

Total Holiness

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In this chapter, Paul draws our attention to the all of life nature of Christianity when he writes, “Finally...we urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God that you do so more and more” (1). He urges us to *walk in a way that pleases God*. Walking is an all of life metaphor; we do it everyday. It takes us everywhere: work, home, restaurants, venues. It’s here, in the everyday, that we’re called to *please God, verse 3 to do his will, verse 4 to walk in holiness*. All of life. This comes “*in and through the Lord Jesus*” because to be a Christian is to live under the definitive authority of the Lord Jesus, in all of life. It’s to say, Jesus you are so grand and so dear, so authoritative and so sweet, I’ll live in total holiness. I’ll honor you in every sphere of life: *sexual, communal, vocational*.

Sexual Sphere

Another way to talk about this in verse 3, “*For this is the will of God your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality*. Sanctification is one of those robust, technical terms. Like all disciplines, theology and Scripture have technical terms that operate like a kind of shorthand to condense a lot of meaning into one word. We can say “*being made progressively holier to reflect the moral beauty, purity, and presence of Christ*” or “sanctification” or verse 4 “holiness” (same word). This is the will of God. You want to know what the will of God is? Your holiness. Holiness is so embracing the presence of Christ that you look like him, and act like him, more and more. And here, the focus is *sexual* holiness. Like our times, this church was living in a sexually *unholy* time. Men in particular often had a wife to bear children, a concubine or two for sexual exploits, and could freely act on their impulses with others. It was, and is reprehensible. If you’ve suffered from assault I am truly sorry. We would love to help and encourage everyone to listen to our Public Faith Forum on Sexual Assault. Part of the reason sexual sin was commonplace was that a lot of Greek thinking separated what you did *with your body* from what you did *with your religion*. So you could be devoted to a local temple, sacrifice regularly, *and* consort with prostitutes. You could pay homage to Roma, the god of government *and* cheat your taxes. You could worship Aphrodite and cheat on your spouse. Today, for many the thinking is the same. You can be devoted to a local church, attend services regularly, *and* fantasize about people, surf the net for porn, or voyeuristically watch sex scenes. You separate what you do with your body with what you do in your religion. This is a problem when it comes to Christianity *because it’s not permissible! It’s an all of life religion, a commitment to live under the definitive authority of Christ in every sphere*. Christianity possesses a whole person ethic that includes biology, physicality, sexuality. Sanctification includes *abstaining from sexual immorality*. The word is *porneia* and refers to a range of sexual deviances from God’s intended purpose—marital and heterosexual. Sex is a beautiful thing in the safety of that commitment, where the two become one. But in Thessalonica you could consort with concubines, temple prostitutes to get blessing from the gods. Today our temples are invisible, digital fortresses of porn, films that entice with lusty scenes, private fortresses of the mind where we burn with envy and desire. And the Lord Jesus sees it all, and he says *abstain*. Means *run* “put distance between.” To put distance between is to get as far away as possible. It’s *not* making justifications about how porn filters slow down the internet; it’s

