

- ***READ I Thessalonians 4:1-8*** As Paul continues through his encouraging letter to those disciples that are in Thessalonica, he takes time to reinforce his appreciation for their thankfulness, but he also further emphasizes his desire for these brethren to continue to do even more in their faiths. *“Excel still more”* is the mantra that is proclaimed in the NASB. The particular subject that follows this admonition is not one of randomness, but I would suggest to you that Paul addresses the issues of sanctification, holiness, sexual immorality, and impurity because these disciples were living in a society that was not all that different from the society that we live in today regarding the use of our bodies.
- As we look all around, we see a continued surge of influence from many concerning the liberating of our bodies to be able to pursue any sort of bodily satisfaction that one may desire. Whereas some might have been ashamed to express their homosexual desires in the past, we now live in a society where that simply isn't the case because of cries for people to be loud and proud about their sexuality. Where adultery and fornication were often frowned upon in the past, random hook-ups, live-in boyfriends/girlfriends, known mistresses, and even open marriages are not only allowed but even approved of.
- Friends, there is no doubt that we are surrounded by a world full of people who have little regard for the sanctity of the use of the human body in a godly fashion. And yet, the words of Paul to the Thessalonians that they excel still more in their bodily purity remains even for us today. Our God expects for us to be a people who are excelling in holiness within our bodies, and this morning we are going to look through the text of **I Thessalonians 4:3-8** in order to be taught and reminded of God's desires for us in the way that we use these bodies that He has blessed us with. We will begin with God's desires, consider what they mean for us, and then we will close with the consequences of our decisions to not pursue His desires within our lives.

I. God Desires:

A. Our sanctification & holiness.

1. These terms could often be used synonymously because they both refer to the consecration of the believer towards proper godly behavior. These terms can be used generally in regards to the behavior and character of disciples, but in this context of **I Thessalonians 4:3-8**, they are referring specifically to how it is that we use our bodies in regards to sexual purity.
2. It should be no surprise to us that this would be a subject that is important for Paul to address. In almost every, if not everyone, of the “laundry lists” of sin that can be found within the New Testament there is something recorded concerning sexual immorality and impurity. **Romans 1, I Corinthians 6, Galatians 5**, & others all contain mentioning of sexual sins that were just as common in the world of the first century as they are in the world of the 21st century. However, just because it is common and accepted in the world does not mean that it is to be so in the life of the child of God.
3. In fact, we noticed this morning in our auditorium Bible class from **Romans 6:12-19** that we who have been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ are no longer to allow our bodies to be used as instruments of unrighteousness. With our allegiance being shifted to Christ, we are now supposed to be people who are only using our bodies to produce fruit which leads to God's desire for us...sanctification. This fruit can be produce that sanctification in our lives if we are willing to fulfill God's next desire that we refrain from sexual immorality.

B. The refraining from sexual immorality.

1. Within the text of **I Thessalonians 4:3,4** Paul states plainly God's desire in this regard, but there is a pretty significant difference concerning how this is carried out in regards to the way that different translations render this text. The CSB states, *“that each of you knows how to control his own body in holiness and honor.”* But the NASB reads, *“That each of you know how to*

possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor." Part of the reasoning behind this difference comes down to the different styles of translation. The NASB is a very rigid and often very literal translation. The source text would have language concerning vessels which is the reasoning for the NASB to render it that way. However, the CSB balances a literal translation with the desire for the text to read in such a way that our modern minds comprehend easily. Therefore, it records the body in need of being controlled.

2. This might seem pretty obvious to us, but I share this for the simple fact that these not so newer translations actually leave room for some to disagree on what is meant by vessel. The CSB tells you exactly what those translators believe vessel to mean by rendering it as the can controlling his own body (unless you going to apply the concept of the man and woman becoming one body in marriage), but others would contend that this vessel is actually meant as the body of a wife. Meaning that a man ought to be care to make sure that he handles the body of his wife with care by going to her for the needs that he has within his body. In doing so, that man is fulfilling God's design for the marriage bed to be the place where that physical relationship is fulfilled and honored. **(I Corinthians 7:1-4 & Hebrews 13:4)**

3. While these two differing interpretations are indeed different, the end result remains the same. Paul is desiring that we only seek to fulfill the natural desires of the body in an appropriate manner. We are to practice self-control in regards to these desires, and we are to make sure that we don't allow for sexual immorality to find a foothold within our lives.

