

Introduction

Kids say the darndest things. I read about a little boy who told His Sunday school teacher, **"Dad told my brother about the birds and the bees last week. He didn't want to but mom made him. I don't know why though. Everybody knows about that."** He obviously didn't know that term is a euphemism that stands for sex.

Anyway, that little boy was wrong wasn't he? Not everybody does know about the birds and the bees. Yes, most people do know about the physical aspects of sex. But few know about its spiritual aspects and so that's what I'm going to preach about today.

A Sex Saturated Culture

In verses 1 and 2, Paul reminded the Thessalonian Christians that Jesus, through him, had taught them about a variety of spiritual issues. He then brought up one of those issues in verses 3-8 – the birds and the bees. He had given them instruction about sex and now gives it again.

There's a reason he did. The 1st century Roman world was a sex-saturated culture. People viewed and accepted sexual immorality as a normal part of life – so much so that they gave it a ritual role in their worship of false gods. Many of the temples, for instance, had temple prostitutes with whom having sex was considered an act of worship.

But their culture was no more sex saturated then ours is. Ours is just as pagan sexually as theirs was. Situation comedies illustrate what I mean. Illicit sex and filthy innuendos are really the focal points of almost all of them. Or just walk through the mall with your eyes open in the summer. The whole place, from the way the shoppers and even mannequins are dressed to the posters in the store windows, drips with sexuality. Several young men in fact have even asked me how they can go to the mall without lusting. Ask sociologists and they'll tell you. Two things are repeatedly cited as staples of our culture - sex and violence.

There's no doubt about it. We live in a sex-saturated culture.

Sexual Sins

But notice what God's will is, according to verse 3. It's that we "**abstain from sexual immorality,**" that is, from sexual sin. Let me give you a sampling of those sexual sins.

The first two are adultery and fornication. The Bible defines adultery as a married person having sexual relations with someone not his or her spouse. It defines fornication as single people having sexual relations with each other that are not consistent with their relational commitment. The sex act is more intimate than their relationship is.

Almost all writers in ethics today and many people believe that doing either of those things is okay if there is mutual consent. I've personally heard so-called experts and lay people say that. If both adult parties agree to the sex, then it's okay. But that's incorrect. God prohibits adultery and fornication. Both are absolutely and always wrong!

A third sexual sin is what Jesus calls "**the look**" in Matthew 5:28. We happen to see an attractive person and sexual desire arises. That is not a sin. But instead of quickly waving it off by looking away, we indulge and cultivate it. We keep on looking or look again with the purpose of desiring him or her. We use his or her visual presence as a means of savoring sexual desire. The result is what Jesus calls in Matthew 5:28, "**adultery in the heart.**" It is absolutely wrong!

There's a fourth sexual sin – pornography. Several of my college friends had Playboy magazine's all over their rooms and it wasn't for the articles. I don't think they ever read one. "**But what's wrong with that?**" people ask. The answer is, "**Several things.**" As Lewis Smedes points out in his book *Sex for Christians*, "**Pornography is harmful because it makes sex trivial, uninteresting, and dull.**" And as Dallas Willard points out in his book *The Divine Conspiracy*, "**We can see, if we have eyes and brains left, that it always involves some element of contempt or even disgust.**" Pornography is absolutely wrong!

There are other sexual sins including sexism, preferential treatment of the attractive people, power dressing, fantasizing, and more. Those

samplings are enough to make the point. We must be a different kind of people in our sex-saturated culture – people who abstain from the sexual sins that others all around us are committing.

The Source of Sexual Sins

Sadly though, many professing Christians don't abstain. Research bears this out and so does the counseling experience of any long-established pastor. When I lived in Barberton, a young lady from our church asked me what she should do. She came down the stairs late one night and found her husband, a respected professing Christian, watching a XXX video. They got into a big fight about it, during which she learned two things. He had many such videos and had been watching them for years. That's not as atypical as you might think. The truth is that many professing Christians are committing sexual sins.

And Paul tells us why they are in verses 4-5. It's because they **"possess"** their **"own vessel (body)"** in **"lustful passion."** What he's writing about here are bodily habits – the largely automatic responses of thought, feeling, and action that reside in our body parts.

Notice I said **"automatic."** Listen to a critical insight. Most of our sins aren't the result of careful deliberation. They're the result instead of habitual responses to the people, things, and events around us. We encounter a person, thing, or event and our body parts **"go off on us."** They act on their own without us thinking about it or even willing it. In fact, we often will just the opposite of what we do. That's what Paul meant in Romans 7:19, **"But I practice the very evil that I do not want."** It's true. We usually do what we do because the habits of particular sins dwell in our body parts. Thus, we gossip, get impatient, or retaliate because the habits of those sins dwell in our body parts. We **"possess"** our body in gossip, impatience, or retaliation in other words.

