

UNEDITED DRAFT

Dear friends in Christ,

The last few weeks we have been meditating on the 10 Commandments. Why are we taking this time? Of what benefit is it to review, study, meditate on these Commandments? To answer that question, I am going to jump right in to today's sermon text. We are looking at 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8.

Now we need to understand this: Paul wrote 1 Thessalonians to the *Christians* living in Thessalonica. In other words, this letter is not addressed to unbelievers, nor to a mixture of unbelievers and Christians. It is written to people who have already heard the good news of Jesus Christ, they are connected to him, and they are following him. The beginning of the letter says, **"We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. 3 We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. 4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you...."**

So understand what comes next is written to people who are already children of God, already forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ, already pure and holy in God's sight. To these Christ-followers, Paul emphasizes extremely important it is to live lives full of good works! Listen:

As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. ... The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins, as we told you and warned you before. 8 Therefore, anyone who rejects this instruction does not reject a human being but God, the very God who gives you his Holy Spirit.

1) We want to please God. 2) We want to do more and more. 3) The one who doesn't want to please God or do more and more rejects God and will face God's punishment.

The Christ-follower naturally asks the question: "How can I live in order to please God?" God already paid the full ransom price for our sin. He forgave us unconditionally. When some lavishes ridiculous gifts upon you, aren't you compelled to thank them? Because God loved us, we love him. Because we love him, we ask the question, "How can I please you?" And a summary answer to that question is: the 10 Commandments.

So here's what we need to understand: if we are saved by God's grace through Christ and through faith in him... if we are NOT saved by our works, our performance, our striving, our trying... does that make a life of good works that are pleasing to God optional?

Paul answers that question and says, "Not at all!" Paul says that if a Christ-follower willfully and intentionally continues to what God hates, **"the Lord will punish all those who commit such sins."** Anyone who rejects this instruction, rejects God.

To reject any of the instruction God gives in the 10 Commandments is to reject the Giver... you reject God. The one who rejects God, rejects the salvation he offers through Christ.

In other words, rejecting any of the 10 Commandments is an act of unbelief. We can't say "I love Christ" yet habitually, continually, willfully, intentionally do what Christ hates.

The Christian who sins calmly and nonchalantly, and throws out, "Oh well, Jesus forgives me" is in grave danger of the fires of hell. **"The Lord will punish all those who commit such sins."**

So our study of the 10 Commandments is showing us: Sin is serious business. It's highly offensive to God. It deserves eternal damnation in hell. Sin must be confessed. Jesus forgives it. But he doesn't forgive it that we may live in it. He forgives it so we can be free from it. And the Christian that continues to live in it, is not freed from it, and is not forgiven. Our motivation to live free from sin is a joyful desire to please God, for he is the one who forgave our sin through the sacrifice of his Son.

We'll need to move on so we actually talk about the 6th Commandment today. The Commandment reads, **"You shall not commit adultery."** (Exodus 20:14). With this Commandment, God is protecting one of his most precious and important gifts: marriage. Last week I said some things that may have offended some people. This week the chance of offense is even higher. What God says and what our culture says about marriage, family and sexuality are starkly at odds.

Let me just say there are some things we need to talk about frankly today, and the only way to talk about them directly. I don't want to make anyone uncomfortable, but at the same time, we need to speak clearly about that which God speaks clearly about.

[GOD IS PROTECTING HIS GIFT OF MARRIAGE AND FAMILY]

It's interesting to note that God established marriage at the very beginning, even before there was sin in this world. It was not good for Adam to be alone. He needed a companion. He needed help because alone he was incomplete. So God made Eve just for Adam and presented her to him. They were made for each other. They completed one another. Both were lacking without the other. This first marriage is the pattern for every marriage: one man and woman in a lifelong, unbreakable commitment. They enjoy a secure relationship with each other, and create a secure environment in which they might have and raise children. The family is God's building block of a healthy society.

[Anything that undermines or harms God's institution of marriage violates the 6th Commandment.]

[To honor marriage you must understand and properly use God's gift of sex.]

The Bible is very clear about the proper use of God's gift of sex. And it is a gift! People tend to go to extremes. The pleasures of close physical intimacy are either the devil or God. They are evil and are to be avoided, or they are divine and eagerly sought without restrictions. The truth is neither. Sex is a wonderful gift from God. But God defines very clearly how and when and why the gift may be used. What is a wonderful thing becomes as very dangerous thing when used improperly.

In a sense it is like fire. If you are camping, fire is a wonderful thing. It can warm you. Roast marshmallows. Cook your food. Provide a gathering point for stories and conversations. But if a child pulls a burning stick out of the fire and goes running through a dry, pine forest, the good thing now becomes an immensely destructive and even deadly thing.

So also with God's gift of sex. God gave the gift as a means to physically and emotionally bond a husband and a wife for life. And secular psychological studies have shown that this is

exactly what takes place. The great pleasure of physical intimacy forms channels in the human brain to the one they are enjoyed with. Like water through a canyon that continuously carves deeper and deeper, the husband wife strengthen and deepen their bond to each other through physical intimacy. It's a bond that isn't just external, but very personal... internal. The Bible describes it as two persons becoming one. What an incredible gift! What a wise God we have that he would think up such a thing and give it to us. It's a gift to thank God for.

But when this gift is used outside of God's instructions, it becomes a very destructive force. God forbids us from forming such channels and bonds with someone that is not our spouse. It is wrong to form those channels and bonds with a person with whom you have no life-long commitment. Within the boundary of a life-long commitment, it's an incredible binding force. Outside that boundary, it is a something that can hurt you deeply.

