
Words of Truth

I Thessalonians 4:3-5

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Knowing the commandments of the Lord (I Thessalonians 4:1-2), the Thessalonians were instructed the following: *“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 honour; Not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God”* (I Thessalonians 4:3-5).

The sanctification of the saints is the will of God. The word that is translated “sanctification” [ἁγιασμός] means: “properly purification, that is, (the state) purity; concretely (by Hebraism) a purifier: - holiness, sanctification” (Strong’s # 38). This is up to the Christian to do. That is made clear in verse four and in other Scriptures as well. Notice: *“I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness... Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord”* (Romans 6:19 and Hebrews 12:14). In each of the two Scriptures I quoted above, the same Greek word translated “sanctification” is translated “holiness” which is why I underlined those words.

In connection to living a life of holiness, all Christians need to abstain from fornication (I Corinthians 6:9-11, Galatians 5:19-21, and Ephesians 5:1-3). Fornication [πορνεία] broadly covers various sexual and even spiritual sins. Thayer’s Greek Lexicon defines the term like this: “illicit sexual intercourse; 1a) adultery, fornication, homosexuality, lesbianism, intercourse with animals etc.; 1b) sexual intercourse with close relatives;) sexual intercourse with a divorced man or woman) metaphorically the worship of idols; 2a) of the defilement of idolatry, as incurred by eating the sacrifices offered to idols” (Strong’s # 4202).

As Christians, we should flee from fornication (I Corinthians 6:18). A lawful marriage is the relationship whereby we should find the fulfillment of our sexual desires (I Corinthians 7:1-5 and Hebrews 13:4). Of course, fornication has long been a problem within the body of Christ. Such occurred in the congregation that assembled in Corinth as well as the congregation that assembled in Thyatira (I Corinthians 5:1-13 and Revelation 2:18-29). When a person decides to give his or her body over to such sinful actions, that person has chosen a path to eternal destruction (Revelation 21:8). A moment or even many moments of carnal pleasure is not worth the cost of one’s soul (cf. Matthew 16:24-27).

We read that the Thessalonians should have known how to possess their vessel in sanctification and honor. The word translated “vessel” [σκεῦος] is really broad. Even in the short definition found in Strong’s Greek dictionary we find this to be true. Notice: “Of uncertain affinity; a vessel, implement, equipment or apparatus (literally or figuratively [specifically a wife as contributing to the usefulness of the husband]): - goods, sail, stuff, vessel” (Strong’s # 2932). With the context and definitions in mind, I think of what was written to the Corinthians: *“All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats: but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord; and the Lord for the body. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s”* (I Corinthians 6:12-20).

If the “vessel” is taken to mean a man’s wife, that fits the Scriptures too. A man ought to treat his wife properly, as a vessel (I Peter 3:7). He should not commit fornication against her. He should be pleased with her body instead of pursuing the body of another (Proverbs 5:15-23).

When we look at the phrasing of “the lust of concupiscence” we have multiple Greek words to consider. The meanings of which are, in part, “a passion, inordinate affection” and “a longing (especially for what is forbidden): - concupiscence, desire, lust (after)” (Strong’s #s 3806 and 1939). These things are supposed to be put to death when you become a Christian (Colossians 3:5 and Galatians 5:24). If left alone to fester, unlawful desires cause an internal war (Galatians 5:16-17 and I Peter 2:11). These lusts lead to sin (James 1:13-16). Therefore, Christians ought to cease making provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof (Romans 13:13-14). The context we are studying is about sexual lusts. However, the Greek word that is translated “concupiscence” is not limited to sexual lusts. That same term appears in a context dealing with the sinful desire of material wealth (I Timothy 6:9).

By referring to the actions of the Gentiles “which know not God” (cf. Ephesians 2:11-12), the point was that they acted without being taught the ways of God. Gentile nations were known for walking in lustful ways (I Peter 4:3). For those that knew God, they knew that God could not be pleased while acting upon acts of fornication or the lusts leading one to fornication (Exodus 20:14, Leviticus 18:1-30, Leviticus 20:10-21, etc.). Such lusts are of the world, not of God (I John 2:15-17). So, Christians should know better than to do such things.