

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 Life Between The Bookends [4 October]

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[0:00] Lord Jesus, we want to hear from you and your word. As the scripture tells us today, we want to hear the ideas of God, not the ideas of man.

Lord, we pray that the scripture, I want you to write it in our hearts. Give us the spirit, God, to understand your will, to know your will and your calling for our lives. Help us, we pray, in your wonderful name. Amen.

Let's listen to God's word. Thanks, Celeste. Good morning. Today's scripture reading is taken from the 1st Thessalonians, chapter 4, verses 1 to 12. Please follow along your Bible.

If you don't have a Bible, I'd encourage you to pick up a church Bible at the front of the stage or at the back near the door. Our passage is on page 928 in the church Bible.

Hear, then, God's word to us today. Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that as you receive from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.

[1:09] 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 sexual immorality, that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God, that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.

For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore, whoever disregards this disregards not man, but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

Now, concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another, for that indeed is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia.

But we urge you, brothers, to do this more and more, and to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.

Let us believe and respond to God's true and living word. Okay, great. Thank you, Celeste. Do keep that passage open, because we're going to be looking at it a little bit as we go through today.

[2:40] Life is full of many, many decisions and choices. I'm sure you're aware of that. Some important decisions, some unimportant decisions ones. Things like what clothes to wear, or where to go on holiday, or how to spend your public holiday.

Things like which schools to apply to for your children, or whether to switch jobs. Move apartments, or stay where you are. Whether to get a dog or not.

Life is full of thousands of these decisions that we need to make. Some important, some not so important. But of course, the most important decisions are the moral decisions that we need to make.

How we treat other people. How we treat the poor and the marginalized in our city, in society. How we relate to our elderly parents, or our siblings. How we spend our money.

Whether we put that personal expense, the company credit card. How we use our positions of power and authority. Life is full of many, many decisions. Some important, some not.

[3:43] Life is also too busy and too complicated to have to stop and think about every single decision we make. And the implications of it.

Which is why what we need is a framework, or a paradigm, or a worldview that will help us in the decision making process.

Not only to make these decisions, but more importantly, to frame the whole decision making process. For example, maybe you're someone who, you've already thought about this and you've decided, I don't want to get an unnecessary credit card debt.

Well, that makes decision making process around how you spend money very simple, doesn't it? Do you have the money in your account already or not? Which of course is exactly what the banks do not want us to think about.

But we all need a paradigm, a worldview, a framework to think about life and think about the decisions that we make. Like, El Mola once said this, he said, You get to shape your worldview, and then your worldview gets to shape you.

[4 : 47] And so the question I want to think about for a few moments is, What is your worldview, your framework, your paradigm for life? What beliefs, what convictions, what assumptions, what fundamental beliefs have you settled on that are shaping your decisions, your actions, the person that you're becoming in this world?

Now, of course, one of the challenges is, is that, as El Mola said, this is a little bit simplistic, because we don't quite get to shape our worldview as much as we think we do. It's not quite as simple as you just go on holiday and decide what kind of person you're going to become. Actually, our worldview is being shaped all the time. It's being shaped by school, being shaped by families, being shaped by culture, being shaped by technology, being shaped by the people around us.

And so without deliberate care or intentionality, your worldview gets shaped for you, and then that worldview is going to shape the kind of person that you become. For example, the AI revolution is shaping an entire generation's worldview into believing that the most productive people who can do in the shortest amount of time is the biggest winner.

Well, I'm not sure if I fully agree with that conviction. So, friends, here's my question. What is your worldview? Who or what is shaping your moral framework, your paradigm, how you think about life, the decisions you make?

[6 : 13] Who is shaping the kind of person that you become? Now, the Bible also has a worldview, and the Bible wants to shape our worldview. And one of the goals of the Christian life is for our worldview to be shaped more and more by the paradigm of Scripture than that of culture.

And in 1 Thessalonians, we see an aspect of this paradigm, this worldview, very clearly. Neil spoke about it a few weeks ago. And it's this, that in 1 Thessalonians, almost every chapter, in fact, every chapter, references in some ways the second coming of Christ.

