

BIBLICAL MANHOOD AND WOMANHOOD VII PASSION UNDER CONTROL

1 Thessalonians 4: 1-8

Don't forget to review the catechism question for this week.

INTRODUCTION

What are some situations in which we are given commands that are for our own good?

- *Doctors give us commands for our own good*
- *Traffic signs are giving us commands for our own good*
- *Flight attendants give us commands for our own good*
- *Lifeguards give us commands for our own good*

When do we view commands as not for our own good?

We view commands as harmful when they forbid us from doing things we want to do or tell us to do things we don't want to do. We view commands as harmful when people who we do not trust give them.

God's commands are always for the good of his people. We know this because he is infinitely wise and knows every possible contingency. Therefore he is able to tell us what is the best course of action in every possible situation. We know his commands are good because he loves his people with an infinite love and would never will anything that would be harmful for them. In 1 Thessalonians 4 Paul is giving commands to the people in the church at Thessalonica. These commands, he says, are God's will for them. What he commands goes against their and our natural desires. Therefore, he gives them at least 4 reasons why obeying these commands are for their own good, and ours.

STUDY

1. Read Acts 17: 1-15. What are some things you find out about the church in Thessalonica?

The membership of the church was made up of some Jews and a large number of God-fearing Greeks. There was a sizable faction in the town that was opposed to the gospel and the church and sought to harm Paul. We can presume that persecution was an ongoing problem. They even sent people after Paul and Silas in Berea in order to cause them trouble there.

2. In pairs skim 1 Thess. 1-3. What do you find out about the church from this passage? What do you find out about Paul's relationship to them?

Paul is very sure that God has saved them because of how firmly they held to Christ in spite of the persecution. There was a very definite change in the lives of these people, especially the Greeks who turned from idolatry to worship Jesus. They are still undergoing persecution. It was so intense that Paul was afraid they might abandon Christ because of the pressure. Paul had a very deep affection and concern for them, like a parent for his or her children.

3. The primary command in this passage is contained in vv. 3-5. It is given in three different forms. What are the three ways this central command is given?

- *Avoid sexual immorality*
- *Control your own body in a way that is holy and honorable*
- *Don't use your body in passionate lust*

4. What is sexual immorality? What is it we are to avoid? The Greek word is "porneia", the word we get the English word, "pornography" from. Also, note that v. 7 uses "impurity" as a synonym for sexual immorality. Read the following passages and identify what each one adds to the idea of sexual immorality/impurity. (NOTE: NT ideas of sexual ethics are based upon OT teaching so we will begin by reading an OT passage.)

- *Lev. 20: 7-24 Sexual immorality would include all manner of deviant sexual behavior including homosexuality and bestiality.*
- *Mark 7: 20-23 The thing to note here is that Jesus includes sexual immorality and adultery in this list of vices. Adultery stands for sex with a married person you are not married to and sexual immorality*

to all other forms of sexual impropriety, including premarital sexual relations.

- Romans 1: 24-27 Note here that homosexuality and lesbianism are the examples of “impurity” that Paul cites.
- 1 Cor 6: 9-11 This passage lists adultery and homosexuality separate from sexual immorality. Therefore it is used here to refer primarily to premarital sexual relations and other sexual deviances.
- 1 Cor 6: 12-19 Here prostitution is the primary form of sexual immorality being referred to but v. 16 seems to broaden the idea to include all forms of sexual sin.
- Gal 5: 19 Sexual immorality and impurity are used here in much the same way as in 1 Thess. 4. They stand for all kinds of sexual sin, including adultery, etc.
- Matthew 5: 27-30 Here we discover that sexual immorality is not confined to just behavior but also to looking and thinking as well.
- 1 Timothy 5: 1-2 Paul here gives us a practical description of what “controlling your body in a way that is holy and honorable” can be measured. Simply put, don’t do anything or think anything with or about a person to whom you are not married that you couldn’t do or think with or about your sister, brother, mother, father.

5. How would you summarize or define sexual immorality based on these texts?

6. Based on these texts I (John Swanson) define sexual immorality in this way: “Any intentional behavior or thought that is designed to stimulate and/or gratify sexual desire in myself or another person, unless that behavior is with my spouse.” Do you agree or disagree with this definition? Why have I included the word intentional in the definition?

It is possible, especially in our culture and especially for men, to be sexually stimulated without your consent just by walking through the mall. What matters is what you do when this happens. Do you look away and call out for mercy or do you look again? Looking again is sexual immorality. Or for a woman you might feel yourself attracted to a man who treats you with respect or tenderness. The initial attraction is not sin, it’s what you do afterwards. Do you flirt? Do you inappropriately affirm the man?

