

**WALKING OUT HIS WORD EACH DAY
THE 1 THESSALONIANS SERIES**

**COMMENTARY
ON MESSAGE #8**

March 4th, 2018

Q1: Over the course of your life, what is the most treasured possession you have ever owned?

In some ways that is a difficult question for me to answer because over the course of a lifetime I have changed in many ways (the same as you have!). But if I had to narrow it down to one thing, I think I would say it was the catcher's mitt (baseball glove) I received as a birthday gift when I was nine years old. Because of the nature of my childhood, that glove was used until it wore out. It's funny, but even now, decades later, I can picture that glove in my mind and remember it in exact detail.

*“For you are a people holy to the LORD your God.
The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples
on the face of the earth to be His people,
His treasured possession.”
Deuteronomy 7:6*

Q2: In Question 1 you were asked to identify your most treasured possession. At that time, how much value would other people have placed on your possession?

I have a good reason for asking you that question. Now maybe the reason you treasured your particular possession was because it cost \$1,000,000.00, but in my case I know my catcher's mitt had little monetary value. It was a nice quality junior size catcher's mitt, but it did not cost my parents a fortune. Its value to me had nothing to do with money. And more importantly, for the sake of this illustration, no one else would have placed much value upon it. No one would have ever thought about breaking into the house on 41 High Ridge Road to steal my glove. It had little or no value to others, yet to me it was priceless.

Christian, God calls you His treasured possession. This is really what He thinks about you. If you heard the message that goes with this commentary (#8 in the series), you also saw the statistics we showed on the screen regarding the vastness of the universe. By way of reminder, we estimated there could be 400,000,000,000,000,000,000 stars in the universe, each one separated from the others by vast distances. Every star is His. Every planet is His. Yet it is **you** that God's Word identifies as being His treasured possession.

Don't ever think or say that God doesn't love you or care about you!
If you get to feeling or thinking that way,
wait until the sun goes down,
go out and look at the moon and the stars,
consider how majestic and vast they are,
then read Deuteronomy 7:6 and Psalm 8.
You are loved!

Before we shift gears and look more directly at sanctification, consider one last thing about that nine year old boy's most treasured possession, the catcher's mitt. Adjusting for inflation (remember, it has been a **long** time since I was nine ☺), that glove probably cost my parents about \$120. It cost me nothing, because it was a gift.

*"For you know that it was not with perishable things
such as silver or gold that you were redeemed ...
but with the precious blood of Christ,
a lamb without blemish or defect."
I Peter 1:18-19*

Christian, you are God's treasured possession, and no one gave you to Him as a gift; to possess you He had to purchase you. ★ The purchase price for you was the death of His own Son. You are loved.

You now know that the root word for sanctify is the same root word for holy or saint. All of these words share the common meaning of being "set apart" unto God. Whatever it means to practice sanctification in daily life, at the heart of it is the idea of being set apart unto the God Who loves you as His most treasured possession.

I suspect that the majority of time that pastors preach on sanctification, and in the majority of books written on the topic of sanctification, the connection between sanctification and God's intense love for His people is either minimized or ignored altogether. Maybe this explains why for some people the word sanctification has negative connotations.

In the next installment of this commentary, the one that will go with sermon #9 in the series **WALKING OUT HIS WORD EACH DAY**, we will study the difference between what we call **positional** sanctification and **practical** sanctification.

★ Of course in one sense you were always His possession since He owns the universe and everything in it (please read Psalm 24:1, it is classic!). But in the realm of salvation, to make you His child He had to purchase/redeem you.

Q3: Are you familiar with these two types of sanctification? Do you think you could explain them to someone else?

Sanctification is one of the great themes in I Thessalonians. When you read 1:10 and then read chapters 4-5 the other major theme, **The future return of the Lord** stands out. We have also already noted the constant persecution faced by the Thessalonians as well as Paul's deep personal affection for them being essential elements within this letter to the church in Thessalonica. One of the key passages on sanctification is found in 4:1-3.

“Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus. It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality.”

This passage's focus is on practical sanctification – the daily changes to our lifestyle and behavior that gradually transform our character and make us more like Christ.

Q4: In 4:3, what is the specific commandment that is connected to sanctification?

Here is something startling: The Greek word which is translated “sexual immorality” is *porneias*. Does the Greek word have a ring of familiarity? It is the word from which we get the word pornography. Technically speaking, the Bible uses the word *porneias* to refer to any sexual activity outside of the marriage between a husband and wife (adultery, pre-marital sex, homosexuality, incest).

This was a huge issue for the Thessalonian Christians. By the time Christianity appeared in the first century, sexual immorality was widespread in the Roman Empire. As bad and as rampant as sexual immorality is in America today, most historians who have studied both cultures would say that the Roman world (and the Greek influences that were very present even after the downfall of the Greek empire) was even more immoral than our culture. Granted, they did not have the technology that contributes so much to the immoral climate of our day, but they did have a negative influence that we have not had to deal with.

Q5: Please read I Thessalonians 1:9. According to this verse, what had they turned away from?

Be careful not to think that first century idols were simply carvings made out of stone, wood, metal or clay. These idols represented religious beliefs associated with many false gods. Nearly every one of the false religions and false gods celebrated and promoted sexual immorality as a means of worshipping or communing with the false gods represented by the idols of 1:9. Many ancient temples housed male and female prostitutes that were there as part of “worship”. How messed up is that?!

Among the new Christians in Thessalonica were Jews. For the Jewish Christians the worship of idols/false gods was not an issue (although they certainly struggled with other sins). But the majority of Thessalonian Christians were Gentiles, and because of their background sexual immorality was a challenge.

Q6: According to 4:1, how were they doing with practical sanctification?

How are you doing with practical sanctification?

Because Paul was a Jewish scholar of the Hebrew scriptures (our Old Testament), I suspect he had used Genesis 1:26 -31 and 2:18 – 25 to teach the Gentile Christians about God’s beautiful plan for human sexuality. God’s ways are always best. The sanctification that would put an end to *porneias* (sexual immorality) was not about depriving Christians of something good, it was about putting them on the path where they could experience something great – sexuality and marriage as God designed it to be.

Q7: There are many commands in the New Testament that cover a wide range of topics and issues. Can you name some without having to look in your Bible?

There is much more to learn about sanctification than what has been covered so far, but remember these two truths:

1. No matter what sins you have committed in the past and how you might feel defeated even now, remember that God’s mercy is **always** available for those who want it. Talk to Him!
2. The call to be sanctified (holy, set apart unto God) is wonderful for it testifies of how deeply loved by God you are.