The fact that Christ is going to come again. Look at it with me. Chapter 1, verse 10, Paul writes this. He says, We know how you turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from heaven, whom He raised from the dead, Jesus, who delivers us for the wrath to come. At the end of chapter 2, he says, For what is our joy and hope and crown and boasting before the Lord Jesus at His coming? Is it not you? You are our glory and our joy. Or at the end of chapter 3, he says, May God establish your hearts blameless and holiness before our God and Father at the coming of the Lord Jesus with all His saints.

And chapter 4 and 5, he's going to really dive in and focus on this, which we'll look at in the next two weeks after the retreat. The point is this. 1 Thessalonians has this worldview that Christians are those who live their lives between two comings of Jesus, between His first coming in humility and His second coming in power and glory.

[7 : 52] Christians are those who live their lives between when Christ comes to us in the gospel, the word of truth that you believed and received and encountered Jesus, and His second coming again.

And between those two bookends, we get to live our lives now. And so Christians who are embracing this worldview, let that paradigm, that framework shape the kind of lives that we live now.

And that's what we're going to see in our passage today. So in our passage, there's a structure. This is how it works. There's an overarching worldview, which is that we live between these two comings of Jesus.

Then there's a principle in verse 1 and 2. And then there's two practical applications, 3 to 8 and 9 to 12. Okay? So that's where we're going today. Overarching worldview. Christians live their lives between the two comings of Jesus.

Within that, there's a principle and then two practical applications. Okay? Are you following with me? Okay, great. Let's dive in. So Christians live between Christ's coming.

[8:50] Here's our guiding principle. Look at verse 1 and 2 with me. Paul writes this. The Bible's guiding principle for Christian ethics and morality is not pragmatic that, you know, he who wins with the most toys at the end of the day wins.

The Bible's guiding principle for Christian ethics and moral decision making is this. I'm not sure what you're going to say. I'm not sure what your childhood was like or what kind of home you grew up in. For some of us, it's not true. For some of us, our childhood was full of happy memories, joy and laughter and a loving home. For others of us, it's not true. For others of us, our home was maybe a hard place.

A difficult place to grow up. A place where we maybe constantly lived under the frown or the disappointment or maybe even the anger of our parents. But whatever your upbringing, however you experience it, whether you experience it yourself or whether you long for it and struggle to receive it, we've all seen the joy on the face of children who know and experience the pleasure of their parents.

You see little children that draw a picture or make something and they run up to their parents and they say, Look what I did, mom and dad. And the mom says, It looks beautiful, my daughter.

[10:38] Which way does it go, right? And what is it? I love it. What is it? And, you know, it's a monster eating a lily or something. I don't know. But it's beautiful. And the joy on the child's face, knowing the pleasure of their parents.

Well, think about a child that gets an award at school, right? And the joy and the pride that beams from their face as they know their parents are in the audience, watching them receive this award. It's a wonderful thing to please one who you know is already inclined to be pleased with you. When Jesus Christ was on the earth, remember at his baptism?

God the Father speaks these words over him. He says, This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased. And Jesus, in response, his entire life, he says, I always do what pleases my Father. My will is to do the will of my Father. Jesus, in response to God the Father's perfect love and pleasure in him, always lived to please the Father. And the Bible tells us that for those of us that are Christians, if you are in Christ, if you've turned to Christ in faith and repentance, God the Father welcomes, loves, bestows grace and favor upon us, sinful and imperfect as we are, simply because we are in Christ the Son.

[12:02] God loves us not because of what he sees in us or what's found in our hearts, but because of what's found in Jesus' heart, what's found in his heart. And out of the overflow of his heart, he loves and welcomes us.

And if you are in Christ, if you have put your faith in Christ and come to him in faith and repentance, the words that God the Father speaks to the Son, you, my son, my daughter, with you, I'm well pleased, you now can receive as your own.

God is pleased with us. Not because we're perfect or wonderful, but because Jesus is perfect and wonderful, and we are in Christ. Okay? Does that make sense? Are you following me? Okay? Okay?

Okay. Well, I'll try again. Okay? Let's go back to the top. Okay. God the Father is pleased with Christ the Son.

