

## 7—1 Thessalonians 4:1-8—Saved to be Restored in Holiness

BY PASTOR JASON SNIDER

### I. Introduction

- A. When we think of salvation we must think of it in at least two ways: salvation from something and salvation for something.
- B. For example, our neighbor's shop and house were in need of salvation from a fire three weeks ago.
  - 1. The shop was not saved. The fire consumed it and it has been loaded in a dumpster and hauled away.
  - 2. The house was saved FROM the fire but is that all? Did those fire fighters risk their lives and fight that fire at 5am for nothing? No. That saved it from the fire and FOR restoration. The shop cannot be restored to functional use because it was not saved.
  - 3. The house was saved and it is being restored to its functionality even now.
- C. We have been saved from the fire to be restored. God is far more amazing than our local fire department.
  - 1. He even saves people like our neighbor's shop and restores them. Nothing is impossible with God.
  - 2. The way this illustration connects to our text is that God has saved the people of Thessalonica and us from his wrath through the death of his begotten Son.
  - 3. But he also saved us to restore us to be who he created us to be—like himself.

### II. Main Point

- A. God restores his people to be like him again

### III. Outline

- A. Restoring through asking and urging
- B. Restoring Sexual Purity
- C. Restoring through God's Call and Gift (of the Holy Spirit)

### IV. Exposition

- A. We ended last week hearing Paul pray a benediction asking the Lord Jesus to make them increase and abound in love for each other and for all. He explained that God was saving a people for himself to make them holy—uniquely like him. This is the work of God to accomplish through the gospel and through many other means. We ended last week with the means of prayer for restoration to holiness but this week Paul makes use of asking and urging to restore them to do more and more.
  - 1. Verse 1 says—Finally, therefore, brothers, we ask and exhort you in the Lord Jesus.
    - a) Paul is nearing the end of the letter when he says—finally.
    - b) We pray for God to do great things—impossible things—and then he uses us to accomplish those things for his glory.
    - c) Prayer does not negate the need for asking and exhorting the church.
      - (1) I can affirm that both prayer and this asking and urging are necessary.
        - (a) I pray for my kids in various ways but I ask them to do things.
        - (b) Sometimes asking them doesn't work. They need to be urged or persuaded.
        - (c) Both are necessary.
        - (d) It's necessary because it's really hard to be different than the world.
          - i) The world doesn't like feeling uncomfortable and they will try to put that uncomfortable feeling away somehow.
          - ii) They will put pressure on you to leave your job through any means possible to escape the uncomfortable feeling they have around someone who is "not of the world." Jesus promised that the world will hate us for being like him.
          - iii) This pressure from the world who hates us causes us to ask, "is it necessary?" Isn't grace enough?
          - iv) Actually grace is enough but how do you know that you have experience the saving grace of God without some sort of evidence in a changed life?
          - v) Why would God save a people for himself out of the world only to leave them like the world?

2. Well, it is possible to please God. There are many passages that speak very clearly how we please God.
  - a) (Colossians 1:10-12 ESV) <sup>10</sup> walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; <sup>11</sup> being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light.
  - b) (Colossians 3:20 ESV) Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.
  - c) This is not a self-help message to make you a better you. That's moralism.
    - (1) "Any gospel which says only what you must do and never announces what Christ has done is no gospel at all" (Kevin DeYoung p. 11)
    - (2) Christ has died for the penalty of our sin but he has freed us from its power too.
    - (3) We can now walk in a way that pleases God.
    - (4) More about the how at the end.
    - (5) But for now, God is accomplishing our restoration through Paul asking and urging.
- B. While Paul hasn't said anything very specific yet, that all changes in verses 3. In the rest of the letter, clear points of restoration that Paul addresses in this letter. The first one as he wraps up is abstaining from sexual immorality.
  1. The salvation from sin which leads to eternal judgment also saves for a restored sexual purity.
    - a) We often wonder what God's will is for a particular matter but in this case, we have no doubt what God's will is concerning sexual purity.
    - b) Christ came to take the punishment for all the various forms of sexual immorality that his people have participated in. He also paid for the sin of agreeing with and not condoning the sin of sexual immorality.
    - c) Christ came to save us from sexual immorality and to restore us to sexual purity.
  2. Verse 3 expands verse 1—how it is necessary to walk and to please God more and more.
    - a) Indeed, Paul says there in verse 3—For this is the will of God, your sanctification—your restoration—your holiness—that you abstain from sexual immorality.
      - (1) Christ saved us from the fire—like our neighbor's house—so that we would be restored to God's design for humanity.
      - (2) We must believe Genesis 1 where we hear very clearly that God created everything good.
        - (a) Mankind was not created to be sexually immoral. The design of God from the beginning has been this—(Genesis 1:27-28 ESV) <sup>27</sup> So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. <sup>28</sup> And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."
        - (b) The only thing that was not good in the beginning was this—(Genesis 2:18 ESV) The LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."
        - (c) A few verses later—(Genesis 2:24 ESV) Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.
        - (d) These three set the design for how not just a man and a woman—but a husband and wife—are to walk with God in the Garden of Eden and please him.
          - i) It's very simple to understand. A man and a woman are to marry and fill the earth with more and more image bearers to have dominion over the earth.
          - ii) Jesus takes up these verses in Matthew 19 when he teaches about divorce which is the result of sexual immorality.
            - (1) Here's what Jesus teaches—(Matthew 19:6 ESV) "What therefore God has joined together, let not man separate."
            - (2) When asked about the command for Moses concerning a certificate of divorce Jesus replied—(Matthew 19:8-9 ESV) <sup>8</sup> "Because of your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. <sup>9</sup>

And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery.”

