

2014\_11\_02 All Saints  
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL  
Pastor David Pfeiffer

## **You Have Been Called Into Holiness, Now Abound It**

1 Thessalonians 4:1-12

INI

To those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints: : Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

### ***1 Thessalonians 4:1–12***

*Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; <sup>2</sup> for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.*

*<sup>3</sup> For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; <sup>4</sup> that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, <sup>5</sup> not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God; <sup>6</sup> that no one should take advantage of and defraud his brother in this matter, because the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also forewarned you and testified. <sup>7</sup> For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. <sup>8</sup> Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.*

*<sup>9</sup> But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; <sup>10</sup> and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more; <sup>11</sup> that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, <sup>12</sup> that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.*

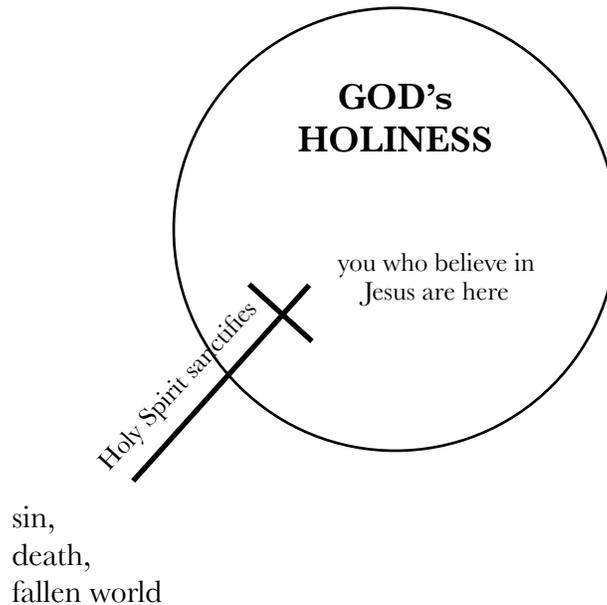
**We pray, O Lord, make us holy by Your truth, Your Word is truth. Amen.**

In Jesus name, dear fellow saints and members of the household of God,

Its not a halo over your head, but a halo around your heart – it is the halo where Christ lives. Yesterday was a special day in the church year known as “All Saints Day” – So today we are taking special note of what it means to be a saint. The word “saint” comes from the Latin: *sanctus*. From that Latin word, *sanctus*, we get all kinds of Bible words in English: sacred; sanctified; sanctification; sacrament; ... these all relate to one concept: “holiness.” A saint is one who is called into the halo of God’s holiness.

This is what Paul is saying in v.7: *For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness. Therefore he who rejects this does not reject man, but God, who has also given us His Holy Spirit.*

Take a look at the diagram on the cover of you bulletin:



Literally, Paul writes: “God called us into holiness.” The Greek preposition Paul uses indicates a spacial idea. Picture a circle with an arrow pointing into it. That arrow means “into” and that arrow is the work of the Holy Spirit. To bring us into holiness.

The Bible calls this movement: “sanctification.” Sanctification is a movement from one status of being to another; from death to life; from uncleanness to holiness. It is a movement that happens when one believes in Jesus.

Perhaps you could picture not an arrow, but a cross – a cross leading through an open tomb into a circle of light and life. The cross of Jesus changes our status, takes us through death and into life; from uncleanness to holiness; where we reach the destination of God, there we find His resurrection and the halo that belongs to Jesus, now belongs to us. The Spirit’s work is to bring us through that open tomb and to make us holy by faith. So we confess in the third article: “I believe in the Holy Spirit, who has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified (made a saint) and kept me in the true faith.”

*7 For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.*

This true Biblical use of the word “saint” is applied to every Christian who believes in Jesus for salvation. The Roman Catholic concept of sainthood has not been helpful. Sainthood is not some standard that elite Christians receive when they die. Holiness isn’t a halo around your head, its a halo around your heart; its the halo of Jesus which has surrounded you with His forgiveness, life and salvation. It is a status, not a standard.

And so this is where we are; this is who we are; there is nothing more to do but abound in it more and more. “We encourage you, just as you have received commandment from us, so abound more and more.” Dig deeper. Don’t be a one dimensional Christian where your. Let your circle with God become a sphere in the world in which you grow and abound in your Christian conduct.

We will look at three practical applications in our text which show us where to abound in this holiness: 1. by honoring your body; 2. by honoring your brother; 3. by honoring your business.

### **1. Abound in holiness by honoring your body.**

I’ve been to Chicago a few times since I came to the area. Its a pretty city; as long as you look up. What is not so beautiful are the billboards. You can hardly walk down the street without a huge billboard of some scantily clad man or woman jumping out at you. You can hardly stand in line at the grocery store without having to protect your kids from the magazine rack. It is right at your fingertips.