And for those of us that are in Christ the Son, we can receive those words as ourselves, as our own. When God the Father looks at me, he says, my son, with you I'm well pleased, my beloved son.

[13:02] Not because I'm amazing. I'm a wreck. Just ask Claire. Right? I'm a mess. I'm a deeply, deeply, profoundly, deeply sinner. But because I'm in Christ, those words, I can receive those words as my own.

Now, the New Testament says that because Christians are in Christ, because God is pleased with me, and if you're in Christ, pleased with you, we now get to live our lives like Jesus, seeking to do what pleases the Father.

So, look at how Paul writes this. Let's read this again. Look at verse 1 and 2. It says, disposed and inclined to be pleased with us.

Okay? So, Ligon Duncan says it like this. The command to please God and walk in His ways is not just a set of random instructions. It really is an encouragement to please the one who is already

disposed to be pleased with us.

And that's what Paul says here. That's why he goes on and says, and you are already doing this. Now, keep on doing this more and more. This is the Christian ethical moral framework. This is the principle, the paradigm for how we live our lives.

[14 : 37] Now, in a few minutes time, we're going to get to what does this mean practically. But I want to just pause and think about two implications of this. I want you to think about two things about this moral ethic.

Firstly, think about how radical it is. It's radical because it speaks to the very heart of our desires, our ambitions, our motivations. Here is a call to love and seek God with all of our hearts, with all of our intentions, irrespective of the outcome, irrespective of the response.

In some ways, it's so much easier just to give a person a bunch of rules and regulations. If you want to be a moral Christian, he has five things to do. Go to church, read your Bible, be nice to people, don't swear, don't smoke, and go on a holy pilgrimage.

Okay, done. But actually, that's not what the Bible says. The Bible doesn't just give us a set of rules. It gives us this framework. And it's a radical framework that says with all of your life, with every aspect of your life, with all that you have and all that you are, seek to please the one who is already disposed to be pleased with you.

The Christian ethic is way more radical, all-encompassing than that. It's a call to live our entire life seeking to please God and delight in our Father in heaven. Whether anyone notices or not.

[15 : 51] Whether you are recognized or whether you ostracize. Whether you applauded or whether you ridiculed. The radical call that strikes at the heart of every goal, motivation, and intention. So it's a radical call.

But second, notice how flexible it is. That is, it rescues us from the rigidity and the stiffness of religious rule-keeping.

Think about most religions of the world. The more radical or devout you are, the more kind of stiff and rigid and maybe self-righteous, maybe legalistic you become. Think of the Pharisees in Jesus' day.

Think of the religions in our day, right? In other religions, to be radical means you've got to cut yourself off from anybody that's not as radical as you. You hide yourself in a cloister, in a monastery that just becomes rigid and legalistic and as rigid and as radical as you are.

But Christianity says, the more radical you are, the more devoted you are, the more devoted you become, the more free you are to love God and love others.

[16 : 54] Because living between the bookends of Christ's first coming and Christ's second coming does not consist of a bunch of do this, do this, don't do this, and do this. It's a call to love God with all that you are.

And that frees us to love God and love others. So this radical call to live, to please the one who pleases you is both radical and yet flexible because it speaks to our hearts, not just our behavior. Christianity is radically different. A few years ago, I heard a story of a man who once worked in a Christian business or vocation or maybe in a church. I'm not sure.

Maybe he was a pastor. And he wanted to leave working at church and go and work in business.

And he really wrestled with this call. He wondered, is that the right decision?

Am I disobeying God? Am I running away from my calling? Am I just after money? Am I too weak to handle Christian ministry? And he really wrestled with these decisions.

[17 : 53] What will people think of me? Am I abandoning my calling? Am I selling out? Et cetera, et cetera. So one day, he goes to speak to a man called Dallas Willard. And Dallas Willard asks him some questions. And then he says to him, if your heart is to please God and to live for his will, then do whatever you please.

Do whatever you want. Friends, a Christian is someone who seeks to please the one who, because of Jesus, is pleased with you. To seek to honor him with all of our lives and then to live how we want.

