

1st Thessalonians 4: 6-8; “The Avenger of Lust”, Sermon # 17 in the series – “A Persevering Faith”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on April 22nd, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

In my last sermon to you from this chapter, I was speaking to you about the very important topic of our sexuality. I tried to show you that each of us, whether we are young or old, or somewhere in between, has to come to terms with the power and presence of what God has given to us in our sexuality. For it is His gift to us to learn to use it in the right way; in the holy way in which He intended. We must come to the place where we learn to “possess our own vessel in sanctification and honor”, and not in lust. Indeed, Paul has stated in verse 3 that this “is the will of God” for us. This “is our sanctification: that we should abstain from sexual immorality”. This means that we should not participate in the use of our sexuality until we come into the state of holy matrimony; the time when God says to us that, not only is this the right time, but it is the holy way to enjoy this gift. You can then give yourself totally to the one who will also give themselves to you, with the blessing of God. In marriage, God’s design is that there will be the personal and the intimate, and the exclusive care of one another’s sexual needs in a way that renews the covenant vows which the married couple have taken before God. And thereby, the marriage bed is undefiled, and God richly blesses it.

But this afternoon we want to focus our attention on the subject of defrauding our brother in this matter of our sexuality. To defraud, my dictionary tells me, is “to deprive someone of some right or property by fraud.” A very severe warning is given by the Apostle in regard to this; that the Lord is the avenger of all such. We want to ask ourselves: What do these words of verse 6 mean? We are going to ask the question, 1st of all – What does it mean to defraud our brother in regard to our sexuality? Then 2nd, We will ask – What does it mean that the Lord is the avenger of all such? And 3rd – What is the role of the Holy Spirit in regard to these things? I want to answer these 3 questions by looking at the scriptural principle and also scriptural examples of people who had to deal with these issues.

1st of all - What does it mean to defraud our brother in regard to our sexuality?

(verse 6)

The word “defraud”, here, has some commentators on the Bible puzzled into thinking that Paul has changed his subject from the previous verses on sexuality, and is now talking about how Christians should conduct themselves in their business dealings with one another. But this is hardly possible in light of the fact that he returns to the same subject of sexuality in verse 7. No, this defrauding; this depriving and cheating of a brother is indeed, in relation to the way that we use our sexuality. Since there is no obvious explanation of this in the text itself, we must try to think of what the Apostle intends, by comparing Scripture with Scripture. Where is the word “defraud” used in other places in the Scripture? Well turn with me to 1st Corinthians 7 and I think that we will be able to understand what Paul is driving at here in 1st Thessalonians. Paul says here in 1st Corinthians 7: 1 – “Now concerning the things of which you wrote to me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.” (This means to touch a woman sexually.) “Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband.” “Let the husband render to his wife the affection due her, and likewise also the wife to her husband.” “The wife does not have authority over her own body, but the husband does.” “And likewise the husband does not have authority over his own body, but the wife does.” “Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer; and come together again so that Satan does not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” “But I say this as a concession, not as a commandment.”

Now as we look at this passage and we compare it to the other in 1st Thessalonians, we find that the subject of sexual immorality is the subject being addressed in both. And here in this passage we find that it is wrong within marriage for either the husband or the wife to deprive or defraud

one another of the affection that they are to render to each other. The word “deprive”, or “defraud” is being used in a similar way in both of these passages, for the word “defraud” in the Greek in the passage in 1st Thessalonians is **Pleonekteo** (πλεονεκτεο) and it means to overreach, or to get an advantage, or to defraud. The word “defraud” in the Greek in the passage in 1st Corinthians is **Apostereo** (αποστερεο); a word derived from **stereo** which means to despoil, to defraud, or to keep back by fraud. So, in the passage that we are studying in 1st Thessalonians, the word is used in the sense of going too far, and doing what is unlawful. In the Corinthians passage it is speaking of withholding or depriving the other person in marriage of what lawfully belongs to them; that is, sexual affection, help, and care.

This leads us then to ask, again – In what way does a person defraud his brother in this matter of not being sexually pure and chaste? And there are a number of answers which could be given. A man defrauds a woman when he unlawfully touches a woman, or when a woman unlawfully touches a man, before marriage or outside of marriage. It is to defraud or to deprive the person that you are going to be married to, in the future, of what is lawfully theirs. To engage in sex outside of marriage is to deprive your future husband or wife. A wife or husband is to be sought “because of sexual immorality”. It is because we know ourselves, and the strength and the power of sexual temptation; that we seek to find a husband or wife. That is one of primary reasons. It is not the only reason. There are also the reasons of companionship and children. But then, when we do find that right person, and we marry them; we are not to deprive them for any reason other than that of prayer or fasting; and that only for a time.

