



As in the Days of Lot

Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us instruction as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; 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. For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification. So, he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

— 1 Thessalonians 4:1–8

Depending on your choice of Bible translation, the word “sanctify” and all of its related variations appear throughout Scripture approximately 65 times. The specific variant “*sanctification*”, however, appears only 8 times, 3 of which are clustered together in these few verses where Paul connects it with the exhortation, “...*how you ought to walk and please God*”. Do churches still preach and teach about sanctification? Because if they do, I am finding it difficult to believe that they are emphasizing the biblical aspect of pursuing sexual morality. In the past 20 years studies have repeatedly proven there is no longer a statistical difference on any issue of sexual immorality ranging from divorce to adultery to homosexuality between those who say they regularly attend church and those who do not. Who, exactly, is still in pursuit of biblical sanctification?

Look at the specific, behaviors which provide a definition of “*sanctification*” and how to “*walk and please God*”:

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- "...**that you abstain from sexual immorality**". (v.3) (Some translations such as the KJV render "*sexual immorality*" as "*fornication*".) Let us be clear that whereas "adultery" involves married people, this term is used in a general sense for **any** unchastity, for **any** sexual relationship outside the bonds of marriage.
- "...**know how to possess his own vessel in...honor, not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God...**" (v.4-5) It would seem that operating according to the passions of lust rather than the self-control of biblical love is proof of the lack of a proper relationship with God. (This is exactly my point about no statistical difference in such behaviors between those who go to church and those who do not.)
- "...**and that no man transgresses and defraud his brother in the matter...**" (v.6) There are those who propose that "*sexual immorality*" is a victimless crime but that is far from the biblical truth of the matter. In the New Testament context where loving others is the prime directive, few things irreparably destroy love than the wake of the pursuit of relationships characterized by lust. It is not just characterized as a sin ("*transgresses*") but deceit ("*defraud*").

Throughout Scripture the most oft-repeated example of a wrong spiritual relationship is that of adultery while that of a right spiritual relationship is likened to a faithful bride, wholly and exclusively committed to her husband alone. (In other words, a right relationship within the strict boundaries of marriage.) In fact, a wrong spiritual relationship is sometimes likened not just to an unfaithful wife but to a prostitute, someone selling their self to another. In biblical terms, physical relationships mirror spiritual relationships. Those who cannot maintain a faithful earthly relationship will not be capable of being exclusively faithful in their spiritual relationships because by the

definition of God's Word they are pursuing a lifestyle which depends to some extent upon sin and deceit.

Can you be in a right relationship with God and keep stealing from others? Can you maintain a right relationship with God and continue murdering people? Neither can you successfully engage God while in the pursuit of wrong relationships with others, sexual or otherwise.

I don't know why we are perplexed that the Church, at least in the Western world, is no longer salt and light when, statistically speaking, it behaves no differently than anyone else. For anyone on the outside looking in and seeing the extent of our unfaithfulness in personal relationships, why would they think it somehow transcends into faithfulness when it comes to spiritual relationships? Biblically speaking, the outside observers are absolutely right.

I have come to personally believe this is the greatest factor in the mass abandonment of God's Word in Western churches over the past few decades. Anyone who preaches the plain text of Scripture cannot escape the fact that divorce as generally practiced and accepted today is biblically defined as sin, that sex outside the strict confines of marriage is sin, or that homosexuality is sin. In order to tolerate these behaviors within the walls of the church, it is necessary to dramatically reinterpret Scripture out of all reasonable context or, better yet, do away with Scripture altogether.

This is not merely an old man's rant about the disintegration of moral values in society. Such we should expect from the world. I am talking about the *churched*. What kind of testimony is the Church to the rest of the world when their behavior is absolutely no different from the rest of the world? And in particular within the context of Paul's message to the Thessalonians it touches on what is supposed to be a defining difference between those of the world and those of the cross, the desire to do God's will. Look again at how Paul defines someone

who is in compliance with God's will. This is not an intellectual matter of theology but a practical matter of Christian living.

*For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality;
— 1 Thessalonians 4:3*

Once upon a time as a youth pastor I would purposely trap my Christian teenagers with the question, "How many of you will do the will of God if He tells you exactly what His will is for your life?" Naturally they would all raise their hands because they mostly thought of knowing the will of God as having the answers to such questions as, "What will I be when I grow up?", or "Who will I marry?", or "What college does God want me to attend?" It was devastatingly penetrating to their very hearts when I would challenge them with this verse because, unlike modern so-called adult Christians today, these young lambs knew **exactly** what it meant. They immediately knew that sex outside of marriage was wrong, they immediately knew their treatment of others as sex objects was wrong, they never argued the need to abandon lust for the greater work of love. Deep down, don't we all **really** know the same thing even today?

It is interesting that this is not the only place in Scripture which defines doing God's will as being faithful to His Word and ways.

*Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.
— Romans 12:1-2*

It is hard to find even the most marginalized Christian who is not aware of these oft-quoted verses, but is this actually put into practice? The emphasis is on "*holy*" and "*acceptable to God*", something exclusively faithful to His Word and ways alone which provides the basis for knowing God's will for one's life. The believer who remains

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immersed in God's Word and dedicated to putting it into practice understands that God's will for their life has **already** been fully revealed as living a changed life according to God's Word and ways; the hallmark of a nominal or "in-name-only" Christian is someone who thinks the meaning of God's will is only found when he reveals something like where they will live, where they will work, or who they will meet because they are living only for their self.

Of all the scriptural parallels which teach us that we are without doubt living in the Last Days, the one which disturbs me most is Sodom and Gomorrah. There is no mistaking that the core problem was sexual immorality escalated to the point of becoming an all-consuming lifestyle. It was not simply that they were not practicing love toward others, they had so abandoned love that their very identities could not be separated from perpetual unfaithfulness. They became so immersed in a contra-biblical lifestyle where others were concerned that there was no hope they could ever engage in a right relationship with God and were ultimately given over to the wrath of God's judgment. The inevitable consequences of the pursuit of unfaithful earthly behavior is final judgment for spiritual unfaithfulness. They are **not** separate nor distinct issues. Even Jesus Himself stated that God's Word hinged on **both** our relationship to God **and** to others. We cannot biblically love God if we do not biblically love others.

"Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" And He said to him, " 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' "This is the great and foremost commandment. "The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' "On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."

— Matthew 22:36–40

I am not so much disturbed by the growing darkness of the world as I am for that within the Church. I don't expect biblical behavior from the world, but am distressed when those calling themselves "Christian" embrace the very worldly behaviors which are bringing on that

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darkness. I would not expect Christians to successfully legislate good behavior against the world's wishes, but what happens when they abandon accountability within their own ranks? Biblically it results in Sodom. Spiritually it ends up like Gomorrah.

I don't know why we are so surprised the preaching of the Gospel has so little impact these days when so few are living examples of the Gospel. Remember, judgment always begins with God's people first. But in an age of growing apostasy in parallel with the age of Lot, bear in mind how so few escaped and what happened to the vast majority. Yes, I am actually giving an old fashioned "fire and brimstone" message. Don't burn in eternity because of the way you burn in this life.

In His Love,

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