It's the same way with our sexual sins, Paul teaches in verses 4 and 5. Yes, the devil and our sex-saturated culture are contributors to them. But the primary contributor is that we possess our bodies in lustful

passion. It's that certain sexual sins have become bodily habits. They're automatic responses that flow from our body parts.

That's what "**the look**" is for instance. I once counseled a young man who was trying to follow Jesus. And he didn't want to go to his college classes because he was. They were filled with suggestively dressed girls, he said, and he was looking and lusting all the time. I replied that his overriding problem wasn't the devil or even the allure of the girls. It was that he possessed his body in lustful passion. Looking and lusting were automatic responses of his head, eyes, and brain. They were bodily habits that compelled him to do what he wanted not to do.

So that's why we usually commit the sexual sins that we do. It's because the habits of those sins reside in our body parts.

But we can conquer those habits and possess our bodies in sanctification and honor. We can be sexually pure – before God and men – and Paul tells us how in verse 4. We do two things.

Think Straight about Sexual Sin

The first is inferred from the text. We think straight about sexual sin.

I mentioned the professing Christian who watched XXX videos. His wife made him come to see me when she found out but it didn't do any good. His point of view was that he didn't know what all the fuss was about. Pornography, he argued, isn't that big of a deal. "**It's normal,**" he said, "**Most men I know do it.**"

He illustrates that some professing Christians have the same point of view that our culture does. They think crooked about sexual sin in two ways. First, it's irresistible. It's an overwhelming force that human beings, especially men, are pretty much helpless against. And second, it's normal. It's a universal trait of human beings, one that God Himself instilled within us. It is, therefore, only human (normal).

You can calculate where that kind of thinking leads. Since sexual sin is irresistible and normal, we might as well do what almost everyone

in our current culture does. We might as well quit struggling against it and just let it happen. So that's exactly what some professing Christians do. They just let it happen without feeling guilty about it at all.

But that's crooked thinking. We can infer that from our text. God exhorts us not to commit sexual sin. I'd note two things. First, God doesn't call us to do what we can't. That means that sexual sin is resistible. It's just a chosen habit and like all habits, we can, with the Holy Spirit's help, break and change it. I'd note a second thing. What God calls us to do is always normal. That means that sexual sin is abnormal. We need to understand that common and normal are two different things. Everyone doing it makes it common. It does not make it normal. The fact is that we're wired spiritually, psychologically, and even bodily to be sexually pure before God. Being sexually pure is our normal and intended state.

That then is what straight thinking is. We believe that sexual sin is resistible and abnormal.

Straight thinking is vital to conquering sexual sin. If we truly believe sexual sin is resistible and abnormal, we won't just let it happen. We'll intend to abstain from it instead, which is foundational to the second thing we do to conquer it.

Disrupt the Habits of Sexual Sin

We see what that second thing is in the word "**possess**" in verse 4. That word connotes "**control**." We control our bodies so that they're sanctified and honored, that is, so that they're sexually pure. What that means, more specifically, is this. We disrupt the habits of the sexual sins that are in us, if they are. We short circuit their power over us.

But those habits are so strong, how do we do that? The answer is, "**by practicing certain bodily activities**" – with intensity I would add and in the context of discipleship to Jesus. We call those bodily activities spiritual disciplines. Our own sexual sins, if we have them, and our personalities dictate which ones we practice. But there are five in

particular that are central to disrupting the habits of sexual sins.

The first two, which work in combination, are solitude and silence. In solitude and silence, we learn to do what terrifies almost everyone - nothing. And the person who is able to do "no thing" is usually able not to do the wrong things and to do the right things - including the sexual.

The third and fourth disciplines are study and worship. In study, we learn in depth who God is, what He did, does, and will do, and what He teaches. In worship, we take what we learn and put our whole being into ascribing greatness, goodness, and glory to Him. Those two activities dramatically impact us. They imprint on our whole being the nature of what we've studied and worshipped, God. That in turn radically disrupts the powers of evil in and around us, including our sexual habits.

The fifth discipline is fasting. Craving for food is one of our strongest desires. It has a grip on us all. Consequently, abstaining from it permeates the entirety of our persons and lives. It retrains us away from always having to get what we want. It disciplines our desires, including our sexual ones, so that we, not they, control us.

Now, I know some of you are probably skeptical about the effectiveness and relevance of these disciplines. It isn't something you hear from professional therapists. If you're skeptical, all I can say is, **"Try it and see."** If you need help with that, let me know. I'll be glad to give you materials about how to practice these disciplines.

Conclusion

Now look at verse 8 in closing. Paul makes a simple but profoundly important point. Sinning sexually is the same as rejecting God. It treats Him as One who can be easily disregarded. The last clause in the verse reveals the result. It cuts us off from the flow of His presence and power, from the flow of His goodness and joy.

So, learn about the birds and bees from your heavenly Father, God - some of which I've explained today. Then live out what you learn. You'll be sexually pure and empowered by Him if you do.