

Possess Your Vessel In Sanctification And Honor

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Text: 1Th 4:1-8

Introduction:

- I. Relate “Al’s Story” (See Appendix)
 - A. Satan won. A soldier, once faithful to the cause of Christ, was removed from the battlefield. I lost a good friend.
 - B. At least part of the reason was because Al didn’t know “how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor” (1Th. 4:4).
- II. My task in this lecture is to talk about 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 and particularly what it means to possess your “*own vessel in sanctification and honor*” and the challenge that all of us face to maintain sexual purity in an immoral world.
- III. God created us—both men and women—as sexual creatures and designed the marriage relationship within which these physical desires may be enjoyed (Gn. 2:24). Yet, from early times, men have sought to fulfill godly desires in ungodly ways.
 - A. Gn. 19: Sodom
 - B. Gen. 34: The rape of Dinah by Shechem
 - C. Num. 25: Balaam instructed Moab to entice Israel by harlotry (Rev. 2:14).
 - D. 1 Sam. 11: David & Bathsheba
 - E. Hos. 1: Hosea & Gomer
- IV. It is really not surprising, therefore, when we come into the first century world—the world of the New Testament—to find instruction against sexual sin.
 - A. Mt. 5:27-28: Jesus’, in his mountain message, warned against adultery and the lust within that motivated it.
 - B. Mt. 15:19: Jesus classified *adulteries* and *fornications* as evil and taught us that they come from a defiled heart.
 - C. Mt. 19:1-9: Jesus taught the sanctity of the marriage relationship, quoting from Gen. 2:24 regarding the permanence of the marriage institution (cf. Mk. 10:11-12; Lk. 16:18).
 - D. Cf. Acts 15:19-20; Rom. 1:24; 13:9, 14; 1 Cor. 6:9-11; 2 Cor. 12:21; Gal. 5:16-21; Eph. 5:3-5; Col. 3:5; 1 Th. 4:3-5; 1 Tim. 1:8-10; 2 Tim. 2:22; Heb. 13:4; 1 Pet. 2:11; 4:2-3; 2 Pet 1:4; 2:14; 1 Jn. 2:15-17; Jude 7, 16-18; Rev. 2:14, 20
- V. Why so much instruction? I think there are at least two reasons:
 - A. They lived in an immoral world (just as we do today)
 - B. God wanted them (as he does us) to live sanctified/holy lives.
- VI. I think it is interesting to note the overall context of 1 Thessalonians, particularly giving consideration to Paul’s instructions regarding their personal conduct.
 - A. 1 Th. 1:1-10: Paul commends the Thessalonians. No instruction, only observation regarding their “work of faith, and labor of love and steadfastness of hope” (v. 3)

- B. 1 Th. 2:1-20: Paul's observations about his work among them and how well they received him and the gospel he preached. No admonition to personal conduct.
 - C. 1 Th. 3:1-13: Paul recounting Timothy's visit to Thessalonica and his glowing report of the faith and love. Because of this good report, the apostle earnestly desired to see them. Still no admonition to personal conduct.
 - D. 1 Th. 4:1-8: The practical, instructional, section of the book *begins* with the admonition to sexual purity. **Surely the fact that this instruction is mentioned first says something about its need and importance.**
- VII. Let's examine the text (1 Th. 4:1-8)
- VIII. There are three things in this passage that I want to talk about, and then I'll close with some practical advice on how to avoid sexual immorality.
- A. Instruction on the conduct God expects from us.
 - B. Instruction concerning how this conduct can be accomplished in one's life.
 - C. Reasons why we should live sexually pure lives.

Body:

