

Whatever Happened to Holiness

1 Thessalonians

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If you would please turn to the book of 1 Thessalonians chapter four. In our study of this book we have come to the fourth chapter and tonight we are going to look at verses one through eight.

Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to live 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.¹

Let's pray together.

Lord, now we lift this opportunity before you thanking you, Lord, that we are together, thanking you that we have your Word, thanking you that we have been given your Son and that your Spirit lives in us to teach us and to guide us in the ways that please you. Lord, we ask, then, that you would take this time of preaching and make it effective and, Lord, you would grant me an ability to clearly present what you have given to us here and that, Lord, you would open our hearts and communicate to us in such a powerful and a clear fashion that we leave here tonight, Lord, encouraged, strengthened, our souls would be fed and where, Lord, we have been sinning you would break our hearts over it and give us a desire to turn from it and to walk in the truth.

¹ 1 Thessalonians 4:1-8.

We also recognize, Lord, that there may well be someone with us tonight who doesn't even know you and we ask for their salvation. We ask that you would open their eyes to their need for your Son, to their need for forgiveness that is found only in him.

Lord, we love you. We thank you for loving us. Lord, we thank you for your patience toward us and your faithfulness toward us. Every day, Lord, we taste of your goodness. Ever day we see your greatness demonstrated in the way that you deal with us. And we thank you for this in Jesus' name. Amen.

I want you to think for a moment about all of the voices that we hear in our world claiming to represent Christianity. I want you to think about all the voices that you will hear on the radio, sometimes Christian radio, sometimes even on just public radio that doesn't claim to be Christian, people who are representing Christianity. I want you to think about all the voices you hear on television. You know, when you think about these late night talk shows like *Larry King Live* or something like that and they will have a panel set up and you have some people on there who represent Christianity. I want you to think about all that has been written and shows up in the newspaper. It shows up in magazine articles. It shows up on the internet claiming to represent Christianity. I want you to think about the people you talk to at the office, the people you talk to at school, the person you might talk to out on the street if they are willing to talk to you about what it means to be a Christian, what it means to be a part of Christianity. Think about the kind of conversation you might have with them.

And I want you to think about how the gospel is commonly shared today in popular approaches to evangelism, how Christ is being presented, how salvation is being presented and then think about the Church and how we—and when I say we I am talking about Christendom in general—how we represent the Church. I mean, what is the Church? Why does it exist? How do we advertise ourselves? How is the Church being marketed today?

I want you to think about all those voices, all of that which collectively forms, you know, the message. This is Christianity. And when you think about all of those voices and then you look at the New Testament and you ask: What does the New Testament focus on as it addresses believers? You know? When the New Testament says to us, “This is Christianity. This is what it means to be a Christ follower. This is what it means to live the Christian life,” when you think about what we are hearing versus what we can read, is there anything in the voices out there today, is there anything that is glaringly absent?

Sure, there is more than one thing. But there is one particular thing that I want to talk about tonight from the text we have just read, something that I believe is glaringly absent, something that is noticeably missing. And I could put it to you this way. What ever happened to holiness? Whatever happened to holiness?

When we hear about Christianity we hear about love. When we hear about Christianity we hear about grace, forgiveness. Unfortunately, in a way that doesn't match up with the New Testament at all, we often hear about not judging and not being judged, right? What

does it mean to go... to belong to the Church? It means you are in a place where you can just be you and no one judges you and you don't judge anybody.

We hear about happiness a lot. Do you sense something missing in your life? Do you want to be happy? Do you want to be fulfilled? Do you want a real reason to live? And all of these themes, I mean, there is some truth in them. I mean, all of these things it is true to say that the truly joyful life and fulfilled life is found in Christ. It is true to say that the Church is not a place where we ought to practice hypocrisy. I mean this ought to be the place where we can be honest with our struggles., shouldn't it? Struggles with sin, struggles as we strive to walk with Christ. It ought to be a place where there is acceptance and we love each other through those issues as we teach truth and apply truth. That is true. And God does love and there is grace and there is forgiveness. All those themes have a truthfulness to them and they are found in Scripture, but what is glaringly absent from the conversation as I see it is where is the emphasis on personal holiness? That to follow Christ means you walk in purity. To follow Christ means you put away sin. To follow Christ means you don't just call him Lord. You do what he says. To follow Christ means that it won't just be in your beliefs that you are different from the world. You will be different in your behavior. I mean your life will look different when compared with those who do not know Christ.

