



# VILLAGE BIBLE CHURCH

## SUGAR GROVE CAMPUS

## Pleasing God in a World Gone Wild

Ready: Strength for Today, Hope for Tomorrow | Part 6  
Tim Badal | February 14, 2016 | 1 Thessalonians 4:1–8



We've been in a series entitled "Ready," looking at Paul's letters to the church at Thessalonica. We've been seeking wisdom and understanding about what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. These are great letters because the church in Thessalonica was full of new followers of Jesus Christ who were seeking to understand and know what following Christ involves. I hope and pray that you are enjoying this series, because these people we're reading about were transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ. They weren't just transformed in name only, now labeling themselves as Christians, but in the first chapter we learned that these people turned away from their idols and former way of living to follow Jesus and obey Him with all their hearts.

While they were an obedient group of people who wanted to humble themselves under the teaching of God's Word and receive it from the Apostle Paul, we know that being a Christian isn't a one-time decision that then takes care of everything for the rest of your life. Paul says numerous times that the Christian life is a walk—a daily journey where we put one foot in front of the other spiritually and try to follow Christ to the best of our abilities, relying on the Spirit to strengthen us so that we can follow Him in a way that brings glory and honor to God. The Thessalonians were doing this in some real, tangible ways. But Paul is now going to use some of the last part of this first letter to talk about areas where maybe they were struggling; maybe as they were walking they found themselves falling down or being tripped up by the things of this world and the ways they used to live.

If we are honest with ourselves, many of us would talk about our walk with Jesus Christ as more of a stumble. We've spent more time on the ground than we've actually spent walking. Take heart that the Thessalonians were in the same boat that many of us are: a tough walk, seeking to honor God, yet finding ourselves under temptations, trials and tribulations. We often lose sight of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ whose longing is to serve Him and honor Him in all ways.

One of the key areas that Paul is going to address is sexual immorality. The Thessalonians had left lives that were full of perversions and struggles. They were trying to figure out and understand what being a Christian meant in the different facets of their lives. They understood what it meant to be followers of Jesus Christ when it came to receiving the gospel, and they understood they couldn't worship any other gods. They understood that they couldn't be idolatrous people and say that they followed Jesus Christ. They understood what it meant to love one another in a way that would bring glory and honor to God. But in these last couple of chapters, Paul tells the Thessalonians that their Christianity impacts all areas of their lives.

This week we're going to talk about sexual immorality. Next week we're going to talk about caring and ministering to one another. After that we'll talk about how being a follower of Jesus Christ affects things when we die—that when hope is lost we can look to the coming of the Lord. We'll address what it means to work. Paul is going to give us a practical understanding that our walk with Christ impacts every facet of who we are.

Here's the great thing: The Scriptures tell us that we can be ready to honor and glorify God in all that we do if we are willing to humble ourselves and put ourselves under the authority of God's Word. By the Spirit's help, we can attain the very things that the Thessalonians had: fellowship with their God and lives that were changing others around them.

1 Thessalonians 4:1–8 says:

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. <sup>2</sup>For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. <sup>3</sup>For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; <sup>4</sup>that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, <sup>5</sup>not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; <sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. <sup>8</sup>Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.

It's easy to look back with great nostalgia at things that you experienced as a child. On a recent vacation I saw a hamburger joint that I remembered frequenting as a child. It isn't your run-of-the-mill fast food restaurant but a place where you basically make your own burger. You get to put all the different toppings that you want on it. You get to have it "your way." There's no limit on what you can put on it. If you want a lot of lettuce you can put on all the lettuce you want. If you want a lot of cheese you can put on all the cheese you want. For a young boy, that was heaven. That was the way to live. When I saw it I told the boys, "We're going to go there. They have the best burgers you could ever imagine! They're so great. When you get to do all your own toppings, you're going to love it." We went in, but it was one of the worst experiences of my life. The food wasn't that good. One of the boys said, "Dad, why didn't you just tell us it was a burger place with a salad bar? You really enjoyed this?" My oldest son said, "You lived a boring life if this was fun."

