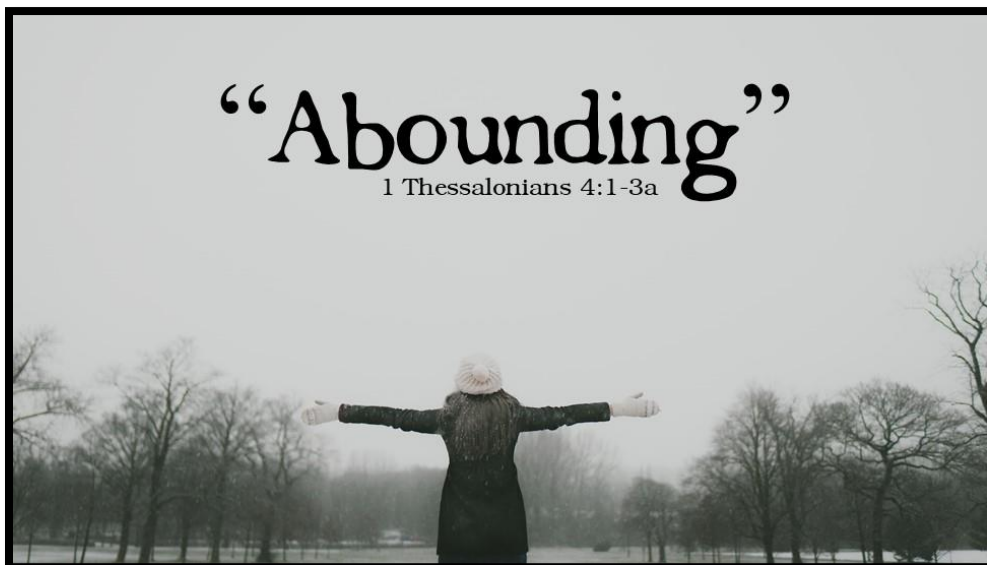


"Abounding"

by Pastor Tim Dodson
at JF Believers Church
in Menomonie, Wis
on Nov 5, 2023

- 1 Thess 4 -

1 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; 2 for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus. 3 For this is the will of God, your sanctification



4:1

One of the great inadvertent principles or purposes of this letter is that it lays out how those in the church in Thessalonica...as well as the reader today, is to live in the light of the soon return of Jesus Christ. In this section, Paul deals with some practical instruction in faithful living as a child of God. He begins today by reminding us that due to the inherent nature and power of salvation, we as Christians must be continually growing stronger...conforming into the "image of Christ." We must be not just *living* but *abounding*.

It's been said that "*Christian living is not a desirable option but a compelling obligation. That binding obligation is 'how you ought to walk and to please God.'* The matter of how they should live as Christians is central for all followers of the Lord Jesus. Paul is seeking to help them to know how they can fulfill this obligation." Morris writes that... "When a man is saved by the work of Christ for him it does not leave open before him as a matter for his completely free decision whether he will serve God or not. He has been bought with a price. He has become the slave of Christ." The Apostle John says... "the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked." (1John 2:6) We must remember that when we become a Christian, Jesus doesn't enter our world, but rather *we enter His*.

Paul desires...moreover our *God* desires, that we more than simply *survive* this walk in Christ but moreover that we *abound*. "More and more abound" he says. He calls us to this in the strongest language...*I urge* you...*I exhort* you. He desires the attributes which naturally thrive in the matter of walking in and pleasing our God. This matter ironically is one of the great divisions in the realm of those who claim to be believers today. For there are so many who say that they love Jesus yet they have no real time for Him. How would that work if applied toward your girlfriend or boyfriend? Then there are those who only tacitly serve Him out of constraint and peer pressure. They give nothing of themselves, nothing toward the pursuit of the advance of His kingdom, nor do they even attempt to live a real committed life of holiness. It's just sort of like their 9 to 5 job. They will do it, but don't expect them to be happy about it! So many will fight and struggle with this issue their whole lives and yet still at the same time say they love Jesus! They never find the joy in walking in and pleasing God. They never really experience or manifest the attributes of an individual who is in love!

One cannot help but notice that this passage makes no claim that God is pleased by our arrival at some level of spiritual standing, but rather it is in the "walking"... our moving forward, our action and the efforts in which God is pleased. This is a critical understanding for us reborn believers. There are no "degrees" or "status"...no "finish line"...no arrival wherein you have come far enough to deserve His love for you and now you are finished. We have never achieved enough to settle on our laurels and camp out until He returns for us.

