

LSB 1 Thess. 4:1 - 8 That You Excel Still More Pt. 2

1 Finally then, brothers, we ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. 2 For you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. 7 For God did not call us to impurity, but in sanctification. 8 Consequently, he who sets this aside is not setting aside man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

Picture if you will, a world, where there is a single possibility to satisfy your God given sexual needs and desires. Only one possibility. No other choices.

That single avenue is the communion of one man, one woman, before God in Holy matrimony, and afterwards you are committed to each other as literally one flesh. You may have slightly different roles with lots of crossover, but the twain build a life, in common, together, for as long as they are both alive.

Birth control has not been invented so families just happen. Children are welcome, especially in agrarian societies because it really doesn't take very long before they become valuable additions to the combined effort at living.

Yet always with the caveat that after a good 10 or 15 years of usefulness to you in your efforts and work, those children will leave father and mother and cleave to a wife or husband and begin the cycle all over again.

Sex outside of that single possible avenue that God ordains can result in

death by capitol punishment. Really not an option. If you have deep drives towards sexual satisfaction your only sensible option is marriage, families, extended families, communnities of families joined with each other through marriage unions, lots of children, lots of strong young men and mature men to get the hard work done. Lots of women to help each other with the workload of raising children, caring for families, domestic comforts, food preparation, cleanliness.

Young men don't dilly dally around until they're 30 something to get married perhaps if they feel there might be some benefit, if there is no other avenue to satisfy their God given drives except choosing a partner (or in some cultures accepting the one your parents chose for you).

Young men have to grow up quick. Those needs and desires are God given and designed to MOVE otherwise lazy silly foolish young men into manhood and maturity much sooner. Then the babies come and a mature work ethic is do or die. A needy family and a happy wife are motivators designed by God. Want to enjoy sex. Grow up. Get a life partner. Leave father and mother and get married. Get to work.

This is the single God ordained and blessed path to enjoy the gift of sexuality. Does that seem unreasonable? Hard? Narrow? Negative? Unfair? Is God just a killjoy who doesn't want us to have any fun? Does God inflict limits that hold us back from full joy, full pleasure?

Or did God set up the boundaries I've just described because He loves us and within those God given boundaries are the deepest fulfillments and satisfactions and thriving available to us in a fallen world.

You've all heard the term Judeo-Christian ethic. Western civilization is based in a judeo-christian ethic. The boundaries I just described are not some natural default to fallen sinful broken men. We don't default to this narrow ethic of faithfulness to a single partner and nurture and provision to the resulting families and children.

Look around you. Those constraints are not the default of a lost world that is ruled by Satan. Where did that ethic come from? The answer is it was revealed to men by God who chose the Hebrew peoples to be His own chosen family to reveal His words to. That ethic came to the Jews, and then spread to the Christians and ultimately defined so-called Western civilization.

Let's take a couple of minutes to listen to Jesus re-define what I'm speaking about. Jesus clarifies and restates God's intended design for sexual fulfillment and human thriving.

Mt. 19:

Now it happened that when Jesus had finished these words, He departed from Galilee and came into the region of Judea beyond the Jordan; 2 and large crowds followed Him, and He healed them there. 3 And some Pharisees came to Jesus, testing Him and saying, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any reason at all?" 4 And He answered and said, "Have you not read that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, 5 and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? 6 So they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate." 7 They said to Him, "Why then did Moses command to give her a certificate of divorce and send her away?" 8 He said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart Moses permitted you to divorce your wives; but from the beginning it has not been this way. 9 And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another woman commits adultery." 10 The disciples said to Him, "If the relationship of the man with his wife is like this, it is better not to marry." 11 But He said to them, "Not all men can accept this statement, but only those to whom it has been given. 12 For there are eunuchs who were born that way from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made eunuchs by men; and there are also eunuchs who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to accept this, let him accept it." .

It's a fascinating discussion and gets even more fascinating with just a little background.

The jews lined up behind two major teachers within their own constraints of the law of Moses. The names aren't important to us for this discussion. Suffice to say one famous teacher said you can divorce for any reason or no reason. Stay with her if she pleases you, get rid of her if she doesn't.

