

Having bared his heart of love and affections for his newly saved brethren in Thessalonica, Paul proceeds with solid exhortations regarding their conduct before the living and true God whom they had turned from idols to serve. Indeed this remark in chapter 1:9-10 sets the stage for these appeals to their love for the Lord Jesus. Not that they weren't living for Him already, but he desires they abound more and more. We are not to rest upon our oars. We can always grow more conformed to Jesus Christ, even though even the youngest believer is like Him in some measure already. To this end Paul reminds them of some commandments he had given them before he abruptly had to leave them. These commandments were "by the Lord Jesus." Commands given by the Lord are God's will. Some nowadays have become afraid of being "legal" (or perhaps worse in their view, being called legal). But wholehearted devotion to the Lord who died to save us need not be "legal." The God who purchased us with the blood of His one and only Son is worthy of our total enthusiastic obedience. He has a will. That will is that we be sanctified. This was one purpose of the Cross. Jesus Himself expresses it in His prayer to the Father before the cross.

*John 17:13 And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves. 14 I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 15 I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. 17 Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth. 18 As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. 19 And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. 20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word;*

Sanctified means to be set apart, set apart from sin, set apart from this world, set apart as far as He was in His life down here and as far apart as He is now. Here we learn this, **that down to earth every day holiness of life starts with fundamental sexual purity. Abstinence!** "Legal" you say? Not! Purity of spirit, soul and body before a Pure God. Abstinence.

(Abstinence: Greek: to hold oneself off, i.e. refrain)

Any act of intimacy outside of marriage, is sin. It is defiling personally, dishonoring to both involved, dishonoring our Creator, dishonoring our Lord and Savior, dishonoring our God and Father, corrupting the Assembly of God, and if not checked, bringing about utter destruction of the local assembly. He appeals to the call of God. A call unto holiness. Pagan Gentiles or religious Jews, they had not been holy when God called them. Now they are cautioned against relapse into old habits. The local surrounding culture was completely accommodating of premarital, extramarital or promiscuous relationships.

There was no restraining legal or cultural influence to be found in the city, much like the world we find ourselves in today. As little as 50 years ago the community we live in was publically intolerant of divorce, adultery and fornication, not to name other unmentionable vices. No longer, although not yet given up to total dissoluteness. The walk of the believer is to be one as a light in a dark place. Even if different! Not conformed, Romans 12:1-2. Not a non-conformist, but not conformist.

Note there is no indication of Paul having taught them what he later wrote the believers in Rome (Romans 6 -8), Galatia, and in other epistles about the positional basis for overcoming sin in the flesh. His appeal is to the newborn believers, who in their simplicity of heart are willing and able to please God. First Love!

Paul goes into some specifics in this passage, which we need to understand. He deliberately uses delicate language and euphemisms to speak of this intimate subject in a way that is not defiling to the reader. May we learn from his example. Not that God won't or doesn't use very graphic and shockingly gross terms and descriptions in scripture of sin and its consequences. But we do well to follow Paul's example here and heed his admonishments regarding what we say, how we say it, and even whether we should say it at all.

*Ephesians 5:11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. 12 For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.*

What does he mean "possess his vessel?" Each person? Each male? Is the "vessel" a man's wife? His own body? Clearly the man is to be in control of both himself and the situations he encounters or enters into. There is no double standard here. A man isn't free to roam while demanding purity in his wife or fiancee. And he is not to attempt to go as far as he can and rely on her to protect her honor and say no. He is to say no. Say no by avoiding temptation, tempting situations and refusing to yield to temptation if tested. Flee fornication.

*1Corinthians 6:18 Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. 19 What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? 20 For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*

If possible, say no before even starting down a path that might lead to temptation.

*1Corinthians 10:13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*

Have the Lord Jesus before us. He is the only way we can have eyes to spot the way of escape He has provided. He

is the reason we can carry out God's will in these matters. Be continually in the word and prayer and rely on the Holy Spirit within us for the power of self control (which is part of the fruit of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22-23).

I repeat. Scripture consistently places the responsibility upon the man for the purity of any relationship involving a male and a female. In reality this is inherent in his created masculinity and his God given position of headship. Every young man should take this responsible position seriously when escorting a young lady to some activity. Guys are responsible for the lady's honor. Older men are still vulnerable to temptation. David failed in this regarding Bathsheba. Countless others have before and since. Men of all ages must consciously maintain all purity when visiting or counseling a woman.

*1Timothy 5:1 Rebuke not an elder, but entreat him as a father; and the younger men as brethren; 2 The elder women as mothers; the younger as sisters, with all purity.*

**Sanctification**, being set apart to holiness, is the key to a walk pleasing to God. It is the key to an effective testimony to man. The scriptures abound with references to this basic principle of God's will.

Along with sanctification **brotherly love (phileo)** is the key to healthy relationships between believers in Christ. In this, more is always better. This love is not confined to local saints but is toward brethren in the Lord everywhere. Each local assembly is, in one sense, uniquely constituted and gifted by the Head for every work into which He may lead it. It is also fitted for every responsibility and local issue He may give it to handle. He is, after all, in the midst, Matthew 18:20. But the local assembly is not independent at all, as these scriptures among others clearly show. Their love and friendship flows out to all the assemblies for miles round and Paul encourages this. No thinking in terms of "our assembly" here. What a shame that saints of God nowadays are so often found to be separated from one another. This was not His original plan or intent. This sad condition has been brought about by the inattention of believers to God's word and lack of dependence on the Holy Spirit. The consequent infiltration (or eruption) of evil teaching, immoral practices and worldly living were allowed to remain undisciplined and then to persist in the assembly. Finally it became necessary for godly saints to leave it. We Christians have helped the Enemy make ruin of the assembly of God founded on the day of Pentecost. He left it in our hands to hold, honor and treasure. Despite the failure, we are to seek to carry on the original order and intent to the greatest extent practicable, while maintaining the sanctification mentioned first in this chapter. Meanwhile we look forward to being united in glory with

the Lord who died for us and His Assembly of called out saints. He speaks of that rapture in our next lesson.

The third component of a successful testimony here is **our quiet, honest, industrious daily lives**. Paul has to remind them gently here (but some more forcibly in his second epistle) of their need to work hard to support themselves with food and covering (clothing and shelter). He had. Note the objective of working was not to pursue a fulfilling career or to have money for pleasures, or to save up for security but simply to have lack of nothing. Not to gain, but rather not to lack. Idleness is not a godly way of life.

He assumes we may be employed with unbelievers (those that are without) or have other regular contact with them as neighbors, with business, shopping, etc. We are not called to be reclusive. On the other hand he also exhorts that we not become busybodies in the affairs of others. This habit is disruptive to unity within the assembly and it is antagonistic to those without who might otherwise listen to the gospel. We ought not intrude into other persons lives much less seek to control them.

**Summary.** We see the wisdom of Paul's earlier three chapter review of his conduct toward them. He was able to admonish them effectively because he had practiced what he preached while with them.

Fond brotherly love is strongly encouraged among the believers in the local assembly and surrounding assemblies as well, for there is one body. But there are dangers to be aware of in the close, affectionate fellowship of saints, brothers and sisters in the Lord. As our character and personalities are growing more and more like Christ we become close friends, dear to one another. This nearness can be overdone in ways that impose upon and even victimize another. The worst example given is an extramarital affair and even separation, divorce and remarriage between believers within the assembly. Another temptation is to impose upon the generosity and love of others to support us rather than to work ourselves. Paul worked even while serving the Lord among them. A deeper imposition along this line is to meddle in the business of others, and even seek to control them. Those shepherding the flock and seeking to counsel others must be constantly aware of this, 1Peter 5:1- 4. Love doesn't lead to these departures from the path, but our human flesh is still in us and can corrupt the loveliest of God's gifts. Wherefore the exhortations given in this passage. May we be able to see and weigh things from God's perspective and get it right before our limited time down here is wasted.

By Ron Canner, October 5, 2005