Satan does tempt people because of their lack of self-control. A person may think that they are strong enough to face sexual temptations, whether they are a single person or a married person, and they may still fall prey to them. The answer is to flee immorality; not to toy with it, or to think that you are strong enough to overcome it. The answer within the marital state is to come together sexually and to fulfill that need of your husband or wife. The answer for those who are single is to deal with your sexual desires by referring them to marriage and not cultivating your sexual imaginations, but rather by means of prayer and the grace of Christ, pouring all your strength and energy into those things which God would have you to do in relation to your preparing for that time of marriage; pursuing the practical things of doing good works, and helping others in practical everyday ways, and cultivating that pure mind and body which are the delight of those who know God.

So now we understand something more about what it means to deprive or defraud a brother or a sister in marriage. To touch a woman sexually when you are in the single state is not a good thing. The whole movement of our day for young people to “live together” before getting married, or maybe never getting married at all, and it deprives the couple themselves of the kind of exclusive commitment and fidelity which true love requires. And, of course, it is a sin against God in that you will not enter in to the covenant of marriage in His sight. There are, perhaps you know, shows on TV today, which show flirtation and romance with anyone, and which encourage multiple sexual encounters before marriage or even when you are married, as though this is perfectly normal and right. This is actually a form of radical self-deception and sin. Jealousy, envy, anger, and even revenge come from playing around sexually. Free love is never free. It costs the person their self-respect, and it will cost them their soul if they do not repent of it. I will talk more of this in a few minutes.

But of course, it is also possible for a person to defraud his or her marital partner by engaging in lust-related practices either in secret, or by flirting with others besides their own husband or wife. This is defrauding them as well. Oh, how terribly marriages are weakened when the husband pursues the lusts of pornography! Pluck your eye out, and cast it from you; you men who find yourself tempted in this way! This is what Jesus says to do in Matthew 5: 29. “If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you, for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than your whole body to be cast into hell.”

Young men; remember the words of Solomon's mother to him in Proverbs 31: 2 and 3 – “What my son?” “And what, son of my womb?” “And what, son of my vows?” “Do not give your strength to women, nor your ways to that which destroys kings.” You can see that in this case, that even his mother would be defrauded in regard to the favorable outcome of the vows that she had taken before God in regard to giving him to God and teaching him the right way, if he was to depart from this instruction about not giving his strength to women. Therefore, you can see from this, that a young man can do this with his heart, and his eyes, and his body, and defraud even more people than his wife-to-be. Let us all, married and unmarried, search our hearts, and put to death the lusts of the eyes and the flesh so that we will not defraud the people that we are closest to, the people around us.

The remedy for all temptations is Jesus Christ Himself. The Apostle Paul says in Romans 13: 14, “But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.” Cut off the sources and provide not for your sinful lusts. Do not defraud your wife or your future wife in this regard. But do not forget that you must put on the Lord Jesus Christ. He is ever with you when you entrust your soul to Him for safe-keeping. He is the only one who can deliver you from temptation and sexual sin. He is the One who will turn you to the right way, so that you will be able to have the grace to “set your mind on things above, where He is, at the right hand of God.” It is He who will work in your mind so that you will meditate on “the things that are true, and noble, and just, and pure, and lovely; the things that are of good report; the things which are virtuous and praiseworthy.”

I want to add, at this point, that there are good ways that you can practically avoid getting lured into pornography. One of those I will mention at this point because it has been so beneficial to me. There is an app that you can download to your phone, your I-pad, or your computer, which is called Accountable2You. You give it permission to monitor all of what you are viewing, and then the results are emailed to your wife or parent or whoever you want to hold you accountable for what you look at on the internet. I personally have found this app to be a very good safeguard and I am sure that it will be helpful to parents with their children as well. Please, dear brethren, take steps to hold yourself and others in your family accountable for what they look at on their phones or on the computer. For this will have a bearing on what I want to preach to you about now.

2nd – We want to ask the question: What does it mean that the Lord is the Avenger of all such who defraud their brother?