Where is that emphasis? Where is that message?

Come to the church and you will be taught how to live a holy life.

I bring it up tonight because this is Paul's emphasis. This is the Holy Spirit's emphasis through the apostle Paul in verses one through eight.

He says in verse three, for example, "This is the will of God, you sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality."²

Verse seven. "For God has not called us for impurity, but in..."³ What? Holiness.

This is God's will for you, a sanctified life. This is God's will for you, a holy life. And from verses one through eight he is urging them, he is commanding them to live holy.

This is true in general and then in specific terms he talks to them about sexual purity. The Roman world was a world engulfed in sexual immorality. So is the world we are living in. And believers are being called upon in Thessalonica to live in the sexual realm in a way completely different than what they are surrounded by. And I want to say tonight from the Word of God that we are called to live by the same standard.

Three things we will see tonight. We will study these verses under three headings. First of all, the believers are exhorted here in general terms. There is a general exhortation. You find that in verse one. Second, the believers are then exhorted in specific terms. You

² 1 Thessalonians 4:3.

³ 1 Thessalonians 4:7.

see that in verses two through seven. And then, third, believers are exhorted in binding terms and you see that in verse eight.

So we are going to look at a general exhortation followed by specific exhortations and then we are going to see that this is nonnegotiable. This is binding.

Verse one.

“Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to live and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.”⁴

You notice he begins with, “Finally, then, brothers...”⁵ We need to hear chapter four as connected with chapters two and three. He has moved from three chapters of explaining his care for them, love for them, relationship to them to now in chapter four he is going to begin to apply all of this. You know, I pray for you continually and we hear of your faith and love and we are encouraged by that. So finally in view of our love for you, concern for you, relationship with you and what we hear about you, here is what the Lord has me to say to you. This is my exhortation to you.

And he puts it in very gentle terms. He says in verse one, “We ask and we urge you...”

But as you keep reading all the way down to verse eight you will see this also carries the authority of a commandment. Even though he is sort of putting it in gentle terms, the reason why he is putting it in gentle terms is because in general terms they are already living what he is calling for. This is not someone he is having to correct sternly. This is not a group of people who in general as a pattern as a congregation are heading in the wrong direction. They are on the right path. It is a joy when you don't have to sternly correct people because they are already doing, in general terms, what they should be doing.

So he comes to them in these gentle terms, but then he has some exhortations for them. Now we need to read verse one in the context of the whole eight verses and understand that as he is exhorting them in verse one, he is exhorting them to holiness. He is exhorting them to sanctification. He is exhorting them to everything else he is going to mention in specific terms. He is just beginning with general terms as he exhorts them.

So as you look at verse one that way, let me sort of put it in principle form, ok? First of all he is teaching them this. Holiness requires salvation because he addresses the brothers.

“Finally, then, [brethren], we ask you and urge you...”⁶

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 4:1.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

You see? You don't urge lost people to live holy lives because they can't. They are not capable of it. There is a difference between morality and true holiness. There is a difference between the kind of ethical behavior that any old person can live according to and it can be very high from an earthly point of view.

I am always amazed. I like watching professional golf. And I am amazed when these guys call penalties on themselves. You know, they accidentally... I watched a tournament the other day. Phil Mickelson was playing and he was hitting out of one sand trap. He hits this shot, flies over some grass, lands in another sand trap. He didn't know it was going to land in another sand trap so after he hits his shot he sort of goes to hit the sand again which would have been a penalty if it had landed in the second sand trap, which it did. He stops himself but he is not sure whether he hit the sand or not. And so they actually call an official out. They review video tape to see if he touched the sand the second time. And this is something he is calling on himself. Nobody noticed it. Nobody saw it. No one would have been aware of it. I mean, that is a pretty high standard of morality.

