

Your Sanctification • 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Read 2 Peter 2:1-9 • Note what it says about Lot

B. A Lot of Lot

1. Lot lived in Sodom; a city so evil it demanded God's judgment.
2. Lot was the only real believer in Sodom. He was **disgusted** by the utterly gross behavior of his neighbors.
3. The problem was, he **never said anything**.
  - a. Though a leader of the community, he never used his influence for good.
  - b. No doubt he thought taking an unpopular stand for righteousness would cause him to lose position.
  - c. So he suffered in silence.
4. Lot took that silence home with him too. He failed to stand for righteousness with his family.
5. When the angels told him Sodom was going to be destroyed & he had to leave, Lot went to his son-in-laws to warn them. They thought it was all a joke.
  - a. Lot failed to show any spiritual substance before
  - b. So when he warned of God's wrath, they chalked it up to the ravings of a loon.
6. **Even Lot's wife** had been poorly served by him.
  - a. On the morning of the day Sodom was to be wiped out, Lot, Mrs. Lot & their 2 daughters left.
  - b. But **reluctance** dogged her steps & lagging behind, she was caught in the city's judgment.
7. Even though Lot's daughters left Sodom, Sodom didn't leave them. It's corruption had crept into their hearts.
  - a. First chance they had, they got Lot drunk so they could get pregnant by him.
  - b. Talk about a **dysfunctional family**.
8. The point is this: Though Lot was grieved by the wickedness of Sodom, **he didn't do anything about it**.
  - a. He assumed his quiet, inner moral outrage was enough. **It wasn't**.
  - b. Surely he saw the **effect** Sodom's corruption had on his loved ones.
  - c. **Why didn't he say something?** Why didn't he speak to them of God & His ways?
9. Grieved as Lot was by Sodom's **evil**, he didn't want to give up Sodom's **benefits**.
10. Lot was saved from the **judgment** by the skin of his teeth.
11. Even though **he left Sodom, Sodom's corruption** clung to him like a reeking stench for years after.
12. Lot is a lesson to us about the importance of walking in holiness before the Lord.
13. Our culture resembles Sodom in many ways & more so as each year passes.
  - a. It's not enough to be disgusted with sin & suffer in silence as evil stalks our streets & tries to climb into our homes thru the TV & internet.
  - b. For the sake of our families & the innocent victims of sin who don't know any better,
  - c. We need to speak up about sin & God's righteous judgment. We need to declare the way of forgiveness & salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.
14. But if we're so **immersed in modern Sodom** that we're no different from it, our warnings carry no weight. We will sound as Lot did to his son-in-laws.
15. This would be the point at which to quote statistics proving how many of those who call themselves Evangelical Christians ARE like modern-day Lots. It seems the church has a lot of Lots.
  - a. While they **say** sin is wrong,
  - b. They **live little differently** from non-Christians.
16. But I'm not going to give any stats because I don't need to. You don't need any proof.
17. You probably met **lots of people** who call themselves Christian but live like the world.
18. What we're going to look at today is a much needed corrective to the Lot-like mindset that thinks it's enough to be **bugged by the sins of others** but tolerant of it in our own lives.

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 1-2

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; <sup>2</sup> for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

1. Because of the report Timothy had just brought, Paul knew the Thessalonians were doing well.

2. He encouraged them to **go even further** in their pursuit of Christ.
3. They had both his example & teaching on how to keep growing.
- B. Vs. 3-9

<sup>3</sup> For this is the will of God, // pause!