We have a way of romanticizing the past and look back with great affection. It doesn't mean that those things didn't happen, but whatever it was that made me so excited about that place as a child really didn't stand the test of time. My view was warped to the reality of the situation. I share that with you as an illustration of how we often approach the sacred Scriptures.

As we approach the Bible we often have a romanticized view of what it's talking about. Many of us will even look at what is written in 1 Thessalonians with a romantic view, thinking things were different than what is actually articulated. We look with sterilized eyes at what we're reading. We consider what it was like to be one of the Thessalonians receiving this letter and think the issues that they were dealing with really weren't as bad as they seem. They were living good lives. They were wonderful people with no struggles or issues. Everything was just fine. We tend to approach a text like this as if Paul was saying, "Timothy has returned and he's seen what you guys are doing. He says you guys are doing a great job. You're following the Scriptures and doing what you're called to do. Now just a couple words of instruction."

In this letter he says, "Before I close out this letter here's one more instruction for you: abstain from sexual immorality." Paul didn't write this because he was just coming up with ideas of what to write about. "What should I tell them? Let's just come up with something out of thin air. Let's pick sexual immorality. I don't know if they're actually dealing with that." By the very fact that this is in the Scriptures, we can know that this was going on in the church. These issues and struggles were real, with all the drama that surrounds these things. This wonderful church was filled with individuals who were struggling with sexual immorality.

Some of us will read, "*Abstain from sexual immorality*," and think, "Well, that would have been easy in the times of the Thessalonians. They didn't have the bombardment of sexual images in their culture like we do. It would have been easy. These wonderful people with their bonnets on and bland clothing probably sat with their hands folded and said, 'Of course we'll abstain from sexual immorality, Paul! As if a Christian would act any other way.'"

I want you to know that if that is your understanding of it, then you will be quick to excuse your own fight with sexual immorality because you'll say, "They had it easy! But with things like the Internet, cable television, broadcast television, magazines and all of the stuff that bombards us, it's a lot harder for us than it was for the Thessalonian church. It's so much more difficult for us."

We have a letter before us that is going to teach us what it means to please God in a world gone wild. I'm not talking just about today but what was going on in the first century in northern Greece and throughout the Roman Empire. The issue of sexual immorality was sordid in the Roman Empire where its cities were pockets of wild corruption. From the upper class to the lowest slaves, debauchery ruled the day. It has been said that there was probably no period of time in all of human history when vice was more extravagant and uncontrolled than the time under the Caesars. That's the time that Paul was writing in. It was a cesspool of sin.

In his commentary on 1 Thessalonians, William Barclay said, "In Rome for the first 520 years of the republic there had been not a single divorce. But now under this new empire, it had been put that divorce was a matter of caprice." Seneca, a philosopher and statesman in the Roman Empire, said the following: "Women were married to be divorced, and divorced to be married." He goes on and says, "In Rome, the years were identified by the names of the consuls. But it was said that fashionable ladies identified

the years by the names of their husbands.” Juvenal quotes an instance of a woman who had eight husbands in five years. Morality was dead.

In Greece, immorality had always been quite blatant. Demosthenes wrote, “We keep prostitutes for pleasure. We keep mistresses for the day-to-day needs for the body. We keep wives for the begetting of children and for the faithful guardianship of our homes.” So long as a man supported his wife and family, there was no shame whatsoever in extramarital relationships.

It was to men and women who had come out of a society like that to which Paul wrote this paragraph. What may seem to many as commonplace in Christian living was strikingly new to the Thessalonians. One thing Christianity did was lay down a completely new moral code regarding relationships between men and women. It is the champion of purity and the guardian of the home. This cannot be affirmed too much in our own day, which again has seen a pronounced shift in standards of sexual behavior. Pastor John MacArthur has said:

“[Thessalonica] was rife with such sinful practices as fornication, adultery, homosexuality (including pedophilia), transvestitism (men dressing like women), and a wide variety of pornographic and erotic perversions, all done with a seared conscience and society’s acceptance, hence with little or no accompanying shame or guilt. Unlike people in Western nations today, the Thessalonians grew up with no Christian tradition to support laws and standards that forbid the grosser manifestations of immorality.”

