

The Believer's Walk

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In the first of the two Thessalonian epistles, chapter four, Paul says, furthermore, we beseech you brethren and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us, how ye ought to walk and to please God so ye would abound more and more. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification. that ye should abstain from fornication. That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honor, not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God. Let no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter, because that the Lord is the avenger of all such. As we also have forewarned you and testified. For God has not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. And he therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, God who hath also given unto us His Holy Spirit.

This is only a little section of a letter written by a man named Paul, an apostle to a church in the city of Thessalonica, a Greek city, to a new church, relatively new. And these persons to whom he wrote, were good Christians. That is, the church was good. There are seven things said about the church, said about the Thessalonian Christians by the man Paul. For Paul was always very careful never to deliver a 100% condemnation. He always wove into his condemnation some complimentary remarks about their spiritual lives. He knew that if you are too hard on people, you discourage them. If you're not hard enough, you let them go to sleep. So he tried to keep them awake and still not be too hard on them. He said this about them, that they had abandoned idolatry. They were by nature, rather by culture, they were idolaters by religion. But they had now abandoned this. They had turned to God from idols, and they had turned to the true God.

I have said many times, I suppose I will not say anything this morning I haven't said many times. I've said many times that God never recommends vacuum. If He takes you out of a place, it's in order that He might take you into a place. He never takes you out and leaves you. If He says, turn away from that, He says that in order that He might say, turn unto this. So they had turned away from idols and turned to the true God. They were not left in the middle in a state of of unanimous indecision, I think I heard it call last week on the board. They were unanimous only in their indecision. But that would be a frightful place to leave a man. But they turned to the true God after turning from idols. And in their faith, they worked and hoped and loved and labored. And they received the gospel in power, Paul said, with much assurance, which he took as a proof of their election of God. And they were actively missionary-minded, for they send out missionaries and

supported them. They had continued true under persecution, which is a good test of a Christian, and they were living in expectation of Christ's return.

Now those seven characteristics of the Thessalonian Christians, were enough for them to get into any church in Christendom and to be taken further as an example of other churches. And still Paul was not content. He commended them for what they were, but he also urged the sacred duty of their being holy people, holy beyond the call of duty, holy beyond the current mores, holy beyond the standards of their time. And he warned them as I warn you, that nothing else is enough. If we do not seek and pursue purity of heart, which results in personal purity of life, nothing else is enough. Now, Paul said that he had taught this to them. And he had taught them what he called righteousness and true holiness. There is such a thing as righteousness that is not true holiness. But there is righteousness and true holiness.

Now, Christ personalized righteousness when He came. And He took it out of the realm of what we now call ethics, or have always called ethics, and taught that righteousness was simply to please God. We need not know what righteousness is, but we do need to know that if we please God, we're doing righteousness. John said, that if we kept the commandments of the Lord, He would hear our prayers, and then added, and also if we do the things that are pleasing in His sight. Not that the keeping the commandments of the Lord was not pleasing in God's sight, but it was not enough. There has to be an affection shown toward God.

It's the same as rules in a household. The average household has rules and you keep those rules, and you see that the children do, and everybody takes it for granted. But that's not enough. You could come, your children could come into your household and watch not to break the rules, and yet never do or say anything affectionate to show that they really loved you. It isn't enough that I keep the laws of the New Testament, the commandments of Christ, that I am to do this and do that and refrain from this. That's not enough. That must be, but Christ personalized all this and made it to be the result of a spontaneous, loving, relationship toward God.

And the church of Christ is righteous when she does those things which she knows to be pleasing in the eyes of her righteous Savior, and goes beyond mere keeping of rules, however important they may be. And Paul lays many of them down. We can talk about grace all we want to and freedom all we please. We've got to throw a lot of the New Testament out if we reject commandments and rules, for there are a lot of them here. But keeping to those rules is not enough. There must be added to this, or perhaps I should say, that we keep them because they are to us the mind of our Lord, that we do the things that are pleasing in His sight.

Philosophers analyze righteousness, but Christians obey and are righteous because they do the things that are righteous without knowing why they're doing them. We're now in time of analysis. Somebody referred once in my hearing to the paralysis of analysis. And now in seminaries and

Bible schools, they analyze till they're paralyzed. They stand halfway between two extreme views of things and can't make up their mind which and split hairs and divide them until there's no spontaneity left. We scarcely know which side we're on at all. Well, that's not a Christian's approach. If a Christian knows that the Lord wants it that way, he wants it that way whether he knows why or not.

