

1Thessalonians 12-04-20a

This is Friday, the 20th of April, 2012. We're in the book of 1 Thessalonians after a week hiatus, which basically means it's been two weeks since we were in 1 Thessalonians, but we resume in chapter four, verse six tonight, and we will move into the, do six through 12 in this session and then start 13 in our second session tonight. Lord willing, and I stay on my plan, which as you know, is never certain, but we'll follow our usual custom and take a moment as we begin to allow us to focus and concentrate and ask God's blessing on our study together.

Shall we pray? Father, we thank you for this opportunity to study your word together, to spend time in fellowship, enjoying the blessings that come through the function and the work of your Holy Spirit in our midst. We thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ in whom we have all of our being, our standing before you, our many privileges and blessings. We thank you for this opportunity to learn more about him through this passage and more about the life that we are enabled to lead and are called to lead in your plan and purpose for all believers in this age.

We pray that God, the Holy Spirit, will illuminate these verses for us, enable us to understand them and see their applicability for the life that we live now and in the days to come. We ask these things in Jesus' name, amen. Let's just read these first verses, actually the verses beginning at the first of chapter four to kind of bring ourselves back into the picture.

Paul says, finally then brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God. This is great information, is it not? If we're a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, it would be great to know how to abound more and more, how to live our lives and please God. I think if we succeed at this, if we are a success at pleasing God, that would pretty much be a fulfilling and rewarding and meaningful life, wouldn't it? Well, that's the beauty of this letter is along with all of the other scriptures, that's the information we get.

It's not vague, it's not inscrutable, it isn't far off, it doesn't take years of philosophical study or deep wool gathering, navel gazing meditation, it's laid out for us. We know what we're supposed to do. And it's a matter not of ignorance, but of motivation.

It's a matter of whether or not we are willing, whether or not we are dedicated, whether or not we care enough about pleasing God to live the life that does please Him. It's not a difficult concept to grasp. They're not difficult ways of living to understand.

We know what they are, it's the doing of it that's difficult. This is kind of like people who play a sport or play an instrument. You know how it's supposed to sound, you know how it's supposed to look, you know the little round white ball is supposed to go in that far distant cup, but how can you get it there effectively and gracefully and impressively and not just be chopping away like I do when I try to play golf or play an instrument.

You can hear someone who's very proficient and it's just a thing of beauty. They make it look effortless. You think, well, they're just barely moving.

Their fingers are barely moving. I watched Diana Krall playing the piano the week or two ago and her hands never leave her wrists. She's just very calm, sedate, her fingers just glide and you think it's just effortless.

It's beautiful to watch as well as to listen to. And we can live this life of obedience, faithfulness and do it elegantly, do it in a way that reflects God's glory. That's what Paul is talking about here when he says, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you abound more and more just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God.

For you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. And again, as we noticed when we went through this earlier, the Lord Jesus Christ is the beginning, the ending, the middle, the up, the down, the over, the under. It is all in and through the Lord Jesus that these things take place.

We are nothing without Him. We are everything and have everything through Him. This is the will of God, your holiness, your sanctified life, your dedicated God glory reflecting life.

That's God's will. That you should abstain from pornia. In its usual sense, this word is used.

It's interesting. I don't know if I've covered this or not, but pornia is of course a noun, but it comes from a verb, which had the basic idea of selling. And in its fundamental sense, this means to sell out or to sell yourself.

Hence its use for both male and female prostitutes. But the idea isn't just that pornos and pornia speak of sexual immorality per se. It is the unnaturalness of it.

It is the out of the patternness of it. The normal pattern is there is a family, there are children, those children grow up and they get married and have children of their own. That's the pattern.

And to, for your own reasons, break that pattern, cross those lines and do something that is more or less against the natural order is what is in view. And so it does mean prostitution, fornication, sexual immorality of various kinds. There is a more specific word, moicheia, M-O-I-C-H-E-I-A, which is specifically used of adultery.

And it emphasizes sins against marriage. It's used almost exclusively for breaking the walls of a marriage in some way. But pornia is, in a more general sense, it's a sellout.

Why would anybody sell out? And we use the word prostitute in a more general sense. You know, somebody politically or economically or in business or whatever can prostitute themselves. And it has nothing to do with physical relationships.

It has to do with selling themselves, with breaking rules and breaking faith in order to gain some personal advantage. So that's what is in view here, that you should abstain from pornia, that you should abstain from moicheia, that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor. Now this is a, you remember the Latin phrase, crux interpretatum, a difficult passage to interpret.

This is one of those. And interpreters of the Bible have been struggling with this statement right here, know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor for literally almost since Paul sent the letter. Early church fathers wrestled with this, Theodoric and Augustine and all down through the centuries.