I. What God Expects (1 Th. 4:3)

- A. To most people, freedom of expression, and particularly *sexual* expression, has become their cultural god. In their frame of reference...
 - 1. Sexual activity is only a biological function (cf. 1 Cor. 6:13); and the norm should be to express yourself without moral restriction.
 - 2. "Casual sex" is just another form of fun and pleasure (as long as there is a consenting partner).
 - 3. Fulfilling one's sexual desire comes before, and is often considered more important, than developing meaningful personal relationships.
 - 4. To some, sexual intercourse is the most important factor in establishing a good marital relationship; therefore every stage of the romantic relationship should include sex.
- B. This philosophy is not new—it is as old as man—and most certainly was the philosophy of the debauched Greco-Roman world of Thessalonica.
 - 1. *John MacArthur, Jr.*: "Thessalonica was part of that debased Greco-Roman culture. The city was rife with such sinful practices as fornication, adultery, homosexuality (including pedophilia), transvestism (men dressing like women), and a wide variety of pornographic and erotic perversions, all done with a seared conscience and society's acceptance, hence with little or no accompanying shame or guilt..." (*1 & 2 Thessalonians*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Chicago: Moody Press, 2002., 102)
 - 2. *Leon Morris*: "A marked feature of life in the first-century Roman Empire, and specifically in Greece, was sexual laxity. The Thessalonian Christians lived in a world where people did not see fornication as a sin, but as part of normal life. It featured in the worship of more than one deity, and men in general found it difficult to feel deeply on the subject." (*1 and 2 Thessalonians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984)
 - 3. *Jacob Elias*: "Because Thessalonica had a seaport, we can surmise that prostitution and other forms of illicit sexual activity might have presented a continuing distraction or temptation for recent converts. Sexual themes were also prevalent within the

mystery religions, such as the cults of Dionysus and the Cabiri, from which at least some of the converts had likely come. Some of these cults featured orgiastic rituals and promised ecstatic union with the deity through intercourse with temple prostitutes.” (1 and 2 Thessalonians. Believers Church Bible Commentary. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995., 137)

4. *Jacob Elias*: “The cult of Dionysus (also called Bacchus) was known, among other things, for its sexual symbolism and for its wild and frenzied celebrations, at which wine flowed freely. Paul may have the sensually provocative Dionysian orgies in mind when exhorting the Thessalonians to maintain concerning sexual morality (1 Thess. 4:3-8) and when using the metaphor of drunkenness to depict the risk of spiritual laxity (1 Thess. 5:5-7).” (1 and 2 Thessalonians. Believers Church Bible Commentary. Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995., 366)
5. *Michael Martin*: “The casual use of prostitutes and the practice of ritual sexual intercourse in certain cults was common in Hellenistic cities. Far from limiting sex to the bounds of marriage, it was common for a man of means to have a mistress, and it also was acceptable for him to make use of his slaves for sexual gratification.” (1 & 2 Thessalonians. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995., 123-124)

C. God doesn’t want this lifestyle for his people. He will not tolerate it. God called the Thessalonians to *sanctification*, or holiness.

1. “Sanctification” (*hagiasmos*). “It signifies (a) separation to God, 1 Cor. 1:30; 2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Pet. 1:2; (b) the resultant state, the conduct befitting those so separated” (Vine, W. E., Merrill F. Unger and William White, Jr. *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Nashville, TN: T. Nelson, 1996., 307)
2. Specifically, in 1 Th. 4:3, this sanctification comes in the form of “abstain[ing] from sexual immorality.”
 - a. “Abstain” (*apecho*) means “to avoid contact with..., keep away, abstain, refrain from.”
 - b. “Sexual immorality” is from the Greek *porneia* which refers to...
 - 1) “sexual intercourse in general” (Thayer, Joseph Henry. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*. New York: Harper & Brothers., 1889., 532)
 - 2) “unlawful sexual intercourse, prostitution, unchastity, fornication” (Arndt, William, Frederick W. Danker and Walter Bauer. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000., 854).
3. “Sanctification” then, for the Thessalonians, came first in the form of not being like the perverse Greco-Roman society in their debauchery.
 - a. God called them to live chaste, pure lives.
 - b. Don’t you know that this pure lifestyle was noticeably different in the Thessalonian community.

II. How It Can Be Accomplished (1Th. 4:4-6a)

A. Possess your own vessel in sanctification and honor (v. 4)

1. Here is our “sticky wicket.” What does Paul mean when he says to “possess his own vessel?”
2. One’s understanding of this statement depends upon the meaning of two Greek words; “possess” (*ptaomai*) and “vessel” (*skeuos*).