Does that make sense? Okay, so overarching principle and paradigm. Christians live between the two bookends of Christ's first coming, his second coming. And within these two bookends, we live to please the one who is already disposed to be pleased with you.

Friends, let me ask you, is that true of you? Do you have this instinct? Do you love to please God and seek his pleasure? Is pleasing the Lord Jesus a delight to you?

Do you? This is one way that we know that we truly know God and love him. Pleasing the one who is pleased with you. Now, look what happens next in our passage in 1 Thessalonians.

[19:05] Paul takes this principle and he applies it to two very practical areas of life. And what happened here is that, you'll remember, Paul goes to Thessalonica.

He plants his church there. After three weeks, he needs to leave very quickly, very suddenly, because his life is in danger. And so in the middle of the night, he leaves and he's worried about the church in Thessalonica.

And so he sends Timothy back to them to see how they're doing. And Timothy comes back to Paul and says, the Thessalonians are doing well. They're standing strong. They love you. They love Jesus. They're doing well. But they've got some questions.

They've got some questions about how this Christian life plays out. How's it work in terms of all these areas of life? Paul, the Thessalonians need you to write a letter to instruct them how to think about the Christian life in a practical level.

And so Paul here in the second half of the letter gets very practical. And here he's going to talk about how this principle of seeking to please the one who is already pleased with you plays out in two areas of life.

[20:05] One, sexuality, desires, and holiness, okay, on the one hand. And secondly, work, money, and brotherly love. What does it look like to live out our Christian faith and our sexuality, our desires, and work and money, okay?

And that's where Paul's going to go. And so let's look at these two together. And we'll start with the second one because it's quick and easy. And then come back to the first one. Look at verse 9 to 12 with me. Paul writes this.

It says, Now, what on earth is Paul talking about here?

What's happening in the church in Thessalonica is that there are some people, for whatever reason, who are becoming lazy. And they're not working very hard. They are being idle.

They are just hanging around in the marketplace. They're getting involved in everyone else's business. And they're living off the kindness and the generosity of other Christians in the community.

[21:28] And it may be because they expected Jesus to come back any day now. They say, hey, why should we work hard? Jesus is going to come back next week or next month. You know, just take it easy. Or it may be that just they're using and abusing the kindness of the others in the community.

But for whatever reason, here are some people who are not working hard. They're lazy. They're lounging around. They're getting involved in other people's business. They're gossiping. And Paul writes to them and says, tell them to stop it.

Now, we know this because in 2 Thessalonians, Paul writes this a little bit stronger. They obviously didn't get the message in 1 Thessalonians. Look at what he writes here. I think the slide is next slide. He says, Okay.

So obviously, they didn't get the message first time around. So Paul writes the second message and he ramps it up a little bit. Now, what's Paul's point here? Friends, what does it look like to live our lives between Christ's two comings?

What does it look like to live to please the one who's always pleased with us in our workplace, in the marketplace, in our jobs, in our companies? Well, it means not being lazy at work.

[22:49] It means not feeling entitled to privileges and benefits. It means not sponging off other people's generosity and kindness. It means not getting involved in everybody else's business, in the office gossip, in neglecting your own responsibilities.

Positively, it means do your work as if you're working for the Lord Jesus, which means taking responsibility, working hard as an act of love and service to your family, your community, and your office.

It means being a contributor to the office rather than a consumer. It means someone who brings life and joy and grace and hope to your workplace rather than someone who sucks it out of the workplace.

It means being somebody that others enjoy having around rather than a grump that everybody rolls their eyes at because you've walked into the office again. Why? Because this is what love does.

Look what Paul says here. He says, concerning brotherly love, he wants us to be people of love. And this is what it looks like to live with Christ at the center of our lives in our workplace.

[23 : 53] Pleasing God, who is predisposed to be pleased with us by living for the pleasure of Christ in our workplaces. Does that make sense? Okay. Well, let's look at the second one here.

Look at verse 3 to 8 with me. And this is the more difficult one. What does it look like to live between Christ's first coming and second coming, to live to please the one who's always pleased with us in our lives of sex, intimacy, and holiness?

Well, in the ancient world, at the time that Paul was writing this, sexual relationships had very little to do with love or relationship. Sex was an expression of power, of privilege, of status.

Sex was something that the rich and the powerful could demand from their subjects at any time, irrespective of whether those subjects were their wives, women in their lives, slaves, or their employees.

Historian Tom Holland, not the actor, the academic, he wrote a book called Dominion, which is a fantastic book. And in it he writes that, he says, In the ancient Greek and Roman empires, people's bodies were simply regarded as raw material for the sexual gratification of the rich and the powerful.

[25 : 10] What we would consider to be sexual abuse today, by today's standards, was an unquestioned right of the rich and the powerful in the ancient world. So, here's a quote by a man called Demosthenes, from around that time, a few centuries beforehand.

But this is what he writes. He says, Mistresses, we keep for our pleasure. Concubines, for our day-to-day physical well-being. And wives, well, they're there to bear us legitimate children.

This was the worldview, the natural cultural worldview, at the time of the Bible to which Paul writes.

The notion that a woman, a subject, a slave, had a right to choose what happened to their body, simply did not exist.

Now, look at how Paul writes into that context about God's worldview for stewarding our sexuality.

Let's read verse 3 to 8 together. He says, This, however, is the will of God. Your sanctification, or the word that means your holiness, that you abstain from sexual immorality, that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God, that no one transgress and wrong his brother or sister in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.

[26 : 34] For God has not called us to impurity, but to holiness. Therefore, whoever disregards this, disregards not man, but God who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

Friends, the New Testament's worldview and ethic around sexuality, sex, intimacy, sexual relationships couldn't be more polar opposite from the surrounding culture into which the New Testament is written.

Because what does Paul say the Christian worldview and the Christian paradigm of stewarding our sexuality is? Well, notice how he puts it. Don't you see what he says in verse 4.

He says, Steward your sexuality in holiness and honor. In holiness and honor. That's the overarching principle. That's how Christians think about this massive area of our lives in light of who God is.

How do we please God with the God who's pleased with us? We steward our sexuality in holiness and honor. And Paul actually uses this word three times. Look what he says. Verse 3.

[27 : 37] He says, This is the will of God, your sanctification or your holiness. Verse 4. Let each one of you conduct yourselves in holiness and honor. Or verse 7.

God has not called us to impurity but to holiness. It's actually interesting. Verse 8. He says here, For God has given you the Holy Spirit.

The Spirit of God who is the Holy One. Now, what does this mean in our lives? Well, there's a couple of things. On the one hand, Paul affirms what Jesus taught and what God said all the way back in the Garden of Eden, the Genesis when he created, that sexuality and marriage always go hand in hand.

And that they should never be separated. Either marriage without sex, that's not a good thing. Or sex without marriage. That these two things always go together. Now, you might say, Well, where does this passage say that?

And it's a good question because it doesn't seem like Paul actually says that. But look at verse 3 and 4 with me. He says here, This is the will of God, your sanctification, that you abstain from

sexual immorality, that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor. [28 : 47] If in your Bible you see, there's a little footnote at the bottom. And what it says at the bottom is this. Or it could be written, that each one of you know how to take a wife or a spouse for himself.

The Greek is actually not clear. It could be understood either way. That either you control your body or you take a spouse for yourself. But either way, Paul's point is clear.

That the radically different ethic to his day. In the first century, the idea of controlling your own desires or keeping yourself for marriage was the most outrageous thing you could do. Everybody would have thought that you are being punitive, you're being unhealthy, this is damaging to your well-being, that you're a weak man, that can't, you know, what's wrong with you?

Nobody did that. Except the Christians. The Christians did. And why? Because they'd encountered the person of Jesus. Because they'd met Jesus Christ and Christ had given them a different sex ethic altogether.

And the reason why they did that is because in meeting Jesus, he had redefined what sex and intimacy were all about. See, right at the very beginning of creation, God's vision for sex and intimacy is that rather than it being a human right, which men just demand when they want, which is what the Romans thought, and rather than it being a tool for manipulation and coercion, which is what so many other people thought, and rather than it being merely a physical appetite that needs to be satisfied by two consenting adults, as our culture thinks, in God's view, sex is a profoundly powerful, profoundly sacred and holy, profoundly spiritual encounter that does two things.