C. The controlling of our bodies.

1. This controlling of our bodies is a very serious desire of our God, and we would do well to make sure that this is something that we take just as seriously. To take it seriously is to really understand what it takes to make sure that our bodily desires are not out of control to the extent that we act on any and every desire that is born within us. To take control of our bodies, we must first give forth effort to take control of our minds.

2. In the sermon on the mount, Jesus spoke, *"You have heard that it was said, Do not commit adultery. But I tell you, everyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of the parts of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell."* It is evident to see that controlling our bodies must first begin with controlling our minds for our bodies are going to do as our minds direct them to do.

3. We must give effort to develop the type of mindset that was possessed by Job. It is recorded in **Job 31:1,2**, *"I have made a covenant with my eyes. How then could I look at a young woman? For what portion would I have from God above, or what inheritance from the Almighty on high?"* While not stated, I am convinced that this was the same type of mindset that was possessed by Joseph. I say this based upon his literal running away from the wife of Potiphar as she made advances towards him. **(Genesis 39:6-12)** These men stand as great examples of how God expects for His people to control their bodies.

D. Our distinction from the Gentiles.

1. Finally, God desires for our sanctification, holiness, and sexual purity so that we might stand out as distinct from those of the world who refuse to submit to the standard of purity that God has set forth. Paul told the Thessalonians that they were to control their bodies in holiness and honor unlike those of the Gentiles who lived as if they did not know God. For this original audience, it would have been a warning against participating in the sexual immorality that was associated with one of the main gods of their city, Aphrodite. This goddess of love, beauty, pleasure, passion, and procreation was worshipped in the very ways that she was supposedly representing, and these disciples were to steer well clear of such participation & the generally sexually sinful society.

2. While we don't have an official goddess that can be worshipped in such a way, we do have the god of pleasure and satisfaction that is often put up on a pedestal in our society. No matter what it is that brings joy and happiness to your life, you ought to be able to experience that is the plea of this world. It starts with something such as fornication and adultery, but it spreads to actions such as homosexuality, and goes on from their to even more heinous actions such as pedophilia and beyond. The question must be asked, "Where does it end?" And there is no answer because it only ends where people want for it to end. There is no desire to honor God's will because they only desire to fulfill their own wills. Our God desires differently than that for us because above all He desires for our sanctification and holiness. This leads to a couple of conclusions that are coming up next.

II. Therefore, we must not:

A. Disgrace our bodies, the temples of God.

1. Paul makes it very clear in both **I Corinthians 6:15-20** & **II Corinthians 6:14-18** that the bodies' of God's people are to serve as the temples in which the Holy Spirit and the God of heaven dwells today. *"Don't you know that your bodies are a part of Christ's body? So should I take part of Christ's body and make it part of a prostitute?" (I Corinthians 6:15)* Of course the answer to this question is a resounding no, and that leads Paul into his spirited command that these brethren *"Flee sexual immorality!" (I Corinthians 6:18)*
2. Paul's writing in **II Corinthians 6** is more broad in its application, but the principles basically remain the same. Our bodies are the places in which God's Spirit is supposed to be able to dwell, but it cannot dwell within us unless we live pure and holy lives. Simply stating that the Spirit has an opportunity to dwell within us should be motivation enough to abstain from these types of sins, but it is good to be reminded that we were bought at a great price, and God therefore expects for us to glorify Him with our bodies. **(I Corinthians 6:19,20)**

B. Transgress against our brethren.

1. Additionally, we need to recognize that this subject isn't something that often only involves ourselves, but it involves the participation of another person, as well. In **I Corinthians 6**, Paul writes about these actions being carried out with a prostitute and how every other sin is committed outside of the body but these sorts of sins are committed against our own bodies which are the temples of God and His Holy Spirit. When we engage in sexual immorality with our bodies, we are sinning within and against our own bodies.
2. But we must also acknowledge that we are participating not only in our sin, but we are also participating in the sin of another person. This is why Paul writes back in **I Thessalonians 4:6**, *"This means one must not transgress against and take advantage of a brother or a sister in this manner..."* When we engage in such sinful activities, not only are we putting our own souls in danger, but we are putting the souls of the other willing participants in danger, as well! There is enough condemnation for ourselves when we sin, but how much worse will it be for those who bear responsibility for leading others to sin in the same manner? We are taking that which does not belong to us. We are taking someone's current or future spouse, and his is certainly not the will of God. We must be completely sure that we are not disgracing our bodies and sinning against our neighbors who are image bearers of our great God. This is a great responsibility, and we will close by considering the harsh consequences of not heeding the admonitions of Paul in this text.