Our society does not give a consistent message about this. On the one hand, promiscuity is justified by people when they say, "It's just something physical. It doesn't mean anything." And yet those same people would never dream of saying the same thing to a rape victim, would they? "It was just something physical. It didn't mean anything. Just get over it." No, the person was violated on a very personal level as someone forced an intimate bond that was not desired. It's a hurt that uniquely runs very deeply.

This is why Paul said, "1 Corinthians 6:18 **Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a person commits are outside the body, but whoever sins sexually, sins against their own body.**"

Back to 1 Thessalonians 4 **3 It is God's will that you should be sanctified:** *(You should be holy and set apart. And what does that "holiness," that set-apartedness look like?)*

that you should avoid sexual immorality; and that in this matter no one should wrong or take advantage of a brother or sister.

The Greek word here is "porneia". It's the word from which our word "pornography" comes from. It's a general word that covers all kinds of sexual immorality. Here are the general categories of "porneia"... all of them harm God's gift of marriage:

- It obviously includes **rape**... taking advantage of another sexually who is unwilling.
- It would include **prostitution**.
- It would include **adultery**. At least we still recognize the damage that does to a marriage. But God does not approve of "open" marriages either where each spouse gives permission to the other to seek other partners. This is an offense against God.
- But what many today don't realize, is that "porneia" also includes having sexual relations with someone **before you are married**. The word for it "fornication" although few know that word anymore since it is so common. I'm increasingly counseling people who were never taught that sex before marriage or without marriage is wrong. Statistics indicate $\frac{3}{4}$ of all young people have pre-marital sex before the age of 20. It is a sin. It does do damage to the institution of marriage, and it will create baggage and cause complications that will affect your future marriage.
- Also included in porneia is **lust**, a sin of the mind and heart. God even demands that our hearts and minds remain pure. To look at internet pornography or any other kind *is* a sin. It causes our brain to make connections with what is imaginary and fake, instead of with our spouse... or our future spouse. Studies have shown that those who engage in pornography have a more difficult time truly engaging in and connecting with their spouse.

- Then one last category I must mention because God does, is **homosexuality**. I am staggered at how quickly our society has changed its views about this sin. The shift has come in less than 20 years. In 1996, 27% thought gay marriage should be valid. In 2014, that number has skyrocketed to 55% (although I am surprised it's barely over half. The media indicates a bigger majority.) Finally, morality is not determined by popular opinion, but by God. And here is what God says: 1 Cor 6:9-11: **"Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men[a] 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. 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."**

I conclude this section with this passage because it covers a variety of sins, many of them sexual. And it even says, "that is what some of you were!" Some of the believers in Corinth HAD BEEN sexually immoral, adulterers, homosexuals, thieves, drunkards, etc. They were sinners. But when they came to Christ, their sin was forgiven, and they began asking the question, "How can I live in a way that pleases God?" And they changed, with God's help.

All of the categories of "porneia" above are sinful in God's sight. None is "worse" than another when it comes to damaging our relationship with God. So what is the "porneia" sin you struggle with or have struggled with the most? As you think about your past... maybe college... is there guilt that you carry with you today? What baggage from your past followed you into the future and is hurting your marriage today? What current 6th Commandment sins are separating you from your God and from your spouse... or your future spouse?

For any and all sexual sins, God calls us to repentance. No excuses. No justifications. Just confess.

Today your loving heavenly Father calls you to come to Jesus and be washed, be purified, to have all these sins forgiven. "Yeah, but you don't know what I have done." I don't need to. Jesus sacrifice on the cross didn't pay for *some* sin. But for *all* sin. And it didn't pay for some people, but for *all* people. God gave his pure Son to purify us from all sin. His perfect life and his death on the cross were the all-sufficient sacrifice for sin.

So listen: Jesus has forgiven you! Isn't that amazing? Completely, totally. Forgiven. You are pure in God's sight through Jesus. What a gift! Don't you want to ask, "God, how can I please you? I want to please you more and more!" And God says, "Uphold my institution of marriage. Use my gift of sexuality within the boundaries I have established.

Continuing our reading in 1 Thess 4: **4 that each of you should learn to control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the pagans, who do not know God;**

God says "You please me when you control your own body. When you control your mind and emotions. When you use my gift of sexuality as I outlined.

Now, from some of you there may be some pushback from some of these things I just said. But understand that the laws God gives are good and they are beneficial. So the question is, would society be better and would we be happier if everyone followed God's will related to the 6th Commandment? To answer that question, we're going to have to use our imaginations a bit. Let's just imagine, that for whatever reason, EVERYONE on the planet immediately started to follow all of God's will related to the 6th Commandment. What would our world look like?

Can you imagine a world where: There would be no more rape. No more prostitution. No more spouses cheating on spouses. There would be no more children born outside of marriage... every child on the planet would grow up in a home with a mom and a dad... unless one of them died. Our high schools would not have a single pregnant teen... unless they chose to get married in high school (in which case it wouldn't be a problem.) There would be no more sexually transmitted diseases. NONE. AIDS would be almost completely eradicated. All the other nasty things that can pass between people who are promiscuous... gone. Even without a change to abortion laws, the vast majority of them would not take place if everyone was following God's will. There would be no more divorces. That pain and anguish of a family splitting up would be history.

This sounds like the kind of world I would want to live in. It's a world in line with the will of God and it would be a very happy place. It's a world in which the institution of marriage is respected and honored by all, and God's gift of sex is only used within the boundaries God intended.

We won't get that world this side of heaven, but what if just the Christians got this right? Friends, God has called you to be pure. He made you pure through his Son. Now live in a way that pleases him. Do this more and more. To his honor and glory. Amen.