

God did not call us to be unclean. He called us to be holy. Moses tells us what it means to be holy. It means that you belong to the LORD your God. He has chosen you, setting you apart from the unbelieving world (Deut 7:6-7; Ex 19:5-6). As St. Peter says, "Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people. Once you had received no mercy, but now you have received mercy." You have been called out of darkness into God's marvelous light. To be holy means that you are not part of this dark world. You don't belong to the world. You belong to God. So Paul instructs the church in Thessalonica what it means for them to live as holy people. God wants to sanctify them. That is to say, he wants to make them holy. He has washed them clean by the blood of Jesus, saving them from the wrath that is to come upon the earth. He has made them his own. And he wants to keep them as his own. He doesn't want them to belong to this dying world.

So don't be like the world. Don't learn from the world how to live. It's true that the world can understand some basic principles of life. Those who belong to the world can know not to murder people, not to cheat, not to steal, and not to lie. But those who belong to the world are not driven by faith in Christ and love from their Creator. What drives them to avoid certain crimes and vices is a desire to avoid bad consequences. Even an unbeliever can understand that getting into legal trouble, being put on death row, and getting a bad reputation are things everyone should try to avoid. But the world does not know God.

Paul mentions two specific things, which he tells Christians to avoid. He warns against sexual sins, and he warns against greed. First, he says that every Christian man should know how to take a wife in a holy and honorable way, not in the way of passionate lust like the people of the world who don't know God. Those who don't know God know how to get married. But they have no regard for the God who instituted marriage. They are driven by romantic love while forgetting the love of Christ, who says, "If you love me, then you will keep my Word." And even if they do take a little time to consider what God's Word says about marriage, in the end they would rather listen to their own passions and desires. This is how worldly people are. This is why worldly couples see nothing wrong with having sex before they are married, moving in together before they are married, and getting divorced simply because they refuse to be reconciled with each other. They are driven by their passions and their desires.

Now, don't take this the wrong way! We shouldn't assume that everyone who is worldly is altogether shallow and nit-witted. No, worldly couples are often attracted to each other for seemingly good reasons. They might share a love for music or literature. They have certain moral values they share with each other. They believe in hard work, giving it your best, and all that good stuff. But even though these things are certainly praiseworthy, they remain only outward things. All the while, they lack faith in the promise of Christ who died for them. They don't fear God and take seriously the instruction of his Word. They care about their own desires more than what God says.

The second thing Paul mentions is greed. He says that no one should wrong and cheat his fellow Christian in business. Now, most people wouldn't legally be considered scammers or thieves. But those who belong to the world do serve the god of material wealth. Money talks. And even if we sing songs about how it doesn't sing or dance or walk, the natural heart still clings to money. The rich and the poor both trust it. Jesus says that the people of the world exercise lordship over one another. And the love for money is at the heart of it all. The worldly heart boasts in its ability to get the better of his neighbor. As Proverbs 20:14 says, "'Bad! Bad!' says the buyer; then as he goes away, he brags about his purchase."

If you ask someone what it means, say, to be conservative, he will likely first talk about being fiscally conservative. That's the first thing that often comes to the worldly mind. Ask someone why he doesn't go to church. Unless he honestly tells you that he has a weak faith or that he just doesn't believe, you will likely hear something about him needing to work or make money. People are convinced that they need money for so many things that they are willing to slave away just so they can pay for stuff, keep up with the Joneses, and not be left out. I remember getting teased in the fifth grade for wearing hand-me-down clothes from my older brothers. It didn't make me feel bad about myself. I just thought it was strange. Why wouldn't I wear these clothes? This obsession with money, this obsession with getting ahead – it doesn't just cause little brats to pick on the poor kid. It causes people to look to their own interests before the interests of others.

Dear Christians, God has not called you to such misery! Don't let money and passions enslave you and determine for you how you will live your life. Of course, you should seek a good spouse. Of course, we all need to budget. Of course, we are free to buy and sell. But this is not so that we can get ahead and accomplish our own personal interests. It is so that we might serve our neighbor and honor God, promoting the preaching of his gospel wherever we can. After all, we are already rich in Christ. He became poor, taking on the filthiness of our sin, to shower us with the wealth of his salvation. We don't learn this from the world. Much less do we learn it from following our own hearts. When Aladdin sang to Jasmin, "Tell me, Princess, now when did you last let your heart decide?" it was typical Disney fluff, driven by the sentimental sap and self-indulging desires of the heart. Jeremiah says that the heart is so deceitful beyond all measure and desperately wicked that no one can even know how bad it truly is.