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3. The difficulty presented by these words is illustrated in the three basic ways the two words are translated.
 - a. “possess his vessel” (NASB, ASV, NKJV, KJV, LEB)
 - b. “control his own body” (ESV, NIV, NCV, NRSV, HCSB, ISV)
 - c. “to take a wife” (RSV, GNB, GW, WNT)
 4. The Greek *skeuos* translated “vessel” (NASB)
 - a. *Thayer* gives us an accurate but somewhat truncated definition of *skeuos*...
 - 1) “1. a vessel: Mk. 11:16; Lk. 8:16; Jn. 19:29; Acts 10:11, 16; 11:5; 2 Tim. 2:20; Rev. 2:27; 18:12...” (577)
 - 2) He then continues to acknowledge the metaphorical use of the term as he says that *skeuos* “is used of a *woman*, as the vessel of her husband, 1 Th. 4:4 ... [al. take it here (as in 2 Co. 4:7 below) of the *body*]” (577, Emphasis mine - jhd).
 - b. *BDAG* handles *skeuos* with a little more detail, offering three specific usages of the word...
 - 1) “1. a material object used to meet some need in an occupation of other responsibility... thing, object” (e.g., “merchandise,” Mk. 11:16; “article,” Rev. 18:12; “goods,” Lk. 17:31)
 - 2) “2. a container of any kind, vessel, jar, dish, etc.” (e.g. “container” Lk. 8:16; “jar” Jn. 19:29; “vessels” 2 Tim. 2:20)
 - 3) “3. a human being exercising a function, instrument, vessel” (e.g., “a chosen instrument” Acts 9:15; “treasure in earthen vessels” 2 Cor. 4:7; “weaker vessel” 1 Pet. 3:7)
 - a) “**1 Th 4:4 from antiquity has been interpreted to mean *one’s own body ...or one’s own wife*... The former interpr. is supported by passages cited at the beg. of this section 3, and the latter is in accord w. rabb. usage...** Also probable for 1 Th 4:4 is ‘penis’... cp. the euphemistic Lat. ‘*vasa*’ in this sense... on sim. usage at Qumran s. TEIgvn... renders guarding his member ... In such case *ptaomai* must mean someth. like ‘gain control of’, etc.” (927-928, Emphasis mine - jhd)
 - c. How one translates or interprets Paul’s usage of *skeuos* in this passage depends somewhat upon the meaning they place upon *ptaomai* (“possess” - NASB95).
 5. The Greek *ptaomai* translated “possess” (NASB95)
 - a. *Thayer* defines *ptaomai* as “to acquire, get or procure a thing for one’s self.” (e.g., “do not acquire silver or gold” Mt 10:9; “you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money” Ac 8:20; “I acquired this citizenship with a large sum of money”)
 - 1) To its usage in this passage *Thayer* says, “to procure for himself his own vessel (i.e. for the satisfaction or the sexual passion;... the words (“in sanctification and honor”- jhd) are added to express completely the idea of marrying in contrast with the baseness of procuring a harlot as his ‘vessel.’
 - 2) *Thayer* does mention the possibility of translating *ptaomai* as “possess” but he admits that this is “not found in the N.T.” (363)
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- b. *BDAG* defines *ptaomai* as “1. to gain possession of, procure for oneself, acquire, get; 2. bring upon himself (as in misfortunes, etc. - jhd); 3. possess” (572)
- 1) He sees the first usage as applicable to 1 Th. 4:4 and offers two alternatives: “take a wife for himself (or: gain control over his own body...) in consecration and honor 1 Th. 4:4.”
 - 2) Neither of the other usages, according to Bauer, are found in Scripture.
6. How others have interpreted this data.
- a. *Robert L. Thomas*: “The positive side of holiness requires one to ‘learn to control his own body’ or ‘learn to live with his own wife’ (cf. footnote in NIV; also note below). Some have resolved the uncertainty over the exact meaning of the Greek by referring *skeuos* (literally, ‘vessel’; NIV, ‘body’) to the human body, a meaning that seeks support from Paul’s usage in Romans 9:22, 23 and 2 Corinthians 4:7. But this overlooks the figurative nature of this term from the ceramics trade in its other two contexts. It also strains the meaning of *ktasthai*, which can only with great difficulty be understood as ‘control.’ **Taking *skeuos* to be a wife may therefore be preferable.** *Ktasthai* may in this way be given its natural meaning of ‘acquire.’ Or it may mean ‘keep on acquiring’ or ‘live with’ in the sense of cultivating a wife’s favor, i.e., the couple should not be unduly separated and thus strain their marital relationship (cf. 1 Cor 7:2-5). Use of *skeuos* as ‘wife’ is loosely paralleled in 1 Peter 3:7. A wholesome marriage was thus Paul’s antidote for ‘sexual immorality.’” (*The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, Volume 11: Ephesians Through Philemon*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981.. 271, Bold emphasis mine - jhd)
 - b. *Ellingworth & Nida*: “If the word ‘vessel’ is translated *wife*, this phrase will be related to the verb ‘to get’ (*to live with*). If Paul is referring to the body or a part of the body, the phrase will be related to the noun, as in Knox’s translation ‘Each of you must learn to control his own body, as something holy and held in honour.’ *Holy* indicates as relationship with God, and *honorable*, in this sense, usually a relationship with other human beings. GeCL [German common language translation – jhd] brings this out by translating ‘as is pleasing to God and men,’ and **this is particularly natural if ‘vessel’ is understood as ‘wife.’**” (*Ellingworth, Paul and Eugene Albert Nida. A Handbook on Paul’s Letters to the Thessalonians*. UBS Handbook Series. New York: United Bible Societies, 1976., 80, Bold emphasis mine-jhd)
 - c. *John MacArthur*: “The New Testament uses *skeuos* metaphorically for utensils, implements, or tools (Rom. 9:21; 2 Cor. 4:7; 2 Tim. 2:21); it also uses the term in reference to people (Acts 9:15; Rom. 9:22–23). But the present verse uses it for ‘body,’ which matches some rabbinical uses of the word. **Paul was admonishing the Thessalonians to control their bodies**, the unredeemed human flesh that is the beachhead for sin and immorality (cf. Rom. 7:18; 8:5–8, 23).” (1 & 2 *Thessalonians*. MacArthur New Testament Commentary. Chicago: Moody Press, 2002., 106, Bold emphasis mine-jhd)
 - d. *Leon Morris*: “There is a problem about the meaning of the word translated body (*skeuos*). The word literally means ‘vessel’, which many of the early Greek commentators took to mean ‘body’, though *skeuos* does not seem to have this meaning elsewhere. But in Greek writers generally the body is sometimes thought of as the instrument or container of the soul, and, while this is not a New Testament thought, there are passages that contrast the real ‘I’ with the body (e.g. 2 Cor. 4:7; 5:1-4, 6-8), and some where ‘vessel’ means people (Acts 9:15; Rom. 9:22-23; 2 Tim. 2:21). But Theodore of Mopsuestia, Augustine and others took

