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Hungering for Holiness, Part 7

Text- 1 Thessalonians 4:1-7

When I began preaching at age 17, I believed then, as I do now, that the only way to get better at the craft of preaching was to preach. However, I was in a culture that over-spiritualized decision-making. When I’d get an invitation to preach, the inviting person would say, “We need a speaker for Youth Sunday, March 30. Would you pray about it and see if God wants you to speak on that Sunday?” This was always problematic for me. I thought, “God has called me to preach. It is God’s will for me that I preach. If I go to God and pray about this what am I expecting Him to say?” I thought then, as I do now, that the call of God was irrevocable and that every opportunity to preach was an extension of both the call and God’s provision for me. The cynic in me always wanted to respond to the inviting person, “I don’t need to pray about this invitation. I am still called to preach. That hasn’t changed. I am available that day. Let’s do this!!

Sometimes the will of God for you and for me is not clear. We wrestle with the question, “What would God have me do?” Other times, the will of God is VERY clear. We must simply submit ourselves to that will.

This passage makes it very clear that in matters of lifestyle and holiness, there ought to be no angst about discerning the will of God.

With a phrase that suggests a summary/closing Paul says, “Finally, then brethren” and reminds the saints of a few items.

1. Keep growing, abounding, expanding in your walk.

I exhort you, not in my name, but in the Lord Christ.

2. This is God’s will for you: your sanctification. That is, your being set apart, your being different, distinctive. Holiness is not a fad. It is *the* will of God for His people.

3. About your body:

A. Separate yourselves from *sexual immorality. The* Greek word is *porneia.* Variously translated as *fornication, prostitution, idolatry*(figuratively), *any kind of sexual misconduct, premarital and extramarital sex, homosexuality.*

B. Each of you should know how... There is an assumption made that by this time in their spiritual journey, the Thessalonians ought to know how to control their passions. Note both a positive and a negative articulation of this exhortation: *in sanctification and honor*(positive); *not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God.*

Some commentators have suggested that by verse 6, Paul is not talking about sexual conduct anymore. They suggest that verse 6 is Paul’s transition to business ethics. They point out that the verbs, *defraud* and *take* *advantage* are business terms. However, when Paul changes subjects, he usually does so with the use of a phrase such as

* Finally, then, brethren (4:1)
* But concerning brotherly love (4:9)
* But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have died...(4:13)

I think verse 6 is another angle on holiness. What Paul is saying is that the Thessalonians

1. Should separate themselves
2. Should know how to control themselves and
3. Should act honorably, ethically and morally, not taking advantage of anyone. Remember the phrase your Mom or Dad or authority figure used to utter? *You* ***know better*** *than to do that.*

2 Corinthians 7:2- *Open your hearts to us. We have wronged no one, we have corrupted no one, we have cheated no one.*

2 Corinthians 12:7-8- *Did I take advantage of you by any of those I sent to you? I urged Titus and sent our brother with him. Did Titus take advantage of you? Did we not walk in the same spirit? Did we not walk in the same steps?*

Paul reminds the Thessalonians that God is the avenger of the defrauded. God sides with the one who is taken advantage of (Psalm 79:10).

**Illus.**

These days we seem afraid to speak the word of God to our culture. We are currently trying to counsel people about what we used to cast out. We need more exorcisms and less building up of people’s self-esteem. We are winking when we should be gasping and shrugging our shoulders when we should be unapologetically declaring truth.

If you're a fan of alliteration, I offer you three Ds on which to hang this exposition.

1. Paul addresses the idea of **discipline** - of body (v. 3-4)
2. Paul addresses the idea of **distinction**- in lifestyle. You should not live like those who don’t know God. (v.5)
3. Paul addresses the idea of their **defrauding** one another- of taking advantage of each other (v. 6)

**Illus.**

On February 20, 2000, I baptized my then-six-year-old son at the St. Paul Missionary Baptist Church in Marion, IN. We were members of that church at the time, while we were serving at Taylor University. Last February 20, I sent my son a text and rehearsed the memory of that day with him. I closed my text with, “ Son, remember your baptism and the commitments made. I love you!! Daddy.”

That’s Paul, as he writes to these Thessalonians.

* Remember your calling
* God didn’t call us to a ragged life
* God called us to holiness!!

Amen