The other teacher said there is almost no possibility of divorce. Abandonment or gross infidelity are the only reason you might be free to choose another spouse. You can guess which teaching was the most popular.

So the pharisees come to Jesus with a lose - lose question for Him because either side of the discussion he identifies with He alienates half the population. The question was designed to harm Jesus, not because they actually were interested in His take on the matter.

Jesus not only gives His answer but He actually expands into the reason behind the reason from within the mind of God at the beginning. His words here would be blasphemous with the exception of a single possibility. He either can tell you the reasoning from the mind of God in creation because He is God, or His words if He is not God are so presumptuous as to be a blasphemous claim to somehow know the intimate mind of God in creation.

He also makes them look wicked and stupid when He answers; *Have you not read*. These are the scholars and lawyers of the law of God. These are the men who actually DO have access to the documents. The rest of the folks didn't have Bibles laying in their houses collecting dust like we do. The general population were like dumb sheep dependent on these shepherds to study and guide them in God's law. They couldn't read it for themselves. These men could.

Jesus facetiously says, the answer is in the book. Did you ever read it? God made boys. God made girls. When boys grow up and become men

they are to leave the unit of father and mother and choose or take a wife and then they become a single unit together. One flesh. God joins them together in God ordained and blessed marriage within His design.

Men are not allowed to break the union that God joined within the marriage union. So the pharisees come right back with a mis-quote. Why did Moses order us to give our wives a certificate of divorce. They twist Moses command. They make it sound as if Moses demands divorces.

Jesus tells them Moses permitted divorce because of sinfulness. It was never God's design. It was a protection for the innocent party because of sin. And then Jesus defines the single parameter to protect innocent parties in cases of infidelity. He also makes clear that outside of that single cause, remarriages are adulterous. Period.

Was He clear? Did the people understand His position in this moral question? One woman, one man, cleave together for life. No other partners allowed. God forms that union. Man shall not break it. Pretty clear?

Clear enough that His own disciples are sort of flabbergasted into getting in line behind the progressive folks that the pharisees were working to alienate against Jesus.

The disciples are like, if that's actually true, if that narrow possibility is the only possibility and anything else is immoral adultery, then it's better not to marry at all. If I'm going to be stuck with a single person until death, no marriage at all sounds like the best option.

And Jesus says basically, let Me know how that works out for you. Because Jesus knows that within God's design for pro-creation is a God given sexual drive and need that in most cases, it isn't practical to say I'll just choose celibacy in order to avoid God's rules.

So that's the judeo-christian ethic for personal thriving. Boundaries given

by God for our benefit. Stable marriages driven to some extent by God given sexual drives. Children born into loving stable homes with both parents present. God given boundaries and constraints against our fallen sinfulness are a gift to us from God given in His love for His own creation. Sex. Love. Families. Work. Stability. Security.

We can state, and history can prove, that anywhere this judeo christian ethic took root, peoples thrived. Civilization developed within those God given boundaries. Nations thrived. We call it Western civilization. It was based in the words of Jesus that I read to you.

But that brings us to an interesting problem that Paul is addressing in his letter to the Thessalonians this morning. What happens when judeo christian boundaries overflow into a new territory where they have not been before. Some place like, say, Thessalonica in northern Greece.

What was present, what was normative before Paul walked into that place? Well, the jews were there. There was a synagogue of the jews at Thessalonica before Paul got there. So this morality based in the Word of God was present to some degree. Although the jews had weakened it with easy divorce.

But there was a clear separation between jews and greeks. Jews do what jews do. Jews live like jews live. Greeks do what greeks do. Greeks live like greeks live. Separated. No pressure from jews on greeks for them to live like jews live. No expectations. Funny that jews always seem to thrive if they obey God at all. And then the world takes offense at them and anti-semitism is born. But all in all, jews don't expect greeks to live like jews and vice versa.

What was the overwhelming majority morality at Thessalonica? It was do whatever you can get away with. Anything goes. A wealthy man might have a wife to cook and clean and care for his children. He might have female friends who are sexual partners because of mutual consent. He could purchase concubines for his pleasure. Or he could choose any

number of religions with temple prostitutes and pay a small fee for sexual pleasures of worship in a pagan temple. Or when all of that got dull he could investigate homosexuality and if he so desired he could own male boy slaves to be his sexual partners. Girly boys.