III. If we fail to control our bodies:

A. We reject God's desire for our sanctification & holiness.

1. As those who have been bought at a great cost, what must it feel like to God and our Lord Jesus when we reject the purification of our sins in order to pursue whatever fleshly desire that we have within us? Specifically when it comes to sins of this nature, what must Jesus feel when He sees His people behave in such a way that it seems as if they have no appreciation for His sacrifice?

2. **Hebrews 6:4-6** has something to say about that. This text is considering those *“who were once enlightened, who tasted the heavenly gift, who shared in the Holy Spirit, who tasted God’s good word and the power of the coming age.”* These are clearly people who are disciples of Jesus and who know the cost of getting them to this point in their lives, and they know what God expects of them. However, these are people who have fallen away. These are people who know the right things to do and the wrong things they are not to do, and yet they choose to disregard God’s desires for them in order to do whatever it is that they want to do that is against the will of God. They plainly want to reject God and His will for them.
3. The Hebrew writer says of these people that *“they are recrucifying the Son of God and holding Him up in contempt.”* They care nothing for God’s desires...they only care for their own. We might not think of ourselves as being that far removed from God...It is only in this one area where we will follow our own desires. However, we cannot say that we love and respect God and yet fail even in just this one area to control our bodies in a sanctified and holy manner. These things simply cannot be so, and they come with horrible consequences that are described in **Hebrews 10:26,27** when the inspired writer says that there no longer remains a sacrifice for us. Instead, we can only expect to experience a terrifying judgment.

B. We leave no room for the Holy Spirit to dwell within us.

1. Maybe the greatest consequence is the fact that the Holy Spirit cannot dwell within us while we are rebelling against God in this fleshly manner. The presence of God was only able to be found within the temple of the Jews in Jerusalem because it was a consecrated and holy place. Only the high priest after rigorous washings and purifications were themselves able to enter because of the sacred and pure nature of the location. It was only made with the highest of quality supplies because God is certainly deserving of nothing less.
2. The same truths and principles continue to remain within us as Christians who are serving as the temples of God, today. We are to be consecrated and holy before God so that His presence and Holy Spirit might be able to dwell within us in fellowship. But that is not going to happen if we are continually and willingly desecrating our minds and bodies by thinking and acting upon the desires of the flesh. It is one thing to be actively battling against the temptations of this world, for we know they are many, but I’m talking about those who know what is right and wrong and yet refuse to fight against the enticements of the evil one.
3. Friends, we must be fighters! We must be people who are giving effort to fight against temptation remain pure and holy in our minds and bodies because anything less will only result in us rejecting God and the Holy Spirit He has given to dwell within us. We might look around us and think this fight isn’t that big of a deal, but it is of the utmost importance because our fellowship with God hangs in the balance. We must seek to remain sanctified and holy so that the Spirit might have a place within us to dwell and we might realize the ultimate result of resurrection to eternal glory in the last day.

I fully recognize that this type of lesson is difficult to consider simply because these are sensitive issues, and I hope that there hasn’t been anything crude or distasteful said. However, these difficult topics are important to discuss from time to time because lives are being destroyed through uncontrolled desires that are acted upon at a moment’s notice without any consideration for for God’s will or the damage that will come as a result. As the people of God, we are called to be excellent in all that we do and that includes how we use our bodies. We are to stand out bright and shining in this dark world because of our commitment to holiness and righteousness in all that we do. Not only will God be gloried in our righteous actions, but our lives will simply be better. We will be free from the many consequences that often come from this type of uncontrolled behavior, and we will be thankful for it the older we get. May God be with us and strengthen us as we strive to be excelling in holiness within our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ.