

# Expectations of Sexual Holiness

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, today's sermon is about sex. Now, it's often a difficult, controversial topic to preach on.

As you can see, I was so stressed out about it this week that all my hair fell out. That's right, a little off the top, right? Here's our plan for this morning.

What we're going to do is we're going to continue our study of the Apostle Paul's letter to the first century church in Thessalonica. So we're coming to this text. This isn't an arbitrary choice. This is something that we've been led to as we proceed through the book of 1 Thessalonians.

So you and I, we've been considering these great expectations that Christians have been given. We've been considering the hope of resurrection life when Jesus Christ returns. What we're going to find today, starting today, is that great expectations have been placed on us as well.

Expectations of hardworking love. Expectations of sober-minded holiness in the here and now.

Now, these relational expectations, these expectations that God has of our relationship with him, of our relationships with one another, these relational expectations are what you and I call righteousness.

[ 1 : 17 ] Righteousness. Righteousness is just a word that is used to signify the relationships, the expectations we have for our personal relationships. Now, these expectations that God has for us, they're not placed on you and me as a way that we can somehow, if we meet those expectations, we're going to definitely win the approval of God or the approval of other human beings.

That's just simply not possible. It's not going to happen. These expectations are placed on those who have already been approved by God. We've already, we who believe in Jesus Christ, have already been counted righteous because we believe that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, he is the one who has met all of God's righteous expectations through his life, through his death, through his resurrection.

Jesus was righteous in our place. So, we who are Christians, we aren't trying to earn God's approval by meeting these expectations, by obeying God's righteous law.

What's going on is that this law has been given to you, it's been given to me in order to show us in practical ways the new way of life in God's kingdom, in God's royal family, in the family that God has welcomed us into as our father.

God's way of life is the good life. And we have great expectations that we will enjoy this good life to the full when we are raised from the dead, when Jesus Christ returns.

[ 2 : 50 ] Those great expectations, that resurrection hope, that is the unifying theme in this letter in 1 Thessalonians. Now, those great expectations, they deeply influence, they drive the way that we live here and now.

This was true for the Thessalonian believers, many of whom came out of a pagan background, a polytheistic background, a background that deeply contradicted the Christian sexual ethic.

Now, one modern commentator on this letter named Gene Green, he writes this, Far from prohibiting sexual immorality, the cults of Dionysus, Aphrodite, Osiris, and Isis, the Kabiris, and Priapus promoted sexual license.

The Gentile members of the Thessalonian church would have found it difficult to understand how their conversion to the living God necessitated abandoning those pleasures that their previous religious alliances had approved or ignored.

In other words, the background they had come from, the gods that they had worshipped, had said that these sexual pleasures you're pursuing, go ahead, do whatever you want. And they're finding it hard to understand.

[ 4 : 09 ] Why should that change now that I follow Jesus Christ? Gene Green continues, moreover, the social norms of the day permitted those practices that the Christian ethic prohibited.

Now, this attitude, the attitude of Thessalonica, of Macedonia, of the Roman Empire around them, this attitude was very, very different from the Christian understanding of what human sexuality is meant for.

The Christian sexual ethic is different because it is grounded in our understanding of the purpose for which God created the world. So if you and I, if what we were to do was to open the Bible, study the first two chapters of the Bible, we would read, first of all, in Genesis chapter 1, God created man in his own image.

In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.

And have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth. So in other words, God created human beings. God set apart human beings from the animals to demonstrate his holiness, his loving, life-giving character.

[ 5 : 34 ] We've been given authority over his creation to rule over it with his holy wisdom, with his compassion, with his care. And God created human beings as male and female.

He did that so that we could be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth with holy, loving, life-giving representatives of our God. Human sexuality makes this possible.

Which means that human sexuality is good. It's part of the divine order. In fact, it's not only good, it is critical to God's intentions for our world.

Now, as you and I, if we were to continue our study, we would read in Genesis chapter 2 the boundaries that ensure that human sexuality remains a holy, life-giving good.

In Genesis chapter 2 we'd read, A man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

[ 6 : 34 ] So here we see that human sexuality is restricted to a God-given, lifelong, one-man, one-woman relationship. Human sexuality is restricted to a God-given, lifelong, one-man, one-woman relationship.

Human sexuality is restricted to a God-given, lifelong, one-man, one-woman relationship. Now, that word restricted or restrictions, that seems like such a limiting, negative word. But this is a restriction in the same way that the rails on a train track are a restriction to the train.

The rails guide the train. They ensure that the powerful potential, what that train was created to do, that is directed towards a good end.

Without those rails, the train runs off the tracks. Without those rails, the train carries everybody on board towards inevitable disaster and destruction.

But this restriction, the marriage bond, it ensures that sex can intensify the loving, life-giving intimacy between two human beings. And if we were to continue reading Scripture and continue into the New Testament, we'd find that this intimacy, furthermore, acts as an image, a picture of the relationship that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has with his people, the church.

[ 7 : 55 ] So we see that sex and sexuality, they are a God-given gift, a good thing. They are meant for the glory of God. They are meant for the good of his image-bearing people.

Now, I'm not going to ask for a show of hands. It's a very dangerous thing in a sermon on sex. I'm not going to ask a show of hands, but how many of you in this room have benefited greatly from sex?

Now, before you get too worried about that question, let me give you the answer. One reason I don't have to ask for a show of hands is because the answer is everyone. At the bare minimum, if nothing else, you are here, you exist, because your parents had sex.

I know that's exactly what you want in your mind this morning. Right? Well, sorry to remind you of that fact, but it's true. It's true. Whether you like it or not, you're here because of that.

So sexuality, it's vital to your existence. You have benefited greatly from it. It's vital to God's plan. It is vital to human flourishing. What if I were to ask you the second question?

[ 9 : 02 ] How many of you in this room have been harmed by sex? How many of you in this room have been harmed by sex? Once again, another reason I won't ask for a show of hands is because every one of us would have to raise them.

It's because we are affected not only by the consequences of our own sexual behavior, but we are affected by the consequences of other people's sexual behavior as well.

You know, I personally, I come from an extended family that's been deeply harmed by sexual misbehavior, by adultery, by divorce.

Human sexuality is good. It is very good. And it is a deeply and easily corrupted good.

It is an easily corrupted good. It's like this healthy and delicious and amazing fruit that can so easily turn into a rotting poison in our families, our church, our community.

[10:14] So how do you and I, how do we resist the corruption of human sexuality? How do we ensure that it remains a holy, life-giving good?

How do we ensure that it remains an expression of love for God, an expression of love for our neighbor? Well, this morning, what we're going to do is we're going to learn from 1 Thessalonians 4, verses 1 through 8.

We're going to learn that our resistance requires our resurrection hope. This resurrection hope that strengthens our resistance, it is unique to Christians because we look forward to the return of Jesus, our Lord.

What we're going to see is that our great expectations intensify our sexual holiness for the sake of God's pleasure, God's honor, and God's call.

So let's first read the whole passage.

[11:20] Let's first read 1 Thessalonians 4, verses 1 through 8. Now, if you're using one of the blue Bibles that our usher has handed out to you, that will be on page 987. 1 Thessalonians 4, verses 1 through 8.

Finally then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you 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 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.

[12:34] This is the word of the Lord. We're learning here that our great expectations intensify our sexual holiness for the sake of God's pleasure, God's honor, and God's call.

So let's tackle those one at a time. First, verses one through three, we read here that our great expectations intensify our sexual holiness for the sake of God's pleasure.

Now notice Paul's emphasis on the authority of God, on the authority of his son, Jesus Christ.

Notice Paul's emphasis on what pleases God, beginning in verse one.

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.

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.

[13:43] So four times, he emphasizes the authority and the pleasure of God and of his son, Jesus Christ.

We learned last week from chapter three, verses 12 through 13, the verses immediately before this. We learned what God's desire, we learned what his passion, his pleasure for you and me is, that we may increase and abound in love for one another and for all.

And in so doing, we may appear blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints. And so Paul is now explaining what it looks like to increase and abound in love.

And he's beginning, first of all, with expectations of sexual holiness. Now Paul grounds his instructions in the character, in the authority of Jesus Christ.

Verse one, we ask and urge you, in the Lord Jesus. Verse two, what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. So Paul is referring back to Jesus' teachings on sexual holiness.

[14:53] Paul is saying that in order to please God, we must increase and abound in love for one another and for all. And in order to do that, that means that we have to follow the example of Jesus Christ, our Lord.

So what this means is that the best way to love your brothers and sisters in God's family, the best way to love your biological family, your friends, your neighbors, your coworkers, the best way to

love is to embrace the sexual ethic taught by Jesus Christ and repeated by his apostle Paul. That is the best way to love. The thinkers, the trendsetters in our culture, they think they have found better ways to love.

They think that they have found a better sexual ethic. But you know what? You cannot outlove Jesus. You cannot outcompassion Jesus.

It is the absolute summit of arrogance to think that we can love better than Jesus by promoting the sexual ethic popular in our culture.

[16:12] If you don't like the Christian sexual ethic, you can take it up with Jesus. And in fact, you will one day. But at that time, you will not be the one in the judge's seat.

In verse 3, Paul says that the will of God, what God wants, what God desires for you and for me, what pleases God, is our sanctification.

And that's just a fancy way of saying our holiness. Being like God in his loving, life-giving, set-apart character. God wants us to be made more holy, to be made blameless and spotless in preparation for our appearing before our God and Father.

Paul wants to prepare the Thessalonians. God wants to prepare us for our future life, our resurrection life, when Jesus Christ returns. And so he urges us in verse 3, abstain from sexual immorality.

Now, that word that Paul uses, the word translated sexual immorality, Paul is using it the same way that Jesus used it, the same way his Jewish contemporaries used it.

[17:25] If you want to read the way that Jesus used it yourself, you can read these words. If you want to write down some references, Matthew chapter 5, verse 32. Matthew chapter 15, verse 19.

Matthew chapter 19, verse 9. Mark chapter 7, verse 21. John chapter 8, verse 41. In other words, Jesus and his apostle Paul, here is what they mean by this.

Abstain from any kind of sexual relationship outside of that one man, one woman, lifelong relationship called marriage. Keep your distance from anything else because anything else is a counterfeit love.

Don't even toy with it. Keep your distance because when your sexuality is kept holy, when it is expressed as God intended, that is what pleases God.

That is what pleases the God who gives us a future life, eternal life, the good life in his kingdom.

Our great expectations intensify our sexual holiness for the sake of God's pleasure.

[18:39] second, our great expectations intensify our sexual holiness for the sake of God's honor. Now, Paul gives some further details in verses 4 through 6.

He writes, 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. Now, in order to understand this passage, these three verses in the best way, I've found, just as I'm studying it this week, the best way is if we start with the middle verse, verse 5, then we work backwards step by step through verse 4.

And then once we've done that, then we can go to verse 6. So that's what we're going to do. We're going to start in verse 5, step backwards through verse 4, and then go to verse 6. So verse 5, here we have Paul, and he is contrasting the sexual holiness that is expected of the Thessalonian Christians.

He is contrasting it with the sexual promiscuity of the Macedonian culture, the Gentile culture around them. Now, most of these Christians, that was the culture that they have been born and raised in and lived almost their entire lives in.

[20:07] They have gained habits and ways of thinking and ways of life from this culture. And as we learned earlier, their old religions, their old community identities, would not have rejected sexual license, but would have embraced it.

As long as you were a male, by the way. You could embrace what Paul calls the passion of lust. You could embrace it as much as you wanted, do whatever you wanted, with one exception, you couldn't sleep with a married woman.

And that's because, unlike the men, married women were expected to stay sexually faithful to their husbands. Their husbands could do whatever they wanted, but the married woman was not allowed to do whatever she wanted. She had to remain faithful.

Paul is not impressed with this double standard. Paul says in verse 5 that this sexual license characterizes people who do not know God.

They have no part in God's kingdom. They have no great expectations of Christ's return. They have no love for the God who extends to them his offer of resurrection life.

[ 21 : 15 ] Instead, what we read in verse 4 is that Paul holds Christians to the standard of what he calls holiness and honor.

In other words, Paul expects Christians to behave honorably in God's eyes according to God's holy standards, not according to the libertine standards of Macedonian culture.

Paul expects that God's family is supposed to live up to the code of honor that the Lord Jesus gave to you and gave to me. We're to treat one another with honor and we are to honor the God who calls us by his name.

So how do we live according to God's family honor? Well, in verse 4, Paul explains that a Thessalonian man would do it by rejecting his former pagan habits and instead he would begin to control his own body.

Now, that phrase, control his own body, now that's a disputed interpretation and the reason it's disputed is because in the original language the literal expression is possess his own vessel which, if you're sitting here like, well that doesn't help me at all, yeah, I know, exactly.

[ 22 : 33 ] Maybe your copy of the Bible has a footnote explaining this. You can, really, you can go, this is not sort of a new thing where, you know, people, you know, only very recently have people been confused about this.

You can go back to the early church fathers to find that some of them agreed with this interpretation and then others thought this idiom, it meant something like acquire for himself a wife in holiness and honor.

Now, there's several reasons for that alternative view. One of them is the fact that the word for vessel or jar, it was sometimes used by the Jewish rabbis to refer to a woman or a wife.

If this is correct, that makes a huge difference because it requires a very different approach to all the verses that follow. But, I think the English Standard Version and just about every other English translation gets this one right.

The reason is that the word for vessel, it's also used very commonly as a metaphor for the human body and sometimes used that way in the context of sexual behavior.

[ 23 : 35 ] A very striking parallel. You'll find it in 1 Samuel 21, verse 5. The Greek translation uses the same word. And here's what David tells the priest Ahimelech in 1 Samuel 21, verse 5.

Truly women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition. The vessels of the young men are holy even when it is an ordinary journey. How much more today will their vessels be holy?

That word vessel, it's used several times in the New Testament as well to refer to the human body, to your physical body. 1 Peter 3, verse 7, the apostle Peter uses it in this way.

He says, likewise husbands, live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the woman as the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered.

Now, at first that sounds like the other interpretation, this idea that a vessel is a man's wife. It sounds like this is using that word in that way, but notice this.

[ 24 : 39 ] He refers to the wife as the weaker vessel, and that implies that they are both vessels.

The only difference between these two vessels is that the wife's body is physically weaker than her husband's, which is true in, I don't know, 95% of marriages, except those guys who are married to like a UFC fighter or something like that, right?

So maybe this verse doesn't apply to that. Peter's warning men. He's warning men against using their physical strength to abuse, to threaten, to intimidate their wives.

If you want to look up two more examples later, you can write these down. 2 Corinthians 4, verse 7, 2 Timothy 2, verses 20 and 21. In all of these cases, the word vessel refers to the physical body of a man, sometimes a woman.

And so, we have to make a big deal about it because this does make a big difference in the way that we approach the rest of these verses. As a result of this, I think it's very, very, very likely, it is the most likely by far, that in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4, verse 4, Paul is telling the Thessalonians, and especially the men who are coming from this promiscuous pagan background where the men

are allowed to do whatever they want.

He's telling them, control your body. Control your own body. Take ownership of it. This is the honorable behavior expected in God's family.

[ 26 : 14 ] And this undercuts any excuse that you and I might have that my sexual desires are too strong to be controlled. My sexual misbehavior, it can't be helped.

That I must give in to sexual temptation. No, no, and no. What we're going to learn from Paul in a few minutes is that God gives you, God gives me the resources and the relationships to master our sexual desires rather than to be mastered by them, to own them rather than to be owned by them. For the moment, Paul says at the beginning of verse 4, let each one of you know how to control his own body. What this means is that some of us sitting here in this room are mastered by sexual temptation towards pornography, self-stimulation, sexual fantasy, immoral behavior.

And if you think you're the only one in this room struggling with that, don't think you're so special. You're not alone. But some of us are mastered by that simply because you have never bothered to learn how to control these things.

there are real-life practical steps that you can take to break free from this toxic, dishonorable slavery to the passion of lust.

[ 27 : 52 ] And we'll talk more about that in a few minutes. In the meantime, it's important to consider verse 6. Paul continues to tell us about the honorable expectations of God's family.

He says in verse 6, that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter. So with this statement, Paul is exposing one of the two massive differences between the sexual ethic of our modern secular culture and the sexual ethic of God's family.

So on the one hand, in our secular culture, the governing sexual ethic is what we might call the ethic of consent. Maybe that's the word you've seen thrown around a lot in news stories, in opinion pieces, and so forth, this word consent.

The ethic of consent says that any sexual behavior goes, nothing is forbidden, as long as all sexual participants consent to the actions.

Now, you and I, we could spend time critiquing the failure of consent, that it's not protecting, you just need to look at the news, it's not protecting the weak from the dangers of the sexual desires of those who are stronger.

[ 29 : 06 ] It is not protecting them. apart from that, the sexual ethic of God's family is not consent. The sexual ethic of God's family is love.

Our culture thinks that consent is sufficient. The reason it thinks consent is sufficient because it views you and me as though we are individuals who are siloed off from one another.

You know, my own decisions are my own decisions, they're my own business, what goes on in my bedroom has nothing to do with you. What I view on my computer screen has no effect on you.

Our God is not nearly so naive. Our God is not nearly so foolish. He knows better. He knows that he made you and me to be relational beings.

He knows that there is nothing that reinforces, strengthens, and creates human relationships like sex. Our sexuality contains all the potential, all the danger of a nuclear power plant.

[ 30 : 07 ] Right? A nuclear power plant can bring an enormous amount of good to all the people who are connected to the grid. This nuclear power plant brings great good to our brothers and sisters in God's family.

But if it is handled poorly, those same fuel rods melt down into a disastrous Chernobyl. They scorch our family and our community with the evils of adultery and sexual abuse and sexual scandal.

But there is something that is even more common. There is also the subtle radiation, contamination of Three Mile Island or Fukushima.

The hidden sins of sexual activity outside of marriage. The hidden radiation of sexual misbehavior or coldness inside of marriage.

the hidden contamination of addiction to pornography and the wandering passion of lust. And the thing is, all that background contamination and radiation usually goes unnoticed by the population.

[ 31 : 16 ] there is just an uptick in the cancer rates or the local ecosystem starts to fall apart in some subtle ways.

You may be totally unaware of these sins in my life, but just because you're unaware of them doesn't mean they don't harm you. They do. because they shape my character and they shape my attitude towards you and towards our Father.

I think if we were to see what our church would be like, how effective we would be, how loving and how different we would be if we were not beset by sexual sin, we would weep at what we are missing out on.

We would weep at all of the good that has been lost. This is why sexual holiness is so important. It is because we are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves, because we are all woven together into one.

The second of the great sins that are recorded in the Bible, the second great sin occurred in Genesis chapter 4 in which Cain murders his brother Abel. And then he challenges God by saying this to him, am I my brother's keeper?

[ 32 : 41 ] Am I my brother's keeper? And he is implying there that he has no obligation to care for his brother. He is siloed off from him. He has got his own business, I have got my own business.

God had warned Cain before this about the danger of entertaining this disregard for his brother. He had told Cain, if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door.

His desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it. You must rule over it.

And when Cain did not rule over it, but let it rule over him, he murdered Abel, his brother, and God responded to Cain with vengeance, saying to him, what have you done?

The voice of your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground, and now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand.

[ 33 : 42 ] When you work the ground, it shall no longer yield to you its strength. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth. And so Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 verse 6, the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you.

This is why we as Christians do not see our sexual behavior as merely a personal, a private matter. It always, always, always affects the rest of God's family.

And the Lord Jesus, when Paul says the Lord is an avenger, he is referring to Jesus. The Lord Jesus has appointed himself and has been appointed as his father as avenger when he comes with all his saints.

So do not let sin master you. Do not let sin own you, like Cain did. You must master it. You must own it instead.

So that when Jesus returns, you and I will have great expectations of holiness and honor. Rather than vengeance and anger from the God who zealously protects his family that he loves, zealously protects them from harm.

[ 35 : 05 ] You and I must keep our future destiny in mind because our great expectations intensify our sexual holiness for the sake of God's honor.

Third and finally, our great expectations intensify our sexual holiness for the sake of God's call. Our great expectations intensify our sexual holiness for the sake of God's call.

So Paul concludes in verses 7 and 8. 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.

Paul has already told us in chapter 2 verse 12 this, God calls you into his own kingdom and glory. God calls you into his own kingdom and glory.

So what that means is that we who are Christians, we are called to great expectations of a future kingdom and glory. We are called to great expectations of a world of compassion, of love, of righteousness, of justice.

[ 36 : 22 ] And this kingdom, this glory, it cannot be restrained, it cannot be confined to the future. These benefits, these blessings of God's kingdom, they just bleed back into the present.

They offer us this glimpse, just a glimmer of that resurrection life that is still to come. So you and I, who are Christians, we are called as a church, a Squamish Baptist church, to live as an outpost of this future kingdom.

We're almost like, we're like time travelers from a future age. We're pointing the way towards our great expectation of Jesus Christ's return. We're calling out to the people around us, come with us, join us, be present in God's kingdom.

So this is our new nature. This is our new identity. This is our new purpose. future orientation. You know, it's a lot, I think I like to think of it, it's a lot like the way that you and I speak to our children, right?

Sometimes, have you ever, as a parent, have you ever addressed your son as a young man, or your daughter as a young woman, when they were just kids, right?

[ 37 : 38 ] When they're this tall, they're not a man or a woman. Who are we kidding ourselves, right? We call them that not because of what they are, but because of what they are becoming. Because we are calling them and expecting them to behave as a man and as a woman as they prepare for their future adulthood, right?

We call them to become what a human being was meant to be. God does the same thing for you and God does the same thing for me.

God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. God has called us to flourish. God has called us to become fully human.

God has called us to become what we were meant to be. It is God who gives us this call. That's why in verse 8, Paul says, whoever disregards this, disregards not man, but God.

I've noticed over the past few years how more and more Christians seem ashamed of the sexual ethic that the church has promoted for the last 2,000 years.

[ 38 : 57 ] I've noticed Christians who like the message of the gospel. They really like talking about the mercy and the grace of God, the salvation and righteousness offered in Jesus Christ.

But then when it comes to the sexual ethics laid out in scripture, they want to minimize it or renovate it. What Paul is saying here is that those sexual ethics were delivered by God our Father.

They were delivered by our Lord Jesus Christ. They were delivered by the Holy Spirit of God. A Christian cannot affirm the gospel call while renovating the sexual ethics that come with it.

The commentator Gene Green again writes this. Such people would have distinguished between the gospel proclamation which they received as divine and the moral teaching of sexuality which they rejected as coming simply from a man.

Those who had engaged in this selective acceptance and rejection of certain points of Christian teaching are reminded they had not rejected a man but God and the consequence of their action was fearful.

[ 40 : 11 ] So these are not merely old fashioned human teachings. Things that have now been abandoned in the wake of human progress and in liberty and equality because now it's 2016. They're not old fashioned because they've never been in fashion.

