the Bible are you reading from, Pastor? ... How did you get THAT from these verses? That isn't what I read...

I know. So let me explain.

The most literal translation from the original language of the New Testament is: “*that each of you know how to acquire/posses his own vessel in holiness and honor...*” ... I just finished reading these two verses in the English Standard Version... where the translators tried to help us

understand Paul's meaning. But they took it in a different direction than what the plainest meaning of the original text says. They didn't **need** to... and in my opinion... should **not** have. Please look at verse 4...

1 Thes 4:4

Do you see the word "control"... "*that each one of you know how to **control** his own body...*" The word in Greek is "κτάομαι." It is used 7 times in the New Testament and **never** is it translated as "control." It is always translated as "possess" and "acquire." ... But the ESV translators thought they would help us by translating it in a way that is done nowhere else. The same is true for how they translated the Greek word "σκεῦος". "σκεῦος" is found 23 times in the New Testament... and it always depicts a vessel... jar... gear... but never "body."

I think they should have left this to the common meaning as well (which is – "his own vessel"... not his own "body.") "Vessel" makes perfect sense. Look how Peter used the word...

1 Peter 3:7 (ESV)

⁷ Likewise, husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

I think that Paul was saying: "Let each of you know how to possess (or acquire) his own spouse..." In other words... we are to view our spouse -or our future spouse (if we are not married) – the way that God sees them. Don't just look at the outside – look at the inside!

This understanding fits the context better! Look at the very next verse (verse 5) again...

1 Thes 4:5

Gentiles (and by that... Paul means “the typical unbeliever”) goes about seeking a mate primarily on the basis of sensuality. First and foremost it is romantic feeling. And what happens when those feelings wear off. They think love is gone and it is only right to go seek a different partner who will bring those feelings back. “As long as you continue to satisfy me in the way that I want you to... we will remain together...”

I believe that Paul is teaching us that we are to be different. This is not the way to acquire and possess a mate.

COMMAND #1 – STOP THE SNOWFALL. STOP YOUR IMMORALITY.

COMMAND #2 – KNOW HOW TO ACQUIRE AND POSSESS YOUR MATE

COMMAND #3 – STOP MESSING WITH SOMEONE ELSE’S

1 Thes 4:6a

Having sex outside of marriage is stealing from someone’s current spouse or future spouse.

Dr. Jim Cecy tells the story in his book and in his Personal Purity seminars... about a conversation that he once had with a former Porn star (who eventually gave her life to Christ.) Jim speaks of how she sobbed uncontrollably as she told him her story. She was finally able to say though all her heart-felt weeping something that Jim says he will never forget...

Do you know the hardest thing out of all of this? I realize that even today there are a number of men, some might even be my brothers in Christ, who are looking at photos and films of my nude body and sinning against the Lord and their families. Don’t they know that I am

a sister in Christ? Don't they know that I will be with them in Heaven? Don't they know that I am not just a bunch of body parts? Why are they looking at me that way? Can't you make them stop?

Then Jim advises his audiences:

"I have thought about that conversation many times. Often it has stopped me from being tempted to peek at something inappropriate. When I start to notice a beautiful woman walking down the street, I imagine that she has just given her life to Christ and is my fellow citizen of Heaven. Even if she is not yet my sister in Christ, I know that by God's grace, she might soon be."

So here is Jim's advise put plainly: personalize the person you are tempted to gawk at. See that person as a real person with a real family. It is very possible that they have someone in their life who is praying that they will become a Christian – and they very well might! Do not defraud him/her... or their family and friends. This is a real person with a mother and other relatives (like a grandparents) who don't want you to treat them as if they are just a body for you to have pleasure with.

One of the best ways to be PRO-active is to consider the person who you have inappropriate thoughts about – as a personality for who Christ died.

So... we have three commands.

#1. Learn to say "*stop it!*" to all the compromises that you have been allowing. (Think of it like dropping sand in your gas tank.)

#2. Appreciate more and more God's mate for your life. See them the way God sees them. Ask Him to allow you to see them as precious.

#3. Train your wandering eyes to consider attractive people as real people for whom Christ died... and with whom you might spend an eternity.

So... we have three commands. Now let's see what Paul gives as the reasons for these commands. (If the commands alone will not motivate you... perhaps the reasons behind them will.

REASON #1. – GOD AVENGES SEXUAL IMMORALITY

1 Thes 4:6b

Take this to the bank! If you are going to **play** – you are going to **pay**!