What happens when sin is so readily available that it is right at your fingertips. Take a compulsive eater for example. He’s had a bad day, he’s knows he’s overweight, he’s already not feeling good about himself, and there is half a cake left over from the birthday party. It’s right at his fingertips.

Or what about an alcoholic? She’s lost her job, going through a divorce, all alone in her hotel with a fridge full of those little bottles. It’s right at her fingertips.

Which takes us to the issue in our text – *3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God.*

It's right at your fingertips. It's much more readily at hand than the billboards and the magazines; it's just a click away. Think of how easy it is – remote on the lamp stand, digital cable channels on the TV, mouse on your desktop, smartphone in your hands, girlfriend at your apartment, boyfriend over when your parents aren't home; it's right at your fingertips.

Is it enough just to cover the cake or put a cork in it? Is it enough to clear the history off your computer or to tell yourself, "well, at least we're living in separate bedrooms"? This is your sanctification – an arrow of the Spirit separating you from a certain realm of life and bringing you into holiness: abstain from sexual immorality. Abstain means separate. Abound in your holiness more and more; the sphere of Christ's holiness surrounds you.

You have been called into holiness. That means, first and foremost embrace God's grace. To be a saint is not a standard of living, but a status of life. You've been called into God's holiness; that is to say, you've been cleansed by the blood of Christ; the Spirit has taken you through the waters of baptism and into God's presence forever. This is the water which washes you daily and renews you again in the Spirit. So Paul writes: *1 Corinthians 6:11 But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.*

Now abound in it. Abound in that sphere of Christ's influence. Possess your body in sanctification and honor; for your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who dwells in you. Abound in abstaining. It may not be enough to cover the cake or put a cork in it. It may not be enough to think you can resist your flesh; you need to restrict your flesh.

So a Christian finds ways to restrict his flesh. His compulsion was an addiction to his smart phone. Right at his fingertips. So this is what he did: he asked his wife to set the restrictions and enter a password that only she would know. Then he asked her to periodically check the history. He couldn't resist his flesh so he restricted it; he made himself accountable.

Sometimes we need that 1st use of the law: a curb to our flesh. So we don't just cover the cake; we throw it out; we don't just put a cork in it, we pour it out. Maybe we can't have that girlfriend over to the apartment; maybe we get rid of cable TV. Maybe we need to get other Christians involved so that together we can learn to abound more and more in honoring our bodies. You are holy; now be yourself.

## **2. Abound in holiness by honoring your brother**

Has anyone here ever been to Philadelphia? So is it true to its title? The word Philadelphia means “city of brotherly love.” I’ve never been to Philadelphia, but I have been to Chicago. I’ve been to Chicago about three times since we moved here. On the last visit, I took two of our boys. It was windy, raining, and cold. Block after block, we were making our way through the drizzling rain to the Hancock Building. Think of how many different people we passed by on the way. We walked along weaving in and out and around – runners, dog walkers, employees rushing to get to work, people getting done with work; ears plugged in; people tuned out; crowds waiting for the light to change; we must have passed by hundreds of people; and all along the way, there were those who was not part of the busy bustle of business – block after block there were beggars.

As you might guess, walking two miles with a 4 and 5 year old, we ran into the inevitable: “I need to go potty.” We were about half way to the Hancock building and I knew this couldn’t wait another 15 blocks. So what would we do. The only thing harder to find in Chicago than a free ride is a place to go to the bathroom. I spotted a hotel just around the corner. So I went up to the door man and said, “do you know where I can find a restroom?” He looked at me skeptically. I pointed to the 5 year old. “Sure, straight into the elevator, second floor.” Out of the drizzle, out of the wind, and into the warmth of hospitality. But what if it was a dirty old man, missing teeth, ragged clothes, with a garbage bag over his shoulder? Do you suppose the door man would have let him into the warmth of hospitality?

I imagine a large city like Philadelphia is not much different: a busy bustle of business and as you go along beggars. We can hardly claim that to enter a city like Chicago or Philadelphia is to enter a sphere of brotherly love. It is too windy, too cold, too busy for such things. You can’t help everyone. And some of those beggars are frauds. Some are making higher salaries than a person working at McDonald’s. Too windy, cold, busy, and we’ve got a schedule to keep.

But there is a city which is truly to be called Philadelphia.

*9 But concerning brotherly love you have no need that I should write to you, for you yourselves are taught by God to love one another; 10 and indeed you do so toward all the brethren who are in all Macedonia. But we urge you, brethren, that you increase more and more;*

The Greek of v.9 begins: *peri de tes philadelphias*. “Now concerning brotherly love...” There is a city which truly lives up to the name: philadelphia . The Church. The communion of saints. You have been called into it; now abound in it.