But that has nothing to do with holiness unless he is a believer and he is doing that for the Lord's sake.

You see, holiness is always focused, ultimately, on the glory of God. Holiness has to do with love for Christ. And the lost man has no capacity to do what he does of the glory of God, consciously, willingly. He has no capacity to do what he does out of love for the Lord Jesus Christ which is where all true holiness is focused.

So if you are going to talk about being separate, right, separated unto God, notice what you are separated from. In fact, look at what he says down in verse four.

He says:

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.⁷

You see? You are called upon to live in a way different from those who do not know God. Why? Because you do know God.

So holiness requires salvation. He is addressing the brothers.

Something else we see here is holiness is found in Christ. He is asking them and urging them in the Lord Jesus. I mean, even if you say you are a believer, if you have been saved, understand this. You are still not striving for holiness if you are not consciously aware of how it relates to your relationship with Jesus.

I will put it to you this way. It is easy even for saved people to sort of, you know, regress and devolve into what is just moralism. You know, telling the truth because you are

⁷ 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5.

supposed to tell the truth. Not stealing because you are not supposed to steal. Going to church because that is the thing you are supposed to do, reading your Bible because that is the thing you are supposed to do.

I want to ask you. Whatever you are doing in the moral realm, are you connecting it to your relationship with Jesus? He is urging them. He is asking them to do this in the Lord Jesus, I mean, in connection with their relationship to Christ. So true holiness belongs to believers and true holiness is in this relationship that we have to Jesus.

Something else you see in verse one in this general exhortation is that this kind of instruction is vital, basic, foundational Christian instruction because he says in verse one, that he is urging them to do what they had already received from him.

“Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to live and to please God...”⁸

When did they receive this from the apostle Paul? Well, when he was in Thessalonica.

Now remember something. We have already seen this in our study of this book. He was not there very long, remember? He got driven out of town. There was that riot. He had to leave and all the rest. So he wasn't there that long.

If you are not there very long, but you have already taught them these ethical standards, right, the Christian life is not just about what we believe, it is about how we behave. He has taught them about how they ought to live. He has taught them about what it means to please God. He is talking about their behavior. That tells us then that when we preach the gospel in all of its fullness we are not just going to get people doctrinal information. We are also going to deal with ethical information.

The Scriptures contain not only doctrine. They contain instruction for living. So if we are going to be faithful in teaching the Church, we are not just teaching about the trinity. We are not just teaching about salvation by grace through faith in Christ. We are also teaching people that sexual immorality is something you must abstain from. We are teaching people about what it means to be submitted to the people they work for. We are teaching people what it means, Romans 13, to submit to the governing authorities.

So true Christian instruction is not just about doctrinal matters. It is also about behavioral matters. I mean there is a way that one ought to live, right? Verse one. And there is a kind of behavior that pleases God. So holiness is a vital part of Christian instruction.

If the Church is not teaching people to live holy, then they are neglecting the Word of God. There is an element of the Word of God that they are not teaching.

Something else we see here about holiness is that it is a matter for growth and progress. He is not saying what he is saying in verse one because they haven't been living holy.

⁸ 1 Thessalonians 4:1.

Notice what he says there. He says, “Just as you are doing. I mean, you are already doing this from what I hear. I have heard about your faith. I have heard about your love. You are already walking in holiness.”

But notice what he says.

“I urge you. I ask you in the Lord Jesus that you do so more and more, that holiness would abound in our life, that you would increase in what it means to live a life separated unto the Lord.”

That means even if you are living a holy life right now there is still room for you to grow, room for you to grow in holiness and, listen, a responsibility to grow in holiness.

Is there anybody here tonight who doesn't need to grow in holiness and is there anyone here tonight who is a believer who isn't responsible to strive for a growth in holiness?

Now notice in verse two he moves from this general exhortation to some specific exhortations. He says in verse two:

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.⁹

Now several things I want you to notice. And all of it relates to this question. What is holiness? All right? I mean, we are exhorting people to live holy lives. Well, what does that mean? What is a holiness?

Well, we begin with what it is not. What it is not is whatever you want to make it. Holiness is not some vague concept. It is not something that you and I come up with. It is not something that is always changing based upon the individual or changing based upon the culture. Whatever it is, it represents something, verse two, that can be imparted through instruction, right?

He says in verse two, “What I am urging you about has to do with instructions we have already given you, teaching we already passed on to you through the Lord Jesus, teaching that was given in the authority of Christ, teaching that was given in the ability and the power of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

⁹ 1 Thessalonians 4:2-7.

There is already instructions that they have received. So there is a body of truth that represents what we are responsible to know and to live. It is not a matter of personal opinion.

How disappointing it is to speak with believers who are violating the Word of God and they want to act as if that what it means to obey God is something vague.

Well, I will pray about that. I will think about that. Let me look into my heart. You know, I need to examine my heart. I need to find out how I feel about this.

And I pray for you, beloved, and I pray for me that we would learn more and more that the way that is right to live and the way that pleases God is not something we are going to find in our heart. It is something we are going to find in God's Word.

How do I know how to live? It is not found in some emotional search within myself. It is found in Scripture. It is not vague.

You say, "Well, what is it then?"

Well, here is what it is, verse three.

"For this is the will of God..."¹⁰

I mean, isn't that what we are searching for when we talk about holiness? What is the will of God?

"For this is the will of God, your sanctification."¹¹

And the word there has to do with holiness. It means to be set apart, to be set apart, to be set apart from and to be set apart unto.

What are we set apart for? We are set apart, verse three, "the will of God."¹²

This is the will of God that you are set apart, set apart unto the Lord, that is what I want to strive for is what his will is. That is holiness to pursue the will of God. It is also to be set apart from. Verse four, we saw it a moment ago. We are not living like the Gentiles who don't know God.

So set apart from an ungodly world. Holiness means I am not going to live according to the standards set by unbelievers. I am going to live according to the standards set forth by God. That is holiness. So I am not going to live according to unbelievers in terms of the way they think and view things and evaluate things. I am going to live according to what God's will is.

¹⁰ 1 Thessalonians 4:3.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

And where do I find what God's will is? I find it in Scripture.

So it is not vague. It is specific. It can be taught. It can be given in the form of instruction. How do you do that? God has revealed his truth to us.

Holiness means I am not living like an unbeliever. I am living like someone who believes God's revelation.

So holiness is consecration to God, set apart for the will of God as it is revealed in the Word of God.

But notice something very important in verses three through five. Notice also that this consecration we are talking about is not just something that involves the soul. It is not just about your heart. And, folks, I am telling you. Listen. You know this. You see this yourselves. There are people in this world who claim to love Christ and follow Christ who say they love him in their heart when they are absolutely, clearly violating his Word in their body.

Consecration to God is not just a consecration of the soul. It is a consecration of the whole man. It is a consecration of your body.

He gets very specific, doesn't he, in verse three. "That you abstain from sexual immorality."¹³

πορνεία (por-ni'-ah) that is sexual immorality in all of its forms: fornication, adultery and everything else that would violate the Word of God in the sexual realm.

"That each one of you," verse four, "know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust."¹⁴

Consecration of the body, it means abstaining from sexual immorality. What does it mean to abstain from? It means you don't do it. It means you don't commit sexual immorality. That is what it means to live according to the will of God. It is God's will that you not commit sexual immorality. And his Word is the standard that lets you know what that is.

So when the world says, "Oh, it is just normal to have a sexual relationship before marriage."

I mean, folks, I don't have to tell you. You live in this world. You know what the world's standards are. The idea that a sexual relationship takes place before marriage has been canonized in our culture. In fact, it is even though this is one of the things you ought

¹³ 1 Thessalonians 4:3.

¹⁴ 1 Thessalonians 4:4-5.

to do before you get married to make sure you are compatible, to make sure you really care about each other.

