

THE ABUSE OF LOVE

Wednesday, October 22

Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-5

1 Thessalonians 4:3 *It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality;*

In his prayer for the Thessalonians (3:11-13), Paul had asked that God would “establish your hearts blameless in holiness” and that they would “increase and abound in love.” Paul now applies this thought in the following passage.

PURPOSE OF GOD (4:1-2) – God’s purpose for believers is that they walk in such a way that their lives please God. Paul had expressed that they were God’s children and now he exhorts them to live to please their heavenly Father. Believers are to become what they already are in Christ. This is the work of sanctification or spiritual growth. Paul knew that it was vital for these young Christians to grow in their walk with the Lord. His concern was that the believers did not grow content in their Christian growth. Paul’s earlier comments about their faith, hope, and love showed that the Thessalonians were already answering God’s call but needed to continue in their spiritual walk with Christ.

PURSUIT OF PURITY (4:3-5) – Just as today, the Thessalonians lived in a sexually obsessed and permissive culture. Marriages in the Greek and Roman world were arranged by family. Love had nothing to do with it. This led to an environment where husbands were not expected to be faithful to their marriages. Several centuries before Paul wrote this letter, the Greek writer Demosthenes said, “Mistresses we keep for our pleasure, concubines for our day-to-day physical well-being, and wives to bear us legitimate children.”¹ The pagan religions also encouraged (almost demanded) immorality among its’ adherents as an act of worship. Immorality was seen as normal and acceptable behavior. This is the culture these new believers had come out of and they needed to understand how to live for the Lord. Paul calls it “the will of God” that they live holy lives. Paul was not so much concerned with the evil in the culture, but with the conduct of the church. The apostle instructs believers to do two things in regard sexual purity.

1. **ABSTAIN** – To “abstain” means to stay away from any thought or behavior that violates God’s principles. It means to avoid the very appearance of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22). The word Paul uses for sexual immorality is porneia. Our word pornography comes from this word. It had a broad meaning that included all immoral practices.
2. **CONTROL** –The idea is that Christians should learn to control their basic human desires and conform them to God’s standards. Christians do not change their moral standards to adapt to society. The Christian’s standards stand in stark contrast to those of the world. Whenever believers abandon the high moral standards of God, they bring shame on themselves and tarnish the name of Christ.

‘Love’ is greatly abused in our culture. God’s standards of purity and holiness are not popular today. But God’s standards have not changed. Are you living a life pleasing to God? What things or places do you need to avoid to keep your life pure and holy?

¹ James H. Grant Jr. 1 & 2 Thessalonians: The Hope of Salvation (Preaching the Word series), p. 91