

Sermon #1,252: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 (Historic Epistle)  
3-12-17, Lent 2, Bethany-Princeton MN (*Hymns 258, 430.5-9, TDL, 385*)

## TRUST IN JESUS INCLUDES CHASTE LIVING

Prayer: O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength: Keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one true God, now and forever. Amen. (*Collect for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday in Lent*)

**The Text, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 (v. 3).** <sup>3</sup> For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality ... Lord, this is Your Word and these are Your words. Sanctify us by the truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear saints, who are given the promise that the God of Peace will sanctify you completely so that your whole spirit, soul, and body shall be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (*1Th 5:23*):

The gospels tell what Jesus did for our salvation. But you do not find a “what does this mean” there. Sermons answer this question. But there is also a “what does this mean?” section in the Bible: the epistles, letters inspired by God and written by the apostles to the fledgling Christian churches. They explain what Jesus’ work means.

First, they teach what it means for your faith and conscience: Jesus’ blood cleanses you of all your sin, you are forgiven of all your sins for Jesus’ sake, you have salvation and eternal life by trusting in Him for salvation. That’s the the message in this season of Lent. We love this part, the heart of our faith. It makes you wonder if it is out of place on a Sunday in Lent to hear about “**sexual immorality**” and “**passion of lust.**”

It isn’t out of place. In the early church adult baptisms and confirmations were done at Easter. These epistle lessons in Lent were chosen as a final instruction to “catechumens” preparing for baptism or confirmation: what the new life in Christ consists of, and what it is careful to avoid. Some of us are a long way removed from confirmation as children. And some aren’t. ☺

But as you look at the world we're living in, it is especially important that we hear God's teaching on moral issues. The epistles, like the passage we are hearing today, include this. **"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his vessel"** – the body being like a "vessel" that houses the soul – **"in sanctification and honor."** Sanctification here means cleanness. We also call it being chaste, or pure. Holy living, clean living, chaste living.

This is the second part of answering the "what does this mean" about Jesus' work. The first part of the answer is how His work saves you from your sins. The second part is what it means for how you live, especially in your moral life. A good example is in Ephesians 4:19-20: After speaking about those *"who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness,"* the apostle says: *"But you have not so learned Christ."*

This is a key passage to understanding the epistles' instructions for godly living. It says that if you think you have learned Christ, that you believe in Him and love Him, and yet think it's OK to engage in lewd behavior, using bad language, viewing sexually explicit material, treating women as objects, dressing in ways that reveal too much of the body and encourage lust, or having a tolerant attitude toward homosexual behavior or think it's harmless or normal for a man and woman to live together before marriage or outside of marriage, then God says you actually haven't learned Christ at all. Or you need to be retaught, or at least instructed further. Here in 1 Thessalonians the same apostle says it this way: that this is being like the heathen **"who do not know God."**

It's even worse than that, of course. If you don't know God you don't know Christ. Then you don't receive His benefits, chief of which is forgiveness. Of course the sins against the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment are forgivable sins. They are forgiven when a person who is rebuked from God's Word truly repents. But people who say they want to be forgiven, and also want to continue in the sin, are not forgiven. They don't want God to forgive them but to excuse them and let them sin. God will not do that. We as His Church cannot tell them God will do that. That's lying.

What makes this difficult is that the world we live in is constantly teaching – catechizing – people in the devil’s doctrine, the devil’s lies. Movies, television, Youtube, music videos and lyrics bombard young people with images and story lines that turn them away from seeing sexuality as God’s gift for expressing love in marriage between man and woman, and frame it only in terms of self-gratification.

Now add to this that the common religion of our culture – including many who consider themselves Christian and were even raised in the Christian church – is something called Moralistic Therapeutic Deism. Basically, the core beliefs are: that God exists but is somewhere above us, He wants people to be nice and fair to each other, He wants you to be happy, and people who are good go to heaven. Notice though, what being good consists of. It’s being nice and not judging. Not obeying God and His standards written in the Bible. If God just wants me to be happy, then He has to agree with the choices I make; not the other way around. If a person can only be happy by leaving a marriage, or cohabiting, or doing drugs, or skipping school or quitting your job, God can only say: “Good for you.” This makes a person his own god. It’s a license to sin.

