



# DUDLEY'S MONTHLY MESSAGE

1 THESSALONIANS 3

JULY 2022

## HOLINESS: THE GOOD NEWS

---

*"Now may our God and Father himself and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints." 1 Thessalonians 3:11-13 NRSV*

---

Paul's first letter to the Thessalonians is full of hope for us. The city of Thessalonica was a true cultural model for commerce, religion, and government without the influence of the gospel. Paul and his two companions had spent three weeks there proclaiming the gospel before they were ushered out of town. The impact of that preaching was felt in the whole region as those who heard the gospel received it as the very word of God. They were being changed by the alive word in their hearts. Having moved on to Athens and Corinth, Paul sent Timothy back to check on the newly formed faith community. The report was very good. There were some aspects to daily living in light of the gospel that needed to be addressed, but Paul was overjoyed that the gospel was so quickly and powerfully working in them.

Why does that give us hope? First, our culture is becoming very much like Thessalonica. Their morality was based on a con-

glomeration of religions, beliefs, and values. Sexuality was mostly about satisfying the human drives and justifying the means by cultural norms. Exploitation was common in both sexual and economic relations. Religion was accepted as long as everyone let everyone else alone, with the exception of the Roman Imperial cult, which demanded that Caesar be called Lord. Gods were everywhere, and they sanctioned the perverted desires and demands of the people. It was not uncommon for men to have a wife for respectability and home management, a concubine on the side, and access to prostitutes promoted by various religious customs. You could argue that the culture was an accurate reflection of humanity ruled by basic desires and under the darkness of deception.

Second, we have hope because the gospel had such an immediate impact on the city and the whole region. A little light makes a huge difference when it is dark. We should

*(continued next page)*

never faint in the seeming delay of the gospel's impact. We can rejoice that the word of the gospel does work and brings about transformation when preached and heard. It is truly a heaven-empowered project. We are not alone in the mission. The Spirit of God works in the word of God to transform the people of God to do the will of God. We are privileged to be earthen vessels of heavenly truth.

Third, we have hope because in instructing those new disciples, Paul gives us the secret to daily transformation as we deal with the issues that confront us. In 1 Thessalonians, chapter 3, Paul prays:

*"And may he so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints."*

He introduces the dynamic of holiness. In fact, the remainder of his letter explains how the holiness of God inside the believer affects the ethics of daily life. The issues that have emerged in their lives are matters of sexual morality, acceptance of brothers and sisters in the faith, and work. He shows them what holiness looks like in those arenas.

Holiness doesn't always bring pleasant memories to mind. For instance, I remember the Holiness Church in my hometown being a place where the people were distinct because of their dress and unusual behavior in their meetings: no makeup, long hair and dresses, black suits, and running and jumping during their worship services. As a good, calm Baptist, I didn't understand all that. Later, as I read about church history, holiness was depicted as an austere demeanor with strict adherence to codes and regulations. Almost always the featured portrayal of holiness was all about religious behavior. It is important,

however, that we get a proper view of holiness because God is holy. He is the most liberated person in the universe. He is the most fulfilled. He is the most fun. If he is holy, it must be a good thing.

*Finally, brothers and sisters, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that, as you learned from us how you ought to live and to please God (as, in fact, you are doing,) you should do so more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from fornication; that each one of you know how to control your own body in holiness and honor, not with lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one wrong or exploit a brother or sister in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, just as we have already told you beforehand, and solemnly warned you. For God did not call us to impurity but in holiness. Therefore whoever rejects this rejects not human authority but God, who also gives his Holy Spirit to you. (1 Thessalonians 4:1-8 NRSV)*

In the absence of the powerful presence of God inside us, the sex drive is hard to manage. It is a powerful drive because it is related to reproduction of the human race as well as to the fulfillment of the human soul in intimacy. God designed it to be a strong drive. Without it, human life would not continue to exist, nor would human relationships have the level of pleasure God designed. Only the presence of a greater power can assure that it will not run amok and out of control. Its destructive power when not aligned with the design of God is recorded in human history as monumental. Paul says that the heathen just naturally live in lustful

passion because they don't know God (*see 1 Thessalonians 4:5*). He insists that Christians don't live by that same power because we do know God, and He is holy. Holy basically means different, distinct, wholly other, one of a kind, a category of its own. So what is different about God? Other gods only have jurisdictions over that which they supposedly rule. Some over rain, fire, agriculture, storms, the sea, the mountains, geographical domains, etc. Our God rules over all! He is sovereign, and He is good. He is by nature a person of unconditional love. Everything He does is motivated by His love. He can't be bought, bargained with, or deserved. He gives because He is the source of all good things. He is delighted when His creation enjoys the bounty of His wealth. He has power over all His creation and nothing can stop Him nor manipulate Him. Those who know Him become like Him. They, too, are different. They stand out from cultures that have imbibed the values of lustful heathen society. They may be admired or persecuted, but they cannot suppress their inner holiness as it demands to reveal the nature of God through the person. Like a seed planted in good ground, holiness will find a way to break through the surface and grow in the light of His love. In other words, our initial holiness is given to us by our Father when we receive Jesus as Lord. He gives the HOLY SPIRIT. As He "strengthens our hearts in holiness" (*see verse 3:13*), we grow increasingly in love with Him and His character is produced in us. We are made holy by God's gift. We are increasingly revealing holiness as we walk in the Spirit. Eventually we shall be as He is.