Listen. The Word of God says that is sin. To live together prior to marriage...

Someone says, "Well, we won't just, you know, commit sexual immorality with someone we don't care about. We are going to be in a committed relationship. It is not marriage, but it is a committed, monogamous relationship. It is just me and this other person. We will live together first."

According to the Scriptures that is just fornication. Any sexual relationship outside of the marriage union prior to marriage is fornication. To be involved with someone sexually once you are married who is outside the marriage union, that is adultery.

And, listen. If we are going to take God's standard seriously, Jesus made very plain to us that not only are we going to be careful to watch over ourselves physically with what we do with our bodies, we are even going to watch over our minds.

Matthew chapter five verses 27 and 28 Jesus said that if you look upon a woman to lust after her, you have committed adultery with her already in your heart.

To abstain from sexual immorality means you watch over what goes into your eyes, what goes into your mind, what you look at, what you think about, what you imagine about. And this is so serious.

Look over to 1 Corinthians chapter six.

This is so serious that the Bible says that when someone habitually practices sexual immorality, they are giving evidence they are not a believer at all.

1 Corinthians chapter six verse nine says this.

Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.¹⁵

What is salvation? Well, one aspect of salvation is being saved out of those things, right? Notice the next verse.

"And such were some of you."¹⁶ Past tense. You were these people. "But you were washed, you were sanctified,"¹⁷ set apart unto God. "You were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God."¹⁸

¹⁵ 1 Corinthians 6:9-10.

¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 6:11.

This is how you once lived. But it is not how you live anymore, because you have been saved. You have been set free. You have been washed, sanctified, justified.

Does that mean that a believer can't struggle with sexual sin? Of course not. If you look down at the very same chapter, chapter six of 1 Corinthians and you look at verse 15.

He says:

Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, "The two will become one flesh." But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him. Flee from sexual immorality.¹⁹

Folks, listen. God doesn't warn people about things that they are not in danger of. So the very fact that he warns believers to flee from sexual immorality means that believers can fall prey to it.

"Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body."²⁰

What do you do with sexual immorality? You run from it. You don't say, "Now how close can I live to the edge of this sin without falling into it?"

No, you stay away from it because you understand the danger.

Verse 19.

Or 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.²¹

Look back if you would, please, at 1 Thessalonians chapter four. What is holiness? What it is not is something vague, something that you come up with, I come up with, standards are always changing. You know, well, as an individual here is what I think is right or wrong.

No, holiness is a fixed standard that has to do with not just morality, but faith and a relationship with Christ and love for the Lord and a desire to glorify God, to live a life

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ 1 Corinthians 6:15-18.

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 6:18.

²¹ 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

that pleases God. That is true holiness and it doesn't just involve your soul. It involves a consecration of the whole person.

He states it negatively in verse four. It also means this. It means you know how to control your body in holiness and honor not in the passion of lust.

You don't live according to the impulses and passions that are in your physical self. The body has been affected by sin so that now at times what the flesh wants is not what would please God. So living the Christian life is both negative and positive. It is saying no to those fleshly impulses that would dishonor the body and dishonor the Lord and saying yes to that which is right, what one ought to do and what pleases God.

This is holiness. And do you know what? Every single day we live, we ought to consciously give ourselves to that.

You know the verses well, but I will read them to you. Romans chapter 12 verses one and two.

What does it say? It says this.

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies [the whole man] as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”²²

How do you worship the Lord today? Do you say, “Here I am and I am yours, body and soul, the whole man consecrated to you, the whole man living as a sacrifice to God this day.

Verse two says, “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”²³

This day I live my life for God's will. This day I live my life, body and soul, for what is good and acceptable and perfect in the sight of God. That is holy living.

Look back at our text if you turned over there with me.

So it is consecration to God and it is consecration to God with the whole you, with the whole man.

There is another element of what holiness is. You see it in verse six. Holiness also means to live your life in love and in fear.

Verse six he says this.

²² Romans 12:1.

²³ Romans 12:2.