[30 : 29] It both expresses and celebrates the marriage vows and commitments that people make, and it fortifies and strengthens the bond and the relationship that those two people have made.

Okay, do you see that? The sex does these two things. It both celebrates and expresses the marriage vows and the commitment which two people make, which is to live all of life vulnerably and transparently and openly before each other.

And it says, if I'm going to live openly before you in every other area of my life, I also get to do so physically. And the physical openness and transparency is an expression of the openness I live in every area of my life, financially, emotionally, everything that I am.

At our wedding day, at our vows, I said to Claire, with all that I am and all that I have, I give myself to you. And the physical expression of sex is just an expression, a celebration of that all of life transparency and openness.

But on the other hand, it fortifies and it strengthens and it ties this bond together in a wonderful, wonderful way. Which is why God says that it's always to be celebrated in the context of marriage.

[31 : 40] Okay? Are you tracking with me? Now, no doubt, some of us here think that is the most backward, outdated, prudish thing that you've ever heard, right?

And you may be thinking, what century is this guy living in? I mean, this is the 21st century. Things have moved on. But I want to ask you, have they really moved on?

Is our world all that different from back in the first century? Friends, is our modern sexual ethic expressed along Lockhart Road and Wan Chai or Temple Street or the bars of Wan Chai or the porn channels on internet or the sex thing that's happening on social media?

Is our sex ethic of today, have we moved on that much from the Romans and the Greeks and the Spartans? And furthermore, what are the outcomes or the results of our modern sexual liberties? Of the progressive sophistication? What's the fruit of the sexual revolution that liberated people from these old repressive views? Friends, is it not greater divorce rates?

[32 : 45] More children growing up from broken homes? More teenage pregnancies? More single moms carrying the burden of raising children alone and supported because men have just abandoned them for someone else?

More shame and guilt? More teenage suicide? More infants killed in the womb? See, friends, the life-giving wisdom, the life-giving grace of Jesus, the life-giving instructions and the beauty of Jesus and the way of the gospel, as outdated and as traditional and as regressive as it may seem to modern sensibilities, His holiness and honor is life-giving.

It's not repressive. It's life-giving. To honor Christ, our Savior and our King and our Lord as much with our sexuality and our desires in the intimate and private areas of our lives as we do on Sunday morning with our words and our worship and our public lives.

This is what Christ calls us to, to all of life, to live to please the one who is disposed to be pleased with us in public and in private in the inner places of my heart and the words of my mouth.

Now, we must be careful here because it's tempting to think that the Bible's solution to the problem of our sexual desires is just get married and then all your desires will be fulfilled, right?

[34:05] Just find a spice and what could possibly go wrong? But of course, that doesn't make sense, right? If we turn marriage into a legalized form of lust and perversion, we end up just thinking like our culture and bringing all our problems into marriage, which is going to be doubly painful.

And so what Scripture says here is not just get married and all your struggles will go away. No, friends, Jesus' instructions, Jesus' wisdom, Jesus' word to all of us, whether you are married or you're single, whether you've been married for six months or 60 years, whether you're divorced or widowed, whether you're in your 20s, your 50s, or your 80s, whether you grapple with same-sex desire or heterosexual desire, Jesus' word to every single one of us in the room because we are all sexual beings is not just keep a lid on it until you get married and then enjoy yourself, but how does Paul put it here in verse 4?

To steward your sexuality in holiness and honor. In holiness and honor. And this is how we live to please the one who's inclined to be pleased with us.

This is how we steward this massive area of our lives between Christ's two comings, treating sex and intimacy as the profoundly sacred, spiritual, unifying gift it was designed to be.

So, what does that mean? What does that look like? How do we live this out? Well, he has a couple of thoughts. Friends, it means honoring God's word and his instructions regarding sexuality.

[35:35] Do you see what Paul wrote here in verse 8? He says, therefore, whoever disregards this, disregards not man, but God. It's treating God's word as his good grace to us.

