

LSB 1 Thess. 4:7 - 12 Setting God's Sexual Boundaries Aside

7 For God did not call us to impurity, but in sanctification. 8 Consequently, he who sets this aside is not setting aside man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you. 9 Now concerning love of the brothers, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another, 10 for indeed you do practice it toward all the brothers who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to excel still more, 11 and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you, 12 so that you will walk properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.

Last week we defined how God's boundaries for all mankind in the realms of sexual morality actually sets those who heed them apart from the rest of the world. A morality that causes stability and love in strong families with great security for the resulting children. A morality that can motivate foolish young men to embrace a work ethic and grow up sooner.

We don't need to re-visit that, and if you missed last week the manuscript is on line, available, plus there's now a button that says "listen". We've begun to do a voice recording and make that available on the same page as the weekly studies.

That's hugely popular by the way. Last week our web page got 21 views. While *Call of Duty: Modern Warfare II - World Gameplay Reveal Trailer* got 24 million hits. Don't worry, we're neither jealous or discouraged by those numbers.

We did however run out of time and didn't really address the truth in vs. 8 completely last week and I want to quickly speak to that important truth before we move on to real love for the brethren in vss. 9 - 12.

For context, in vs. 7 Paul says;

7 For God did not call us to impurity, but in sanctification.

God calls the church out of the world to be distinctly separate and different from the world. Set apart. Distinct.

And the area that makes us most distinct and separated is this distinctly different kind of sexual morality. Paul uses two words to define our distinction.

First is impurity. The world is impure. The culture without God is impure. We read in Romans chapter one that God keeps giving the world over to it's desired impurity. Even though impurity is ultimately harmful to everyone involved. God gives them over.

You want harm? You want destruction? You hate me and my boundaries given to you in love for you? Fine, I'll let you go. Deeper and deeper into depravity. Until ultimately the depravity affects peoples reason.

God calls His church out of all of that. He calls us to the sanctification of boundaries that cause us to thrive. Within God's boundaries for human thriving there is dignity and security and health. The greatest dignity and protection for women and children is found within God's gift of sexual boundaries given for human thriving.

But what happens when the church is pressured by the world to move away from it's distinctly differentness?

Nothing new under the sun. Peter writes to the first century christians these words about the world's reaction to christians who have separated themselves from how the world lives.

3 For the time already past is sufficient for you to have carried out the desire of the Gentiles, having pursued a course of sensuality, lusts, drunkenness, carousals, drinking parties and abominable idolatries. 4 And in all this, they are surprised that you do not run with them into the same excess of dissipation, and they malign you;

When the world and the church weren't that far apart in recent history, we didn't see this phenomenon that much. But as the world has abandoned judeo - christian morals and become completely secular, the gap between God's boundaries, embraced by christians, and the world's debauchery of no boundaries at all has suddenly made these verses a reality to us.

Now, the ever widening gap between the world's morals and the distinctly christian morals of the church has become an offense to the world. The world is maligning the church. They're coming at us from all angles.

Suddenly there is something they like to refer to as "science" even though it's laughable to any honest intelligent scientist. Christians are knuckle draggers who have joined in some wacky conspiracy theories to band together to abandon and ignore science! We're the lunatics.

That's just a single way of many others that christians are now maligned by the world. The world is calling us evil. We won't join in the delusions and the debauchery, therefore, we are un-loving, and therefore we are the evil troublemakers in an otherwise happy debauched world.

And the lukewarm church has reacted. We don't like it when the world pulls back it's approval (and it's money). What do we do? What has the lukewarm church done to mollify and pacify an increasingly dis-approving world.

Well we've found some ways to relax the boundaries. We've closed the gap between the world's rules and God's boundaries. We've assured the world that the church will receive and accept and affirm all peoples doing all things in the name of love.

The church has re-written vs. 7. It now reads; *7 For God did not call us to sanctification, but in impurity.* We get it. We understand that the world could never be reconciled to a God who calls the world impure and expects people to come away from that and embrace holiness. So we've re-written the verse. All fixed. God will take you in your debauchery and be glad to

have you. Of course!

That's all well and good and affirming and loving that we've set God's standards of holiness aside and embraced and affirmed the world's standards and no boundaries, but, we'll need to make a few adjustments to vs. 8 also.

8 Consequently, he who sets this aside is not setting aside man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.

Oh dear. That sort of says; if we don't play by God's rules, He's going to take his ball and bat and go home. Can that be right? Is that really what that means?