Christianity is an active living out of faith. Indeed there will be ups and downs, and successes and failures, but there will always be an ultimate movement forward. Even if it is 2 steps forward and one back! This is an inherent aspect of Christianity. It is a foundational aspect. Christianity is alive, active, and moving. The critique of our own personal lives as to these intrinsic aspects is essential in our personal reviews of our status in Christ. This is part of the process in which Paul calls upon us in 2 Corinthians 13:5 to "test ourselves." It is a call to give honest evaluation of our lives to see whether we are "living in a dynamic, faith-oriented connection with

Jesus Christ.” In other words, “Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith” means to examine yourselves to see whether you are living a dynamic Christian life! Whether you are living abundantly, *aboundingly*.

Enoch of Old Testament fame was a man who stood the test and moreover he did so over the long haul! In Genesis 5:24, we are told that Enoch “walked with God.” Hebrews 11:5 says that Enoch’s life pleased God, and finally we are told then that he was “taken up.” It doesn’t say Enoch was a perfect man, it says he was a man who walked with God. This is the life model that Paul is presenting herein: *walk with God, ... please God, ...be physically with God for eternity.*

Ray Stedman illustrates the Christian’s life, noting that walking...

“merely consists of two simple steps, repeated over and over again. It is not a complicated thing. In the same way, the Christian life is a matter of taking two steps, one step after another. Then you are beginning to walk. Those two steps (are seen in Colossians 3), Paul describes them as, “Put off the old man” and “put on the new.” Then repeat them. That is all. Keep walking through every day like that. That is how Scripture exhorts us to live.”

Paul calls upon us here in our text today to “please” God. But what does that mean? How are we to please God? The writer Richison wrote... “A central characteristic of the Christian life is to please God. Christians accommodate themselves to their God. God never accommodates Himself to us. The idea is not that we appease God or conciliate Him. Christ did that on the cross. We please Him because we honor Him. It is a matter of gratefulness. A holy walk pleases God. We want to walk in a way that puts a smile on the face of God. Many of us make Him frown.” To please God is to walk with Him...to walk with God is to please Him. This is clearly an important relational aspect of our life with God...for Genesis tells us that He walked in the garden with Adam and Eve! One’s walk speaks of his or her abiding lifestyle. Like the players in scripture, our response in repentance and faith must be followed by continuing obedience and perseverance.

This does not mean we won’t fail or we won’t stumble. But it means that in our lifetime we are continually and forever moving forward...pushing on...growing stronger, more faithful, and a greater servant to God and kingdom. This is not some sort of addendum to salvation...it is not a mandate to prove our muster. It is rather a natural and innate aspect of true redemption. It is ours as a sign that we are truly reborn. When we fall and stay down, we were never truly part of the team. It proves we were never one of His to begin with, but rather just going through the external motions of religious acts. We all know people who fell prey to such. 1 John 2:19 states emphatically this truth saying *“They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.”*

Is there an ultimate goal then in this today? Our text calls upon us to “please God” by the way we live, the way we walk out this life. And in that “pleasing” we will therefore “abound” more and more in our relationship with Him and our path through this life. That is not a prosperity doctrine, for “abounding” herein speaks to far more than material gain and standing. One aspect in which we abound is in our work for the Lord. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.” (1Cor 15:58) Our “work of the Lord” pleases Him!

Again Richison notes that...

“The words “more and more” point to spiritual growth. It is not enough to exist as a Christian, we must move toward excellence. It is one thing to park ourselves in the Christian life but it is another thing to prevail in it. God wants us to move beyond the status quo. We should ask ourselves whether we are making any progress in the Christian life. We do not tell our spouses that we love them the day we get married and that is supposed to last them for the rest of their lives! Neither do we live the Christian life with one fell swoop. Each day with the Lord should be sweeter than the day before but it will take work. Status quo in the Christian life always means stagnation, deterioration and decay in holiness. Doctrine precedes duty and precept precedes practice. The Christian life is not a set of rules but a set of principles. The design of the Christian life is to teach us God’s viewpoint on life by forming that viewpoint into principles. When we apply those principles by faith God transforms our lives. Principles are lifeless without application.”

4:2

As Paul begins to move into the first of these exhortations in practical Christian living, he seems to want to make clear that they are not “suggestions.” They are in fact clear mandates from God, and absolute elements of the Christian “walk,” the “abounding” believer.