Sexuality is a big issue for all humans. What does holiness look like as it relates to that arena? First, it doesn't look like what the

heathen-influenced culture produces. Looking different from culture sexually means rejecting the notion that sexual fulfillment is a right and must be demanded. Fornication is the cheap substitute for sexual fulfillment, not the solution. Second, we are given the power to control all of our drives rather than being servants to them. Each person can choose to use his or her sexual drive for the benefit of another (a spouse) rather than his or her own satisfaction. After all, we do not belong to ourselves but to the one who purchased us by His own blood. We live not to satisfy any personal drive, but the higher goal of glorifying God by serving another.

*For the love of Christ urges us on, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, so that those who live might live no longer for themselves, but for him who died and was raised for them. (2 Corinthians 5:14-15 NRSV)*

God has graciously designed marriage to be the epitome of human sexual pleasure. This is not a social construct designed by narrow-minded legalists. It is God's design, and those who reject it are rejecting God (*see 1 Thessalonians 4:8*). No man made laws can alter this fact. Those who reject or ignore this design are building towards societal destruction. Without sustainable marriage and family, there is no way to structure any society that can flourish. But we all know that marriage alone is not the panacea to fix sexual brokenness. Many marriages fail because the partners have not found the power to control their own desires, nor to love beyond human capabilities. Christian men and women have the life of Holy God living in them and have resources that come with that high privilege.

*(continued next page)*

Since sexuality is so important, its misuse carries big ramifications. The resident sense of condemnation and disgust that comes from being a creature of God who is not reconciled to God is most often expressed in sexual terms. Sadly, we try to rid ourselves of the shame by focusing on how to deal with the sex drive rather than the deeper root of shame and condemnation. God's solution to our brokenness is adoption. When we are listening to the voice of the Spirit crying "Abba Father" we are not listening to the voice of condemnation that is the default voice of alienated ones. When we are experiencing the joy of being His beloved sons and daughters, we are rejecting the voice of condemnation urging us to do something to gain His acceptance. Make no mistake. The voice of condemnation is common and constant for all of fallen humanity. As long as that voice is dominant, we live with fear and shame. Feeling separated from God, we try to manage the desires He has built into us, and we settle for less than He has designed. The result is the guilt and shame that comes from failing to live up to His standards (*see Romans 7*). Trying to be sexually holy without being conscious of God's accepting grace is futile. Condemnation stirs sexual sin and sexual sin brings more condemnation. Again, God's solution is adoption. We are granted a new identity. We are sons of God. We are given new status. We are righteous in Him. We are given new power to live. The Holy Spirit is poured into our hearts. We are given a new future. We are heirs of His kingdom.

In trying to successfully deal with sexual sin, some have emphasized public confession of all past deeds. Transparency is vital to living in the light, but a giant download of shame and guilt in front of others is not the end of the fight. Getting rid of the load

of self-loathing, disgust, shame, and guilt can be so relieving that we conclude it is the victory. It is not the end. God's grace offers us a safe place to be real (*see Hebrews 4:16, but the power to destroy shame comes from the Holy Spirit who, with our own spirit, is crying "Abba Father."*) It is the conscious awareness that we are loved beyond measure and treasured by God Himself that gives the power to rule over our own bodies. We are holy. We have the Holy Spirit in us. He raised Jesus from the dead. He longs to give us the best as we loosen our grip on the substitutes. We are different. We can live differently.

Holiness is good. Our Holy Father has rescued us from the condemnation of sin by sending his Holy Son to free us from sin and death. Upon His ascension, He sent the Holy Spirit to empower us to live the life He demonstrated on earth. That life is distinct. It produces joy. It also offers hope to those still struggling with shame and condemnation. We are not slaves to fear, perversion, or shame. We are adopted sons of a holy God.



P.O. Box 2022  
Colleyville, TX 76034  
(817) 267-9224  
Email: [Contact@KerygmaVentures.com](mailto:Contact@KerygmaVentures.com)  
[www.KerygmaVentures.com](http://www.KerygmaVentures.com)