What were the life and times of these people like when they received this letter and heard the words, “*Abstain from sexual immorality*”? It is not very popular to say this, but it was far more difficult to be sexually pure in the days of the Thessalonians than in the twenty-first century in the United States. It was going to be a tall task for them. We’re going to learn that they were able to do it—and we too can do it—by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit.

So as we approach this same passage that these Thessalonians were receiving in that culture, let us appreciate that it is the gospel alone that changes lives. I hope you don’t walk away from this saying, “I’m just going to try a little harder. I’m going to try with a little more might to not give in to these things.” “Try hard-fail” doesn’t work. What works is bowing the knee to Jesus Christ and giving yourself over fully to the work of the Holy Spirit. It is then and only then that the gospel will transform your life. We’ll also learn from this great example that it will change society as well.

There are four commands that Paul draws out in this text. Let’s consider each of them:

## **1. Admit our failures in this area.**

As we approach a text like this, it is quick and easy for us to deflect it toward someone else. I can hear your thinking right now.

“I’m sure glad that Pastor Tim is dealing with this text today because so-and-so really needs to hear it. How great to deal with this on Valentine’s Day.” [By the way, we planned this sermon series almost eight months ago. Who would have thought that on Valentine’s Day we would be dealing with this topic? Pretty amazing!] You might be thinking, “I’m sure glad my husband is listening to this.” “I’m sure glad Johnny is listening to this.” “I’m sure glad that person down the row is listening.” But in this passage Paul doesn’t address anyone by name. In fact, he shares this with the entire church.

The text says, “*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.*” He uses the word “brothers.” So is this a message only for men? If we were to take that Greek word for brothers, *adelphoi*, and say it only applies to men, then the whole letter is only written to men. This word “brothers” is used throughout the letter, not to speak specifically to men but to the entire group of brothers, or those in kinship in Christ Jesus. He was writing to the church—men and women, young and old, married, not married, divorced, single, new believers and older believers. He was speaking in one voice to everyone.

Why would Paul feel so confident that he could address such a taboo subject so generally within the church? What would possess him to think that if he shared it in a letter that they would know exactly what he was talking about? The answer is that Paul knew how God created us. God created every human being with the ability to experience all sorts of pleasure—eating, laughing with people, good entertainment, hobbies—all of which have been given by God for our enjoyment. But God also created us in His good plan and good will to experience not only generic pleasure but also the more specific pleasure of our sexuality. He did not give this gift only to men or only to women specifically—He gave it to all people. It wasn’t given just to a segment of people outside the general population. God’s gift of sexuality was given to every human being. This universal truth is seen in the fact that we mark when our children become adults predominantly by their sexual maturity. A boy or a girl becomes a man or woman when their body matures sexually.

But what does it mean that we are sexual beings? For some the answer is that God has given us certain organs designed for that particular purpose. To view our sexuality that way would be like looking at a massive iceberg and see only the tip of it sticking out of the water and say, "There's the entire iceberg." No, that's not all of it; it's only a small part of the whole. Our sexuality is deeper than we could ever comprehend or imagine. We cannot limit our sexuality to biology. It is intertwined with the very fabric of who we are.

For lack of a better way of explaining it, our sexuality is a God-created buzz which gives us the capacity and desire for sexual things. That buzz is not something that we should fight or suppress. We need to get that right in our heads. Sexuality is a gift from God to humanity. We shouldn't suppress or fight it. We should not seek, as people have throughout history, to castrate or mutilate in attempts to destroy sexuality. We shouldn't try to redefine it. God created man and woman, male and female, as a gift for mankind. While we shouldn't fight or suppress this capacity and desire, like every other emotion and every other activity, we as believers must learn to control these things in a manner that is supported by Scripture and pleases God.