Because we live in this culture, we need to be taught and retaught what God says. We are affected by the culture we live in. You might not even realize how you have gotten used to the 6<sup>th</sup> commandment sin, accommodated yourself and learned to live with it rather than struggle against it and keep a line that will not be crossed. You may give your children the impression – even just by what you’ll watch on TV or what crudeness you laugh at – that these sins are not that big of a deal.

Just this week I was listening to a Johnny Cash version of a gospel song called “The Great Speckled Bird” – which is an Old Testament image of God’s Church as a bird harassed by vultures around it – which says about the church living in the world: “*Desiring to lower her standard/They watch every move that she makes.*” That is what the world does to Christians: try to lower the standard. We also experience the world crying that the Christian church is harsh and unkind in being against such things as gay marriage and saying no to permissiveness. But as that song goes on to say “*I am glad I have learned of her meekness,*” it is a humility before God and His Word: to let God’s Word form what we believe and how we act.

What you should be aware of is that the sexual revolution has increased exponentially the number of victims. What happens to the body affects the soul, because God creates, redeems and sanctifies you as a whole person: body and soul. What you see with your eyes and hear with your ears can defile your soul, or exalt your soul. When you say yes to sinful desires you are saying no to God. That way only ends in destruction.

This is where Jesus comes into the picture. He is the Savior from destruction. He said no to every sinful desire and said Yes to God and His will, every single time, to count for you. So *“the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1Jn 1:7)*. And, as we sang: *“My sin and shame/In Your dear name/Are washed and cleansed forever.”* He makes you clean. He makes you pure. He makes you holy. He forgives you for Jesus’ sake. You receive a clear conscience from His forgiving word. He heals the wounds that sins of the body have done to your soul, with His medicine of immortality: Jesus’ body and blood in the Lord’s Supper.

**“For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.”** Not only to believe in Him and be holy by receiving His forgiveness. But also to live according to His Word, to be holy in living, with His help to say No to your sinful desires and to say Yes to God and His Word.

When you turn away from unclean things and fill your life with cleanliness and purity – chaste living – this gives you a good conscience about what you do and you can sleep well at night, because you know you’re doing what God wants you to do, you know you’re doing His will, which is your sanctification, your cleanness.

This is part of trusting in Jesus. I would say it this way: In your life of sanctification, in the use of your body, you are entrusting yourself to Jesus. You are trusting Him with your body and life. You are trusting Him, your true Bridegroom, that in your singlehood He will give you everything you need and you can wait for marriage to the person He has prepared for you. You are trusting Him in your marriage that all your contentment comes from Him and He will make your marriage what it needs to be. You will need to pray persistently like the woman in today’s gospel who suffered from the devil’s presence in her home life too. Trust in Jesus includes all of this.

It is about keeping clean – and infecting everyone around you with this cleanness. The first place we do this is in our own homes:

*“The first line of defense is our own families. Our children will honor marriage if we honor our own marriage and the spouse God has given us and show them how much we as spouses love each other, delight in each other, and want to be with each other. Sexuality will be seen as a good gift of God where sexuality is spoken of as a blessing of love between husband and wife. We must explain to young people that sexuality is a self-giving that is shaped by the life of Christ and His love for His bride, the Church. Where there is fidelity to marriage then the sexual love that husband and wife share in the chastity of marriage will be revered and honored. Then Christ will be glorified and the church built up”*  
(Rev. Scott Murray, Memorial Moment: “Honorable Sexuality,: 2-3-17)

Our sanctified living will never be something we do perfectly. But having been cleansed and forgiven, we say we “intend to live a holy life with the help of God.” By God’s help we will do it. Where does God help us do this? In His Word. So the essential thing is to return to His Word, come to church as a family every week to hear His Word. First to be told what His will for is for us to do; second, to be fully forgiven and made clean; and finally to receive from His Word the strength to do His will. His Word is the only source of this strength for parents and youth alike.

*Your Word, a Lamp unto my feet,  
A Light, it leads me alway.  
Your truth with joy I gladly greet,  
To guide me on my pathway. (ELH 430 v. 9)          Amen!*