

Want of Rectitude in Thessalonica: Paul's Appeal for Sexual Abstinence, 1 Thess 4:1-3; Sexual Lust Wages an Ongoing Campaign against the Soul, 1 Pet 2:11

Paul gives the church at Thessalonica a synopsis of rectitude in:

1 Thessalonians 4:1 - Finally then, fellow believers, we make a special request of you and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you have received from us instruction about how you ought to walk [**behavior in compliance with wheel-tracks of righteousness**] and to please God (just as you must behave), that you excel still more.

v. 2 - For you know what commandments we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus [**these believers had learned the doctrine but were weak in its application**].

v. 3 - For this [**the commandments**] is the will of God [**divine guidance**], your sanctification [**experiential sanctification in the areas of sex (vv. 3-5), social life (vv. 6-10), and establishment (vv. 11-12)**]: that you abstain [**the present middle infinitive of ἀπέχω, *apechō***] from sexual immorality [**ablative of separation from πορνεία, *porneia*: all sexual sins**].

NOTE: The word “abstain” is the present middle infinitive of *apechō* and is one of several New Testament uses that mandate abstinence from sexual sins. An analysis of the word is provided by:

Spicq, Ceslas. *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament*. Translated by James D. Ernest. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 1:162, 165-67:

ἀπέχω, *apechō*, to hold; remain distant; abstain. This verb is a compound of *echō*, “to have,” which expresses a relationship of possession: “to hold, keep.”

The verbal prefix *ap-* retains its full force when *apechō* means “be distant.” From this spatial meaning comes the definition “remain apart, stay distant.”

In the language of New Testament ethics, *apechō* (in the middle voice), as in classical Greek, always has the nuance of prohibition: “to abstain.” At the Jerusalem Council, James proposes, “Let us write to the Gentiles to abstain [*apechō*] from the pollution of idols and fornication” (Acts 15:20 cp. v. 29). Paul gives this definition: “This is the will of God, namely, your sanctification, abstaining [*apechō*] from sexual immorality” (1 Thessalonians 4:3). Peter writes, “I exhort you to abstain [*apechō*] from fleshly desires that make war on the soul” (1 Peter 2:11).

In 1 Thessalonians 4:4, the present middle infinitive of *apechō* calls special attention to the subject which is the plural masculine pronoun, **σὺ, su**, translated “you.” These are followed by the ablative of separation of the proposition **ἀπό, apo** and its object, the accusative of separation of the noun **πορνεία, porneia**, a term for acts of sexual immorality.

This is very close to a mandate since abstinence from sexual immorality is a principle in the plan of God for the male believer. The relationship of such misbehavior is related to the lust patterns of the sinful nature according to:

1 Peter 2:11 - Fellow believers, I exhort you as temporary residents [**their citizenship is in heaven**] to abstain [**ἀπέχω, *apechō***] from fleshly lusts [**σαρκικός ἐπιθυμία, *sarkikos epithumia*: lust patterns of the sinful nature**] which war [**στρατεύω, *strateuō*: wage an ongoing campaign**] against the soul.

Peter promotes abstinence as the soul's only successful defense against the ongoing campaign waged by the body's Fifth Column of sexual lust patterns. The verse affirms that passions and desires will work in concert with the sinful nature to promote sexual sins but that the practice of abstinence is the only means of subduing these temptations.

The word "war" is the present active indicative of the verb:

στρατεύω, *strateuō* - "to wage war; to campaign" The latter translation is supported by:

Friedrich, Gerhard (ed.). *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. Translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1971), 7:701-702, 712:

στρατεύομαι [*strateuomai*]. From **στρατεύω [*strateuō*]** comes the noun **στρατεία [*strateia*]**. It denotes the essential activity of him who is in the **στρατός [*stratos*]**, "campaign." (pp. 701-702)

In figurative usage the word is used for the endangering of men by the inner foe, by **ἐπιθυμία [*epithumia*]**: the lust pattern]. First Peter 2:11 shows that we have here a mortal threat, a campaign of extirpation [Implies extinction of a race, family, species, or sometimes an idea or doctrine by destruction or removal of its means of propagation (MWCD-11)], directed against the **ψυχή [*psuchē*]**: soul] itself. (p. 712)

This campaign by the lust patterns is waged by the flesh in an attempt to regain control of the command post of the soul. In so doing, the "ideas and doctrines" that provide the soul knowledge and the "family Member" that provides it the power, namely the Holy Spirit, are rendered ineffectual for the period of time the sinful nature controls the soul.

The translation of *strateuo* as a "campaign" by the sinful nature's lust patterns upon the soul is amplified by the fact it is a customary present.

The customary present is used to denote that which habitually occurs, or may be reasonably expected to occur. The active voice means that the sinful nature is what wages war against the souls of the men in question. The indicative mood tells us this is a fact.

Christian men must understand that their bodies wage an ongoing campaign to entice them into sexual sin and the only true defense against this assault is abstinence.

1 Thessalonians 4: 3 - For this [abstinence] is the will of God [divine guidance], your sanctification [experiential sanctification in the areas of sex (vv. 3-5), social life (vv. 6-10), and establishment (vv. 11-12)]: that you abstain [the present middle infinitive of **ἀπέχω, *apechō*] from sexual immorality [ablative of separation from **πορνεία, *porneia***: all sexual sins];**