We might and I think it wouldn't hurt us if we studied into the why of things. Why is it wrong to steal and why is it wrong to lie? There are good, sound philosophic reasons underneath it all. But that isn't the reason that Christian stops lying. He stops lying because he knows lying displeases his Lord. He allows these scholastic hair splitters and casuists to write their long commentaries on why it's wrong to steal. And if you steal with a certain high principle in mind you're doing right, and why it's wrong to lie. And in some quarters, they even have taught their their devotees that you can lie provided you say instantly afterward, Lord, I didn't mean that. They even say that you can go to court and lie in court, if after you have told the lie in court you say to God, now God excused it, that doesn't count. Now, that's actually in print. I can show you where it is. That's real. That's real. That's Jesuit casuistry. The hairsplitting of morals.

Is it ever wrong to tell a lie, or is it ever right to tell a lie? Is it always wrong to lie? Well, the hairsplitters give good reasons why sometimes a lie is a good thing. For instance, they've argued if you know that somebody is very sick and that a shock would kill them, you can lie to them. I wouldn't do it to save anybody's life. But I wouldn't shock them either. I believe God would help a man or woman out so that he would neither need to lie nor kill anybody by shocking them with the news of their friend's death or accident. I believe it entirely possible to preserve the righteousness of truth and at the same time not give anybody a heart attack.

Well anyway, the Christians who teach morals from that cold standpoint, sit around and talk by the hour about, can you do this, or is it wrong to do that, and just how far can you go in this direction? That is a proof of the lack of spirituality. Paul said that we were to do these things in Jesus, because we do the things that are pleasing in His sight. And Jesus said, thou hearest Me always because I'm always doing what's pleasing to Thee, pleasing in Thy sight.

Of course, we have rules at our house. We always had. When we were bringing up the boys, I used to say to them, now boys, if you were on a basketball team, there'd be certain things that you wouldn't be permitted to do. There would be certain rules. And if you played on the Sox or Cubs, there'd be certain things that they'd say, now, you can't do this. And I said, at home, it's the same. There are certain rules that you keep, and that's it. When we have our grandchildren out to the house now, there are certain rules or things they can't do. We rarely ever have any trouble with them. But there are things they can't do. But the beautiful part about it is, when they go beyond the call of duty and respond to your affection in a way. My little boy Paul, excuse the expression, for he laughs at me, whenever I mention the word Paul, he leans against the wall and says, now, I'm in for

it because he knows what I think of this little blonde boy. But he's a good little fellow and keeps rules more or less, but four years old. One day, I patted his little head and whispered in his ear, you're a good little boy. And he patted my arm and said, you're a good grandpa too.

Well, you know, I haven't got over that yet. That's been months ago. And that wasn't keeping rules. That was a response. That was a response that was something out of the heart, spontaneous. Nobody had taught him to say that. And he didn't have to say it. And it's exactly so here. Righteousness and true holiness is the spontaneous response of the heart to the love of God. Of course, it takes certain directions, and so, Paul wanted to lay those directions down for us. And he pointed out the importance of a holy walk. He said, this is the will of God, even your sanctification, to be devoted to God's uses. Of course, that's one and the primary meaning of the word "sanctified." But it also means to be cleansed for that purpose.

Those who don't believe too much in cleansing, argue that sanctify means to set apart for sacred uses. But I have one question which I want to ask you. Can you conceive of God setting anything aside for His sacred use that wasn't first cleansed? Can you conceive of a priest in the Levitical temple standing and singing or offering incense from a vessel that was dirty that needed to be washed? No. They believed in washings and washings says the writer of the gospels for the Jews will not eat until they have washed their hands. They're always keeping clean. Their idea of a sanctified vessel was a vessel that was as clean as it could be made, and then dedicated to God. It had those two connotations. Not one, but two. I can't think of a holy God using an unholy vessel. I can't think of a holy God eating out or wanting his people to eat out of a vessel that's dirty.

Now, this is neglected in our day, and we want to talk about it a little. It's not denied I think, that Christians should be holy, but not too much has been said about it. And most I think, that most of our preaching after we've got the sinner in, we can't be rough on him. But after we've got him in and he's joined and got baptized, and has gotten into our fellowship, then after that, most preaching consists of telling them how nice they are. At least, that's what I hear when I listen on the radio. Most all that is telling people how nice they are.