There are greek words that describe everything I've just said. The greek language was potent with words to describe every nuance of pagan sexual endeavors. And this was all normative depending on where you found yourself on the social scale. Anything goes. No rules. No boundaries.

Look around you at our culture in 2022. Solomon was writing within the inspiration of God when he stated, "*There's nothing new under the sun*"

In my lifetime we have come full circle away from and out of the boundaries that caused the thriving of first, western civilization and ultimately, the United States of America that I was born into in 1952.

In 1952 anyone who lived outside the boundaries that Jesus clearly stated, christian or not, people who pushed those boundaries were cause for shock and dis-approval. It was sin to color outside the boundaries. And everyone knew it.

Then came divorce for no reason or any reason. Then came the pill. Then came rock and roll. Then came free love. Then came pornography.

Some time in the 1970's Hugh Hefner stated what the new progressives were thinking. He simply put it into words. I quote;

"Sex is a function of the body, a drive which man shares with animals like eating, drinking, and sleeping. It is a physical demand that must be satisfied. If you don't satisfy it you will have all sorts of neuroses and repression psychoses. Sex is here to stay. Let's forget the prudery that makes us hide from it. Throw away those inhibitions, find a girl who is like-minded, and let yourself go," end quote. Hefner

Find a girl? How antiquarian and quaint. Hef might find himself at odds with the new religion of absolute personal autonomy with his references to gender specific partners of the opposite gender. That's sort of old school.

We've come so far into debauchery that even Hefner sounds rather conservative. Find a german shepherd or a sheep is about where our culture is at. In the wise 1970 words of Mungo Jerry; *If her daddy's rich, take her out for a meal If her daddy's poor, just do what you feel*

OK, that was our introduction to Paul's words to the believers at Thessalonica. Paul walks into Thessalonica and the jews who should have been his closest allies caused a riot and drove him out of town.

Nevertheless, in all of the commotion, God has called out for Himself a people for His name at Thessalonica. Both of jews and greeks. A new separated group within the Greek pagan culture of Thessalonica.

They are not jews. Those who were once jews but who have followed Jesus have been un-synagogued. Cast out of jewdom. And the rest are greeks who believed. A little group of christians living in the midst of Greek culture.

Within that context, how do you live? What are the new boundaries? The jews have cast you out. And the greeks had no boundaries. How does this little group of christians live within that culture. What is expected?

2 For you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

We said last week, we weren't there that day. But we can read Jesus words and we can know exactly what those commandments given through the authority of Jesus would be.

Jesus repeated every commandment given to men by God in the 10 commandments. God's moral law. Morality, delineated by God, given to the jews, now passed on, intact, by Jesus, to His apostles, adopted by the

gentile churches who have come out of paganism.

Most of it is common sense, also practiced in pagan societies. Do not murder. Do not lie. Do not steal. All pretty basic stuff for any culture to survive very long. No problems there. But the thing about adultery? And Jesus very very narrow definition of God ordained sexuality only possible between one man and one woman for life?

That was a clear distinction between their cultures and christianity. Black and white boundaries that would make you very very distinct from the surrounding culture.

You're walking home from the construction project and your workmate that you've worked along side of for most of your life says, I'm going to go into the temple for a beer and maybe a hook-up. Wanna join me? And the christian says nope. No can do. Not any more. And his buddy is like, wow, that sucks.

We spent a lot of time showing that, actually, it doesn't suck. The christian guy will go home to a wife and kids who love him, while his friend is getting a case of venereal disease or worse that can kill him.

Still, the reprobate mind, described for us in Romans chapter one, defaults to, it sucks to have to live within God given boundaries. Our fallen minds say, we want freedom to sin all we want. Fallen broken humans want absolute personal autonomy. And God says, have at it! God gives the pagan world over to sin and the results of sin. That's actually the definition of free will.