Lucky for us, this isn't God's first rodeo. We actually have a good 200 years of recent history where the church has done exactly that, found ways to set God's book aside, obviously saving the church from itself, that we can study the results.

Beginning in the 1830's, roughly in alignment with the industrial revolution and bootstrap modernity, the church decided to save the church from itself by declaring that the Bible is full of myths and nonsense. Written by sheep herders with bad teeth. No modern person with electric light bulbs could any longer buy into all of those wives tales and nonsense.

Donkey's talking to humans. Virgin birth's. Resurrections from the dead. Countless healings and miracles. Bodies of water opening up a dry highway for thousands of peoples to walk through and then closing itself over and drowning an entire army. That sort of stuff.

Actually the first liberal theologians weren't trying to adjust sexual boundaries. But they paved the way for modern liberal theologians to use the same logic to re-write the Bible.

We have 200 modern years of men saying the Bible isn't God breathed. It

isn't all true. There are some true things in there, but it's up to us to sort it out and keep the good and reject the bad. God didn't infallibly write the book, men just like us wrote it, and we're smarter and know better now than what they did. And so it goes.

Except that Paul, under the inspiration of God, wrote; *8 Consequently, he who sets this aside is not setting aside man but the God who gives His Holy Spirit to you.*

And we now have the benefit of history. The folks who set God's infallible, inerrant, authoritative truth aside, for their own purposes, those churches beginning in Europe and crossing the pond to us, have become empty stone quarries. All of the main line denominations who embraced liberal theology and set God's book aside, are bankrupt. Vanished. Gone.

Beloved, church really isn't much fun without the Holy Spirit. When God takes His ball and bat and goes home, the game falls apart. The other kids all look at each other and say, how's this gonna work. That was our only ball. Kind of hard to have a stickball game without a ball.

Kind of hard to have real and meaningful experiential personal church, if the Holy Spirit goes home. We have 200 years of history to study after the reformation, of the effects of setting aside God's book, but we must be sort of hard headed, because, well, look around you. The church is willing to give up God and His Spirit, and His Son, and His book, in order to embrace the world. I think I know how it's going to turn out.

OK, it's time to leave false love, love on the world's terms, defined by the world, behind and consider actual love within a sanctified set apart people.

9 Now concerning love of the brothers, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another,

This verse is actually loaded with theology. Paul isn't admonishing the church to love the lost here. This is specifically speaking of love within the

fellowship of the redeemed. The called out ones, and the love within that select group.

The first thing to consider here is a play on words that the original readers understood but that we don't necessarily see. Paul uses two different words for love.

The world wants to talk about love. They want to malign us by saying we are haters and they are lovers. And Paul addresses that charge against the church, in a way, in these verses.

The greeks of course had several different words to speak of love. There was eros, which is erotic love, sexual love. Paul's been speaking to that in his previous discussion. Beautiful and desirable within God's boundaries. Limited to a man and his wife in their own marriage bed.

Then there is philadelphia. Phileo. Brotherly love. Love enjoyed within families apart from eros. Brotherly love. Real affection for each other, just like parents have for their children.

And finally there is agape love which is the love that God gives to sinners. Undeserved inexplicable selfless gainless love. Freely given expecting nothing in return.

And in vs. 9, Paul says; *Now concerning love of the brothers*, the word here is philadelphias. Brotherly love. The world will call you a hater, so let's talk about love, shall we. Concerning brotherly affection; *you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to agapeos, selfless gracious; love one another*,

This is always true and indeed it is part of our christian distinctiveness set apart from the world. Genuine authentic real christians love one another. And Paul tells us why that is;

for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another

Paul says, I don't have to write you and teach you about love, because God has taught you to love. We are taught by God to love each other.

No other religion makes this claim, that when God calls us out of this world, He also pours out within our hearts, affection, love, for each other. God provides a love within us, apart from us, He pours it into us, and we then are channels, a pipeline of God's love through us, to each other.

John, in his letter to the churches, is very black and white about this. If you love each other, you're of God, and if you don't love each other, neither are you born of God. Inseparable truths. Listen to John explain the black and white contrasts.

7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. 8 The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. 9 By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. 10 In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. 11 Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has beheld God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. 13 By this we know that we abide in Him and He in us, because He has given us of His Spirit.

John is very cut and dry. He says I can tell you who the Christians are and who the non Christians are. God pours out love in real Christians, and the ones who do not have love, do not know God.

I'll admit to you that when I meet people in other places who make some claim to being Christian, my ears sort of go up like a horse's ears, and I wait to see if that bond of love just flows easily.

I've met Christians who instantly are on the same wavelength and we immediately have a common bond. And there are some, even close to

home, right here in town who claim to be christians but there's just no connection.

My friend Bruce was telling me of just such a connection and I knew exactly what he was talking about. His wife and him were praying over a meal in a Hotel, and an old chinese lady who was like the breakfast clean up person just came over and needed to know who they were and where they went to church and what they were doing and how she loved the Lord.

And when they told her they were moving nearby she immediately wanted them to come and visit the church she was attending. Total strangers. I've experienced that. Some real believer and the bond is like we've known each other forever. Indeed, it won't be long and we will.

Real born again spirit indwelt believers have a connection to other real born again spirit indwelt believers. It's just automatic. And it's the Holy Spirit that we have in common that creates an instant bond of love.

The world wants to talk about love, eros, and love, phileos, but the world has never experienced the agape love that christians have instantly in common with each other when we discover someone else who has the Holy Spirit dwelling inside their heart. The world doesn't have a clue.

But guess what. Sometimes, it's that real love that someone recognizes and says to themselves, whatever it is that these guys have, I want it, at any price. I'm one of those folks. The love between christians that I knew I didn't possess is what caused the desire in me to be a christian too. It's real.

10 for indeed you do practice it toward all the brothers who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brothers, to excel still more,

Paul says he's got nothing to add to the love that has been taught to these folks by the indwelling Holy Spirit Himself. What could Paul add? And yet Paul simply says, as he said before, excel in your excelling.

Their acts of love weren't local only. Paul says they practiced God's love towards everyone in Macedonia. Philippi, Berea, and everywhere else in northern Greece, the love of the Thessalonians was evident and real. Paul says excel still more.

11 and to make it your ambition to lead a quiet life and attend to your own business and work with your hands, just as we commanded you,

Finally, Paul gives instructions here that are important for all christians in all times in every season.

I laughed earlier, a little self deprecatingly, about the 20 people who visited our web site compared to the 2.4 million that looked at some virtual reality game thing. But actually, I'm doing just what Paul said to do. Lead a quiet circumspect life, working with my hands, minding my own business.

I'm not burning down the abortion center. I'm not standing on my head with a gorilla on you tube trying to sell you a Dodge. I'm not newsworthy at all. In fact with approaching 30 years since I owned a business in town, I'm happy to report, most people in town don't have a clue who I am.

About the most flamboyant thing I do is drive around in a 93 year old car. People wave at the car sometimes and I wave back. Pretty racy stuff.

But Paul seems to indicate, that's how it should be. Make it your ambition, your plan to be executed, to be pretty much invisible. We are to be tranquil people. Quiet people. Minding our own business. Working with our hands. For the most part, not attracting any attention to ourselves. Quiet.

I guess I could go out on a limb here and say, classy. No offense if you have green hair, but mine will probably just stay white, as it slowly thins out to nothing. I don't have any tat's planned. Not going to enlarge my ear lobes and put rings in them. Unless I move to a culture where that's normal and people look at you if you don't have enlarged ear lobes with rings. Then I might have to do that, so I can remain invisible.

We live quiet lives, we work to provide for our own needs, we don't do weird things to attract attention to ourselves, we mind our own business.

Why did Paul need to say this? Where is this coming from. We may have a clue in Paul's second letter to these folks. From 2 Thess. 3:

6 Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who walks in an unruly manner and not according to the tradition which they received from us. 7 For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we did not act in an unruly manner among you, 8 nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with labor and hardship we kept working night and day so that we would not be a burden to any of you; 9 not because we do not have the authority, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would imitate us. 10 For even when we were with you, we used to command this to you: if anyone is not willing to work, neither let him eat. 11 For we hear that some among you are walking in an unruly manner, doing no work at all, but acting like busybodies. 12 Now such persons we command and exhort in the Lord Jesus Christ, that working with quietness, they eat their own bread. 13 But as for you, brothers, do not lose heart in doing good.

We can't help but perhaps read between the lines here as to what may have been happening. The Thessalonians, more than any other group, had a fascination with the imminent return of Jesus to take them home.

Paul had taught them this truth, and he's going to answer some questions about the return of Jesus to rapture His church in the very next verses. Is it possible that there were some there who took things too far. Sell your property. Quit your job. Put on your pajamas and go up on the roof to wait for Jesus.

