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Thoughts from First Thessalonians ...

God Called Us for Sanctification

Solomon, the sage of Proverbs, had some wisdom on the subject of husband-wife relationships of an intimate nature. "Drink water from your own cistern," advised he, to the man and regarding the man's focus on his own wife, "and fresh water from your own well." He continued, "Let your fountain be blessed in the wife of your youth ... be always exhilarated with her love." He then advanced the following question, "For why should you, my son, be exhilarated with an adulteress, and embrace the bosom of a foreigner?" In addition, there is the continuing presence of the

Lord, whose eyes roam to and fro about the earth, and miss nothing. "For the ways of a man are before the eyes of the Lord, and He watches all his paths." The All Knowing has always warned man that sin is destructive, both to the individual and to those around him. "His own iniquities will capture the wicked, and he will be held with the cords of his sin. He will die for lack of instruction, and in the greatness of his folly he will go astray" (Proverbs 5:15-23). Such exhortations and warnings were in the mind of Paul as he wrote to the brethren in Thessalonica.

▲ **Sanctification and honor** — Many in Thessalonica were coming out of the immoral pagan society of Roman and Greek times. Sometimes old habits die hard, so the brethren were in need of admonishment in the matter of husband-wife fidelity. "Abstain from sexual immorality," asseverates the apostle, "that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, and not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God" (1 Thessalonians 4:4,5). True love is caring and giving; lust is selfish and engaged in self-gratification. Love puts the other person first; lust uses the other person. The true happiness that is supposed to result from a loving husband-wife relationship only will happen if such intimacy is in an atmosphere of holiness to the Lord, and giving proper honor and respect to the partner in the relationship.

▲ **No transgression** — The old commandment warned about looking with wrong desire over the neighbor's fence; part of it read, "You shall not covet your neighbor's wife" (Exodus 20:17). One of the reasons the grass seems greener on the other side of the fence is that the imagining of the sexual interludes comes without the attendant responsibility of a real relationship. The danger of such dreaming is that the dreams tend to become reality, and the reality becomes a nightmare! So the apostle's instruction to the brethren sounds the alarm to let "no man transgress and defraud his brother in this matter because the Lord is the avenger in all things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you" (1 Thessalonians 4:6). The *solemn warning* is not to be shunted aside easily; where the thoughts go, the body follows.

▲ **God's purpose** — The holy God is using the gospel to call people out of this world and transform their character so that they are fit to fellowship with Him for all eternity. "You once were not a people," Peter quoted the Old Testament prophet, concerning the Gentiles who previously had been set aside while God worked His program with the physical descendants of Jacob, "but now you are the people of God." These special individuals, along with the Jews who turned to Christ, are thusly described in terms such as "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a *holy nation*, a people for God's own possession" (1 Peter 2:9,10). The apostle Paul concurs, averring, "For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in *sanctification*" (1 Thessalonians 4:7).

God is serious about this matter of sanctification in all areas, but in this context especially in the matter of marriage faithfulness. "Consequently," Paul intones, "he who rejects this is not rejecting man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you" (1 Thessalonians 4:8). To describe God as the One who "gives His Holy Spirit to you" puts tremendous weight on what has just been said. Moderns, take heed!

JAY WILSON

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Christ's Church
30 Red Fox Lane
Bozeman, MT 59718