

1 and 2 Thessalonians

Living Holy Lives (1 Thess. 4:1-12)

Lesson #7 for August 18, 2012

Scriptures: 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12; Matthew 25:34-46; Genesis 39:9; John 13:34,35.

1. This lesson will focus on the challenges of living holy and pure lives in a largely immoral and sexually explicit generation. If we were truly living holy lives, we would not be here!

All heaven took a deep and joyful interest in the creation of the world and of man. **Human beings were a new and distinct order.** They were made “in the image of God,” and it was the Creator’s design that they should populate the earth. They were to live in close communion with heaven, receiving power from the Source of all power. Upheld by God, they were to live sinless lives. (*RH*, February 11, 1902 par. 1; *1BC* 1081.3; *SD* 7.2; *TA* 48.1)

2. So, why did God invent sex? When populating planet earth instead of creating billions of individual beings, He just created two with the ability to procreate. Many of the most important lessons that God needs to teach us come as we deal with our own children! Remember that Adam and Eve were created **after** sin had begun in heaven. Our creation was at least partly to respond to Satan’s accusations against God that He was not willing to share His creative power. (See handout: *The Great Controversy Described in Scripture* on our website - www.theox.org under General Topics in the Teacher’s Guides section)
3. Are we a “new and distinct order” in other respects as well as our sexuality? As far as we know, angels are not sexual beings. (Matthew 22:30) So, why did God make us that way? Do angels have some kind of personal, more intimate relationships with certain of their friends? Does God intend for all of us to become unisex when we go to heaven?
4. How do you understand Jesus’s comments in Matthew 22? Will all human procreation cease in heaven? Will there be any special relationship between married couples when they get to heaven? Will marriage end at the second coming? God has never taken away from us anything that He declared “very good.” Could God somehow return marriage to its originally intended role?
5. What was God’s original purpose in creating marriage? Ellen White strongly suggested that the purpose of marriage is for the husband to learn more about God from his wife and for the wife to learn more about God from her husband. Does human sexuality have anything to do with that process?
6. If, in fact, that was God’s original plan—and it was to teach us about Him—wouldn’t you expect Satan to do everything possible to attack it? We can procreate, and the Devil cannot; he is very envious and angry about that! He wanted to be part of the creation “committee” for this earth. (See *Great Controversy* 492-504, *The Origin of Evil*)
7. During his ministry, Paul spent major amounts of time in three cities that we know about. The first was Antioch, his home church. The second was Corinth. And the third was Ephesus. Each of these cities had so-called “temples” that were attempts to promote fertility. They were little more than glorified brothels. There were both male and female prostitutes. Is that why Paul spoke so forcefully about sexual immorality?
8. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12. In 1 Thessalonians 1-3, Paul discussed his relationship with the Thessalonians and their brief but important history together. In 1 Thessalonians 4 & 5, he started to speak about the future. He began by linking 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 with 1

Thessalonians 4:1-18. Paul was strongly suggesting that the kind of lives that the Thessalonians had been living since they became Christians was according to God's order. But, the process of being Christians calls for more and better living in the future. As we will see in future lessons, he called for the Thessalonians to live pure, holy lives—avoiding sexual immorality—as a preparation for the second coming of Jesus Christ which he expected to take place soon.

9. In his later correspondence, Paul specifically stated that they should avoid sexual immorality. “Any other sin a man commits does not affect his body; but the man who is guilty of sexual immorality sins against his own body.” (1 Corinthians 6:18, *GNB*)
10. Clearly, God's intention was for one man to be married to one woman and for them to be in a very close and meaningful relationship. That was to be the closest and most intimate relationship known to human beings. This close relationship was to be a part of the love that would form the perfect environment into which children would be born and grow up.
11. Paul mentioned specifically in 1 Thessalonians 4:1,2,15 that Jesus Himself spoke on this issue. We know that 1 Thessalonians is almost certainly the very first book in the New Testament to have been written. So, how did Paul get the information about Jesus' words? We must conclude that Paul had access to sources of information that we do not have now.
12. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 preferably in several different versions. What was Paul trying to say in those verses? Paul suggested that God is the Avenger on those who get involved in sexual immorality. God calls us to live holy lives with the help of the Holy Spirit.
13. In what sense is God an Avenger? Is God waiting with a big stick ready to zap people who misbehave? There would not be any of us left! Certainly, we do not believe such a picture. Is this possibly referring to the fact that in a day when there were no treatments for such things, that sexually transmitted infections were God's way of punishing those practicing sexual immorality? Or, were those the natural consequences of such behavior if the partner had a sexually transmitted disease.
14. Read again 1 Thessalonians 4:3,7. Paul was contrasting two very different ways of living. In the cities of Antioch, Corinth, Ephesus, and probably Thessalonica, sexual immorality was rampant. By contrast, Paul was calling for church members to live holy lives. What is the definition of a holy life? *Holiness* means to be “set aside for a special and sacred purpose.” The word used in Thessalonians implies a process rather than an outcome. We are to be growing continuously more like God. That is totally incompatible with a life of sexual immorality. The word he used in these verses is *porneia*. That basically covers all forms of sexual immorality from what we call pornography all the way to prostitution and certainly would include most aspects of the fertility forms of worship as practiced in Paul's day.
15. How are Christians supposed to maintain a healthy and holy attitude toward marriage and the sexual relationship in our day when sex is used almost indiscriminately and publicly for advertising purposes for almost every product?
16. Notice these words from the Roman pagan orator Cicero:

If there is anyone who thinks that youth should be forbidden affairs even with courtesans, he is doubtless eminently austere... But his view is contrary not only to the license of this age but also to the customs and concessions of our ancestors. For when was this not a common practice? When was it blamed?