the word to mean ‘wife’ here and many accept this view today. It is supported by the fact that the verb translated ‘to control’, which more literally means ‘to acquire’, is not very suitable for ‘body’ but is found in LXX and elsewhere of marrying a wife. Support is also sought in the reference to the wife as ‘the weaker vessel’ (1 Pet. 3:7, AV). This last point does not count for much, for (a) both husband and wife are ‘vessels’ in this verse, the wife being the ‘weaker’, and (b) both are vessels of the Holy Spirit. The wife is not the husband’s ‘vessel’.

“The big difficulty in the way of ‘body’ is the verb ‘acquire’. But there is evidence that it can mean what follows from acquiring, i.e. ‘possess’ (MM cite a papyrus dated AD 23 where a man declares on oath that he ‘has’ thirty days to produce a man he bailed out of jail; they think that here the meaning is ‘gradually obtain the complete mastery of the body’); the difficulty is not insuperable.

Against ‘wife’ are two strong arguments. One is that it demands a low view of marriage (i.e. that the primary function of the wife is to satisfy her husband’s sexual desires) just where Paul is advocating a high view. The other is that there is no reason for holding that the words apply only to the male section of the church. The letter is written to the whole church (masculine forms like *his* arise because the Greek masculine embraces both sexes in such contexts). Neither single nor married ladies could acquire a wife, but all, of both sexes, married and single, should control their bodies. **Our best understanding is that Paul is calling on the Thessalonians to keep their bodies pure (perhaps in the style of 1 Cor. 6:18–20).**” (*1 and 2 Thessalonians: An Introduction and Commentary*. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1984., 81-82, Bold emphasis mine-jhd).

