

1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 - 21st a. Pentecost (9.10.2016)

Living to Please God!

¹ Finally, dear brothers and sisters, we urge you in the name of the Lord Jesus to live in a way that pleases God, as we have taught you. You live this way already, and we encourage you to do so even more. ² For you remember what we taught you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.

³ God's will is for you to be holy, so stay away from all sexual sin. ⁴ Then each of you will control his own body and live in holiness and honour – ⁵ not in lustful passion like the pagans who do not know God and his ways. ⁶ Never harm or cheat a Christian brother in this matter by violating his wife, for the Lord avenges all such sins, as we have solemnly warned you before. ⁷ God has called us to live holy lives, not impure lives. ⁸ Therefore, anyone who refuses to live by these rules is not disobeying human teaching but is rejecting God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you. [NLT]

‘How do we Christians live in the world?’ - In the first centuries of the church's existence it had no protection from the law. And yet the way in which Christians lived changed the world - to such an extent that there is hardly any sphere of life as we know it that does not have its origins in the way Christians acted.

In the 21st century we, as the church, have every protection. And yet it appears that we so often live under the influence of others! We aren't changing the world, but allow the world to change how we see and think about issues. It's almost as if we are afraid to make a stand for Christian values.

One such area where the influence of our world on us has grown ever stronger has to do with sexual morality. Do we still dare to point out what God's will is in this regard? In a world where the norm has become: ‘Your body is your own, and you can do with it as you choose’, how do we model God's norms and demonstrate to our world a different way of living?

Sexual morality is not just up to the time we live in, and what the majority thinks or does. At the time Paul was writing, sexual morality was anything but exemplary - and the temptation for new Christians to live like others do, was very great. That is why Paul places so much emphasis here on

Living to Please God!

and not on living to simply please ourselves. That will not win us any popularity contest - we may be seen as being judgmental or as fundamentalists by those who do not accept God's way for their lives.

Since the beginning the lie of living to please ourselves and therein finding self-fulfilment has been sugar-coated to make it seem so very attractive. Have people really been happy and free since doing what they want? Have they really found the fulfilment and ‘freedom’ they thought to find? [We need only remind ourselves of what happened to Adam and Eve - the big discovery after taking the fateful bite was ... they are naked. But the worst was that they suddenly were afraid of God - their relationship had broken down!]

Since the 1960's when the ‘sexual-revolution’ took place much has changed. Revolutions tend to overthrow what was - and the question is whether that was always good in this regard. Through this time the subject of sex has lost the taboo value it had previously had. Whereas this subject previously remained hidden from sight, it has been shoved onto centre-stage by things such as fashion, film and internet. Wherever we look, the age of ‘free sex’ is on us with a vengeance, and this has become accepted to such an extent, that hardly anybody thinks of it in those terms any more. If our bodies truly are ours to do with as we please, then sex with whom you please, and under any circumstances is your right.

What are the consequences? It is telling that the one thing which could truly stem the tide of HIV infections, i.e. abstinence before marriage, and then only having sex with one partner, hardly features anywhere in the fight to curb the spread of infections. Instead condoms are made freely available, because it is unrealistic to expect that people will abstain from having sex! So instead of living sexually pure lives, people are encouraged to give full reign to their **lustful passion like the pagans who do not know God and his ways.**

For those of us, who know God and his ways, there is an obligation to live differently in our time. There is an obligation - and this is not just for

ourselves, but for our world, to model a different kind of behaviour. Our lives are not just to be about seeking fulfilment by doing what we want, but by realising that we will only live full lives by doing what pleases God.

What then does please God? Paul writes here, **God's will is for you to be holy, so stay away from all sexual sin.** Not to belabour the point, but sexual sin does not depend on what the world we live in thinks is acceptable or not, but what God in his Word says. Sexual sin is when we are no longer in control, but are controlled by our lusts and desires.

When we do as we please a result may be what has made news recently where some prominent public figures were accused of sexually molesting teenagers. While one may almost feel sorry for an old Bob Hewitt, the fact is that these - now middle-aged women - were severely traumatised, and have had to live with the handicap of their abuse.

God's will is for us to live holy and pure lives, because our bodies are not ours to do with as we please, and with whom we please. We have been bought free from that kind of slave-like existence - and we have been returned to a relationship with God which is free from the deadly power of sin. In a relationship in which fear no longer features.

And since that relationship was restored, the way we treat other people has also changed. Others are not simply to be objects to satisfy our desires - they are to be seen as people who were made in God's image, and for whom God has the desire that they have real life.

To return to the specifics of our text: it pleases God if marriage is once again considered a sacred institution not to be violated, because the family is the very basis of our society. Single-parent families should be the exception rather than the norm, because God designed the family to have two parents: mother and father! On this foundation, and by his guidance we can build and live lives pleasing to him, and satisfying to ourselves.

How are we to live as Christians in this world? That is the question which must determine our daily lives. By his grace God has made us holy - and his desire for us is to live holy lives.

By living to please God, you and I can once again make a difference in our world - we may actually bring about a revolution in the positive sense: a turning around of how sexuality is viewed in our world. Living to please God has a promise - that he will give us a fulfilled life!