The natural, worldly heart has no patience for God. How hard is it to put up with your brother and try to settle things with him? Yet, the sinful heart would rather use financial or legal skills to take him to the cleaners or at least get the better piece of the deal from him. How hard is it to wait until you are married before you have sex? How hard is it to be patient, doing the work God has given you, waiting on him to bless your work? How hard is this? It's not that it's all that hard in itself. As Moses said to Israel, "What I order you now isn't too hard for you or far away from you. (Deut 30:11)" Instead, it's that our sinful, worldly nature is so utterly opposed to it. And this certainly does make it hard.

It's hard for a Christian to say no to his sinful desires. It's hard for a Christian to be humbled, to wait for what is good and shun everything evil. But it isn't hard because of the good thing itself. As Moses says, the Word is very close to you, in your mouth and in your heart, so that you will do it (Deut 30:14). It is hard, rather, because our old, sinful nature is always denying it. The devil is always attacking it, and the world is always opposing it. It is often intimidating to live contrary to the way the world lives. People get upset with you and slander you because you won't approve of and participate in their worldly lifestyles. But we should not be afraid of men. What do they know about being holy? Paul says that we are not called to be unclean but to be holy, and then he gives this warning: "Now, if anyone rejects this, he doesn't reject a man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit." Those who get upset with you for not affirming their own passions and desires are not upset with you. They are upset with God. They are opposing the Holy Spirit who has set you apart as God's holy and prized possession.

God did not call us to be unclean. He called us to be holy. He *called* us. And his call is what keeps us as his own. His Word, his Holy Spirit who has been given to us, his saving power in his gospel – this is what keeps you holy. So despite how intimidating the world is, despite how deceitful the devil is, despite how luring your sinful desires are, the Holy Spirit is the one who keeps God's Word in your heart and in your

mouth. The same Holy Spirit who led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted on your behalf, the same Holy Spirit by whom Jesus offered himself as a perfect offering and sacrifice for your sins, the same Holy Spirit who raised Jesus from the dead, this same Spirit of the living God cleanses and comforts your burdened conscience. He gives you the conviction that you belong to God no matter how difficult the path gets. Through the gospel, through your baptism, through the body and blood of Jesus given for you to eat and to drink, he richly and daily forgives you of your sins. In this way, he continues to strengthen your faith and set you apart as holy before God.

The world likes to give lip-service to the Lord Jesus. This is nothing new. All sorts of false prophets and pagan kings gave lip-service to the Lord when they thought it might help their own cause. They saw the LORD as just one of many gods to worship. The world is perfectly capable of giving Jesus a little bit of airspace, including him in among their pantheon of gods. When tragedies strike, they organize joint prayer services, inviting the Christian ministers to participate along with Christ-denying Rabbis, Imams, Buddhists, and other pagans. When their moms get on their cases enough, they will make occasional appearances to gather before Christ just to get it done. But the world is incapable of trusting in Christ as the only God and Savior.

When a Canaanite woman from the area of Tyre and Sidon came crying after Jesus, asking him to heal her demon-possessed daughter, Jesus' disciples told him to send her away. Perhaps she was like a typical pagan, calling on Jesus only as one of many other gods. Many years before this, there was a wicked queen named Jezebel who got Israel to worship Baal, and she came from this same region of Tyre and Sidon. The disciples were suspicious of this woman crying after Jesus.

Jesus wasn't suspicious of her. Instead, he tested her faith to prove that it was genuine. At first, he ignored her. Then he responded harshly to her. He said that he came only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. When she continued to cry out, he said that it wasn't right to take the children's bread and throw it to the puppies. He called her a dog. Now, what would the world teach her to do? The world would tell her that this God is a mean god, an unreasonable god, a cruel god. The world would tell her that her love for her daughter is greater than Jesus' love and that she shouldn't let anyone talk to her like this. She should stick up for herself and not allow herself to be insulted.

But this woman did not learn from the world. She knew Jesus as more than just one of many deities. She knew him as the Lord, the Son of David, who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. She knew him as the one who came to crush the head of the devil and all demons. She learned this from the Word. Her faith was given to her by the Holy Spirit. And this meant that no matter how much she was tested, no matter how far her Savior seemed to be from her, she had the conviction that he was very near to her, in her heart and in her mouth. So she said, "Yes, Lord, but even the little puppies eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." This faith was unwavering. It was great. This is because it did not come from her heart. It did not come from the advice of the world. It came from the Holy Spirit of her Lord Jesus Christ. She was not offended by Jesus, because he had made her his own. She was set apart from this proud world, seeking only to feed on the fruit of Jesus' cross.

May we all learn from this great example of faith! God has not called us to learn from the world. He has called us by the gospel to trust in Jesus and learn from him, no matter how difficult his lessons might seem. Because his yoke is easy, and his burden is light. He died for us, and as surely as he was raised from the dead, he remains close to us in his Word, setting us apart as his own. Amen.