- e. *Michael D. Martin*: “The two most common translations of *skeuos* in this context are ‘body’ and ‘wife.’ Scholars have argued these alternatives since the patristic age, and modern commentators are still divided over the issue. Both meanings for *skeuos* are well documented in antiquity—vessel as a reference to *body* is predominant in Greek writings; vessel as a reference to a *woman* or *wife*, more prominently in Jewish writings. **Maurer is correct when he observes that ‘the parallels to *skeuos* (in ancient literature) do not offer convincing support either one way or the other.’**” (*1, 2 Thessalonians*. The New American Commentary. Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1995., 125, Bold emphasis mine- jhd)

7. My conclusion:

- a. Because of a lack of scholarship in the languages, I am in no position to judge the translators of our major English Bibles.
- b. Having said that, it seems to me that “control” seems to be the best way of translating *ptaomai*, and “vessel” seems to be the best translation of *skeuos* as a metaphor for the body.
 - 1) Hence, the *meaning* of the phrase might best be stated as does the ESV, “control your body.”
- c. In my judgment, Paul’s point is this: the body should not control the believer, the believer should control his body (Col. 3:5; 1 Cor. 6:18-20; Rom. 8:13; 12:1; 13:14; Gal. 5:24)

B. Don’t act like the Gentiles (v. 5)

1. The reference to “Gentiles” here refers to those who long ago rejected a knowledge of God; and their lives reflected it (Rom. 1:21-28).

