***God’s Will in Five Words***

**The Gospel Difference, 1 Thessalonians 4:1-12 May 7, 2023**

***It is God’s will that you should be sanctified:  
that you should avoid sexual immorality;  
that each of you should learn to control his own body . . .  
and in this matter no one should wrong his brother . . . .***

**1 Thessalonians 4:3-6**

Diagram

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**Doug’s summary**

*4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words, but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction . . . . 8 The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, 9 for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.*

Doug’s summary: Paul joy and confidence in the gospel are confirmed by the faith, love and hope of the Thessalonian believers which have survived trial and separation. Paul prepares these believers to live lives worthy by sharing the word of God and his life.

**Now, for the leftovers**

*Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.*

1 Thessalonians 4:1-2 (note the similarities to Ephesians 4:17-5:21)

1. Sanctification begins with something to push away and something to hold close

*3 It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, 5 not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; 6 and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. 7 For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. 8 Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.*

1 Thessalonians 4:3-8 (see Ephesians 4:17-24)

2. The first lesson to learn

*9 Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. 10 And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.*

1 Thessalonians 4:9-10 (Ephesians 4:29-32)

3. Not dependent

*11 Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, 12 so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.*

1 Thessalonians 4:11-12 (see Ephesians 4:28)

**The “more and more” (and why even the leftovers carry Jesus’ authority)**

*Finally, brothers, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. 2 For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.*

1 Thessalonians 4:1-2

1. Yes, our sexuality matters

*27 So God created man in his own image,*

*in the image of God he created him;*

*male and female he created them.*

Genesis 1

*18 Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body. 19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.*

1 Corinthians 6

*13 Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. 14 As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. 15 But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; 16 for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”*

1 Peter 1:14, quoting Leviticus 19:2 (see 1 Corinthians 5-6 for a look into Greek/Roman culture)

2. Three examples of the “good”

*9 Now about brotherly love we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other. 10 And in fact, you do love all the brothers throughout Macedonia. Yet we urge you, brothers, to do so more and more.*

1 Thessalonians 4:9-10

**Resources for reading 1 Thessalonians**

The poster for 1 Thessalonians can be found at [*bibleproject.com*](file:///I:\Lent%202023\bibleproject.com)

Doug’s favorite 1 Thessalonians commentaries include   
Charles Wannamaker’s NIGTC volume (Eerdmans, 1990)  
Hendricksen’s *Expository Commentary* (Baker, 1955)  
Robert Thomas’ volume in *Expositors’ Bible Commentary* (Zondervan, 1981)

John MacArthur has a very interesting sermon, “The Ideal Church” at [*https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1317A*](https://www.gty.org/library/sermons-library/1317A)

Spurgeon has an important sermon on this text at [*http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols31-33/chs1979.pdf*](http://www.spurgeongems.org/vols31-33/chs1979.pdf)

Thomas Schreiner has a wonderful essay on the optimism in 1 Thessalonians at [*http://www.sbts.edu/documents/tschreiner/3.3\_editorial.pdf*](http://www.sbts.edu/documents/tschreiner/3.3_editorial.pdf)

John Piper has several very good sermons on 1 Thessalonians 4 at <https://www.desiringgod.org/scripture/1-thessalonians?page=3>

Jim Weidenaar has a short article on why “immorality is such a big deal” at [*https://harvestusa.org/why-is-sexual-immorality-such-a-big-deal/#.ZFQ1Vc7ML7e*](https://harvestusa.org/why-is-sexual-immorality-such-a-big-deal/#.ZFQ1Vc7ML7e)

Some of the voices that have helped Doug think about how the church should respond:  
Rosario Butterfield, *The Secret Thoughts of an Unlikely Convert* (Crown and Covenant, 2014)  
Christopher Yuan, *Holy Sexuality and the Gospel* (Multnomah, 2018)  
Laurie Krieg’s recent article at <https://www.abideproject.org/articles/pastors-will-you-please-preach>  
Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting* (Zondervan, 2010)  
the [Abide Project’s resources](abideproject.org), especially [the four most recent videos](https://www.abideproject.org/videos-page) and [Andy Sytsma’s article](https://www.abideproject.org/articles/a-third-way-or-better-way)