Then meanwhile, since it's been some weeks and months, do you prey on the gracious love of other Christians and eat their food since you're no longer working for your own. You've become an idle busybody going from

house to house, mooching on the other christians.

Paul says, that isn't the model we gave you. We came and we worked all night in our trade so that we could earn money and buy our own bread so that we wouldn't be a burden to anyone. Totally classy. Where did he get that from?

Luke 19:11 Now while they were listening to these things, Jesus went on to tell a parable, because He was near Jerusalem, and they thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately. 12 So He said, "A nobleman went to a distant country to receive a kingdom for himself, and then return. 13 And he called ten of his slaves, and gave them ten minas and said to them, 'Engage in business until I come back.'

Jesus said, I'm going away, while I'm gone, I expect you to engage in the business of the King, in this world. Satan loves it when christians sell everything and set a day and go up on the rooftops in their pajamas. He loves that. And the onlooking world loves it too. Christian laughing stocks. Christian lunatics. Bizarre behaviour.

Why is it important to just be quiet classy invisible people who work for their own sustenance. Calm unrattled people. Vs. 12. Because the world actually does notice.

12 so that you will walk properly toward outsiders and not be in any need.

There's a quote that's hard to pin down whether Ghandi actually said it or not, It goes something like this;

*when Stanley Jones, a missionary, met with Mahatma Gandhi he asked him: Mr. Gandhi, though you quote the words of Christ often, why is it that you appear to so adamantly reject becoming his follower?
Gandhi replied: Oh, I don't reject Christ. I love Christ. It's just that so many of you Christians are so unlike Christ.*

It's like the huge banner at the back of the room for all the news services to record on TV at the 2021 Southern Baptist Conventioneers big meeting. It said, "**The World is Watching**" and then, sure enough, a few weeks ago the independent report came out of gross sexual misconduct and unruliness happening in many southern baptist churches. The world watches our dirty laundry.

It makes it tough on christians everywhere when the most flamboyant christians have a big banner like that and then we find out they're doing tragic crimes that perhaps even the world doesn't do?

In vs. 12 Paul says, we need to walk properly because outsiders are looking at us in order to see Christ. Is that what they in fact ARE seeing? It only takes one unruly busybody moocher lazy loudmouth to undo all of the good that the hard working quiet christians have done.

And while we're on this idea, expand it to something Paul never dreamed of. The internet. How are so-called christians speaking to each other on the internet? Who's shooting into that? How much real damage is getting done in that arena?

When I was 17 years old I swore I was an agnostic. Smart enough to not go so far as to say there is no God, but I rejected my parents faith. One of the reasons was the shooting of christians against christians in Ireland. I didn't differentiate between Catholics and Protestants. As far as I was concerned it was christians slaughtering christians and so why would I believe any of it??

That was actually pretty mild compared to what goes on these days between so-called christians on the interwebs. Shameful. It takes about 5 minutes before the H word comes out. And I don't mean hate, or Hitler. Two favorites of the rest of the world doing battle.

With christians the H word is heretic. And some of them likely are. But again, the world is watching all of this, just like I was watching the

bombings in Ireland.

There's nothing very classy and quiet and respectful about so-called christians flaming each other on the internet. I fear much real damage is done. Meanwhile the world looks on in derision.

Paul was our model. Keep quiet. Work invisibly. Eat your own food earned by your own work. Classy. Loving. Sort of like what Jesus did? The old saw, WWJD is actually a good model, if in fact you've ever read your Bibles and sort of know what Jesus actually did.

Paul modeled himself after Jesus. We should model our walk after Paul. The world is in fact paying some attention. When the tidal wave hits, how about we be the people that the frightened world actually comes to for possible answers.

Quiet confident unperterbed dignified hard working people who are unrattled when disaster comes. How are we doing so far? If Covid was a stress test for the real church, how did we do? That was a tremor.

We're down 45% after a tremor? Paul lays it out. The authentic church of Holy Spirit indwelt regenerated believers has not abandoned God's words and God's morality. Neither will it cave in to stress and pressure. Because that same Holy Spirit gives real believers Faith, and Hope, and Love with which we can withstand the onslaught of the world and Satan.

We need to excel still more in our love for each other. I'm so thankful for what we have in this church together as a family. Paul says we can do even better. I'm sure we can.

9 Now concerning love of the brothers, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another, 10 for indeed you do practice it toward all the brothers who are in all of Central Nevada. But we urge you, brothers, to excel still more,