They have never been in fashion. In some cultures the Christian sexual ethic has been viewed as too libertine. Some cultures even today in Middle Eastern cultures in particular.

You can go back to Victorian England. The Christian sexual ethic was way too libertine for the Victorians. In other cultures such as our own it's viewed as too repressive. Cultures are constantly, cultural ethics are constantly in flux, constantly changing, can never seem to settle on one idea. God has called his family though to an ethical standard above and beyond these stormy unstable waters of secular morality. And Paul concludes verse 8 by telling us that this God gives his Holy Spirit to you.

So in other words, here's the second great divide between the sexual ethics of our secular culture and the sexual ethics handed to us by Jesus Christ.

[ 41 : 29 ] the first great divide was that you are, yes, you are your brother's keeper and we are called to love our neighbor as ourself. The ethic is love. The second great divide is this, that you are to love the Lord your God with all your heart, your soul, your mind, and strength.

That you are not your own. You belong to God himself. Paul explains in 1 Corinthians chapter 6, do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God.

You are not your own, for you were bought with a price, so glorify God in your body. So the Christian sexual ethic is necessary not only to love our neighbor, but to love the Lord our God.

Sexual immorality isn't just like the great sin against Cain's brother, it is like the first great sin against Adam's God. The attempt to usurp his authority, by deciding good and evil for ourselves.

That's what the serpent promised in Genesis chapter 3. You will be like God knowing good and evil. You will be like God knowing good and evil.

[ 42 : 44 ] Sexual sin is a violation of the two greatest commandments. It's a violation of God's righteous expectations. Here we have good news.

God gives his Holy Spirit to you. To anyone who puts their faith in Jesus Christ, who trusts him, believes that his righteous work on the cross was enough to give them all the righteousness they need to be accepted by God the Father, and who turns from their old way of life, repents and believes in Jesus Christ.

To anyone who does this, God gives his Holy Spirit. You and I, we are embedded in a culture that embraces that old fashioned Thessalonian sexual ethic.

It embraces the ethic of consent, promotes it in our conversations, our schools, our newspapers, our television screens, but God has given us his Holy Spirit to promote his ethic, the sexual ethic of love.

Without the help of the Holy Spirit, I want to be absolutely clear, without the help of the Holy Spirit, your willpower will never be enough to master your sexual desires. You can sooner stop a cannonball with a sheet of paper.

[ 44 : 11 ] Your willpower will never be enough. You know this by experience. I know this by experience. So what has the Holy Spirit given us?

He's given us his word. He's given us the scriptures to remind you of your identity, to remind you of your future. The Holy Spirit has given you his church, his family of believers, so that you can gather around you a few people that you can trust, to instruct you, remind you, encourage you, hold you accountable to God's holy and honorable law.

The Holy Spirit dwells within you to enable you to identify and to escape sexual temptation when all else fails. Now how all of this is carried out in practice, the exact details of it, honestly are going to depend from person to person.

It's a conversation that's better had in person, kept personal. But what it means is that you can master your sexual desire. You can own it and you can use it for the glory of God, for the good of your family and you can harness it for these things and for your own joy.

Now if you'd like advice, if you'd like counsel on this matter, we as elders, we're here to help you. We're here to help you and we're here to help you not as individuals who have never gone through this and never experienced this.

[ 45 : 42 ] But because we have. We're here to help you ourselves or we can direct you to somebody who can. Somebody who will know how to help you.

But please, please, please, this is very, very, very important, do not fight this battle alone. The isolated soldier is the first one to be destroyed. Do not abandon the equipment, the resources, the armor of God.

The unarmored soldier is the first to be destroyed. Do not surrender in despair to an enemy who intends only to destroy you. God has given you and God has given me great expectations of resurrection life when Jesus Christ returns.

And our great expectations intensify our sexual holiness for the sake of God's pleasure, God's honor, and God's call. Let's pray together. Lord, be whole temperature and amen Cleav