

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, November 2, 2011 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

CONTAGIOUS CHRISTIANS “A Christianity That’s Catching – A Study of 1 Thessalonians”

Straight Talk About Moral Purity
1 Thessalonians 4:1-8

One of the most telltale signs of a deteriorating society is its loss of moral integrity. When this foundational stone begins to crack and erode away, the effect is nothing short of disastrous. Since its inception, Christianity has stood against moral decay by upholding personal holiness. Throughout church history, Christians have remained committed to purity in spite of the ever-present currents of popular opinion and lax moral philosophies that have encouraged them to compromise their stand. A major reason for Christians to maintain such an unbending position in the clear instruction found in God’s Word concerning this area. 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 stands out in Scripture as one of the more direct passages on moral purity. So, since God has chosen to talk so candidly about this subject, let’s decide right now to hear His counsel with our defenses down and our wills geared toward following His counsel. With this approach, we can bring glory to God and experience His super-abundant goodness in our own lives and truly impact our culture for Christ.

I. THE FOG: A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF TODAY’S MORAL SCENE (Habakkuk 1 and Jeremiah 6)

It’s easy for many of us to think that the moral decline of our day is relatively new in human history. “It’s never been this bad before!” But that is simply not true. Repeatedly, the Old Testament writers told of incidents, cultures, even eras, that were scarred by various kinds of immorality. Two of these authors served as prophets during the days prior to Judah’s fall under the Babylonians invasion of 586 B.C. What they recorded about ancient Judah’s moral condition aptly describes the fog of immorality that had clouded our day.

- 1. The Scream of Habakkuk** – When Habakkuk surveyed Judah’s landscape, he saw a people deserving of God’s righteous judgment yet desperately in need of His merciful salvation.

“The burden which the Prophet Habakkuk says. O Lord, how long shall I cry, and You will not hear?... even cry out to You, ‘Violence!’ and You will not save. Why do You show me iniquity, and cause me to see trouble? For plundering and violence are before me; there is strife, and contention arises. Therefore the law is powerless, and justice never goes forth. For the wicked surround the righteous; therefore perverse judgment proceeds.” – Habakkuk 1:1-4

This ancient prophet described his country as violent. The land as full of iniquity – lying, vanity, and idolatry – and wickedness – oppression, robbery, and assault. Strife and contention constantly arose among the people. They ignored the law and perverted justice. Does any of

that sound familiar? It's no wonder that Habakkuk screamed out at God to intervene in the fog and put a halt to the moral pollution that had permeated Judah.

2. **The Sobs of Jeremiah** – Like Habakkuk, Jeremiah lived and prophesied in Judah during its final stage of political, moral, and religious collapse. And even though he witnessed many of the same immoralities that Habakkuk had observed, it brought him to tears instead of shouts of outrage.

“To whom shall I speak and give warning, that they may hear? Indeed their ear is uncircumcised (not set on hearing God), and they cannot give heed. Behold, the word of the Lord is a reproach to them; they have no delight in it. Therefore I am full of the fury of the Lord. I am weary of holding it in. I will pour it out on the children outside, and on the assembly of young men together; for even the husband shall be taken with the wife, and the aged with him who is full of days. And their houses shall be turned over to others, fields and wives together; for I will stretch out My hand against the inhabitants of the land,” says the Lord, ‘because from the least of them even to the greatest of them, everyone is given to covetousness; and from the prophet even to the priest, everyone deals falsely. They have also healed the hurt of My people slightly (superficially, they weren’t meeting their needs), says, ‘Peace, peace!’ when there is no peace. Were they ashamed when they had committed abominations? NO! They were not at all ashamed; nor did they know how to blush. Therefore they shall fall among those who fall; and that time I punish them, they shall be cast down.’ Says the Lord.” – Jeremiah 6:10-15

Notice some of the observations that he made about the Judeans:

1. He said that they had closed their eyes to God’s Word... God’s revealed Word – indeed, *“the word of the Lord (had) become a reproach to them; they (had) no delight in it? (Jer. 6:10).*
2. They were all “covetous” or *“greedy for gain,”* and were propagating lies (v.13).
3. In fact, the religious officials had lost their desire to be ministers of true forgiveness and reconciliation. Instead, they were telling people that everything was all right when nothing could have been further from the truth (v. 14).
4. To top it all off, these religious leaders were not even ashamed about the pollution they were perpetuating. *“They did not even know how to blush” (v.15).* In other words, sin no longer shocked them. They had grown so accustomed to living in a moral fog that their faces failed to turn red when they encountered impurity. **That is an unmistakable, telltale sign of a lack of holiness.*

II. THE TRUTH: GOD’S TIMELESS COUNSEL FOR CHRISTIANS (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8)

Since impurity is an enemy all human beings must face, God doesn’t mince words when He addresses the subject. He speaks directly, seriously, and clearly. One such instance is lodged in the fourth chapter of 1 Thessalonians. There the Lord of holiness pierces through the moral fog with the penetrating light of divine truth. He conveys three basic directives that are imperative for us to heed if we are to obey God’s command to be holy.