While we've all been called to have this capacity, drive and desire, there are varying levels and diversity of struggle in this arena. Knowing the role that sexuality plays in our existence as human beings, the Bible affirms that sin affects every part of who we are. When we speak of total depravity—a doctrine that we affirm as a church—we're talking about how we as people have been affected by sin. Total depravity doesn't mean we're as bad as we could be. It means that sin is so pervasive that there is not a part of our existence that has not been impacted by the presence, power and penalty of sin. It runs in our veins. Every faculty, every decision, every synapse of the molecules in our nerve endings have been impacted and corrupted by sin. I'm not alone in this truth. You and the rest of humanity are in the same boat.

As a result of this, we must recognize that if sexuality is a key of how God made us, and sin has affected every part of our existence and being, then sin has had a massive effect on our sexuality. That's what we see in the world. The reason Paul says we shouldn't live like the world who does not know God in its passions is that apart from the work of Christ in our lives, that drive for sinful sexuality will become so pervasive in the life of a human being and culture that it will begin to define who we are. We see that in our culture today.

So what are we to do? We must admit that this is a struggle for us. I feel pretty confident that not one of us has not wrestled with allowing our sexuality to control us. At a minimum, we've all been tempted by our sexuality to sin against God. Whether we've used it to manipulate people, or for selfish desires to pursue pleasure, we have allowed this area of our lives to be impacted by sin, causing us to make decisions that are contrary to the will and plan of God.

I don't want to go any further in this message without saying the following: as the one doing the preaching, and as someone who loves Jesus with all my heart and has devoted myself to the advancement of the gospel, I've got to confess that this is an area I've always got to be on top of. I've got to be careful. You might say, "That's unbecoming of a preacher." Well, let me tell you why I share that. Number one, because it's true. I shouldn't lie. As a pastor I need to be careful when I say I don't struggle, because I can allow pride to set in and say, "I've got this one covered." When we say that, we should be reminded that, *"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall"* (Proverbs 16:18).

Here's the other problem: as a pastor I don't want to get up and preach a message acting as if I've got this all figured out. I don't want to pretend that I'm immune to these issues and struggles, then have one of you leave and think, "I must be the only one struggling in this fight." If the people around you aren't man or woman enough to tell you that they're struggling, you can rest assured that the guy who is preaching to you is in the fight with you and is just as broken and messed up as you are.

But here's the thing: just because we're broken and messed up doesn't mean we don't have the capacity, through reliance on the Spirit and the grace of God, to change the way we live. I always want to see victory in this battle. Maybe you're struggling and fighting, and I want you to know that you're not the only one. We're all dealing with this. This is part of who we are. As we wrestle with it we can have confidence in knowing that it's a battle we can win. It's a battle that Christ died on the cross for so we can be victorious. It's a battle that through the help of one another we can say "no" to these things and say "yes" to pleasing God.

So Paul was writing to a group of people who were struggling with sexual immorality. Our struggle with sexuality isn't monolithic. What I mean by that is it isn't one size fits all. Just as each of us looks different from one another, so our sexuality and the battle that we face has intrinsic differences from person to person. Why? Because we're made differently. While we all share much of the same structure and characteristics as human beings, we are different. Because sin is such a pervasive thing, it impacts people in different ways. Sin may come out as anger in one person's emotions. Another person may struggle with lying or cheating. But many struggle with sexual sin.

This may be one of the big reasons why: it's not just because of who we are but what we've experienced. Whether good, bad or ugly, sexual experiences have a massive impact on our lives. Our parents' sexuality and how they interacted with one another impacts us as well. Were there things in your childhood that radically transformed the way you understood things? Did someone violate you as you were growing up in way that radically changed the trajectory of your sexuality? We cannot overlook these things. One of the reasons Paul wrote to this group of people was that they had grown up with their sexuality being so deformed that they no longer knew what gospel-centered sexuality looked like. When they saw the real deal they thought, "That doesn't make any sense. It doesn't seem to feel good. It doesn't seem to feel right."