- (e) These designs mandated by God for his creation from the beginning, is in part what Christ is restoring in those who have been redeemed.
  - i) We all know how ridiculous it would be if our neighbor’s house having been saved from the fire was intentionally set back on fire by the owner.
    - (1) Our neighbor told me a few weeks ago—I’m just so sorry it looks so bad. Please let everyone know, I’ll have it cleaned up as soon as possible.
    - (2) That is a good desire. It’s interesting. If you saw it a few weeks ago, the siding had practically melted off the back corner of the house. If it is not repaired, the house will not be protected from the slow deterioration from the elements.
    - (3) We all want to see the house restored to its functional condition.
- b) That’s what Paul is saying the will of God is—that his people whom he has redeemed be restored in holiness.
  - (1) Restored to the good and unique design of God. That’s what their salvation was meant to do—like our neighbor’s house.
  - (2) The will of God is for our good and for his glory. We are to be image bearers of God’s good design for husband and wife.
    - (a) No adultery. No sex before marriage. In marriage is right and good. Outside of marriage is wrong and immoral. There are many more forms of sexual immorality. All of them do not please God.
- c) It’s rather interesting that God makes use of adultery to describe how it is when his people love other things more than him.
  - (1) With very strong imagery, God calls out his people for giving themselves away to other gods.
  - (2) They break the covenant by not loving him exclusively and ultimately.
    - (a) Like a marriage that is broken from unfaithfulness, so too us when our love is divided.
    - (b) “Love necessarily involves the Christian in separation from the world, because love is exclusive, and divided love is not love at all (J. Webster p. 195)
    - (c) (John 15:19 ESV) If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.
- 3. Let’s try to understand the particular issue of sexually immorality Paul is addressing in verses 4-6.
  - a) Part of it is a bit complicated. The sexual immorality that they are to abstain from in particular is described there in verse 4—that each of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor.
    - (1) The word for “body” is the word “vessel” which opens up a few possibilities.
    - (2) There are three options this could be. (The 3 options from D.A. Carson Oct. 18 For the Love of God)
      - (a) Learn to control your own body (in the sexual arena)
      - (b) Learn to live with his own wife (in honorable sexual harmony, not sexual exploitation or manipulation)
      - (c) Learn to acquire a wife (in an honorable way, not in a relationship based on nothing more than lust)
        - i) I’m not sure we can divide these up but rather take them all in consideration.
      - (d) The point should be understood—the salvation we are to experience through repentance and faith in Christ has “immediate implications for our sexual conduct.” (Carson)
      - (e) Whatever this is, one of the main concerns is there in verse 6—that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter.
    - (3) A NT reference to help get our bearings.
      - (a) (1 Corinthians 7:2 ESV) “But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.”

- i) This affirms the goodness of monogamous marriage and excludes polygamy, for a “shared” husband would not be “her own” husband.
      - (1) Which after the fall in Genesis 3, the sexual immorality of polygamy happens in Genesis 4.
    - ii) I think this is what verse 6 is getting at because marriage is meant to be a picture of the gospel.
      - (1) This union in marriage is a picture of the relationship between Christ and his church—his bride. A husband is faithful to one wife. A wife is faithful to one husband.
      - (2) To believe in Christ, is to be faithful to Christ alone.
  - (4) Verse 5 helps us understand better too—not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God.
    - (a) Those who know God in a saving way, are to be uniquely different than the world.
      - i) The world sees little to no restraint for sexual conduct. “If it feels good do it.”
      - ii) And again...this isn’t about the “don’t do this.” This is about being restored to God’s original good design for us. It is good for us to be like God.
    - (b) Let’s take one example with a church to help us understand this. (1 Corinthians 5:1-2 ESV) <sup>1</sup> It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father’s wife (stepmother?). <sup>2</sup> And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.
      - i) Paul says the church was worse than the pagan Gentiles. They would not have allowed such a thing.
      - ii) Paul urges them to remove this one from the body because of this sexual immorality.
        - (1) This is the good and right response of church discipline. The body of Christ should not represent Christ as sexually immoral. We want a body that is restored to sexual purity.
        - (2) The church is not legislating the world. They need the gospel to be freed from the slavery of sexual sin, first.
        - (3) But the church is to judge each other among the members. A few verses later in (1 Corinthians 5:11 ESV) I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one.
          - (a) That’s right. A member of the church who is living like this should not participate in the Lord’s Supper.
          - (b) (1 Corinthians 5:13 ESV) God judges those outside. “Purge the evil person from among you.”
          - (c) The outcome of the church’s action brought about repentance. In the second letter to the Corinthians, he instructs the church on how to respond to this one who had his father’s wife when he repented—(2 Corinthians 2:6-8 ESV) <sup>6</sup> For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, <sup>7</sup> so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. <sup>8</sup> So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him.
  - (c) Paul prayed for God to make them increase and abound in love for each other. Both the judging of sin within the church now and restoring that one are two acts of love.
4. Why is all of this important to believe and practice as a church?
  - a) Look there in our text at verse 6—because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.
    - (1) Instruction and warnings are a means of restoring us to the image of God and restraining us with consequences.
  - b) I cannot think of any words more clear about this than when Jesus spoke to the church of Thyratira.