#### Why Is Sexual Immorality Such a Big Deal?

Jim Weidenaar, October 21, 2021   
at [*https://harvestusa.org/why-is-sexual-immorality-such-a-big-deal/#.ZFQ1Vc7ML7e*](https://harvestusa.org/why-is-sexual-immorality-such-a-big-deal/#.ZFQ1Vc7ML7e)

The temptation to single out one type of sin or one category of sinner as uniquely worthy of condemnation is common. It often springs from and feeds the self-righteous hypocrisy of our hearts, which seeks to find a point of comparison by which we can stand over another as morally inferior to us. This temptation is especially strong when the sin to which another person is tempted is one to which we feel no attraction whatsoever or which we find safely unattractive. Because we are confident that we would never do that, we find it easier to treat the person who would as particularly depraved. It is useful to our proud hearts precisely because we are sure that we are not personally susceptible to this depravity.

And yet it would be wrong for us to react to this possibility of self-righteous judgment by taking a ho-hum, cavalier attitude toward sexual sin and temptations. In the Bible, sexual immorality is a big deal. Most who are familiar with Scripture sense this. The subject of sexual immorality comes up often and is treated with heightened seriousness.

So here is our challenge: How do we understand and heed the seriousness of the Bible’s concern over sexual immorality while not giving space to our impulse to look down on others? I suggest three perspectives to help us maintain a proper biblical concern for sexual immorality without being self-righteous:

1. **Have a biblically high view of sexuality.**

In 1 Corinthians 6:12–20, Paul explains to his readers why sexual immorality is so serious: It’s because sex is so precious. Paul opens his discussion by quoting a typical cultural understanding of sex—that it is just an appetite, a biological drive to be fulfilled: “Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food” (6:13). Paul contradicts this directly with, “The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.” His point? This is not a mere issue of appetite, a biological need for the flourishing of the human animal. Human sexuality is not primarily biological; it is theological.

This assertion alone is in radical conflict with almost all that our culture believes and teaches about sexuality. But the further we go into this truth, the more incredible it becomes. For Paul goes on to describe the content of the theology of sex, which is nothing less than union with Christ: “For, as it is written, ‘The two shall become one flesh.’ But he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him” (6:16–17). He says the same thing to the Ephesians, “’…and the two shall become one flesh.’ This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church” (5:31–32). We have only begun to plumb the riches of biblical teaching on the ways that sex as God designed it displays to us the wonder of the salvation given to us in union with Christ. His lavish love and delight in his Bride, the intimacy and affirmation of his setting apart his Bride as belonging to him exclusively, the safety of his commitment to never leave or forsake her—these are a few of the enormous gospel realities which true marital sexuality was designed to picture. Sexual immorality, in all its forms, destroys this picture.

David White says it this way:

“Sexual sin damages the self in a way that is unique, unlike any other sins. Why? Paul points to the profound mystery, reminding that sexuality is a reflection of the ultimate union with Jesus. Sexual sin dilutes the greatest wonder in the universe. The glorious hope of the world to come is living in a face-to-face relationship with Jesus—of which marriage and sexuality is the closest terrestrial analogy.”¹

In summary, sexual immorality is so serious because it corrupts and deprives us of something so good.

1. **Respect the personal and relational power God has given to sexuality.**

No one needs to be convinced that sex offers powerful pleasure. The ubiquity and endless variety of options in sexual immorality reflect the pursuit of this pleasure. But lingering beneath our fascination with sexual pleasure, there remains a sense that something more profound is involved, something deeply personal and enduring. The Bible teaches that sex cements the bond of a husband and wife in a lifelong union (Mark 10:8–9). In some mysterious way, this bonding aspect is still present even when we rip sex out from its lifelong, marital context, as Paul explains, “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 shall become one flesh’” (1 Corinthians 6:16). We can try to take sex out of the marriage bond, but we can never completely take the marriage bond out of sex. It’s just the way God made it.

As it turns out, there is even a biological component to this bonding. The pleasure of sex corresponds to the powerful release of certain chemicals that have the effect of forming a strong social bond.² On the one hand, this is a wonderful reality that should fill us with gratitude and praise. “Our bodies are the splendid interweaving of the physical and the spiritual. God’s design of our physiology should generate deep awe and worship.”³ But the dark side of this is that all forms of sexual immorality unleash this bonding power in destructive ways. As Paul says, “He who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her.” Or, as William Struthers warns concerning the use of pornography, “Unfortunately, with repeated sexual acting out in the absence of a partner, a man will be bound and attached to the image and not a person.”⁴ Imagine how this damages a future or present marriage. This biological bonding effect is also part of the reason people can speak of sexual addiction. Everything you do sexually contributes to a physiological momentum that builds toward a bondage not easily broken.