They've tried to figure this out. Here's why. It says how to possess.

Possess is kind of a pushed translation for this. The word does not mean possess. This is katastai, which is the infinitive form of kataomai, K-T-A-O-M-A-I, kataomai, K-T-A-O-M-A-I.

Now the omai ending, anytime you see something with omai, not oh my, like oh my, but O-M-A-I, it often carries a middle or reflexive idea. It's something that you tend to participate in for your own benefit or in your own interest or something like that. It's just, that's sort of the aomai form.

So kataomai, but what this means is it means to get, to obtain or to acquire. That's its universal fundamental meaning, to get, to obtain, to acquire. Probably one of the more memorable places where this is used is in the book of Acts, and I'll tell you in a minute exactly where it is.

It's used of a fellow who got his citizenship and when he finds out that Paul is a citizen, it's Acts 22, 28, where the commander is talking to Paul and he says, with a large sum of money, I obtained this citizenship. That's kataomai. I had to pay a lot of money to get, acquire, obtain my Roman citizenship, which Paul was apparently born with.

It's used earlier in Acts, Acts 8, 20, Peter, remember when Simon, the magician, comes up and says, let me pay you some money and teach me how to cast out demons and do these things? And Peter says, your money perished with you because you thought that the gift of God could be acquired, obtained, purchased, gotten with money. Kataomai. This is what the word means.

So why did it get translated possess? Well, it's because of the next word, vessel, which is skeuo, S-K-E-U-O, skeuo. About the only other place in the New Testament that you see this word used in a memorable way, it's in the plural. Remember when Paul says, we have this treasure in earthen vessels? That's skeuane, S-K-E-U-E-O.

S-K-E-U-A-N, skeuane. And so the idea comes that you either have to translate this as body or wife. Is that each man knows how to get, acquire, you can't make that work.

As soon as you say the pornaya, if you limit pornaya down to some sort of physical immorality,

some sort of fornication type idea, well then this connected idea that each man ought to know how to not do that, well then he must, it can't, in the minds of the interpreters and translators, it can't have anything to do with getting or acquiring or obtaining. It must be keeping and possessing. And so then vessel has to mean either keeping your own body pure or maybe acquiring a wife.

And so then vessel becomes a term or a euphemism or a reference to the wife. Well, if you think about it, it's kind of demeaning. Your wife is just a vessel.

Each man ought to know how to acquire his vessel or possess his vessel. And there have been even more sort of graphic interpretations of this language, none of which for me work in the context. And I think one of the reasons that they kind of get painted into a corner on well, it's either your body or your wife is because of narrowly defining pornography.

So let's go back and look at this in a little bit wider context. By the way, it is also much more applicable. It's much more convicting when you take it in a more general sense.

Don't, and remember, we talked about this when we were here last time, that Paul's context here is don't overreach your brother. Remember the gravy analogy? Don't reach across your brother's plate. Don't, we had our two words for overflowing and going beyond.

And we had playonazo, playonexia, the idea of something going beyond. Don't go beyond and don't overreach. And so this, the whole context here is it isn't just about you.

I want a thing and I'm going to get it. If you go outside the lines, if you go beyond the limits, you're going to hurt someone else. This is why we have speed limits.

This is why we have traffic signals. It isn't just trying to impede your progress or prevent you from getting someplace as fast as you can. Why do we have those limits? Why do we have speed limits? Why do we have stop and go traffic signals? It is to hem in and to limit the behavior of each person so that he does not overreach or intrude upon or cause harm to someone else, right? If you were the only guy on the road, you wouldn't need a speed limit.

If you're the only guy on the road, you don't need a stop sign or a traffic light. Those limits are there so that people do not hurt each other. And this is the idea.

If you get so interested in your passion or your desire that you disregard others, you have crossed this line. It's like running a stop sign and T-boning somebody in the intersection. It's like breaking the speed limit and endangering other people on the road.

And this is the context. Context, context, context. What is the context? How do you treat your brother? We have it in our memory verse.

Each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. If you are

doing this, you have the mind of Christ. Christ did not look out only for his own interests or he would have done more than just pray that the cup passed from him.

He would have pushed the cup away and said, I'm not drinking this cup. This isn't in my best interest, right? Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, looking out for the interests of others. Greater love hath no man than this, right? So this is what the flow of ideas is in the passage.

So when Paul says, you have been called to this holy life, abound in it more and more, walk in a way that pleases God. That's what this chapter is about, right? The will of God is your holiness, your set-apartness. And if you think about hagiasmos, if you think about sanctification, what is it? Israel was told in the Old Testament, come out from among them and be ye separate.