As a culture we must recognize that because of the pervasiveness of our sin, and the evil that men and women commit, people are walking around—probably many in this church—who are absolutely broken and turned upside down. They say, "I'm a believer now. I want to follow Jesus Christ. But this issue of sexuality has got me so turned upside down, I don't even know which way is up anymore." So when we come into contact with people who are struggling with sin, even sin that may disgust you, remember that you are looking at just another broken individual—an individual who needs Jesus as his or her Savior.

I always think it's somewhat hypocritical that the world comes down so hard on people who fall in this area. We've seen politicians and celebrities fall in this area. The world is quick to tell them, "Take, eat, enjoy!" If we were living in the world it would say, "Accept your failure." But the second you move past a particular norm, the world will shun and mock you. But God doesn't want you to stay there.

## **2. Accept God's plan for our lives.**

The Bible makes it clear that we must admit our failures, but just admitting them isn't going far enough. We can't just simply say, "I'm an addict. I was born this way and I'm going to stay this way." Christians will admit their failures and then accept God's plan for their lives. What are sinners to do after they give their lives to Jesus? Paul tells us in verses two and three. *"For you know what instructions we gave you through the Lord Jesus. For this is the will of God, your sanctification."* We are called to live in light of God's will for our lives. For many Christians, God's will seems a bit cryptic or mysterious. It's not all together clear. We might seek God's will for big decisions, but it seems as though He is silent on these matters. I want you to understand that He isn't silent at all. He's crystal clear with us.

God's purpose for our lives is sanctification. That's a big theological word, so let me help you to understand what it means. Sanctification means being set apart from something to something. The best way I can explain sanctification is every night when our family sets the dinner table, we go to the same cupboard and we pull out the same red dishes. If you've been to our house and we're having a casual meal you know you're going to get the red dishes. Around our table, the kids will grab plastic cups, we'll grab our run-of-the-mill silverware, and we'll eat our meal. That's our everyday, ordinary table service.

But when we're having a nice event—whether it's a holiday or we're celebrating a big moment in our family or friends' lives—Amanda doesn't tell us to go to the cupboard and grab the red dishes. She says, "Go to the dining room hutch for the good plates." They're beautiful white china plates that have a beautiful design on them with a gold rim. There is beautiful stemware. We are very careful with them. The kids wear gloves when they bring these things out. The silverware isn't good enough to just put out as is. Amanda will polish it to make sure there are no fingerprints showing. That is sanctified table service. It is set apart for a particular use that the owner has for it.

The Christian is given to sanctification. No longer are we to live a life of ordinary use. We are to be sanctified. God says, "I've got a particular and special use for you. You are going to be My advertisers. You are going to be My witnesses. Your job is different than an unbeliever's job. Your job is to point people to Me. Because of that, I'm setting you apart and you are going to look different from everyone else in the world." The way you talk, the way you live, the way you love, the way you raise your kids, the way you watch entertainment, the way you use your money, and the way you invest your time will all be sanctified and set apart, not for your purposes but for God's purposes.

So what's God's purpose? It says that God's will is your sanctification. What is His sanctification? What does that mean? What am I supposed to do? Verse one says, *"You ought to walk and to please God."* The word "please" in the Greek language is *areskó* which was used both in religious writings and secular writings, meaning to accommodate one's self to the opinions, desires and interests of another. At the root of it is sacrifice. I have desires, wants and plans, but I am willing to lay those down to please you in any way, shape or form. I will accommodate what you desire and what you want.

With regard to sexual desire, *areskó* means you acknowledge, “God, I have plans, feelings and desires. I have sexual feelings, sexual desires, sexual dreams, sexual wants and aspirations.” But for Christians, this pleasure must be funneled through their commitment to please God. I have plans, desires and wants, but my job to please God is primary. Therefore, I must give myself to that first before I seek to accommodate myself. Whatever decision I make in the realm of sexuality, I must first go to God and say, “God, is this what You want for me? Is this what You have planned for me? Because if not, I’m not going there. I’m not going to do that because Your plans, desires and wants are primary and mine are secondary.” To follow God means He has first place because we are to please Him primarily. This is an ongoing process. Paul calls it a walk. And it isn’t always going to be easy.