Well now, we want to do that, as I pointed out that Paul does and Jesus does in these seven letters. But they also, we must shout aloud, that He that saith, He abideth in Him ought also to walk even as He walked. That it is the will of God that we should be a holy people. And in this particular chapter, Paul talks about one kind of evil which our missionaries tell us sometimes creeps right into their churches and I'm afraid in our own churches, too. He talks about, he said that everybody should be freed and delivered from fornication.

Now, the damning effect of impurity will never quite be known in this world. We'll never know until the judgment, until we know as we're known, the ravages of impurity are greater than that of any disease, greater than the ravages of any of the great killers. And the victims of this, of these

sins, are found by millions in hospitals and insane institutions and institutions for the blind. But the most deadly effect of sin is always in the heart of its victim. Never forget that.

A man may, as has happened some times, a man may get drunk and fall into fire. I knew a man that His neck was all burned. He said, years ago, he'd become a Christian. And he turned around and showed me the scars on his neck. He said, I worked in a factory where there were blazing fires. And he said, I'd get drunk and stagger around and even at my work and fall in and have to be dragged out. He said, that's the result. Well now, that was bad because it had burnt him. It might have killed him, but it burnt his neck and left great, ugly scars there. But those scars didn't represent the real deadly result of his sin which happened to be drinking. But something inside the man was suffering. Something inside the man was getting sore, shriveling, cracking, splitting, dividing, withering, dying. Thank God, our Lord Jesus Christ got a hold of that man and saved him, saved him, wonderfully saved him.

Incidentally, I might as well carry on that little story. This man was named Jim Terwilliger. And he was about that high and about that thick through. And I knew him when he was in his 70s. He had been saved when he was 56. And that dear man of God, here's how he was saved. He was dead drunk lying on a couch. His wife was kneeling at his head, and his Christian doctor kneeling at his feet praying for him. He said, he heard a voice say, wake thou that sleepest and rise from the dead, then Christ will give thee light. And he stood and wept as he told his story. He said, I woke up completely cold sober and thoroughly converted and born again.

Now don't ask me about how it happened. That's not the way the little book tells you. That little book you get three for a quarter on how to win souls, and what to say to them and what to say next. That isn't the way they do it in the little books, but that's the way the Holy Ghost did it, brother. This man lived with a Christian wife, and he was drinking and disgracing himself, like an old pig. But she had gotten ahold of God and that physician had gotten ahold of God. And here was a man that came bouncing out of a dead drunk, cold sober and converted. From that time on to the end of his life, he did nothing but weep and sing and shout and praise God and testify to what the Lord has done for him. Don't ask me to explain that. I can't. That isn't found in any of the books. That was just done.

Now, dear people, the worst part of any sin is what it does inside of you. A real estate man cheats a widow. The widow suffers. Her children suffers. But that's not the worst. The worst thing is what happened to the man. Emerson said, the thief always steals from himself. And when I cheat anybody of anything, I've cheated my own soul and done my self harm. Always remember that the great evil of sin is internal, that it's what happens inside.

Sometimes in an accident, there will come bearing on a stretcher, somebody in shock. And they will feel the arms, the legs and say, well, there are no broken bones, no broken ribs, but there's

internal injuries. And you die from those internal injuries, not from broken legs. And it's the internal injury of sin, iniquity. What's happening to these people? I don't even get indignant anymore when I hear about them, these people that that live like animals. And their concept of home is like animals. I don't even get angry anymore or indignant. The world is that way, and that's the way it is until the Lord either comes and burns it with fire, or until He takes His people away or sends a revival or somehow changes things. But the terrible part is the cancer eating inside the heart.

Now, we live in in a Sodom today. Our American civilization is a Sodom. That is why when I hear speeches from in Washington talking about our American way of life and the free peoples of the world and all that. I know what they mean, and I know what they think they mean and don't. There are no free peoples. And there are no righteous nations. And the best nations have, oh, so much for which to repent. If America hopes to be preserved on the strength of her righteousness, she might just well prepare herself for annihilation. No nation is righteous. We're living in a Sodom.