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2. Paul described their lives as lived in “lustful passion.” Today, we might call this *hedonism*; which is “1. the pursuit of pleasure; sensual self-indulgence; 2. the ethical theory that pleasure (in the sense of the satisfaction of desires) is the highest good and proper aim of human life” (Soanes, Catherine and Angus Stevenson. *Concise Oxford English Dictionary*. 11th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.)
 3. God’s demands a higher standard from His people (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1)
- C. Don’t transgress and defraud your brother (v. 6a)
1. “Transgress” (*hyperbaino*) here carries with it the idea of “going beyond the proper limits of behavior” (BDAG, 1032)
 2. This “transgression” took the form of “defrauding” or sinning against a brother, in my judgment implying adultery. Adultery is...
 - a. A sin against your own body (1 Cor. 6:18)
 - b. A sin against your covenant wife/husband (Mk. 10:11)
 - c. A sin against your partner in adultery
 - d. A sin against your adulterous partner’s husband/wife
 3. God is saying “Don’t do it!” (Eph. 5:3)
 4. Consider the effect of your action upon others.
- III. **Why, Then, Should We Keep Ourselves Morally Pure (1 Th. 4:6b-8)**
- A. First, because of the nature of God
 1. In calling us to a life of sanctification or holiness, Paul mention’s God (Lord, the Lord Jesus, Holy Spirit) specifically no less than nine times in these eight verses.
 2. Peter helps us understand why God wants us to live holy lives (1 Pet. 1:14-16): “¹⁴ As obedient children, do not be conformed to the former lusts which were yours in your ignorance, ¹⁵ but like the Holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; ¹⁶ because it is written, ‘YOU SHALL BE HOLY, FOR I AM HOLY.’” (cf. Lev. 11:44; 19:2; 20:7, 26)
 3. God calls us to “become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is the world by lust” (2 Pet. 1:4), *i.e.*, God wants us to become like him — to share in his holiness.
 4. Cf. Rom. 8:29; Eph. 4:22-24; Col. 3:5, 9-10
 - B. Second, because of God’s commands and purpose for our lives (1 Th. 4:1-3, 7)
 - C. Third, because of God’s vengeance (1 Th. 4:6; Heb. 13:4; 1 Cor. 6:9-11)
- IV. **Finally, Some Practical Advice To Help Us All Avoid The Pitfalls And To Keep Us From Succumbing To Immorality.**
- A. I deeply lament the fact that I hear of so much immorality among brethren, and especially among preachers.
 1. I grieve to think of the irreparable harm that has been done to their families (spouses and children), to the local church, and to the community at large.
 2. Recovering from a moral lapse is a painful, difficult, and sometimes almost impossible process that can take years to overcome (if it can ever be overcome at all).
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3. So, there is an ever-growing need for us to have a frank and ongoing dialogue about this problem among us.
- B. In preparing for this lecture, I thought about possibly interviewing several preachers I know who had fallen. For more than one reason, I decided against it. **But there are several questions I would like the occasion to ask, and then compare the answers:**
1. Leading up to the time you committed adultery, how was your prayer life? What was your Bible study habits like?
 2. At the point you committed adultery, how would you describe your relationship with your wife?
 3. Prior to your fall, did you ever think, “I know this has happened to others, but I don’t believe it would ever happen to me?”
 4. What “red lights” or “barriers” did you ignore in the process of getting caught up in your affair?
 5. Did you ever think about the consequences of getting caught?
 6. Was there no one close enough to you who could see the dangerous path down which you were running, with whom you could have shared the temptations, and who could have possibly intervened before the deed was done?
- C. I believe a candid answer to these questions would reveal some very important steps we can take to help avoid sexual immorality in our lives. *[Some of the following is borrowed from material prepared by David Banning for publication in “Letter to Young Preachers,” recently published by Warren Berkley. I use it here with his knowledge and permission, having also added material of my own.]*
1. Stay close to God
 - a. A gospel preacher/elder can become so consumed with his study, his work and caring for the spiritual needs of others, that he neglects his own relationship with God—his own Bible study, prayer life, *etc.* When this happens, we make ourselves vulnerable to Satan’s assault.
 - b. One preacher I know carried on an affair for about 18 months while he continued to preach and teach, but his personal spiritual life was a shambles and *he knew it better than anyone else!*
 - c. The solution to this problem is simple.
 - 1) We need to pray (Col. 4:2; 1 Th. 5:17)
 - 2) We need to read our Bibles (Psa. 119:9-11, 148)
 - 3) Carve time out of your schedule for nourishing your own spiritual relationship with God.
 2. Maintain a strong marriage
 - a. In Proverbs 5 Solomon laid out the catastrophic consequences of adultery (Pr. 5:1-14).
 - 1) To help a man avoid this pitfall, he points to marriage as the relationship where sexual desire is to be satisfied (Pr. 5:15-20).
 - b. A good marriage will serve as a vital part of our defense against moral impurity, particularly sexual sin.
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- 1) When marriages are healthy and needs are met, Satan will have a far more difficult time trying to lure a man or woman into sexual sin.
 - 2) But when marriages are dysfunctional and important needs are left unmet, people become far more susceptible to the devil's assault.
 - c. What happens in our marriages through the years is very important in the battle for our moral purity. We need to invest the time necessary to cultivate a strong bond with our wives.
 - d. A careful study of the Song of Solomon will reveal at least four dimensions of the romantic love so vital to a marriage.
 - 1) Companionship (SoS. 1:15-2:13) We need to spend time with our wives. Put off others if you must, but spend time with her. She is a "fellow heir of the grace of life" (1 Pet. 3:7).
 - 2) Communication (SoS. 6:4-9) We need to talk to our wives. "Communication is to a marriage what blood is to the body," it is life. We need to especially hear her when she is trying to tell us, "You're spending too much time addressing the needs of others and not taking care of mine."
 - 3) Caring (SoS. 1:1-14). Paul charges us with the duty to love our wives even as we do our own bodies, to "nourish and cherish" her. We must make it our ambition to understand her needs as a unique woman and become the expert at meeting those needs in ways that are important to her (1 Pet. 3:7; Eph. 5:25-33).
 - 4) Craving (SoS. 2:3-7) When the first three dimensions exist in a marriage, the fourth will be the natural by-product. We will crave physical intimacy WITH EACH OTHER and be less inclined to look elsewhere.
 - e. Do not allow yourself to be so caught up in your work with God's people that you neglect the most important person in your life. A strong marriage will serve as a key line of defense against moral impurity.
 3. Don't be arrogant.
 - a. Some men come to believe that they are too strong, too spiritually mature to get caught up in immorality. As a result, they let down their guard.
 - b. After being caught in adultery, one preacher confessed that he just thought he was too old to be caught up in something like this. He thought he had this battle won and he let down his guard.
 - c. It is arrogant and dangerous to allow ourselves to believe that we are beyond being tempted by immorality (Pr. 16:18; 1 Cor. 10:12).
 4. Because everyone is vulnerable to temptation, you need to protect yourself by putting up some fences—don't allow yourself to be put in situations that make it possible (Pr. 4:10-27; 5:8). Talk with your wife about establishing inviolate rules that will make it difficult for you to become involved in sexual sin.
 - a. Don't be alone with other women.
 - b. Avoid becoming a marriage counselor. When a preacher privately counsels and comforts a woman who is angry and disappointed with her husband, he is asking for trouble.
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- c. Be careful about working relationships with other women. It is dangerous to spend hours working alone with another woman, even if it is a spiritual labor that you are doing at the church building.
 - d. When on gospel meetings, do not stay in homes where you will be alone with a woman.
 - e. Use common sense with the internet. It's easy to get into trouble here.
 - 1) Try to do your internet work in a more public setting and at a time when others are around. Keep your office door open.
 - 2) Give your wife complete access to your "internet life." Never have a computer or email accounts that she is not able to access.
 - 3) Use filtering software and set preferences in a way that will minimize the danger of accidentally stumbling across the wrong material.
 - 4) Be especially careful about your activities on social networking sites like Facebook.
 - f. These are common sense suggestions. Most preachers have given similar counsel to parents with teenagers. Sometimes we need to learn to follow our own advice.
5. Consider and appreciate the consequences.
- a. When we consider David's tryst with Bathsheba, we have to ask, "What was he thinking? How could he do this? Did he not think that God would see/care? Did he honestly think he could get away with it?"
 - b. How does one who knows God's word so well and who teaches it to others (David, preachers) possibly do such a thing.
 - c. Dr. Russell Moore made an interesting observation while commenting on the moral scandal involving politician Anthony Weiner (D-NY). He said, "Temptation only works if the possible futures open to you are concealed. Consequences, including those of Judgment Day, must be hidden from view or outright denied" (*Are You Smarter Than Anthony Weiner*, Moore to the Point, June 6, 1011, www.russellmoore.com).
 - 1) To become involved in immorality, a man must convince himself that somehow he will escape the consequences of his actions. He will not get caught. No one will find out. His marriage will not be ruined. His kids will not be harmed. He will be able to continue preaching.
 - 2) This kind of thinking seems completely irrational. And yet it is exactly the kind of deluded mindset that takes over when a man caves to his lust and becomes involved in immorality. He simply refuses to see the catastrophe that is coming. - d. If David could only have seen the dreadful consequences of his sin with Bathsheba, perhaps he would have made a different choice.
 - e. If we could see the devastation that moral impurity can bring into our lives, perhaps we would make different choices.
6. Find someone to hold you accountable.
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- a. What if you had someone to meet with you once a month and to whom you gave permission to ask very direct, personal questions:
 - 1) Have you been faithful to your wife over the last 30 days?
 - 2) Have your internet activities been pure?
 - 3) Have your thoughts and motives been pure as you have interacted with other women?
- b. This kind of accountability can serve as a powerful deterrent against sin. It has been very helpful in people who had drug, alcohol, and pornography problems.
- c. Knowing that someone is going to ask becomes a powerful incentive to do the right thing at the moment of temptation.