### **3. Abstain from sexual immorality.**

So what does it mean to please God, to submit to His will and plan? Paul says very clearly at the end of verse three, “*Abstain from sexual immorality.*” The word “abstain” is the Greek word *apechomai*. It means to put distance between you and something else. To abstain from this pulpit would mean to create distance between myself and the pulpit, and to keep that distance. If I am called to abstain, that means I’m creating the greatest amount of distance that I can from that pulpit, or from that thing that God has called me to abstain from.

Here’s the problem: as Christians we may not jump in all the way. I remember the games I used to play as a Christian. I’d look at sexual immorality; I’d get a little closer to it. I may not have touched it (because that would be sin), but I might have taken a close look. I would look at what it’s made of, and I’d enjoy it when I saw others hanging around it. Paul tells us here in the text that we have to run away from it. We have to abstain from it. We need to create as much distance as we can.

What are we to keep distance from? The text says sexual immorality, which is the Greek word *porneía*. The word *porneía* was also used in first century secular literature as an umbrella term for all manners of sexual misconduct: fornication (sexual activity between unmarried people), adultery (sexual activity that involves a married person outside of their marriage), homosexuality (sexual activity between two people of the same gender), bisexuality and prostitution. So when they talked about *porneía* it included all of these different acts. It’s where we get the word pornography.

Nowhere does the Bible say we are to abstain from sex. One of the first commands God gave man and woman as husband and wife was to be fruitful and multiply. If you don’t know, that means sex. In the New Testament, Paul says that a husband and wife are not to deprive each other of sexual affection (1 Corinthians 7:5). Nowhere in Scripture does Paul say, “Distance yourself from sex.” It’s a gift from God. He has given it to us to enjoy. Paul is saying that sex outside of God’s will is to be abstained from.

This command is difficult for multiple reasons. One reason is the external conflict we face. Just like the Thessalonians, we are bombarded by all kinds of images, storylines and scenarios that tell us sex is fun and pleasurable; we deserve it. We deserve to have it however we want, whenever we want, with whomever we want. Because of that we live in a day when sex sells things like cars, clothing, cheeseburgers and potato chips. It’s all over the place. I used to enjoy watching the Super Bowl. Now I fear it. I enjoyed watching the Cubs in the playoffs this year until my kids learned about Levitra, Cialis and Viagra. It’s all over the place. We can’t get away from it. If you think you can shelter your family from it, you can’t. It’s pervasive. It’s all over the world. It’s in the church. It’s everywhere.

Probably the greatest enemy to Christian purity in our day and age is the Internet. Porn is a one hundred-billion-dollar industry. More than twenty percent of those one hundred billion dollars is spent here in the United States of America. Eighteen percent of all Internet sites are pornographic. How many is that? Twenty-nine million sites are dedicated to give you what you’re looking for. Every day Google, Yahoo, Bing, plus all the other search engines, keep track of what you searched for and where you went. They tell us that 30% of all Internet searches are for pornography. That means one in three searches. If Grandma wants a recipe for mac and cheese, she looks it up. Someone else wants to know if the restaurant they’re about to go to is good. And the third person is searching for porn. Seventy percent of adult men and forty percent of adult women surveyed said they have searched for pornography in the last month. Those numbers are bigger when they survey younger people.

Last year one of the leading movies was *Fifty Shades of Grey*, which was based on a book about a rich, sexually-charged young man who got pleasure from beating a woman. Even in a world of feminism, women lined up to the tune of almost half a billion dollars to watch a woman being abused, strictly for their own entertainment. Do we not live in an upside down world?

Russell Brand, a celebrity known for sleeping with all sorts of people, recently went on YouTube to share that porn has ruined his life. It has taken away his ability to actually have affection for real life women. This is an unbeliever talking. This isn’t a pastor.