Sex is powerful. God made it so. This makes misuse of sex especially dangerous personally and relationally.

1. **Know that all humanity, yourself included, falls short in God’s design for sexuality.**

Notice that my first two points do not apply to just one type of sexual sin. They are based on what sex truly is, the meaning God designed it to communicate, and the relational power God gave it. Every departure from the original design defaces the picture and abuses the power. Isn’t this Jesus’ point when he said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart?” (Matthew 5:27–28). Jesus did not say it leads to adultery; it is adultery in the heart. It is an act of the heart that misuses sexual pleasure and violates its gospel-shaped design. Who of us is qualified to throw a first stone (John 8:7)? It is spiritually dangerous to focus moral concern on one kind of sexual sin without recognizing the commonality with our own transgressions.

If we have the Bible’s high view of sex as a picture of the Church’s union with Christ and a respect for the power God has given it, we will not only take sexual sin very seriously, but we will also examine ourselves, confess the many ways we have failed to desire and fulfill God’s perfect design, and cast ourselves again and again at the mercy of the gospel. Yes, sexual immorality is a big deal, so let’s keep pointing each other to our only faithful Bridegroom.

###### ¹  See David White, God, You, & Sex (Greensboro: New Growth Press, 2019), 148.

###### ²  See William M. Struthers, Wired for Intimacy (Downers Grove: IVP, 2009), 105.

###### ³  God, You, & Sex, 82.

###### ⁴ Wired for Intimacy, 105.

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# Pastors, Will You Please Preach about Human Sexuality from the Pulpit?

May 3

Written By Laurie Krieg at [*https://www.abideproject.org/articles/pastors-will-you-please-preach*](https://www.abideproject.org/articles/pastors-will-you-please-preach)

What do I, an LGBTQIA person who loves Jesus and holds to a historically biblical view of marriage, look for when I consider attending a church?

Without a question, one of the top things I seek when beginning to look for a church is a senior pastor who is willing to gracefully and truthfully engage the LGBTQIA conversation from the pulpit. It is interesting knowing this about myself with [three of the top four](https://www.barna.com/research/pastors-speaking-out/) things pastors feel both pressured to speak about and compelled to teach on are related to sexuality—specifically LGBTQIA topics (Gallup 2019). There is internal and external pressure to preach, but are pastors moving toward the pressure?

As I travel the country teaching human sexuality from a historical biblical view, and as I sit on the board of directors at the Center for Faith, Sexuality, and Gender, I can at least anecdotally attest to the reality that pastors are beginning to engage the topic from the pulpit. However, many can get stuck in fear. It’s understandable: I have pastor friends whose winsome stand for the gospel in this space has made the evening news, and others who have seen half their congregation leave after they laid out a graceful, biblical argument about God’s design for marriage.

However, even with this pushback (and perhaps even because of this pushback as I will explain later) if I am going to attend your church, it is vital you engage the human sexuality topic from the pulpit.

Why would I want pastors to talk about my sin struggles from the pulpit? Would it not feel safer for me if they did not home in on my sin issue with a sermon or three? Certainly, how the pastor engages this conversation from the stage is equally as important as if they choose to do so. However, avoiding saying “same-sex lust” when listing sexual sins in a sermon, or completely refusing to engage the human sexuality conversation shouts more negativity than actually shouting insults.

Why? When pastors choose to say nothing, I correctly or incorrectly assume one of several things:

