

Session 6

October 6, 2019

UNCOMPLICATED RELATIONSHIPS

1 Thessalonians 4:3-12

People are *relational*. I believe that is part of the image of God in which we were created. God is relational...and so are we. Relationships help define us, motivate us, and fulfill us. But when relationships are complicated by excess “drama” (or outright sin!) those same relationships confuse us, depress us, and tire us. The simplified life does not limit relationships; it guards them. In this week’s text, the guiding principle for making and maintaining simple, healthy relationships is *purity*. God emphasizes this principle in three different ways.

God’s will (vv. 3-5). Paul had spent some weeks in Thessalonica before he and his companions were forced to leave the city (see Acts 17:1-10). After he was safe and sound in Athens, the apostle sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to check on the fledgling church they had planted there. The good report he received prompted Paul to pen this letter. First Thessalonians was written both to instruct and encourage this new congregation of believers who faced the ire of legalistic Jews on the one hand, and immoral pagans on the other. God’s will in every case was the same: sanctification on their part (v. 3). The term sanctification means *purity* or *holiness*. This is accomplished in two ways, as illustrated in verses 3-5. The first way is by ceasing that which is evil, and the second is by learning to do what is right. The rather blunt command to “abstain from sexual immorality” (v. 3), reaches to the depths of human depravity. If one can mortify those base temptations (see Col. 3:5), one can exercise control over every other physical desire. That kind of self-discipline distinguishes believers from those who “don’t know God” (v. 5).

God’s call (vv. 6-8). Along with God’s *will* that believers be pure, Paul mentions God’s *call* to do the same (v. 7). The command not to sin against a brother *in this matter* (v. 6) indicates that the problem of sexual immorality had been all too common among the city’s residents. The use of the word *brother* indicates that the sin—in this case adultery—had been all too common within the church. Against this immorality stood God’s vengeance, a coming judgment about which they had already been warned (v. 6). For this reason, those who failed to take control of their immoral impulses were rejecting the clear teaching of God, who, through His Holy Spirit had both inspired the teaching (see Ex. 20:14, for example) and brings conviction to guilty offenders (see John 16:8-10).

God’s teaching (vv. 9-12). As opposed to the *lustful desires* that characterize the lost (v. 5), believers should demonstrate a pure and genuine love for their brethren instead. In the case of the Thessalonian church, Paul was thrilled that such genuine affection was already present in the new congregation (having been taught by the same Holy Spirit mentioned in verse 8), and that their brotherly concern was already spreading in the surrounding region (v. 10). But rather than settle for the initial sanctification that accompanies the new birth, Paul encouraged them to “do even more.” The suggested attitudes and behaviors that are to follow demonstrate a deeper personal conformity to Christ while building a sound standing in the outside community as well. Rather than producing further animosity in an already hostile city, the church people were to settle down and carry out their calling. The overall goal depicted is a quiet, productive church-

life that would gently separate itself from the lost society from which it came, while at the same time exercising a positive influence upon it.