I know it's easy to make charges from the safety of the pulpit. I know that, and I know how hard it is to prove them because sin is a slippery as an oil eel. And I know that the attorneys for the defense are very, very many, and very learned. You can get books now showing that sodomy is perfectly normal, and that it is simply one person's way of responding. That while naturally, and the majority don't respond that way. Man falls in love with a woman. That's that seems to be the majority, but occasionally, the Sodomite man falls in love with a man. Paul describes it in Romans 1. Back in Genesis, the city of Sodom was destroyed because of it.

Now, we have attorneys for the defense, teaching in our institutions of higher learning in the land supposed to be Christian, writing very carefully thought out and learned books to show that sodomy is not a sin, and that it ought not to be called a sin. We ought to stop that old 17th century view of it. It is simply another person's way of responding to a situation. And though, God Almighty sent fire on Sodom, and though Paul warned in Romans 1 of the ghastly result of this kind of thing, our students in their universities now are hearing that it's all right. Maybe not the most to be desired, but nothing wrong if that's the way you feel about it.

Well, this Sodom can defend its ways all right. And those who would escape the fire though, they can't stand on the street corner and argue. They can't sit in a class or somewhere and read a book showing that Sodomy is all right. Escape to the hills said the angel. Escape to the mountain said the angel. Escape for thy life said the Holy Ghost. And Lot got up and escaped and went leading his wife. I'm thinking of the artist's pictures of it. I suppose he led her. She looked back and he tried to drag her with him. But she said, I want to catch that late TV show. I can't leave yet. So she turned to a pillar of salt, still back there.

Old brother Cout. Do you remember him?. Brother Cout, still the same old Bernard Cout. He's got adenoids you know, and that old ex-missionary. God bless him. He's one of the sweetest old saints I know. He said the other day in a sermon, two shall be grinding at the mill. One's taken and the other left. Two shall be sleeping in a bed, one taken and the other left. Two shall be watching television, both left. Well, I wouldn't, I wouldn't press it like that. There was one in my hotel room in New York. And when I wasn't busy, I watched it to see what was on. I wouldn't go that far, but I think you ought to give that a bit of thought anyhow. That was the theology of good Brother Cout from up in the hills.

Well, Saddam can defend itself all right. And the thing to do is not argue or split hairs, but get out. Separate yourself severely and radically from sin of every kind, and regard it with horror and detestation, says the Holy Ghost. He that despises, despises not man but God that called us unto holiness. Any young man or woman that travels the sleazy way of borderline impurity does so at his own terrible risk. And whoever defends evil, defends what God has severely condemned. And whoever despises holiness, despises that upon which God places such high value.

And after all friends, spirituality isn't what you eat or don't eat, where you go or don't go. Spirituality is thinking about things the way God thinks about them, seeing them through God's eyes, appraising them with God's standards, that spiritual spirituality. And holiness isn't don't wear gold, don't wear a tie. I think you can doll up and look like a Christmas tree and hurt your Christian testimony. I don't doubt that at all. That can be done. I think a lot of Christian women do it. And I think that preachers sometime get so much automobile out ahead of them. That it's a testimony. It's not for God, but for somebody else, and I think I know who.

But holiness doesn't consist in having or not having doing or not doing. It consists of thinking about it the way God thinks about it. Judging it the way God judges it. Responding toward it the way God responds. Reacting from it, as God reacts from it. Loving it, as God loves. Hating it as God hates it. And doing the things that are pleasing in His sight. And surely that will include holiness of life and righteousness of walk, which Paul calls here, righteousness and true holiness. May God grant that we have more than the new birth. May God grant that we have more than the knowledge that we've been born again. Let us go on unto perfection.

And let us seek as the days go by, in our living, the way we handle our money, the way we treat our friends, the way we live in our homes, the way we conduct our business, the way we think when we're free to think the way we want to think. That in all that we will be exemplars of righteousness and true holiness. For he that despises, despises not man but God. May God grant that the words of Peter be fulfilled in us, be ye holy, for I am holy, words spoken first by God and quoted by Peter, be holy, for I am holy.

A yearning to be holy is about all I'd want to know that anybody had, and I'd call him my Brother. Are you longing to be holy? I wouldn't ask that you would know all the different views and the different theological hairsplittings. All I'd want to know is, within his heart is a great longing to be holy. That, it seems to me is more valuable than all the fine churches and all the well-bound Bibles. God grant that we have it. All right.