When was it forbidden?—Quoted in Abraham Malherbe, *Letters to the Thessalonians, The Anchor Bible*, vol. 32b (New York: Doubleday, 2000), pp. 235,236.

17. If “everybody’s doing it” is an excuse for any kind of behavior, then we should all eventually join Satan’s side. (Read Revelation 13:3,4,7,8) Compare *FE* 289.1.
18. 1 Thessalonians 4:4 is difficult to translate. There are probably two meanings implied by Paul’s words. He was suggesting that each man should find himself a suitable wife; (compare 1 Peter 3:7) and even within the marriage relationship, he should control his own body. Once again, this is suggesting that sex should take place only in the context of a committed marriage relationship.
19. Read 1 Thessalonians 4:6-8 again. While we all would recognize that contracting sexually transmitted infections is a serious problem—especially in some areas of the world where HIV/AIDS is so prevalent—it is almost certainly true that the greatest damage done to a person by sexual promiscuity is the damage it does to his/her own mind and character. Sexual immorality involves not only how we are treating others but also how we are treating Jesus Christ (Matthew 25:34-46) and even about how we treat ourselves.
20. It should be noted that in Paul’s world, sexual immorality was almost always connected with alcohol consumption, riotous living, and orgies. What do you think Paul was implying when he talked about living a holy life? He went on to expand the concept in 1 Thessalonians 4:9-12. (Compare 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13) There are four different words used in Greek for *love*. *Epithumia* is a word describing passion. *Eros* specifically refers to sexual love. *Philos* is a word used to describe filial or family love. *Agape*, the word most commonly used for *love* in the New Testament, refers to principled love which is not based on feeling or impulse but on a recognition of the fact that every other human being—like us—is a child of God. (See *DA* 641.3)
21. Is it hard to learn that kind of love? Where do we first learn about love? It should be at home. This far from the Garden of Eden, is it a miracle that any of us still knows how to love?
22. Paul went on to describe the kind of people Christians should be. Not sponging off of others but living a quiet life, earning their own living, and supporting themselves. Is it possible that there were some lazy, even disruptive, individuals that had chosen to join the Thessalonian church? Were some or all of the Thessalonian members living a sort of communal life where free meals were available? Or, were some of the Thessalonian believers actually trying to depend upon Gentiles for their sustenance?

Those who would not fall a prey to Satan’s devices, must guard well the avenues of the soul; they must avoid reading, seeing, or hearing that which will suggest impure thoughts. The mind must not be left to dwell at random upon every subject that the enemy of souls may suggest. The heart must be faithfully sentinelled, or evils without will awaken evils within, and the soul will wander in darkness.—Ellen G. White, *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 518.

23. Perhaps, when thinking about living a holy life, Paul remembered the case of the bruised and bleeding Pharisees. Is this what Paul had in mind for us?

There was the *Bruised or Bleeding Pharisee*. The Talmud speaks of the plague of self-afflicting Pharisees. These Pharisees received their name for this reason. Women had a very low status in Palestine. No really strict

orthodox teacher would be seen talking to a woman in public, even if that woman was his own wife or sister. These Pharisees went even further; they would not even allow themselves to look at a woman on the street. In order to avoid doing so they would shut their eyes, and so bump into walls and buildings and obstructions. They thus bruised and wounded themselves, and their wounds and bruises gained them a special reputation for exceeding piety.—Wm. Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible*, The Gospel of Matthew: Vol. 2. 2000, Rev. ed. (282–284). Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.

24. In how many ways do we need to guard the avenues of the soul? Is it particularly true in the area of entertainment? What about the use of the Internet?
25. By contrast, how do we grow more and more into the likeness of Jesus Christ in the process we sometimes call sanctification? More specifically, how are we changed by beholding? (GC 555.1)
26. Obviously, Paul was quite blunt in speaking about what he thought needed to be done to live a holy life. How do you feel about Paul's overall approach? Are we uncomfortable talking about sexual immorality? Do Christians need to call sin by its right name?
27. What is it about sexual immorality that is so dangerous? What does it do to us as human beings? Would you describe our world as a world of unbridled sexual lust and perversion? Where does homosexuality fit into this whole picture?
28. In 2010, a study was done at Yale University. Clearly, Yale is one of the most prestigious universities in America. Of the respondents, 71% said that their religious views did "not at all" affect their sexual behavior. Another 19% said their sexual behavior was only impacted slightly by their religious views. Only 10% felt that religion had "a lot" to do with their sexual behavior. What does this teach us about trends in America?
29. To get a slightly clearer view of what was going on in society in Paul's day, consider this summary by F. F. Bruce in the *Word Biblical Commentary*:

A man might have a mistress... [*hetaera*] who could provide him also with intellectual companionship; the institution of slavery made it easy for him to have a concubine... [*palace*], while casual gratification was readily available from a harlot... [*porn*]. The function of his wife was to manage his household and to be the mother of his legitimate children and heirs.—*Word Bible Commentary*, 1 and 2 Thessalonians (Waco, Texas: Word Books, 1982), volume 45, p. 82.

30. It is very clear that in the Old Testament many of the "saints" had more than one wife or female companion. Specific examples include Solomon, David, and even Abraham. In light of these clear histories, what should we say to our young people about the necessity of having a monogamous relationship—one man and one woman? Can you make a compelling argument for that from the Bible? Is this something that the church needs to be talking about?

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