

Sexual Ethics

The sexual life of believers has always made us distinctive from the world. In case we think that our sexualized culture makes it impractical to live out the Christian sexual ethic, we must remember that the Graeco-Roman world was at least as challenging as our own. For this reason, the Apostle Paul makes a strong plea with the Thessalonians to live out their sexual lives in a counter-cultural way.

Read I Thessalonians 4:1–8

Let's make three primary observations in the text.

1. If you believe in Christ, you must also walk with Him (vv. 1,2)

Notice that the Apostle says that "you received from us" how you ought to walk. We know that we "receive" the gospel (cf. I Corinthians 15: 3), but he says here that our lifestyles are also received. That is, if we receive the sacred truths of the gospel, we must also receive a new way of living. If we depart from this way of living, we also depart from Christ!

2. Your walk with Christ excludes sexual immorality (v. 3)

We walk with Christ for the purpose of conforming to His will. And what is His will for you? Paul says it is "your sanctification." This He wants from you more than anything else; and the first aspect of holiness Paul mentions is your sexual life: "that you abstain from sexual immorality."

The Bible's definition of "sexual immorality" is roughly this: any intimate sexual behavior outside of a biblically warranted marriage (one man and one woman in a faithful covenant union). Notice in Matthew 5: 27-32 that this moral purity extends even to our thoughts!

So whether we are single or married, male or female, young or old; whether we have homosexual tendencies or heterosexual tendencies, the calling is the same for all God's people, that we must refrain from all intimate sexual activity except that in a biblically warranted marriage.

3. Sexual immorality is highly destructive (vv. 4-8)

Not only does God give us the command to abstain from sexual immorality, but, as usual, He also tells us why: it is highly destructive. In three ways:

1) Sexual immorality destroys our gospel witness (vv. 4, 5)

Paul here draws a contrast between Christian behavior and that of the Gentiles: they have sex according to their glands, we according to God's will and character. The pagan gods were capricious and fickle; our God is holy, faithful and true to His one bride, the Church. We imitate Him. If we were to imitate the unbelievers' sex life, we would simply be demonstrating that we serve the same gods as they!

2) Sexual immorality wrongs our brothers and sisters (v. 6a)

Contrary to the popular idea that sexual relations with a non-marriage partner can be a loving act, the Bible teaches that it is actually a hateful one. At the best it is indifferent. The best thing we can do for one another is to encourage each other to be more like Christ, but if we are having immoral sexual relations with someone, we are doing the exact opposite. Furthermore, we are actually stealing from them, for we are taking something from them that does not rightfully belong to us. Sexual immorality is intensely selfish.

3) Sexual immorality provokes God (vv. 6b-8)

God takes great offense at our sexual immorality. Just take a look at I Corinthians 6: 9, 10 or Ephesians 5: 5 or Revelation 21: 8, and you can see that the Kingdom of God is shut to the sexually immoral. Why is this? Paul tells us: a) sexual immorality is a violation of our sacred calling to follow Jesus and b) it disregards God, treating Him as though He were a light weight

pagan god who has no eyes or ears and no power to react or, even worse, as though He didn't exist at all. And it treats Him as though He were not present, and yet He is the One Who, by His grace, has made our bodies temples of His Spirit!
(cf. I Corinthians 3:16)

Well, what should we do, for we have all transgressed the sexual standards of the Bible and, on our own merits, would stand condemned and excluded from His favor?

Praise God for the Good News! Because of what Jesus has done for us on Calvary's Cross, the powers of death and hell are forever destroyed. Because of His great work for us, we are completely innocent—no matter how wicked we have been. Because of His substitutionary atonement, even our future sexual sins are entirely forgiven already! What a gospel! What a God! What can I do to demonstrate my gratitude to Him?

Live a holy life. Abstain from sexual immorality. Amen.

Discussion Questions

- 1) Why can we not separate Christian doctrine from Christian lifestyle? Why would we even try? (see verses 1, 2)

- 2) When we say we want to know God's will, what issues do we normally have in mind? What issue does God have in mind? (see verse 3)

- 3) Review the implications of sexual impurity. (V. 4-8)

- 4) Think about the power of the Gospel/the atonement over sexual sin.

Suggested reading:

[Sex, Romance, and the Glory of God](#)

by C. J. Mahaney

[Sex Is Not the Problem \(Lust Is\)](#)

by Joshua Harris

Digging Deeper

What concrete steps do you need to take to insure that you are walking with Jesus and avoiding sexual immorality?