1. Disgust. I assume they are so disgusted by my sin that they will not talk about it. If a pastor is repulsed by my sin struggles, I cannot attend such a church even with a goal of helping to transform that pastor’s perspective. I am a strong woman, but it is a bit above my emotional paygrade to battle a pastor who looks at me with revulsion. For such a heart transformation to occur in the pastor, they will likely have to hear from a straight pastor friend they respect who can convince them to love tax collectors, prostitutes and sinners like Jesus ([Matt. 9:12-13](https://www.esv.org/verses/Matt.%209%3A12-13/)). (If this is you, I recommend starting at [centerforfaith.com](http://www.centerforfaith.com/).)
2. Confusion. I assume the pastor is choosing not to preach about human sexuality because they are confused as to what they believe. This is a tougher one for me to believe in 2023 as there is such a plethora of graceful and truthful information available to pastors today, but I know pastors can fall into this category. This would still be a very challenging church for me to attend as they are supposed to be leading me. To submit myself to leadership who is unwilling or unable to pick up a book to lead me, [seven percent](https://news.gallup.com/poll/389792/lgbt-identification-ticks-up.aspx) of U.S adults, and at least [one-fifth](https://www.axios.com/2022/02/17/lgbtq-generation-z-gallup) of Gen Z with wisdom would be a lot to consider (Gallup 2022).
3. Fear. I assume that the pastor has studied and concluded the same things as I have about God’s design for marriage, but they are afraid to step out in faith and take the hits that may come. This third space is easier for me to partner alongside as sometimes pastors simply need ideas to move forward, and some fellow prayer warriors who will take hits with them. “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” Paul says to Timothy ([2 Tim. 2:3](https://www.esv.org/verses/2%20Tim.%202%3A3/)). After nearly a decade of engaging this conversation from many stages, I have found I can take almost any insult or hardship that comes at me in this space if I have the empathizing comfort of the Holy Spirit and a few good friends.

Perhaps this is why I feel so strongly about finding a church whose senior leadership is willing to engage this challenging space from the pulpit. Every day, I do battle with internal temptation, and the Spirit helps me in my weakness ([2 Cor 12:17](https://www.esv.org/verses/2%20Cor%2012%3A17/)). Many days, I do battle from the platform of social media, podcasting, or on stages. I advocate not for straightness, but for the family of God to solve the loneliness problem ([John 17:21](https://www.esv.org/verses/John%2017%3A21/)) and I seek to uplift the beautiful metaphor of marriage ([Eph. 5:32](https://www.esv.org/verses/Eph.%205%3A32/)). “Marriage has to be between two sexually different people,” I say, “because God is so different from us—and yet he wants to be and will be one with us! When sexually different people in a one flesh covenant union die to themselves to be one with each other, they show the world a tiny picture of how the very-different-from-us Jesus died to be one with us and how we are to die daily in order to experience increasing oneness with Him.”

It is an odd and Holy Spirit-filled thing to preach God’s design for marriage even though my very flesh defies my words.

As I consider the fear I face while advocating for God’s design for marriage, I empathize with the fear pastors have of the stage. However, even if my soul feels beat up and my heart may be riddled with insults and rejection, I cannot help but say “It is worth it.” Truly, every pastor I talk to who has engaged this conversation with similar results has also said, “It is worth it.”

Pastors may say it is worthwhile to preach about human sexuality from the pulpit because co-suffering for the sake of the gospel can bring inexplicable sweetness. “The fellowship of suffering for Christ?” said one pastor friend who experienced a loss of at least 30 families from his church because of his graceful and truthful engagement with the LGBTQIA conversation. “Those are good wounds.”

Another reason it may be worth the challenge to engage this conversation from the pulpit is that pastors know people like me (who experience attractions to the same sex or some sort of gender dissonance and yet hold to the traditional view of marriage) exist in their pews. If we are daily fighting our flesh to preach the gospel through our bodies, we need to know that we can reach out to congregational leaders, and they will not give an easy “out” of our lives or marriages. Instead, they will fight the good fight with sound doctrine alongside us.

The third reason pastors find it is worth it is the harvest of blessing they see in calling people to a true life of flourishing within God’s design. Truly, [86 percent](https://www.navpress.com/content/the-untold-story-of-the-lgbt-community) of LGBTQIA people grew up in the church, and 76 percent are willing to go back (with 92 percent of that 76 not needing to change its theology of marriage to begin attending again). Do you know how many non-LGBTQIA people who have left the church are willing to go back? Just 9 percent (Marin 2016). What should this difference in desire to attend church tell us? I believe we can conclude that LGBTQIA people know their hunger for God and are looking for a path toward Him.

We feel our hunger, and yet we struggle to find leaders to guide us toward Living Water and the Bread of Life. Are you willing to do the hard and brave task to lead us?

Laurie Krieg is a coach/consultant, speaker, author, and podcast host whose mission is to equip Jesus-followers with a gospel-centered approach to sexuality.