“That no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things.”²⁴

You want to talk about... listen. You want to talk about teaching that was common to the apostles that may in many cases be absent from our churches, do you see in verse six he says, “Here is what we told you before hand. Here is what we solemnly warned you about. God avenges wrong.”

Do we teach our people that truth? Are pastors teaching God’s people? Are they warning God’s people in solemn tones that God is someone who avenges wrong so that one reason I don’t want to commit sexual sin is because I don’t want to defraud a brother?

What does it mean to defraud someone? Or as he puts it in verse six, “That no one transgress and wrong his brother.”²⁵ I think one version has “defraud.” What does it mean? It means to live selfishly, to greedily take something for personal gain for your own pleasure at someone else’s expense. And when you live in sexual sin it is not just you who is being affected, someone else is also. You are living selfishly. You are living for you own pleasure and it does not matter to you that it is at someone else’s expense. You are damaging, hurting, wronging someone else. And not only are you wronging them in their soul and in their body in a dishonoring kind of lifestyle, but by extension you are also damaging someone else.

You have a young man, a young woman, both are believers. They violate God’s Word sexually. Not only have they done damage to one another in that way and wronged each other in that way, but when you move down the road and now there is marriage and they don’t marry each other, then also you have done damage in another way because they are going to marry someone else.

And instead of protecting their purity and protecting their conscience, you have chosen for your own selfish purposes that you don’t care. That is wrong, isn’t it? That is sin, isn’t it? So if you love someone you don’t wrong them that way.

Why do you want to live holy in the body? Why do you want to live holy in the realm of sexual purity? Because that is love. That is what it means to love someone.

I want to talk to any young person here tonight who has perhaps been flirting with these sins. I want you to hear me. Don’t you dare say you love someone that you are willing to sin with sexually before you are married. That isn’t love. Do you know what that is? That is lust. That is lustful passion. That may be what would please you. That may be the drive of your body, but it is not love.

And do you know who lives like that? Do you know who lives out of the passion of lust? Gentiles, pagans, that is people who don’t know God.

²⁴ 1 Thessalonians 4:6.

²⁵ Ibid.

People who know God have a relationship with Jesus Christ, are indwelt by the Spirit of God, have been called into a different kind of life. They take that different kind of life seriously because they know it pleases God and they strive with all of their heart to live it.

Pastor, what happens if I have already failed in this area?

You confess it as sin. You receive the forgiveness of God that is yours in Jesus Christ. He died for those sins. But then you strive with all your heart to live a pure life as you move forward. And if you really care about purity, you put yourself in a place where there is accountability and there is safety. What do you do with sexual immorality? You what? Flee from it. You run from it. You don't live on the edge of it.

And if you hard heartedly go on and wrong people anyway, what did he warn the believers about? He said, "God is an avenger."

God won't ignore it. If you think you can hard heartedly take advantage of people in this realm not caring about how you are affecting them, if your sin doesn't bother you, understand something. God is an avenger in such cases.

How does God avenge wrong? He is obviously addressing believers here? How does God avenge this kind of wrong with believers?

Well, sometimes it is a loss. It is all loss. Sometimes it is a loss in your testimony, your influence. Sometimes it is a loss in relationships. If you talk about adultery there have been people who have lost their marriage, destroyed their family unit, wounded their children.

Sometimes it is loss of health. Sometimes it is a loss in the realm of just spiritual blessing. What blessing there is when we walk in purity. What a sense of wellness there is when we have a clear conscience. What a horrible experience it must be to put your head on the pillow every night and know that you are living in sin. And in some cases, according to the book of 1 Corinthians, you go on in sin in a brazen fashion and you really are a believer, God even takes lives. People die from a human point of view prematurely because they would not put away their sin.

Is that serious stuff? Would you agree that is serious stuff which is why it says in verse six he told them beforehand. How did he tell them? He solemnly did what? He warned them. He warned them. You see, this is Christian teaching. It is not just love, grace, no one judges, no one...

No. Listen. God has called us to live holy lives.

So this is the last thing we see it in verse eight. The believer is exhorted in binding terms.