- (1) (Revelation 2:20-23 ESV) <sup>20</sup> But I have this against you, that you tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess and is teaching and seducing my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols. <sup>21</sup> I gave her time to repent, but she refuses to repent of her sexual immorality. <sup>22</sup> Behold, I will throw her onto a sickbed, and those who commit adultery with her I will throw into great tribulation, unless they repent of her works, <sup>23</sup> and I will strike her children dead. And all the churches will know that I am he who searches mind and heart, and I will give to each of you according to your works.
- (2) This is a very different outcome for those who refuse to repent.
- (3) The refusal to repent brings about the Lord's vengeance.
- (4) Is this a threat from God through Paul?
  - (a) I would NOT be here today if there were no obvious consequences to sin. I cannot imagine a loving God who gave the most valuable gift to the world in his begotten Son for our salvation only to care nothing about us by letting us do whatever we want.
    - i) That's not love. Even I as a father I love my kids this way.
    - ii) A father wants what is best for his children and sexual immorality is not good for anyone.
- c) This verse sums up everything Paul has been saying here and what I have tried to prove from the beginning. Salvation from judgment but also salvation for restoration .
  - (1) Hear this—(Colossians 3:5-10 ESV) <sup>5</sup> Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. <sup>6</sup> On account of these the wrath of God is coming. <sup>7</sup> In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. <sup>8</sup> But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. <sup>9</sup> Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices <sup>10</sup> and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.
5. God saved us from the guilt of sexual immorality and has broken its power too.
  - a) We are to live free from this. The world thinks they are living in freedom in sexual immorality but really they are in bondage to it. They are slaves of sexual immorality.
- C. The last point is filled with hope because God called and because God gives his Holy Spirit to us.
  1. God has not called us for impurity.
    - a) In keeping with our illustration—the fire department was not called only to save our neighbors house for him only to leave the melted siding on there and rot or to set it on fire again.
    - b) God called us out of sin and into holiness. We are to be uniquely like God created us to be.
      - (1) And this calling is a calling to holiness but more than that. It is a calling to which he will accomplish.
        - (a) He who began a good work in you will complete it.
        - (2) Christ is doing this work in us and part of the way he is doing that is through this letter from Paul.
        - (3) The asking and exhorting. The praying and instructing.
        - (4) He is setting us apart from the world that the world might see Christ in us.
        - (5) We will hear this in the second letter of Thessalonians—(2 Thessalonians 2:14 ESV) To this he called you through our gospel, so that you may obtain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.
  2. But if those who bear the name of brother or sister in Christ want to continue in sexual immorality, verse 8 stands as is—(1 Thessalonians 4:8 ESV) Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God.
    - a) If one is able to disregard this good instruction about sexual purity while having been called—regenerated...born again—and having been given the Holy Spirit how do we reconcile those things?
    - b) You either have to say—God's call is weak and ineffective and if you do, God appears to be not all powerful but rather weak and unable to accomplish his purposes for us.
      - (1) We would be forced to conclude that God cannot keep his promises.

- (2) Or, we are left to conclude that someone may not be born again and does not have the Holy Spirit.
3. How do we reconcile this with our text today?
- a) (Hebrews 11:6 ESV) And without faith it is impossible to please God.
- (1) Nothing we can do—even abstaining from sexual immorality—can make us right with God.
- (2) Faith alone in Christ alone is the only way to be reconciled to God.
- (3) Then why this? Why holiness?
- (a) Because faith in Christ for the forgiveness of sins is also faith in Christ to be restored to what God created us to be. Like him!
- (b) The Bible does not know one without the other similar to our neighbor's house being saved comes with a clear expectation of restoring it.
- (c) Maybe this picture says it all—(Luke 17:11-19 ESV) <sup>11</sup> On the way to Jerusalem he was passing along between Samaria and Galilee. <sup>12</sup> And as he entered a village, he was met by ten lepers, who stood at a distance <sup>13</sup> and lifted up their voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." <sup>14</sup> When he saw them he said to them, "Go and show yourselves to the priests." And as they went they were cleansed. <sup>15</sup> Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice; <sup>16</sup> and he fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks. Now he was a Samaritan. <sup>17</sup> Then Jesus answered, "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine? <sup>18</sup> Was no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" <sup>19</sup> And he said to him, "Rise and go your way; your faith has made you well."
- i) Saved and well are the same word.
- ii) Isaiah 53 says that by his strips we were healed!
- iii) Have you been saved and restored—made well?