3 Moral Directives for Contagious Christians:

1. **In your walk, excel still more (vv.1-2)** – We are not to be lazy or passive in our Christian lives. Instead, we are exhorted to actively pursue personal obedience to the divine commands to submit rather than ignore or revolt against God’s standard of holiness:
 - (1) **Romans 6:16-18** – *“Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one’s slave whom you obey, whether sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you*

obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness.”

- (2) **1 Peter 1:13-16** – *“Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; As obedience children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’”*

It also involves our commitment to diligently work through a process that is sometimes difficult and painful, yet fruitful and rewarding.

- (3) **Hebrews 12:1-3** – *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider Him who endured such hostility from sinners against Himself, lest you become weary and discouraged in your souls.”*
- (4) **James 1:2-4** – *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”*

2. **In your morals, abstain from every hint of immoral behavior (vv.3-6)** – If we are going to excel toward the goal of holiness, then we need to get a grip on dealing with sexual lusts. Verse 3 make it quite plain, *“For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality.”* Part of God’s will for Christians is that they have not even a hint of immorality as a part of their lives. This covers all avenues of sexual expression outside of God’s intended desire with in the confine of a committed and loving marriage relationship.. between one and one woman for life (covers bigamy, polygamy, homosexuality, sodomy, prostitution... all forms of premarital, extramarital, and non-monogamous marital sex). Such relationship (those outside of marriage) are not outlawed because they are unwise, indiscreet, dangerous, unpopular, excessive, or unpleasing, although all of these thing are true. Rather, God forbids them because they violate His holy nature and His holy will for His people. Abstaining from immoral behavior includes knowledge of how to possess our own vessel in *“sanctification and honor”* (v.4). That is, we need to know how to control our own bodies and drives in a pure, upright and God honoring way. We are not to lose control of ourselves and act in *“lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God”* (v.5).

Some Modern Application – Let’s bring this up-to-date for a moment. There are movies, television programs, and magazines that weaken us morally because they beckon us toward an immoral lifestyle. Certain conversations carried on by certain people have the same detrimental effect. Specific types of parties, places, and seductive pastimes have a lure toward impurity that we should avoid, regardless of the pressures to attend. We are foolish to think that we can play around with these things without it affect our lives spiritually, emotionally and mentally. We must stop tantalizing ourselves with sin! Our abstinence and avoidance will be for our own good and God’s splendid glory.

And just in case someone might think that nothing is wrong with immorality as long as it is only carried out in one’s family, God has added these words; *“that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things”* (v.6). Incestuous practices with family members, such as one’s in-laws, parents, stepparents, or children, are labeled as immoral (see 1 Cor. 5:1). God will not allow wrongdoing – even on the

family level – to go unpunished. He will avenge the injustice. And often, He will not wait until the final judgment day to right a wrong; many wrongdoers – including Christians – will bear the brunt of divine chastisement during their own lifetime.

- 3. In your reasoning, remember why God called you (vv.7-8)** – We who are Christians should not traffic in immorality because “God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in (the sphere of) sanctification.” In other words, when God saved us, it was so that we might begin to grow up spiritually. He want us to progressively move out of the fog of impurity and into the bright light of holiness. **1 John 1:5-7** says, *“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declared to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Christ, His Son, cleanses us from all sin.”*

Dr. Charles Swindoll says, **“Our Lord never intended to give us everlasting life so that we could continue to live as if we were still headed toward everlasting death.”** Yet, the truth is, many of us are living this way. And when we remain engaged in an immoral lifestyle, we are **“not rejecting man by the God who give His Holy Spirit”** to us **(v.8)**. That’s serious business!

III. THE CHOICE: A DECISION ONLY YOU CAN MAKE

There are only two options to choose from: to live horizontally in the weakness of the flesh, or to live vertically in the power of the Holy Spirit. Both are diametrically opposed to each other, and both have certain consequences. You must decide which set of consequences you want to live with and die with. Consider them carefully. You must choose one or the other. You cannot straddle the fence that separates them. As Jesus, Himself, put it in **Matthew 6:24**, *“No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”*

1. If you choose to operate horizontally...

- (1) **You will drift in a fog of moral uncertainty and decay** – You will end up playing religious games while your real life becomes increasingly polluted by the moral impurity and general godlessness surround you. It will affect your spiritual health.
- (2) **Your disobedience will result in increasing guilt, grief and instability** – God will not permit His children to traffic in sin without their experiencing the pain and anguish that eventually accompanies it. And this he does “for our good, that we may share in His holiness.” Listen to **Hebrews 12:9-11**, *“Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened (disciplined) us as seemed best to them, but He (God) for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening (discipline) seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.”*

2. If you choose to operate vertically...

- (1) **You will honor the God of moral absolutes** – Your submission to the Lord’s holy commands will bring Him glory.
- (2) **Your obedience will result in greater confidence and habits of holiness** – In time, your obedience will increase your strength to say no to sin as you conform more and more to God’s perfect standard of spiritual maturity – holiness.