Why? Be ye holy for I am holy. What did it mean? Don't do what the Canaanites do. Don't do what the Gentiles do.

Don't pollute yourself the way they do. Don't prostitute yourself the way they do in every different area. Be separate, be distinct.

Well, if you are in a hospital and the doctor is going to perform an operation on you or has performed an operation on you, some of us have already been messed with by these guys, what do they do? What do they do? They go in, they wash up, you've seen it on TV. Marcus Welby, nobody knows who that is anymore. Dr. Kildare, you're really old if you remember Kildare.

Was that Richard Chamberlain, Dr. Kildare? Well, you've seen him. What do they do? They go in, scrub up, yellow soap, hold their hands up like this, back into the room, don't touch me, don't touch me. Why? Disinfect, don't want to contaminate, don't want to have an unclean thing get in and endanger the patient.

Well, this is what holiness is because if the doctor gets contaminated, it doesn't endanger the doctor. If he washes up and then he's got an itch in his ear and digging around in there right before he does the operation, well, he hasn't endangered himself, has he? It's somebody else that is in danger because he has, or if he just pushes the door open that a thousand other people have opened and shut with his formerly washed hand, well now, who knows? You know, little snotty-nosed kids and people that have just, you know, had some greasy hamburger down the street and then they push through the door and there's all kinds of detritus on there and he was sanctified, he was holy, he was disinfected and now he's not. Now there's who knows what all on there and the danger is to the patient, the danger is to those he is near, right? This is Paul's point.

You maintain yourself holy not only because it is pleasing to God but because it is beneficial to your brother. When you contaminate yourself, you endanger your brother. Let me say that again.

If we lose sight of holiness, if we become interested in pursuing our passion, our desire, our self-

interested self-gratification, we endanger others. Regardless of whether or not we defile ourselves, that goes without saying, but we endanger our brother. You are not an island, we are not alone, we are interconnected, we are the body of Christ.

You know what happens when you get an infection? If you don't treat it, it spreads. You get the little red streak going. Same thing in the body of Christ.

We have a responsibility not only to the Lord, not only to ourselves, but we have a responsibility to each other to keep ourselves pure. That infection will spread. Sins of the tongue will breed sins of the tongue.

If you gossip, if we judge one another, if you and I get together, we go off in a corner and say, well, you know, that Matthew, let me tell you about that Matthew. He's my brother, I can pick on him. Or Daniel, or Dan and Matt get together and say, that Sam, you know, they, I apologize for using you guys as my example, but listen, it's real.

If we start a sin of the tongue, if we start a mental attitude sin, and it spreads, it festers, it grows, we contaminate each other faster than you can say Jack Robinson. And Paul says, think about not only pleasing God, not only your own sanctification, but the third area is you have a responsibility to your brother to keep yourself pure. This is why he uses these words, *pleonexia* and overreaching, and why he uses *pornea*.

What's the problem with *pornea*? It's not just that somebody goes and fornicates. Someone else is involved in that fornication. If you look at it in the literal sense, somebody else is involved.

Let's say this is a young man, and this was particularly pertinent in Paul's day because in Greek culture, in Roman culture, men typically got married around age 30. And the mores and the ethics and the expectations culturally were very different than they are in our, or used to be at least, in our Judeo-Christian culture. We take it for granted that, you know, keep yourself pure, wait till marriage, one man, one woman, what God has joined, let no man separate.

The man leaves his father, mother cleaves his wife. They too shall be one flesh. This was kind of an expectation and a given and a standard for a long time.

Not so in the ancient world. Think about it. In fact, it's interesting.

I was digging further into the history of the word *pornea* and *pornos* and its verbal roots. Really, the concept of prostitution was unknown in Greek culture and in early Roman culture until relatively late. The ancient Greek guys, Plato, Socrates, those guys hardly ever talk about it.

And the reason is prostitution as a business had no market because in the ancient world, there, it was commonly viewed that a man would have his marriage to his wife and this is a civil union. And there are certain obligations and expectations within that civil union, but that did not include limiting himself to only spending time with his wife because there were slaves, female slaves

everywhere. And a man would take advantage of female slaves.

Didn't need to go spend money anywhere. Got these house slaves. The wives didn't have any expectation.

And by the way, this is the case still in some cultures today. Your strongly Quranic Muslim cultures, your Sharia-oriented Muslim cultures in Arabic countries, this is still held over to this very day. Wives are expected to be extremely faithful.

Men, there is no expectation in that culture. It's not just religious, by the way, it's cultural. And it is a hold over there in the same area of the world where this has been going on for millennia.