7. Read the following verses. How does God feel about sexual desire and the gratification of sexual desire within marriage? (Genesis 1: 31, Proverbs 5: 15-19, 1 Cor 7: 3-4)

He made both and he calls them very good. He thinks it is a good thing for husbands and wives to enjoy each other sexually.

8. According to 4:1-2 where do the instructions Paul is giving them come from?

He claims that these instructions come directly from Jesus himself. They have his full authority. He also stresses that the commands he is about to give are the same ones he gave them when he was with them. He is reminding them of things he said before, he is not giving them new instructions.

9. What is significant about the fact that Paul instructed this church to avoid sexual immorality when he was with them for only a month?

Sexual purity is very important to the Christian life. It is not the definition of holiness but it is an important aspect of it. Paul is also recognizing that sexual desire is a powerful force in our lives.

10. How are the Thessalonians responding to the instructions Paul gave them while he was with them?

They are obeying his instructions about sexual impurity.

11. Why does he tell them to obey his instructions more and more?

There are several reasons, but I will mention two. First, he knows that there are no sinless Christians and so it is always right to encourage one another to do better. Everyone can be more sexually pure, more “holy”. Second, he knows that if you are not straining forward you are sliding backwards. There is no such thing as coasting in the Christian life. The faith that saves us fights against all sin in us.

12. In v. 1 why does Paul give them these instructions? What are some implications of this statement?

Paul gives these instructions (all his instructions, actually) so that they might please God. This implies that Christians want to please God. The desire to please God is supposed to be a motive for us to obey the commands Paul gives. To not obey is to displease God. To know that the God who made you and who will one day be your judge is pleased with you is an infinitely happy thing. Nothing matters more than this. On the day you die the only thing that will matter to you is whether God is pleased with you.

13. How would a desire to please God motivate a person to avoid sexual immorality? Have you ever done anything because you wanted to please another person? What people do you want to please?

We want to please the people we love. In fact, when those we love are pleased with us or with what we do, it makes us very happy. Christians love God and so pleasing God pleases us. We know that sexual purity pleases God therefore we delight to be sexually pure.

14. Do you often think of pleasing God with how you live your life? Why or why not?

The pleasure of sexual purity is infinitely greater than the pleasures of unrestrained sexuality because only the sexually pure please God.

15. According to v. 5, why is it that people live in passionate lust? Why are they sexually immoral? (Compare with Romans 1: 24-28)

People live sexually immoral lifestyles because they do not know God.

16. What kind of knowledge is Paul talking about?

The knowledge Paul is describing here is not simply accurate information. It is love for the God who is revealed in the Bible. It includes accurate knowledge of God but also affection for the God who is known. In James 2: 19 we are told that the demons believe the truth about God but they do not love him, they hate him. The NT is very clear that you must believe “true truth” about God but you must combine that knowledge with love for the God you know about. This is the kind of knowledge that loving husbands and wives have of each other. It is the

kind of knowledge that sports fans have of their favorite players. It is the kind of knowledge that gourmet cooks have of cooking.

17. How would knowing God keep a person from living in “passionate lust”? (Consider how “knowing” your spouse could keep you from adultery. Consider how “knowing” a sporting event will keep you from looking at pornography while you are engaged in enjoying the event.)

There is so much pleasure in knowing God that all other pleasures take a back seat. If a pleasure prevents a person from knowing God then the person abandons that pleasure in order to know God better. Like the person who enjoys eating fried food but who enjoys living more. So when the doctor tells him that if he is going to keep living he will have to give up all fried foods, he does so with joy. Knowing God is a higher joy and a greater pleasure than the pleasure of illicit sexual behavior and so sexual immorality is abandoned to know and enjoy God more. I think the example of watching a sporting event is very instructive. A man may have an addiction to looking at pornography. However, while he is watching his favorite football team play a game he will have no desire to look at pornography. When we ask why that is the simple answer is that watching football is more pleasurable at that time than looking at pornography.

The pleasure of sexual purity is infinitely greater than the pleasures of unrestrained sexuality because only the sexually pure know God.

18. According to v. 6a what is true of those who are sexually immoral?

Sexually immoral people are wronging others and taking advantage of them. In other words, the sexually immoral person is harming other people. This is true of all forms of sexual immorality, not just the “big” kinds, like adultery.

19. How does our culture view the impact of what is happening between “two consenting adults” or in the “privacy of one’s own bedroom”?

One of the greatest lies of our age in regards to our sexuality is that what we do in the privacy of our own bedroom does not affect anyone else. In other words, no sexual behavior harms anyone as long as carried on between two consenting adults.

The pleasure of sexual purity is infinitely greater than the pleasures of unrestrained sexuality because only the sexually pure love others.