Conclusion:

- I. Don't forget Paul's admonition to the Thessalonians, "³For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor" (1 Th. 4:3-4).
- II. God wants you to live a sanctified, holy life and to bear the image of His Son. What an honor. Do not soil the high and noble calling to which you have been called for a moment of foolish, reckless pleasure.

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Appendix

Al's Story

I first met Al in early February of 1981. I had just moved in, He was preaching for the church across town. Over the next few years we became fast friends. It was only after he had moved to work with another church that I learned he and his wife were experiencing marriage problems - serious marriage problems.

Preaching was his first love. He was possessed with a quick wit and instant recall. He had a special ability to analyze false arguments and get to the core of almost any issue. In my judgment, his pulpit ability was far above average. Al was doing what he wanted to do with his life.

His wife was a master manipulator. Their relationship had degenerated to the point that, if Al didn't do what she wanted him to do, or get for her something she wanted, she would threaten to divorce him. Then, she said, "you won't be able to preach anymore."

His move to a small work in an obscure little town was for the purpose of trying to hide – to get away so that, if she did leave, the damage (at least, in his mind) would be minimal. He was wrong in more ways than one. After some three to five years, he moved again. This time he moved to a rather large established work in a big city. The marriage problems, however, grew worse.

There was a woman doing secretarial duties for the church who would often be in the building alone with Al. They spoke often and confidences grew. He shared his problems with her and she shared her problems with him. It wasn't long before a handshake turned into a comforting embrace, an embrace into a kiss, and the kissing led to a rented motel room. I later asked Al just what it was that drew him to this woman and he replied, "Her spirituality."

It wasn't long, perhaps only a few weeks, until the pressure became too much. Al made a complete and specific public confession of sins. He started once again to try to rebuild his troubled marriage. He wasn't successful. He is now divorced, remarried unscripturally, and pretty much alienated from his children. He quit preaching and eventually left the faith entirely.