But how often doesn't the church appear like nothing more than a busy bustle of business as you pass by the beggars? Are we nothing more than a crowd of people waiting for the light to change? Waiting for the next thing, budgeting for the next goal, cherishing the next accomplishment, and focused on the next destination?

And who do we pass by along the way? We figure: he's just a fraud, I'm not going to help him. And she made those bad choices, she can deal with it. And I just don't have time to stop and listen to him, I've got a schedule to keep. They are just going to dirty things up for us.

The Thessalonians abounded in their riches. There was a famine in Palestine and the Christians were in danger of starving to death. When the call went out for a collection to be gathered, the Thessalonians responded. They responded in such a way that all the surrounding region was taking note. In his letter to the Corinthians Paul uses them as an example. He writes, "In great affliction and in deep poverty they abounded in riches. Although they were suffering in their own financial troubles, they abounded. They gave not of necessity or grudgingly, but were grateful to do this; it was their thanksgiving." And what happened? "They gave beyond their ability." He writes. For they had been taught by God to know Christ who thought he was rich, yet he became poor and through His poverty made you rich. In Christ we know how the Spirit abounds in the midst of poverty and struggle.

You have been called into holiness. The cross of Christ leads through an empty tomb into the city of brotherly love where there is no distinction between whom to honor and who not to honor. Christ had no preference for who was at his doorstep. He saw us all as unclean. All our righteousness were as filthy rags. And he let us in. He opened the doors to heaven by allowing our filthy sins onto Himself as He wore them to the cross. And there He opened the doors; there was born "Philadelphia" – the city of brotherly love. And that is where the Holy Spirit has taken us; sanctified us and that is where we live and move and exist as Christians: holy saints.

"Sure, straight in to the elevator, second floor." Come on in. Stop the busy bustle for just a moment to look around and see the people that have come to the doorstep of this philadelphia; see where God would have you serve your fellow Christians; your neighbors; your church.

### **3. Abound in holiness by honoring your business**

One thing that amazed me about our visit to Chicago was the skyscrapers. I marveled at the magnitude of those buildings; even more so, I marveled at the magnitude of the budget it would take to build them. Now what comes to mind when we think of the CEOs of those big business buildings. One news article went under this title: “Bank Got Bailout, CEO Got Golden Parachute.” It doesn’t really matter whether the CEO had a legal right to his severance package, the people see it one way: he’s not honoring his business. We just don’t expect someone who runs a business into the ground to get that business bailed out by someone else and then just walk away from it all with \$9 million dollars.

But here we are not concerned with CEOs. We are concerned with Christians. For us who represent the name of Christ in the world, we live in a sphere where everything we do will be scrutinized by those who are not Christians. That means that even our business practices are a testimony to our faith. You have been called into holiness, now abound in it.

Maybe you don’t own a fortune five hundred; maybe you are just selling something on eBay. But what happens when people find out that you are overpricing your product or your product doesn’t even work?

Maybe someone owes you money. What happens when people find out you are more like a Mafia wise guy, twisting arms and taking names?

Maybe you are just a FedEx employee running routes all day. What happens when you damage the product before it gets there, but you say it was the customer who did it, and no one can prove otherwise?

Maybe you are just a guy collecting unemployment. What happens when you find some work on the side, but decide the government doesn’t really need to know, you don’t really need to pay taxes for this, its just a side job, just temporary?

*11 that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, 12 that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.*

You’ve been called into holiness. Christ has drawn you into the sphere of His work and His reputation. He has bailed you out of your greatest debt – a debt you could never work off or pay off. He has bailed you out, saved you, made you rich. – not so that you can walk away with the severance package and enjoy retirement, but so that you can

walk in holiness; so that you can abound in holiness. You are walking in Christ's holiness, so abound in it.

Your daily life is about abounding in the riches of Christ so that His generosity, humility, diligence, honesty, are spilling over into your various realms of living. In your families; in your business practices; in your reputation at work; these are all realms to abound. And the point is not so that you can progress and build skyscrapers; but so that you can walk properly toward those who are outside, so that you lack nothing; so that you can support your family and church and live a quiet life.

Abound in holiness by honoring your business practices.

So picture yourself leaving today in holiness. Not that you have a halo around your head, but that you have a halo around your heart. And that is the place where Christ is present. There His holiness makes you holy. There His cross pierces through the barrier of your sinful flesh and into an empty tomb of endless life. There the Spirit is abounding in holy things and thoughts; So honor your body; honor your brother; and honor your business. You are a saint; now be a saint. Amen.