The American Medical Association is doing study upon study, telling us that porn is ruining our ability to understand love, relationships and intimacy.

A couple years ago, Great Britain's Prime Minister, David Cameron, stated that porn is corroding an entire generation of children. *Playboy* magazine, the hallmark of porn, recently made the decision to show no nudity in their magazine this month because people are tired of seeing nude images. Wow! We've got a problem and if we don't get this thing right, it's going to destroy who we are. It's going to destroy our relationships. It's going to destroy our marriages, now and in the future. It's going to destroy the way we look at one another. It's going to destroy the way we minister to one another. It's going to destroy our testimonies. It is destroying us, but praise be to God that Jesus Christ saves us from porn!

That's the external conflict. Now notice the internal confusion. If the external wasn't enough, the internal fight may be even more difficult. We live in a time when people are quick to say, "I was born this way." Or, "It feels right to me." What can we say to them? This is seen most in same-sex attractions. I'm here to graciously disagree. The premise of the argument that you were born this way puts you as the complete standard of truth. We know that is not true! There are laws that tell us we are not a rule of laws unto ourselves, right?

I don't like driving 55 miles an hour. Cars were made to drive faster than that, right? But the law tells me, "Hey, Bucko! You can't do what you want. You can't do what the car was made for. You need to drive at 55 miles per hour in this area." Why? Because we know if we don't, Tim's going to be driving that thing 100 miles an hour with a big smile on his face. Right? We need laws. We need standards. So we cannot say that individuals know the standards for themselves. The Bible puts it this way: "The heart of the individual is deceitfully sick; who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9).

So your body, all of who you are, is lying in your sin against you. It's telling you things that just aren't true. I know it's hard; I know it's difficult. I know it defies your own logic at times. But God has a plan and He alone defines what sexual truth is. And to those who find that truth, whether from the outside or from within, God gives hope and grace. And as a church, we are here to walk with you and help you see the inherent goodness that comes when you seek God with all your heart.

Paul tells us how. He says, "Control your body." This phraseology is unique. To control yourself means it can be done. It means you are greater than your body. So harness it. Bring it into submission. You have the power to do so.

Secondly, Paul says we should know how to control our own body because it's our body. So it's not something we need to try to figure out. "Oh, I just don't know how to control my own body." No, it's your body; control it. There are things you can say no to; there are things you can say yes to. You have to make those decisions and the Bible helps us determine which are to be "yes" and which are to be "no." Paul gives the why: So we don't wrong or defraud or hurt one another. Sexual activity outside of marriage is at the heart selfish. We wrong people when we take that from them, with or without their consent. So we need to be careful. We need to understand that God has granted, by His grace, the marriage bed as the only arena for sexual activity. Anywhere else, Paul says, is stealing from your brother because we use it for our own gratification. We use other people for our own purposes.

Porn is advertised by its producers as harmless and fun. They say to young people, "Enjoy it!" Do you know that probably one of the best voices right now against pornography isn't even a Christian voice? There's a website called "Fight the New Drug" that is secular. It has no connection to any church. It's not evangelical in any way. One of their chief arguments, as unbelievers, regarding this issue of sexual immorality is that porn is destroying the lives of young men and women who are in the business. They have stories upon stories of how women are being abused and lives are being ruined just so others can watch them on computers. Unbelievers are telling us this. So if unbelievers see it as unfit, how much more unfit is it for believers to engage in such activity?

God says Christians are not to live like this, so He gives us His Word and He gives us one another. He warns us that He is the Avenger (verse six). He's not going to sit idly by and allow this to continue going on. And we're warned by Paul in verse seven, *"For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness."* So what do we do? Let me close with this:

We've got to activate a plan of attack. Paul says he's given us the instructions. What are they? The Scriptures are chock full of instructions on how we can find victory over sexual immorality.

