

# Life: Ready When Pornography Controls

February 6, 2015

- The Bible Studies for Life Bible lesson for Feb. 22 focuses on 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8

When God created human sexuality, the Lord gave human creatures a tremendous and compelling gift. He designed the intensity of the sexual experience to draw a man and woman together into a mutually focused relationship that would endure for life. Tragically, human involvement in sin distorted and redirected human sexuality. As a result, people have struggled with sexual behavior through the ages. History is filled with evidence of lives marred and destroyed by wrongful sexual pursuits. This trajectory continues today.

This lesson seeks to help learners understand the Bible's answer to the wrongful uses, abuses and misrepresentations of human sexuality. The Bible, as always, teaches in grand style, pointing out God's design for daily living is holiness. The Bible presents this explanation to God's people.

The unbelieving world is invited to participate in God's kingdom, but this passage clearly states holiness is the standard expected of God's people. Those who hunger for holiness, righteousness (see Matthew 5:6), morality, justice and respect for the law will find such desires can be fulfilled only by the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord lives by these high standards and calls people to live by the same standards.

## **Avoid sexual immorality (1 Thessalonians 4:3)**

This paragraph opens by speaking of sanctification and closes with a reference to the Holy Spirit. One task of the Holy Spirit is to guide the

process of sanctification in believers. The first and last sentences of the paragraph are coordinating thoughts and act like bookends or brackets. The inner verses speak of avoiding things that oppose God's sanctifying work. Truly, any sin disrupts the process of sanctification, but the Apostle Paul focuses here against the damage sexual sin can cause in the sanctification process.

Verse 3 states God's objective is to sanctify his people. Sanctification is the process of making a person holy. Holiness has at its core the concept of separation from everything that harms one's relationship with God. Thus holiness is the opposite of sin, which opposes God and seeks to harm him.

This verse also commands readers to avoid (abstain from) sexual immorality. The Greek word for sexual immorality provides the root for the English word "pornography." Sexual immorality includes a wide range of conduct including unchastity, unfaithfulness, adultery, and prostitution. Focusing sexual desire away from the context of marriage also results in movement away from commitment and devotion to the Lord. So, Paul commands his readers—us—to focus on God's plan of sanctification in our lives and to avoid involvement in sexual sin.

### **Practice self-control (1 Thessalonians 4:4-5)**

Part of Paul's great prescription for avoiding sexual immorality is to know one's own body, that is, its needs, passions and bio-rhythms. Believers are expected to direct their earthly bodies and lives toward the Lord. This is the "seeking first God's kingdom" Jesus taught (Matthew 6:33). The Lord knows the full answer is the transformation only he can provide, but he wants the believer involved in the transformation process. The situation is like a doctor expecting the patient to be fully involved in the healing regimen. Believers should strive to live sanctified and honorable lives. Sanctification and honorable living present much to learn and practice.

The alternative is to be controlled by passionate desires like Gentiles who live by their passionate pursuits, without regard for involvement in sin. Verse 5 states Gentiles do not know God. They have no desire to understand, know or be connected to God in any way.

### **Don't take advantage of others (1 Thessalonians 4:6-8)**

Verse 6 broadens the scope of the passage's imperatives by commanding believers not to take advantage of brothers. It is inconceivable that the word "brother" refers only to fellow believers. All people are to be thought of as "brothers" or "sisters" by virtue of being created by God. If one accepts the worth of others, one is less likely to violate others to fulfill their passionate desires.

Verse 7 brings up holy living again by reminding readers God did not call believers (to save them) and then allow them to return to lifestyles that required Christ's atoning sacrifice. This verse presents a mirror image to v. 3, which mentions sanctification, then its counterpoint immorality. Verse 7 mentions the parallel counterpoint of impurity followed by focus on holy living.

Paul warns in v. 8 that rejecting his instructions is not merely dismissing him. It amounts to dismissing or rejecting God who has given his Spirit to each believer. The Holy Spirit is God's personal attending presence through whom God teaches and guides our spirits and lives. To sin is to reject the Holy Spirit's teaching and wisdom.

Paul would not expect the nonbelieving public to understand the importance of his instruction in these verses, but believers should readily see the issue and the gravity of rejecting God's will for their lives.

This paragraph presents an excellent response to the issues of sexual immorality and pornography. The passage's main answer to sinful sexual conduct is the practice and pursuit of holiness. Such a lifestyle is a pursuit

of God himself. Only once does the apostle mention sexual immorality. This paragraph is not a harangue against plummeting sexual mores. It actually is an exhortation to pursue holiness. Nonbelievers are encouraged to read and observe. Perhaps in the context of the pursuit of holiness, they can understand the importance of avoiding sexual immorality. Yet for the believer, these words are vital, wise, healthy instructions.