“Therefore,” he says, “whoever disregards this...”²⁶

Is there someone here tonight wanting to disregard it?

I don't know about this. Or you sit there and in your own mind and in your own heart you just know that the way that you have been living, no it is not right according to Scripture, but you don't plan to change. You don't plan to change.

He says in verse eight, “Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man...”²⁷

Paul says, “Do you think this is coming from me?”

No, he says, “[You disregard] God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.”²⁸

You are not only walking contrary to teaching you have heard from a man—in this case Paul—but you are walking contrary to the Holy Spirit's testimony in your own soul.

God's people know supernaturally, instinctively that their sin is sin. When you go on in sin as a believer, you violate not only your conscience. You violate the inward testimony of God's Spirit even as you violate the testimony of Scripture.

An exhortation to holiness is a call to walk in agreement with your calling. Live a life that is in keeping with your calling.

Verse seven says, “For God has not called us...”²⁹

Just stop there for a moment. Ok, what calling is he talking about? He is talking about the effectual call of God. He is talking about the day you heard the gospel and the gospel made sense. He is talking about the day you heard the gospel and your heart was broken and your eyes were open and you saw Jesus for who Jesus is and you turned from your sins to follow Jesus as your Lord and Savior. He is talking about the day you were saved.

Now why did God call you? Verse seven. He did not call you for impurity. He didn't bring you to himself to then turn you over to a life of impurity. He called you to himself to lead you into a life of holiness.

“For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness.”³⁰

He saved you to make you holy. So live a life that is in keeping with your salvation. Live a life that is in keeping with God's calling.

²⁶ 1 Thessalonians 4:8.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ 1 Thessalonians 4:7.

³⁰ Ibid.

An exhortation to holiness is a call in and through the Lord Jesus. Verse one, he was urging them in the Lord Jesus. Verse four he reminds them of the instruction he had given them through the Lord Jesus. I mean, this is what it means to walk with Jesus, to live holy is what it means to walk with Jesus.

Jesus said on one occasion, “Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not do the things I say?”

An exhortation to holiness is a call that agrees with the gift of God’s Spirit. You are disregarding not man, but God who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

If you reject what you have heard tonight, you are not rejecting me. You are not rejecting Paul. You are rejecting God. You are not turning a deaf ear just to me, not deaf ear to the apostle who wrote it. You are turning a deaf ear. You are disregarding God.

These were not new teachings. He had taught them this before. These were challenging teachings. He says, “Even though you are doing it, you need to do so more and more.” These were binding teachings not to be disregarded. But these were also testing teachings. Do you receive them? Tonight do you find in your soul a desire to live a holy life? And will you follow your Lord the one you call Lord? Will you follow him by putting away everything that threatens to destroy you?

If we don’t kill our sin, our sin will kill us. If we won’t slay our sin, our sin will slay us and in God’s Son God has given us everything we need to deal with the sin that we battle against. And we think about all those voices representing Christianity. Where do we hear holiness? Whatever happened to holiness?

Let’s pray.

Our Father in heaven, help us to hear what your Word has said to us tonight, to receive it. Implant it in our souls. God, grant to us an increasing desire and ability to walk in the things that we have seen. Lord, we all struggle with sin. For some it may be in the area of sexual immorality. For others it may be in the area of their attitudes. For others it may be in the area of their speech. Lord, we stumble in many ways as the book of James says. We need to be able to confess our faults one to another. We need to be able to pray for each other. We need to be able to encourage each other and so, Lord, I pray that as we think about what we have seen tonight the result would not be hypocrisy, where we begin to wear a mask and hide from each other where we are struggling. But, Lord, I also pray with all my heart at the same time that we would not treat sin lightly, not in our own case and not in the lives of people we love. But we would love you and love each other by encouraging one another to live holy lives.

And, Lord, may a holy church be a powerful testimony to the living Savior for the sake of your name. Keep us, Lord, from mere morality. Let us never disconnect our walk from our love for Jesus. We pray this in Jesus’ name. Amen.