1. Recognize that God's plans for you are good. Maybe you're thinking, "But I have these feelings and desires. Surely God doesn't want me to suppress these things." No, God has a plan for your life and He's given you the gift of sex and He's told you where to find it. So wait and hold God's affections higher than your own personal desires. Wherever you find yourself,

recognize that God's plans are good. You see, one of the ways the devil spiritually destroyed Adam and Eve in the garden was that he got them to believe that God's plans for them were wrong; that they were no good; that God was a killjoy. And the second you go there, you are opening yourself up to all manner of sin. Recognize God has good plans for you.

2. Rely on the Holy Spirit and the help of others. The Bible tells us that we do not have to gratify the cravings of our sinful nature. How? Galatians 5:16 tells us we are to walk in and be filled with the fruit of the Spirit. So we put on the fruit of the Spirit and walk in His truth and His light. Then because of that, we will free ourselves from falling into the darkness of sexual immorality. Rely on the Holy Spirit. Also, find someone around you with whom you have a trustworthy relationship (a guy for a guy; a gal for a gal) and say, "Hey, I need help. I need you to pray. I need you to hold me accountable. I need you to speak into my life because I need someone here who will help carry this burden of sin and temptation in my life." If you don't have someone like this, there's a greater chance that you're going to fall.
3. Run from temptation. Run! There's only one particular issue in the all the Bible that we're told to run from. We're told to flee from sexual immorality. Don't think about it. Don't contemplate it. Run away from it. Don't try to resist the devil. We need to understand that we can't handle it. God has called us to get out of there as quickly as possible. Joseph, in Potiphar's house, gives us the antidote when someone comes on to us with temptation: Run out of there as if you're on fire. Get out. Flee from it.
4. Repent when you fall. Maybe today you find yourself having given into sexual immorality. Repent. "God, I'm sorry. I don't want to do this evil thing. I want to turn to You and pursue good things." The Bible tells us that if we confess our sins (even sexual, immoral sins), He is faithful and just to forgive us and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness, including immorality (1 John 1:9). Repent. It's between you and God. "God, I'm sorry. I'm so glad this is why You died on the cross, to give me the grace I need in this moment."
5. Romance your spouse. Today is Valentine's Day. Husbands, wives, be active in romancing each other. My advice for married couples is very simple: Be romantic often. Why? Because the Bible tells us to. How do we fight sexual immorality? Husbands and wives are active in giving that God-given gift to one another and doing so in a way that shows this world that monogamy is truly the most glorious thing when it comes to sexuality. The Bible tells us very poetically that we are to drink from our own cistern. It tells us that the wife of our youth should satisfy us. Solomon tells his son, "Let the breast of your wife satisfy you, even in your old age." That's good advice from the Song of Solomon. It's not good for us to give our bodies to someone else, but to give them only to our own spouse. Husbands and wives, have these conversations with one another so that your marriage bed will not be defiled.
6. Ready your kids for the fight. This final point is as important as all the others. Let me tell you, if you have children in your home who are 18 years of age or younger, if you have not had on-going, persistent, honest conversations with them, then you are hurting your children. If you do not have ways to protect your children from things on the Internet, then you are hurting your children. If you are not open and honest about your own struggles with this, letting them know that they are not alone in this fight, then you are hurting your children. If you're sitting there now and thinking, "I don't know how to," then come to the next "Passport 2 Purity" that Scott and Naomi Etchison will lead. Be part of this class that we've done twice before. There's another one coming up on how to protect your children from all these devices. Listen. We give our kids these glorious Christmas gifts, but they are just little, hand-held welcome mats to every adult bookstore in the world. If you're not putting safety measures around them, you are hurting your children. Come around them; put your arms around them and say, "Yes, God has given us sex and we're thankful for it. You would not be here without it. But God has given it for a specific time and place. God is only pleased with that activity in the marriage bed of a man and a woman, committed to each other for their entire lives."

The Thessalonians were struggling with sexual immorality, but so are we. By His grace, God inspired Paul to write these words. Thanks be to God that He wrote these words to give us wisdom to live differently from this world gone wild!