So I say all of that to say that trading favors for money was relatively unknown because there were too many other ways to get those favors. And it wasn't until there were reforms and there were some of your stoics and your ascetics and others said, we've got to set a higher standard here. We're really kind of undisciplined.

And then especially when the influence of Christianity came and the influence of Judaism was spread through the Roman empire, the same standard, in other words, in Judaism that came through in Christianity, that's when these things really started to change. Say all of that to say this, personal purity has three directions, just like almost everything that we do. There is the first and foremost, our responsibility before God, what God requires, what God expects.

Secondly, it is our personal status, our personal maintenance, who am I? If you lie, you're a liar. If you thief, you're a thief. If you gossip, you're a gossip.

If you backbite, you're a backbiter. If you hate, you're a hater. Whatever we practice, we become, we take on that identity.

And as members of the body of Christ, what we become has lasting identity, has lasting effects. Toward God, what we ourselves become, what we do to ourselves, what we make ourselves into, this is why you see somebody, just as a sort of inane example, you see somebody driving down the HOV lane, the high occupant vehicle lane here on the highway, you're supposed to be two or more people in that car. But in heavy traffic days, you see one person in his car flying down the HOV lane.

Well, their view is, well, who am I really hurting? If anything, I'm relieving the traffic in those lanes because here I am risking a ticket and driving in this other lane. Well, okay, but what have you done? You make yourself something by willfully and with malice of forethought and knowledge, breaking the law. They, 9999 times out of 10,000, they're not gonna catch you, you're not gonna get a ticket.

It's no harm, no foul. I took the HOV lane, nothing. But you've made yourself something.

You are now a person who, if the pressure is high enough, if my self-interest is strong enough, I'll break a rule. You make yourself a rule breaker. And if you break that rule, it becomes easier to break other rules that maybe do have more consequence, not only to yourself, but to others.

It's like the sear on a weapon. I've thought about this a lot. You get a brand new 45, all of the parts are newly manufactured.

It performs according to the manufacturer's specifications. But if you fire a weapon a lot, or if you take it apart and file down the sear, you say, you know, I really want this to have a hair trigger, or you just fire it a lot. You wear it down.

It no longer meets that specification. Now it goes off more quickly. And some people do it on purpose.

Other people just do it by usage. But pretty soon you've got to be careful because that weapon will go off when you didn't really want it to because you've worn down. And in seemingly innocuous areas, when we give ourselves permission to violate and to offend, we change our conscience.

We change our thinking. We give ourselves permission. We rationalize and we scar and sear our conscience.

Remember Paul talks about this, conscience seared with a hot iron. Well, who was wielding the iron? Who do you think sears a conscience? The owner of the conscience. Nobody can sear your conscience but you.

So if the conscience is seared, this is a self-inflicted change. And we do this in small ways. So when Paul talks about this in chapter four, and by the way, you know where we're going.

Everybody knows 1 Thessalonians 4 gets into the end times and the rapture and all that good stuff. But what is right in front of it? Paul, before he talks about all that real interesting stuff, he says, you know, you really want to be ready for that event. And you don't want to disqualify yourself and desanctify yourself, contaminate, defile, infect yourself so that when that day comes, it is not a day of joy.

It is not a day of gladness. It is not a day of happiness. And it is not a day of reward.

It's not a day of reflecting the glory of Jesus Christ. Why? Because this that Paul puts in front of that was not heated. So he says, you have got to watch out for pornia, for breaking faith.

And the fundamental idea of pornia in this context is crossing this line. And the symptom of crossing that line is somebody else gets hurt. You reach, you step over, you overflow, and you are treading on somebody else's feelings, somebody else's holiness, somebody else's life, somebody else's opportunities, somebody else's conscience.

In the body of Christ, you never act alone. I don't care who you are. I don't care how isolated you think you are.

What you do has an effect because we are all connected. And so Paul's emphasis here is that each man know how to, now, how to acquire his own vessel. Let's go back to the original root, basic meaning of these words.

Each man know how to acquire his own vessel. Let's abandon the historic ideas about what this might be because if you look in Scripture, *skuos* is not used for the physical body anywhere else in Scripture. The closest you can get is when Paul says, well, but we have this treasure in earthen vessels, but he's not talking about the body.

He's saying as a messenger, as a preacher, as an apostle, as a witness and a testifier, we are fallen human beings and we are bringing this treasure of the good news of God. And we don't shoot the messenger. The message is good, even though we are often cracked pots.

So you can't really make that analogy, although that's almost always the other passage that is cited. Nor do you have any other place where vessel is used to mean the woman or the wife. And it's really kind of a demeaning reference that she's just, you know, a mirror that, you know, it just isn't used in that way.