“...for you know...” These instructions he is about to give are not new. They are not going to be a surprise to them or to us! Yet Paul is lining them up as issues that apparently, they needed to be reminded of *...as do we*. They were issues that would no doubt kick their spiritual feet out from beneath them if ignored.

We must lose the idea that we can “walk” with God while at the same time living in opposition to Him. Amos 3:3 states that *“Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?”* A life of true faith is not a smorgasbord. It is a package deal, despite the attempts by many

churches, individuals and even pastors today to make it otherwise! If your desire is to please God, then these are some of the things that you must come to terms with.

4:3

Verse 3 begins with "this is the will of God..." I find that pretty amazing because I lost count of how many people have expressed to me in one manner or another that they could not find God's will for themselves. Yet here it is in 1 Thessalonians 3, verse 3 just as plain as day: *this is the will of God, your sanctification*:

First of all, finding God's will doesn't have to be a complicated process. He has given us many simple and clearly stated principles for life. For example, we are told, "This is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men" (1Pe 2:15). And in 1Thess 5:18 we are told, "In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you." And here where again he says "This is the will of God, *your sanctification*..." Now just what aspects that sanctification encompasses can be extensive...some of which Paul will address over the next couple of weeks. But let us not move quickly away from this stark and simplistic aspect of His "will," in that he wants us to be "sanctified." **Just what is this sanctification?**

Sanctification encompasses the trait and practice of "holiness" but it is a holiness that does not come quickly or easily. There is a "positional sanctification" which is your standing in heaven earned solely by Christ, His work upon the cross, and your acceptance of such. It is done and finished and secure in heaven. But there is another sanctification that is a "practical" sanctification. This is a fluid thing. It is a living and moving thing that we are called to grow in throughout our life. No matter what age you are today.

Sanctification in its most basic sense, is to set something apart for God's special use and purpose. Imagine you own a tux. Do you go out and garden in your tux? Change the oil in your car? Probably not. Why? Because your tux has essentially been "sanctified"...set apart for particular formal events. This is the same idea playing out in our sanctification! Paul herein, as well as Christ Himself, sees our very lives...reborn and now owned by Christ, as being "sanctified" ...set apart for His exclusive use.

God's desire is for our "sanctification." In fact, this verse is saying that it is more than just His desire, it is His "will." Yet how many of us spend our days struggling in one area or another to go against that very will? We often claim we don't know what His will is, but the truth is we usually do but just don't want to acknowledge such, and further, don't want to obey such. What makes us think that we can actually change the will of God? This can be in the areas of our service, our giving, our vocation, our dating habits, and so much more. We reason, we argue, we give excuses, we whine and complain. But God's will doesn't change. Life on planet earth ... is a usually a struggle between our will and His. However, let's not pretend that the result has no bearing as to what we are and where my passions lie. Who wins out expresses the truth of who we really follow and worship!

A lot of older folks think that because they have the years, they have also the standing. Wouldn't that be nice if only it were true! If you are breathing, you are not done. In truth, a lot of older folks are the worst offenders in this area because they feel somehow that they have "arrived." **You haven't.** We must not forget that with Christianity comes responsibility, whether we want it or not. This argument is well understood in the secular realm, but somehow gets lost when we deal with the spiritual realm. But with Christ, we often think we are owed something without effort or cost on our side. As if eternal life, forgiveness of sin, freedom from the power of sin and right standing before God are not enough!

We often are guilty of treating the church with this illogical thinking, supposing we are to freely receive without participation on our part. Do you eat free at McDonalds? Do you keep your job if you don't show up or fail to do the work? Do you have a good marriage when you are a slacker and give no effort? Does your car run if you don't put gas in it? Maybe you think a gallon of gas should be enough to get you to Minneapolis and back. You can get angry and think you have given enough, but it doesn't change a thing. Why then do we think church and God is different? We are not "owed" anything! Except maybe death and hell.

So clearly and succinctly, we are called by God to be sanctified unto Him. Set aside from all the aspects and pursuits of this world, to be used now for the furtherance of Christ and his kingdom. This is his "will" for you and for me. It is the sanctified life that knows the meaning of "abounding." The term "abundant life" is found in John 10:10b, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." "More abundantly" means to have a superabundance of a thing. "Abundant life" refers to life in its abounding fullness of joy and strength for spirit, soul and body. It is living large. It is living to please God and by doing so, being so very pleased with Him...