God's word for us to flourish. It means, friends, honoring our spouse and their bodies, their desires, their fears, their shame, their anxieties, their personhood, never pressurizing, manipulating, or coercing even our spouses.

Friends, it means honoring our single brothers and sisters in church, not viewing them as simply potential dating or marriage partners, but as human beings, loved by Christ, people we get to love and serve and care for.

It means treating our single brothers and sisters with dignity and respect, not just playing with their emotions or their feelings and then moving on suddenly. Friends, it means honoring the self-worth and the dignity of all people, not using sex and intimacy as a means to selfish pleasure-seeking, but rather other-centered love.

It means putting away vulgar talk, whether in the office or online or WhatsApp groups or other online forums. It means putting away pornography, admitting our struggle, opening up to a friend, asking them to pray for us, fighting against sin.

[36:55] Friends, it means seeing the way that we steward our sexuality as part of our worship, seeking to honor God and glorify Jesus, our King, even in this area of life. And how can we do this?

How do we get to do this with such a deep and profound area of our life? Why is it that we, like the first century Christians, can cut against the grain and live so counterculturally?

Well, the answer lies, I don't know if you noticed, in verse 5. Did you see it when you read? Look what he says here in verse 4 and 5. He says, Let each of you know how to control his own body or take his own spouse, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles do who do not know God.

Not like those who do not know God. What's amazing about this little church is that it was made up almost entirely of Gentiles. Exactly the people that Paul's writing to.

And Paul writes and says, this is who you once were, but this is no longer who you now are. You've been given a new identity. You've been given a new heart. You've become altogether different.

[38:02] And now these are people who are defined as not prudes or self-righteous moral people. They're defined as those who know God. What do they know about God?

They know Him personally. They know Him intimately. They know the Lord Jesus Christ. Friends, Jesus Christ is the one who is very opposite to every man in his day.

Jesus Christ is the one that had all the power and all the privilege who claimed to be God Himself. And how did He use that power? How did He use that privilege? Unlike all the other leaders of His day, Jesus did not use His power and privilege to manipulate, take advantage of the people that are His subjects, the women in His life or those who are around Him.

But He laid down His life. You know, the Roman emperors, over the summertime, they would go to their summer houses and exploit the women of the area there, living in sexual fantasies and doing whatever they wanted.

Jesus Christ, the King of the whole universe, came, left heaven and came to us. And what did He do? He didn't exploit a single person. Didn't use His power, His prestige, His position to satisfy Himself.

[39 : 10] But He laid down His life. He gave up His life. He laid it down for us. Gave up His rights. Gave up His desires. So that people that are far from God, people like me, people like you, people that were once outcasts and outsiders, can now be brought into His kingdom, can now become insiders, loved, received, blessed.

Jesus Christ went to the cross and did what no one else in His day would do. He died for us. So that now we can know that God is pleased with us. So that we can live between the two comings of Christ and live to please the one who is pleased with us.

Friends, Jesus Christ came for you. He came for me. He came to give us His Holy Spirit to dwell within us. So now we can live between these two comings, full of His Spirit, able to please the one who is pleased with us.

So, what is Paul's word to us today? We have this overarching worldview. That we live between the two comings of Jesus. And how do we live? We live to please the one who is pleased with us. Doing so in work, looking to love and serve those around us. Doing so in our desires and our sexuality, seeking to please the one who is pleased with us.

[40 : 32] Let's close in prayer. Lord Jesus, we come before you now and we ask you, God, to help us in this regard.

God, our world is, in some ways, we've moved on so much in the last 2,000 years and other ways, we haven't. And God, we notice that the same temptations that the Christians had in the first century, the same temptations we have in our world today.

Lord, help us, we pray. Give us your spirit. You tell us, Jesus, that this is your will, this is your calling for us. And you also promise to give us your spirit. So Lord, I pray, help us. Help us, a watermark God, to be those who live to please the one who is inclined to be pleased with us.

Lord Jesus, we need you. We need your grace. Come and have your way in our lives, we pray. In your wonderful and gracious name, Amen.