In this context, what would it mean then? Well, what is a vessel? Unless it's decorative, it's supposed to hold something. And you do get that from your other passage. We have this treasure in earthen vessels.

The vessel exists for the purpose of conveying the treasure. The treasure is the issue. The treasure is what's important.

If you've got a cereal bowl, well, it's just a bowl until you put the cereal in it. Now it's fulfilling its function. If even if you have a vase that's supposed to be decorative, it's not really a vase until you put in the flowers, put in what it's supposed to hold.

So Paul says that each one of you should know how to acquire his own vessel in sanctification and honor. Now, if each has his own vessel, what's the picture? Let's think about the people in this room. We've got 15, 20 people in the room.

Each has his own vessel. Now, if each has his own vessel, what does that mean? Each of us is hoping to fill it. Think of this in terms of capacity.

Each one should have his capacity, should have his ability to acquire divine righteousness. And what does that mean? I don't want to step in your way and prevent you from acquiring your vessel full of righteousness. If each has a vessel, what we don't wanna do is bump each other and cause somebody to spill theirs, to break theirs, to lose theirs.

Everybody is trying to acquire this vessel and hopefully fill it with something, right? And so you've got a room full of people. You've got a body of Christ full of people with these vessels. Don't think about one guy with a vessel.

Everybody has a vessel. And what do you not wanna do? You don't wanna interfere with someone else before the Lord acquiring, getting, obtaining this vessel into which God is going to pour blessing. That's what I think this passage is talking about.

Each one should know how to possess his own vessel and not possess, but acquire, get, obtain his vessel and get it legitimately in sanctification and in honor, not by cheating someone else, not by pushing somebody else out of the way. You think of a sale at the, you know, the white sale at Penny's or something. Let each one go down and get his set of, you know, 600 thread count sheets in sanctification and honor, not elbowing people out of the way, not leaving ladies laying on the floor with a bloody nose.

You've seen these things that happen when they put out the new Xbox or the next big device and people stay up all night and camp out and they open the door and people get trampled and get taken away in ambulances for the sake of going in and getting some Game Boy thing. Paul says, don't defraud, don't overreach, don't step on one another as you try to acquire that which is going to hold the blessing of God, that which is going to hold and reflect the glory of God. Do it in sanctification and do it in honor.

The view here is toward one another. So this then makes sense of the rest of it, like the Gentiles who do not know God. They're rapacious.

Have you ever thought of what would happen if all of a sudden all the supply lines in the nation stopped? Groceries quit being delivered to the grocery stores? All of a sudden, no more gas, no more food, electricity gets turned off everywhere. If the infrastructure of this country just suddenly stopped due to disaster or attack or whatever, you look around yourself at people in traffic, you look around at people in the mall. How long do you think ethics and morality and respect for others would hold up? Within hours, there would be roving gangs breaking in and taking what they want, saying, well, I'm going to look out for number one.

There's no moral fabric or worry about eternal judgment or anything. The only thing keeping everybody nice is that there's plenty of everything. If we suddenly lost the supply, this would be the worst jungle nightmare in history.

Think about it. The best thing you could possibly do is immediately get away from any populated areas because it's going to be dog eat dog, law of the jungle, every man for himself. I don't care who you are or how you got what you have.

You have what I need. I'm taking it by force. And if you're going to stop me, you're going to have to kill me.

Instantly, there's nothing stopping people from that. Look at just what happens. You know, they'll have the occasional riot.

You know, the power goes off. Look at what happened in New Orleans after Katrina. Think about that on a grand scale.

Well, that's the Gentiles. That's what Paul says. This is what the Gentiles do.

They don't have any constraints. They don't have any eternal judgment or knowledge of God or anything holding them back. Don't be like that, he says.

Recognize each other as members of the body of Christ, as each one trying to acquire a vessel of blessing and glory before the Lord and respect one another. That's the view. No one taking advantage of and defrauding.

No one pushing aside and overreaching his brother in this matter because the Lord is the avenger. And that's exactly what this word means. And Dikas, he is the one who will ensure that righteousness is done.

And if we step on a brother, God will avenge. Avenge, as in avenge. This word doesn't mean anything but avenge.

This is the same word that is used when it talks about the government not bearing the sword in vain. This word is in that verse. They are God's instruments for justice, for vengeance.

And they do not bear the sword in vain. As we also forewarned and testified, God did not call us to uncleanness but in holiness. That's the idea.

Well, we'll pause here and take our break. I've got one more quick thought here in this section and then we'll move into the fun stuff beginning in verse 13.