1. Everyone wants to know God's will. So when you see this, you want to put a bold marker by it.
  2. God's will is  
your sanctification:
  3. That's one of those big religious words which simply means **to be set-apart**.
    - a. If something is **sanctified** it's been set-apart from common use to a special purpose.
    - b. I suspect most of us have a special set of clothes at home in the closet, maybe covered in plastic or a zippered garment bag.
      - 1) They're reserved for special occasions,
      - 2) Some event when we need to dress our best.
    - c. Many homes have 2 sets of dishes; the everyday stuff you keep in the kitchen cabinet & throw in the dishwasher & the special set you store in 'the buffet', w/liners between each plate & wash by hand once or twice a year when you break them out for Christmas & Thanksgiving.
  4. It's God's will that we be set-apart **from sin to His special purpose**.
    - a. Having been saved from the **penalty** of sin by the cross, God wants us free from the **power** of sin by the HS, Who comes to make us holy.
    - b. Just as you'd never change the oil in your car while wearing a tux,
    - c. Faith in Christ means a change in attitude toward the sin **we used to practice**.
    - d. You wouldn't think of doing digging weeds in the garden dressed in an expensive dress & heels.
    - e. In the same way, following Jesus means **turning from** following after the ways of this world.
  5. Sanctification is **the process** of moving **out of** sin **into** holiness.
  6. We get the word **saint** from this word 'sanctification.'
    - a. Saints aren't a professional football team.
    - b. They're holy-ones; men & women God has **separated out of** fallen humanity **to** Himself.
  7. Believers are called "Christians" only 3 times in the NT. They're called **saints**, 56 times!
  8. I love the way a young boy described a saint.
    - a. Asked by his Sunday school teacher what a saint was,
    - b. He remembered his mother telling him the people in the stained glass windows of the sanctuary were saints & said, "A saint is someone the light shines through." Exactly right!
  9. But the light of Christ won't shine brightly if we are **dirty windows**.
  10. Being a saint means being **different** from the rest of humanity that orders its life by the priorities & values of the world.
    - a. Holiness has always been God's will for His people.
    - b. 6 times, the Bible says, "'Be holy, because I am holy,' says the Lord."
    - c. Holiness isn't just a lifestyle choice for people who don't have options.
    - d. It's a defining trait of those who've been born again. Hebrews 12:14 says –
- Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord:
- 1) Children look like their parents because they inherit their genes.
  - 2) The more time that goes by, the more they look like them.
  - 3) I'm looking more & more like my dad with every year that passes.
  - 4) As the born-again children of God, we ought to increasingly resemble Him.
11. But Paul has a specific area in mind regarding the sanctification of the Thessalonians – v. 3:  
that you should abstain from sexual immorality;
  12. This is remarkable when you know what Thessalonica was like.
    - a. The city was a major center of Greek culture. // And that culture was incredibly sexually loose.
    - b. To give you an idea of how bad it was—The Romans weren't exactly the most moral people, yet they considered the Greeks **sick** when it came to sex.
    - c. Immorality was so much a part of Greek society, prostitution was a form of worship in some of their temples.
    - d. While homosexuality was an open secret in Rome, it was **publicly celebrated** by the Greeks.

- e. There was no expectation of sexual purity **before** marriage or fidelity **in** marriage in Thessalonica.
- 13. All of that changed when the Thessalonians became followers of Christ.
  - a. They learned sex was much more than a biological function.
  - b. It was something God created to be enjoyed by a husband **within the bonds** of marriage. It's a gift to deepen their intimacy. Sex blends **souls** as well as bodies.
  - c. God's plan is for **chastity before marriage & fidelity while married**.
- 14. What Paul says here is as poignant & applicable today as they were when he penned it.
- 15. **God's will hasn't changed**. He wants us set-apart from the ways of this world, especially in regard to the place of sex in our lives.
- 16. Let me make it clear – Sex is for a husband & wife to enjoy. Knocking boots is great, **if** those boots are married.
  - a. Here's a line: On this side is marriage; on that side is being single.
  - b. Hebrews 13:4 makes it clear whatever is on this side of the line, it's "Have fun! Scuff up those boots real good."
  - c. Whatever is on that side of the line is, "No boots!"
- 17. The casual attitude so many believers have toward pre-marital sex is distressing.
- 18. And having already considered Lot's error, I can't just endure my vexation in silence. I have to speak up.
- 19. The idea that **morality has changed** because we're more enlightened is based on the errant premise of evolutionary progress, not God's timeless word. // **Truth** doesn't change.
  - a. God hasn't changed His mind.
  - b. Sex was His idea & He sets the boundaries for it. That boundary is marriage.
  - c. Being in love or lust isn't all that's needed to climb in the sack.
  - d. **Making love** is for those in **the covenant of love** called Marriage.
- <sup>4</sup>that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel [body] in sanctification and honor, <sup>5</sup>not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God;
- 20. These bodies we used to pursue sin with, are now the vessels in which the Spirit of God dwells.
- 21. That's why when we **do mess up** & sin, it's not nearly as fun or satisfying as it used to be.
- 22. A Christian makes for a rotten sinner, they're just no good at it anymore.
- 23. But Paul sees immorality as more than just a **personal** sin. It's **cheating** one another.
- <sup>6</sup> that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord *is* the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified.
- 24. Paul speaks generically when he refers to a 'brother;' he means the **family of God** of which we're a part.
- 25. Whenever one of us engages in sexual immorality, it lowers the spiritual quality of us all.
- 26. It's the principle of the **weakest link**. How strong is a chain? Only as strong as the weakest link.
  - a. This explains why the Church seems so **ineffective** in making an impact on our culture.
  - b. Think of it The Gospel is the greatest & most powerful message every communicated.
  - c. The Spirit of God indwells us & Jesus is Lord.
  - d. Yet for all that, the Church is making little difference, at least in the Western world.
  - e. Could it be the reason why is because there's **so little holiness**?
- 27. I'm reminded of Achan, who took some of the forbidden loot from Jericho & hid it in his tent.
  - a. He thought his sin was secret – but God saw.
  - b. And his secret sin opened a hole in Israel's ranks so they were trounced in their next battle at the tiny village of Ai.
  - c. Don't be an Achan!
  - d. The sin you think is secret on earth is open scandal in heaven & provides a beach-head the devil uses to hinder the Spirit & the success of your fellow believers.
- <sup>7</sup> For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. <sup>8</sup> Therefore he who rejects *this* does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.
- 28. Again – the world doesn't decide the guidelines for sexual morality; that's God's right & His will hasn't changed.
- 29. If you call yourself a Christian, live by God's Word, not the desires of your flesh.
- C. Vs. 9-12