Not so for these new christians. The single area that is a clear black and white delineation of their newfound life in Christ is this area of sexual boundaries, sexual morality. Black and white contrast. Total change. Radical change. The difference between these new christians and the culture they came out of is mild in most areas of morality, but in this single area of sexual boundaries, it is radical. Wildly radical. That's why Paul

singles out this single area that is such a radical complete change from the culture they have grown up in.

3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 6 and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you.

That word sanctification is of interest definitively. Sanctification means a clear separation. Total removal and separation.

God sanctified a church for Himself out of this world. It means God removed us from this perishing condemned world and made us a separated family that belongs to Him. Apart from and away from this condemned world.

That's what sanctification means. Called out of one group and placed into a distinctly separated group. We are called out of a perishing condemned world and placed into Christ. Safe in Him. Separated. Different. Purchased by His shed blood. Owned by Jesus. We are the "called out ones".

But Paul says, this whole deal with the boundaries given by God that define sexuality as only permitted and blessed with one man, one woman, joined by God, for life, living within those boundaries is what makes the real authentic church of God, completely distinct from the surrounding culture.

No one else does that. The Jews had found loopholes and teachers to largely dismantle those boundaries. They could divorce their wives for burning the biscuits and take another wife anytime they wanted. So ultimately they weren't much different from the fallen pagan world.

The standard defined by Jesus is radically different from the rest of the

world. And Paul tells the Thessalonian Christians, following and living within the boundaries given by Jesus is actually what divides and separates you from everyone else. Christians everywhere are separated from godless cultures by this single obedience to no sex, at all, outside of marriage to one partner for life.

*3 For this is the will of God, **your sanctification**: that you abstain from sexual immorality;*

Well, our culture has certainly driven home anew the truths of that statement. Abstaining from all sexual activity except within the God-given boundaries of one man one woman in a God-ordained union with each other for life has become so radical as to be laughable. They laugh for about a minute before the pick-up stones to throw. Except, no one is laughing much.

If you gather generation x, y, z, and whatever names we have for them, millennials, whatever, the folks between perhaps 15 years of age and maybe 40, the ones who claim to be Christians, and you ask them if they believe in the sexual boundaries clearly taught by Jesus in Matthew 19 that I read, you're going to find that about 95% of the so-called Christian youth do not believe that those boundaries are viable.

Ask your children and your grandchildren and you're going to find out that they think they are Christians but that the boundaries stated by Jesus are not viable. No God who loves us would fence us in with that stuff.

Oh? Really? That means that the so-called Christian youth has invented a new God. You can't have Jesus who clearly stated those boundaries and reject the boundaries. You have to throw out the Jesus of the Bible with the boundaries. But that seems to be the case.

And Paul clearly states that those sexual boundaries are in fact the very thing that separates us and makes us distinct from the rest of the fallen world.

Paul says this single area is your sanctification. This is the single radical difference that separates Christians from the world. This one thing makes us distinct. Separate. Different. And the modern church and the youth in it say, nah. We don't have to do that. We reject Paul. We reject Jesus. We reject the authority of the scriptures. This problem is critically defined in vs. 8. There is consequence in rejecting God's separation. God's sanctification of His called out church.

4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,

What does that mean? Well, we freely admit, these are strong drives. Sexual drive is strong. Paul says if you're a Christian, it doesn't drive you, you drive it. In the world, the appetites drive the person. In Christ, we have the power in the Holy Spirit to drive the appetites.

Christians are directed by Paul to be in control over their person, control of these strong drives and passions. We are ordered here to be in control of them, not to allow the drives to be in control over us. Pretty straight forward. Easy to state. A challenge to do. Easier for some than for others.

James says: *2 For we all stumble in many ways. If anyone does not stumble in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to bridle the entire body as well. 3 Now if we put the bits into the horses' mouths so that they will obey us, we direct their entire body as well. 4 Look at the ships also, though they are so great and are driven by strong winds, they are still directed by a very small rudder wherever the inclination of the pilot wills. 5 So also the tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. Behold how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! 6 And the tongue is a fire, the very world of unrighteousness; the tongue is set among our members as that which defiles the entire body, and sets on fire the course of our existence, and is set on fire by hell. 7 For every kind of beasts and birds, of reptiles and creatures of the sea, is tamed and has been tamed by mankind. 8 But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless evil and full of*

deadly poison. James 3:2-8

Take that same idea and substitute the sexual drives instead of the tongue and you have the identical idea that Paul has just stated to the thessalonians. *4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,*

Paul calls the church to be separate and distinct from the world because we control our sexual drives and urges instead of those drives controlling us. That's how the world rolls. We are to be different. In control. Both of our tongues, and also of our other members.