20. Can you think of ways that sexual immorality harms others?
The best thing that can happen to a person is that they know and please God. If you are engaging in sexual immorality with another person you are keeping the other person from knowing or pleasing God. If you are engaging in premarital sexual relations you are destroying the relationship between the other person and their future spouse, even if that spouse is eventually you. The victims of sexual immorality are everywhere around us. How many children are living without one of their parents because of sexual immorality? How many husbands addicted to pornography have demeaned and destroyed their wives? How many shattered lives are the results of sexual infidelity of one form or another? How many extended families have been shredded as one "significant other" after another is brought into family gatherings? How many babies have died in the abortuaries because of what consenting adults have done in the privacy of their own bedrooms? How many lives are now lived with chronic pain or ended prematurely through the gift of a sexually transmitted disease?

21. How would you answer an 18 year old who says that he and his girlfriend love each other and so it's OK for them to stimulate and gratify each other sexually?

I would begin by talking with them about how he came into existence and why he came into existence. Did he make himself? If not, who did? Why is he taking up space on planet earth? What is the purpose of his life? I would then show him that he is made by God for the purpose of knowing him and loving him above all things. The God who made him tells him that if he is going to be infinitely and eternally happy it will only be if he desires and loves God above all things. The God who made him for infinite happiness in his fellowship also commands him to not have sexual relations with anyone except his spouse. He says you cannot know him and engage in premarital sex. Therefore, if he wants to be eternally happy he will pursue his happiness in knowing God not in having sex with his girlfriend. I would then demonstrate the many ways he is harming himself, his girlfriend and our entire culture by engaging in sexual immorality. "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked for whatever a man sows that will he also reap." Gal. 5:8

22. What does Paul say will happen to those who ignore what he is saying and engage in sexual immorality? Why will God do this?
He will punish them because they are harming others and rejecting him. He will do this because he did not call them to live an impure life but to live a holy life.

23. How certain is Paul that God will punish all who profess to be Christians but who engage in sexual immorality?
He is very certain as he has solemnly warned them and told them this before. He regularly repeats these warnings to Christians.

24. What kind of punishment is Paul talking about? See 2 Thessalonians 1: 5-10 especially but also, Ephesians 5: 3-7, Galatians 5: 19-21, 1 Corinthians 6: 9-11, 10: 1-13.

Paul is clearly talking about the eternal punishment of hell, not simply some kind of discipline. The word for discipline (paidei,an) is totally different from the word for punishment (e,kdikoi) used here. In addition, the Scriptures are very clear from the OT into the NT that God rejects those who reject him (See Romans 2: 5-11, 2 Thess. 1: 5-10, Jeremiah 2: 10-22 & 5: 7-17 as examples).

25. How can Paul say this to professing Christians who he commends for their faithfulness throughout the letter? Does he believe that true Christians can "lose their salvation"? The primary clue to what Paul is talking about is v. 7 and the end of v. 8, "who gives you his Holy Spirit". What is Paul saying here?

The call of God to which Paul is referring is the effectual call of God in saving sinners. In other words, Paul is arguing that if God has called you to salvation that means that he has given you a new heart, put his Spirit in you and is causing you to walk in his ways. He has given you a faith that loves to obey him and hates to sin. Therefore, the person who is living in sexual immorality cannot know that they are a Christian. In fact, if you are living in any sin you are most likely not a Christian

because, while Christians can commit acts of sin, Christians do not continue in sin. The reason they do not continue in sin is because they have been given new natures, the very nature of God himself, who is the Holy Spirit and so they do not want to sin, they want to live a holy life. So Paul is warning people who are engaging in sexual immorality not to presume they are safe simply because they give assent to the facts of the gospel and claim to be a Christian. Ephesians 2: 8-10 makes this very clear. We are saved by grace through faith and this entire salvation, including the faith, is a gift from God. It is not the result of anything we have done or ever will do. It is entirely a work of God through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. But that salvation, as Eph. 2:10 makes clear includes doing good works. They are the result, not the cause of our salvation. See these passages for the same point: Titus 2: 11-14, 1 Corinthians 6: 9-11 & 15: 10, Ezekial 36: 24-29, John 3:8, 1 John 2: 29 & 4:7 with 2: 3-6, 3: 7-10 & 4: 8, 11-12.

26. How do 1 John 1: 8-10, 2: 1-2 & Galatians 5: 16-18 & 6: 1-5 assure us that Christians are not perfect but they are fighting?

Each of these passages assume that Christians do sin. However, each of them also assume that Christians are fighting against their sin by confessing their sins, depending upon Christ, walking by the Spirit and helping each other to fight against sin.

27. Does a desire to be in heaven help you to keep from sinning, whether sexually or some other way?

The pleasure of sexual purity is infinitely greater than the pleasures of unrestrained sexuality because only the sexually pure inherit eternal life.