<sup>9</sup> But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; <sup>10</sup> and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more;

1. Even though the Thessalonians were doing well in loving one another, Paul urges them to **keep it** a priority.
2. As we saw last week, by keeping the focus on love, everything else would fall into place.

Now, there's a short turn to a different subject -

<sup>11</sup> that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, <sup>12</sup> that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and *that* you may lack nothing.

3. From what Paul says here & in 2 Thessalonians, we learn there was a problem with a few on the fringes of the fellowship who were **taking advantage** of the love of others.

a. Seeing the generosity of those growing in Christ, they'd begun to depend on their support.

b. Some had quite their jobs, justifying it by saying that since the Lord was returning soon, their time would be better served studying & praying,

4. Paul says, "No, get back to work. When Jesus arrives, you want Him to find you taking care of business. -

5. There's plenty of need around. You don't need to add to it by quitting your job. Rather, seek to be one who gives than one given to."

6. If your desire is to be a giver, but you're in a season of un or under-employment, don't be too proud to ask for help.

7. The day will come when things will turn around & you'll be able to bless others as you're been blessed.

### III. CONCLUSION

#### A. Lot Revisited

1. I want to end by looking back at where we started, with Lot.

2. Though grieved by the sin of Sodom, Lot failed to do anything about it.

a. Maybe he couldn't do much in the city at large, given over as it was to wholesale evil.

b. But he could take steps to protect his wife & children.

c. He could have shared his knowledge of God with them.

d. He could have limited the influences of Sodom IN his home by **reasoning** with his family, by setting some guidelines as their spiritual leader.

e. But Lot kept his faith a private matter, & lost his loved ones to the wickedness of the world.

3. Southern CA is in many ways Sodom's mirror.

a. It's a corrupt system we were once **a part of**, but Christ has saved us **out of**.

b. Our walk with Him is to be **different** from the ways of this world.

c. To be a Christian is to be different, to be holy, to separate from the moral corruption of the culture we live in.

d. Specifically, we must embrace a **sexual ethic** very different from the world's.

4. That ethic is **better by far** from the world's.

a. When it's followed, there's no guilt, no shame, no worry of STD's.

b. No need for unwanted pregnancies.

5. But not all negative. As the followers of Christ we ought to be known what we are FOR rather than what we're against.

a. We're opposed to sexual immorality because it ruins the awesome gift of sex God has given humanity.

b. Christians ought to be champions of holy sex – advocating the pure delight of something God gives to a husband & wife.