... [P A U S E] ...

- It may cost you **physically** – through the spread of a disease.
- It will cost you **spiritually** – because your walk with God will be affected.
- It will cost you **emotionally** – unless you are one of the most calloused individuals who ever lived. Even if no one ever finds out... the load of guilt and other emotions will be overwhelming.
- It can cost you **socially** – because if others find out, you can expect to lose many friends who will be disgusted by you. And if there is another spouse involved – expect a great deal of social disruption and hardship.
- It can cost you **financially**. Ask anyone who has suffered a divorce. Ask them what they had to pay in lawyer fees... losing their house... and sharing their kids... and that is just for starters!

No wonder 1 Thes 4:6 says that **God will avenge sexual immorality!**

If you are going to **play** – you are going to **pay**! Scripture promises it. But not just here...

Proverbs 6:32-33 (ESV)

³² He who commits adultery lacks sense; he who does it destroys himself. ³³ He will get wounds and dishonor, and his disgrace will not be wiped away.

I used to think one sin is just as bad as any other sin... (that no sin is worse than another.) ... For example: "A lie is just as bad a stealing." ... But what I thought is wrong. ... Sexual sin is held by Scripture at a different level than other sins. Scripture distinguishes it as worse.

1 Corinthians 6:18-20 (ESV)

¹⁸ Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. ¹⁹ 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, ²⁰ for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Sexual sin is distinguished from all other sin... and God says that it will not go unpunished. (LISTEN TO ME BELIEVER!) You won't get away with it!

REASON #1. – GOD AVENGES SEXUAL IMMORALITY

REASON #2. –

1 Thes 4:7

REASON #2. – GOD CALLS BELIEVERS TO BE PURE

We already saw this in verse 3... didn't we? ... We have already spent some time on this... and I think that I will let what I have already said stand. So let's move on (now) to reason #3. This one is very powerful! We've saved the best for last.

1 Thes. 4:8

The message of verse 8 is this: **If we reject these commands... we are rejecting God – Himself!** [P A U S E] ... But that is not the main thing that I want you to notice.

Between verses 7 and 8... the message is: You and I are to be holy... and the wonderful thing about God... is that He never requires of us – what we can never give Him! ... [P A U S E] ... There it is! That is what I want you to recognize. ... **God never requires anything from us that we are not able to give Him.**

Between verses 7 and 8 a thoughtful reader gets THIS message: “Be holy... for I am holy. Oh! (By the way)... you don’t have the ability to be holy... so here is My Holy Spirit... which is the ONLY WAY you can ever be holy. Take another look at this amazing verse!

1 Thes 4:8

REASON #3. - GOD HIMSELF IS HOLY AND EMPOWERS US TO BE HOLY

So here is what we have in today’s passage:

GOD CALLS ME TO BE PURE

GOD WILLS ME TO BE PURE

GOD ENABLES ME TO BE PURE.

(Now)... if these three things are true... what is the only issue when it comes to my being pure...? The only issue is – DO I **WANT** TO BE PURE?

Rejecting God's commands (*and His **provision***) – is rejecting God! It clearly announces to Him: *“I don't want to be pure... and I don't want YOU, God!”*

Thursday morning I was on the way to the office and the radio preacher that I was listening to used an illustration that I will close with. ... He told of a very wealthy widow lady who lived in the late 1800's when electricity was just beginning to be made available inside people's homes.

But she was a penny-pincher... doing her best to pay the least amount of money that she could to anyone – even though she had ***plenty***. ... So imagine the towns-people's surprise when she became the very first resident in her community to install electricity in her home.

The wiring was all put in and she had been up and running with it for several months when a knock came to her door. The man on her doorstep was from the electric company and he looked very perplexed. *“Is everything working properly with your electricity, Mam?”* ... *“Oh Yes!”* she replied. *“It works marvelous. And what a convenience it is!”* The man from the electric company was even more confused, so he proceeded to tell her that they had been watching the meter showing the amount of electricity she was using – and the meter was barely recording any use at all. *“May I ask how you are using it, Mam”* asked the man. *“Well, every evening just as it is beginning to turn dark... I use it to turn my lights on in the house... so I can see well enough to find my way around as I light all my candles for the evening... and then I turn them off...”*

Many of us are like that woman. We have been given enormous power through the Holy Spirit – but we choose not to use it. We use it minimally... just so we can resume our old ways.

(LISTEN) – GOD WANTS YOU TO BE PURE – AND HE ENABLES YOU TO BE PURE!