not rationalizing because you're single. It's not even just putting distance between you and *porneia*; it's closing the distance between you and God. Holiness is getting closer to God, not just further from sin. It's saying I care *more* about *the presence of Christ, his moral beauty, his intense love*, than false intimacy and fleeting satisfaction. When you make a habit of getting close to something that pure, that lovely, that glorious, you don't want to cheat on it. It's like watching a great marriage unravel on screen, when one spouse starts cheating on the other spouse who is faithful, kind, self-sacrificing, and you think how could you do it; she's such a lovely person? It's unthinkable. *Christ* is that lovely spouse, and some are cheating on him. If you are you need to run back, get on your needs, and beg for forgiveness. Take the Sexual Integrity class. **Why?** Several reasons. 1) *Gospel*. He's utterly committed to you. God's commitment to us is so holy, so pure, so filled with grace and shockingly self-sacrificing he would rather die than give up on you. He's waiting to take you back. 2) Verse 6, *Community*. don't transgress a brother or sister because the Lord is an avenger of these things. Jesus is Lord. Take advantage of a brother and sister, and the Lord will come down on you. If you assault, we *will* report it. Treat the community of faith like a family, respect your brother and sister in Christ. 3) Verse 5, *Witness*. We're to possess our bodies in holiness not in passionate desire like the Gentiles, who do not know God. If people see the same sexual compromise among those who do know God, then why would people want to know your God? We're to be distinct, visibly submitted to Christ. Verse 4, *Worship*. Each one of you possess your vessel in holiness and honor. There's some debate over meaning of this word body. It's not the usual word; instead, it's a word that means *vessel*, and in fact, is related to the word for *temple*. Now, when you put that together with verse 8, Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you, a very powerful thing happens. He's saying your body isn't accidental; it's a temple! Your body is the very place God the Spirit dwells. Where we live and breathe is where we worship. And because of that, what we do with our bodies is a matter of *holiness*. We're to honor not just *the authority of Christ* but *the presence of the Spirit*. Gospel, Community, Witness, and Worship: four motivations for sexual holiness.

Communal Sphere

The second sphere over which Christ rules is community, "Now concerning brotherly love you have need of no one to write to you; you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another" (9). Here's some encouragement; they're doing great! Keep loving one another. We talked about this last week—holy love— even if it's something you think you're A+ on, keep doing it. Can I brag on you for a minute? *In just the past few weeks, you've done remarkable acts of love: counseled one another through pain, confronted one another with the truth, moved a family into a new home, invited someone without housing to stay with you, and when one of our members car broke down a city group pitched in to buy a new car!* Brotherly, sisterly, community love. Keep it up, just as you've been taught by God. Now this phrase, taught by God, is very interesting. It's actually one word in Greek, God-taught, and its likely referring to the Holy Spirit as a teacher. We've already seen he's a Gift, the presence of God in the temple of our lives. Now, he's the Teacher *in* the temple. In fact, Jesus says to his disciples: the Spirit will *guide* you into the truth (Jn 14:26), precisely what a teacher does. But there's a difference. When *the Spirit* teaches, he transforms. He doesn't just speak; he sanctifies. He illuminates the mind, he inebriates the heart, transforms the will. Sexual holiness, communal holiness, love is possible only when we are *God-taught*. So

when you meditate on the Scriptures, listen to sermons, read books, take classes, come to be God-taught, to be transformed, sanctified on the spot.

Vocational Sphere

The final sphere is vocational, *to aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one.* The authority of Christ and the presence of the Spirit affects how we **work**. Work with your hands means don't depend on others in an unreasonable way. There were patrons in Greek culture who you could rely on for a living, and the church was known for pooling resources to help one another. He's saying don't take advantage of the church's benevolence. Get a job, work hard. Your work is a matter of worship. As you work, mind your own **affairs**. It means don't be a busybody, a gossip. Don't talk about co-workers or church members behind their back, over lunch. Honor the family, others, with your words. If you have an issue with someone, Jesus says go directly to that person and be reconciled. Or overlook it, let it go. *Love covers a multitude of sins.* A multitude is a lot. In other words, unless its egregious, we should be overlooking things, *just like God overlooks a multitude of our sins.* He doesn't confront us with everything at once, but with just a few at a time. Finally, aspire to live **quietly**. This means be industrious and not create public disorder. Christians should be known for promoting peace through their vocation not: cheating, cutting corners, and so on. Christians should be distinctive in their work, community, and sexual habits. Why? Verse 7, *God has called us to it:* vocational, total holiness. That's our job, every one of us, to embrace the rule of Christ, to be taught by the Spirit, treating our bodies as a temple in all of life. *Because Jesus is so great and so dear, so authoritative and so sweet, we want to honor him in every sphere of life.*