5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God;

It's normative for the world to revolve around lustful passions and drives. I've often laughed as a christian that money drives the world all day long and sex drives the world all night long.

This is normative for the Gentiles, the pagans, who do not know God. But true christians are called out of that world. Lustful passion is to be expected among the un-redeemed. Control over those passions is to be the norm for true called out of this world believers. It's what makes christians distinct. Again, or is it? If we don't live in the boundaries Jesus restated given by God in Genesis, we are just like the world. No distinction.

*6 and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the **avenger** in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you.*

Paul says if you don't possess your own body and it's passions and if you sin and defraud your fellow man in the matter, you could in fact wake up and find yourself at war with God. At war with Jesus!

The Southern Baptist Convention has had a wake up call in the past few weeks and days as an independent firm has discovered a massive amount of

sin among its leadership and members. You read the news and it's like God is at war with the Southern Baptist Convention.

Should we be surprised? Only if Paul didn't write vs. 6. Paul says, I warned you. Somemply warned you. God means business! Transgress and defraud in this area and you are literally at war with God. The Lord, that would be one Jesus, the Messiah, is the avenger in all of these things.

In Revelation 2 and 3 Jesus is the avenger of the churches. Jesus fights against churches. Jesus goes to war against unfaithful churches. What a frightful thought.

- *Ephesus 5 Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first. But if not, I am coming to you and will remove your lampstand out of its place, unless you repent.*
- *Pergamum 14 But I have a few things against you, that you have there some who hold the teaching of Balaam, who kept teaching Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols and to commit sexual immorality. 15 So you also have some who in the same way hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. 16 Therefore repent. But if not, I am coming to you quickly, and I will make war against them with the sword of My mouth.*
- *Thyatira 20 But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and deceives My slaves so that they commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols. 21 And I gave her time to repent, and she does not wish to repent of her sexual immorality. 22 Behold, I will throw her on a bed of sickness, and those who commit adultery with her into great tribulation, unless they repent of her deeds. 23 And I will kill her children with pestilence, and all the churches will know that I am He who searches the minds and hearts; and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds.*

- Sardis *‘I know your deeds, that you have a name that you are alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up, and strengthen the things that remain, which were about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of My God. 3 So remember what you have received and heard; and keep it, and repent. Therefore if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come to you.*
- Laodicea *15 ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were cold or hot. 16 So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth. 17 Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and pitiable and poor and blind and naked. 18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be manifested; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see. 19 Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline. Therefore be zealous and repent.*

Jesus goes to war with churches who are unpure. Jesus is the avenger against sin IN the churches. Ask the nearest Southern Baptist. They're getting a whoopin' as we speak. Jesus doesn't mess around with sin in the church.

Most of American Evangelicalism is a cross between Sardis and Laodicea. Luke warm and dead. The church never wins the war with Jesus the avenger.

7 For God did not call us to impurity, but in sanctification.

Notice in verse 7 what we've been saying over and over in different ways. Impurity and Sanctification are diametrically opposed. The whole world lies in the power of the evil one. The whole world is impure.

God calls His own people out of Satan's world, out of impurity and sanctifies them, separates them from the world. And the separation is holiness. The church without holiness is . . . not the church. Two opposites. Black and white.

8 Consequently, he who sets this aside is not setting aside man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

I boldly stated that I believe perhaps up to 95% of people who claim to be christians that are in the youth category, perhaps 15 - 40 years of age, reject God's boundaries about sexuality.

Well, we're out of time this morning. We've defined God's boundaries for human sexual fulfilment fairly well this morning, but we are out of time to speak to the consequences of rejecting those boundaries. So I want to pick up the discussion here next week, if God allows it. You've been warned.