Verse 6 says, “...that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified.” “For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.” Remember that Paul is addressing all the believers at Thessalonica. And when a preacher or a teacher is addressing the brethren, he must be faithful to warn them, as the Apostle Paul did, against tolerating any known sin in their heart or life. He does this so that they will not deceive themselves. Paul forewarned those who were Christians, realizing the self-deceptive nature of sin. He knew that there are some who claim to be Christians and yet they lead a double life. Outwardly they appear to be spiritual, but inwardly they have sins that they are not dealing with. “He who covers his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes his sins, this man shall find mercy.” To transgress and to cover that transgression is to “go beyond” the Biblical boundaries and to defraud your brother. God will avenge this, unless the sin is repented of, and forsaken; unless it is left behind. In other words, you must learn to guard your heart with all diligence.

Turn with me to Job chapter 31 and we will see that Job most certainly believed this. Here in this chapter, Job has come to the place where he is vehemently defending his integrity before his three friends who have accused him of being a hypocrite. Actually, the reason that Job had fallen under this trial of losing all of his children, his possessions, and his health, was because he was a man of integrity. But he says here in verse 1 – “I have made a covenant with my eyes; why then should I look upon a young woman?” “For what is the allotment of God from above, and

inheritance of the Almighty from on high?” “Is it not destruction for the wicked, and disaster for the workers of iniquity?” “Does He not see my ways, and count all my steps?” “If I have walked with falsehood, or if my foot has hastened to deceit, let me be weighed on honest scales, that God may know my integrity.” “If my step has turned from the way, or my heart walked after my eyes, or if any spot adheres to my hands, then let me sow, and another eat; yes, let my harvest be rooted out.” “If my heart has been enticed by a woman, or if I have lurked at my neighbor’s door, then let my wife grind for another, and let other bow down over her.” “For that would be wickedness; yes, it would be iniquity deserving of judgment.” “For that would be a fire that consumes to destruction, and would root out all my increase.”

My brethren, this is God becoming the avenger of lust! God, who sees all my ways and counts all my steps knows exactly where my heart and my eyes and my whole body go, and what they do. And my sanctification is in direct connection with this evaluation of my secret heart. The consequences of my secret disobedience are that I have started a fire which consumes to destruction. This is what the fire of lust does. It will be disaster for the workers of iniquity because God is the avenger. In the case of the believer who attempts to secretly engage in this sin, it, “root out all their increase”. What is the answer to this? Job says it is to repent by “making a covenant with your eyes”. It is to pray to God and to tell him that by the grace of Jesus Christ you will not be looking at young women to gaze upon their sexual beauty. I hope that you will understand, that no such covenant as this can be kept except by the grace of Jesus Christ. But with Jesus Christ, there is grace given to direct the eyes to look away at the right time. There is grace given to cover the nakedness of a person instead of exposing it. This is the kind of covenant with God that each man needs to make. Ask yourself, brethren, if you have done this and are doing this day by day?

Now 3rd – What is the role of the Holy Spirit in relation to these things? (verse 8)

“Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.” Paul is saying that the person who rejects these truths that I have just given you; that we should not defraud our brother, and that God is the avenger of all such who do defraud their brother; they should realize that in rejecting this, they are rejecting God Himself, who has also given us His Holy Spirit. The role of the Holy Spirit in the believer’s life is to make Him into a holy man or woman of God. The Holy Spirit is living in the heart and He is presiding over the life of every single Christian. He is with you in the times of your most severe temptations, and He is there, not only to observe every motion of your heart, He is there to convince and to convict you of what is sinful and what is the right thing to do; the right way to think about your own sexuality and the sexuality of other people.

The question that I will end this sermon with is this: Do you know that it is possible for a person who says that they are a Christian to think that they can reject this ministry of the Holy Spirit? They somehow believe that they can engage in many flirtations, many adulteries of the mind and heart, and not repent? They somehow think that they can still profess to be a Christian and not be hurt by this. O do not be deceived! You may think that this self-deception can continue, but it cannot, without your rejecting God, it says here. Remember what it says in Proverbs Chapter 6, verse 27 – “Can a man take fire to his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?” “Can one walk on hot coals, and his feet not be seared?” Let me ask you now; are you listening to the voice of the Spirit to flee immorality? 1st Corinthians 6, verse 18 gives us the message of what the Spirit says to the believer’s heart. “Flee sexual immorality”. “Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body.” “Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?” “For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God’s.” It is God who bought you at this great price; with the precious blood of His dear Son. He bought you back from the slave market of sin that you were in. If He purchased you at such a great price, will you not glorify Him by fleeing from immorality and cultivating purity of heart?

