

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24
(Psalm 1:1-6; John 15:1-11)
“A Neglected Promise: God’s Power to Sanctify”

Introduction

We have been looking the past few weeks, at these two verses that Paul uses as a blessing at the end of his first letter to the church in Thessalonica. In them, we find a neglected message: the message of sanctification, a neglected perspective: the perspective of Christ’s second coming, and a neglected promise: the promise that God will provide all that is needed for our sanctification. We have been asking what this message is, why it is neglected in our day, and have noted that most of us are relatively comfortable with our lives and are not eager to have those lives radically challenged. And yet, the Bible constantly challenges us with the call to radical discipleship. In fact, it gives no comfort and assurance to us, unless we are intentionally working “out [our] own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in [us], both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:12-13).

Far too many Christians are satisfied to live their lives as spiritual children, fed and cared for by others, never taking seriously God’s call to maturity in Christ, and never recognizing his promise to provide all that is needed for their growth. So, this morning, we will ask the question that finally comes to each of us who realize that the call of God is not optional, that it is neglected to our own hurt, and that it is in fact the only way to life and joy and peace. The question is, if God has promised to do the work of sanctification as surely as he has done the work of atonement, how does he do it, and how do we access it? How do we lay hold by faith of this tremendous promise of God without somehow being thrown back on our own meager natural resources, which always leave us depressed and crying out, “Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Romans 7:24).

The answer is found first in knowing what the Bible teaches about sanctification, then in believing the message, then in a conscious act of consecration, and finally in the daily, hourly, moment-by-moment walking out of that decision to live, not for the flesh so as to satisfy its ambitions, lusts and desires, but to live instead for the sake of the One who loved us and gave him self for us. Everything rests upon the cross of Christ and the power of his Spirit. All that Christ has done for us we can only realize through the work of his Holy Spirit within us. Christ has done the work of salvation, but the Spirit of God must apply to the individual life the work of Christ, and the individual must receive that work by faith.

This morning can be for you the beginning of a life marked by victory rather than by defeat. If Satan cannot keep you from Christ, he will at least seek to make you live at a level of defeat unworthy of a child of the King. I invite you this morning to possess your possessions in Christ, to begin to experience his power and his love.

Body

- 1. You must *know* what the Bible teaches about sanctification.**
We are united with Christ in his death, resurrection and ascension
- 2. You must *believe* what the Bible teaches about sanctification.**
Faith, in the Bible, is not merely assenting with the mind, but embracing with the heart.
- 3. You must *consecrate* your entire self, spirit, soul and body, to the Lord.**
This may happen at regeneration, or may happen gradually, but we must consciously, intentionally, renounce lordship of ourselves and consecrate ourselves to the Lord. Our model is Jesus, who said, “for their sake I consecrate myself” (John 17:19).
- 4. You must *live*, not for yourself, but for the Lord.**
This is the only way to grow to maturity in Christ: developing new habits of the heart in daily, moment-to-moment renouncing self and yielding gratefully to Christ. The prayer, “Your Kingdom come, your will be done,” means nothing if we are still engaged in building our own little kingdoms. We are to live, not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

Conclusion

What difference does this make? It is the difference between a person who has come to expect spiritual defeat and is surprised and delighted at occasional victories, and a person who walks joyfully in the Lord’s presence with a clear conscience, and is sickened and mortified at falling into moral or spiritual failure of any kind. It is not perfection, although that is the goal toward which the Lord is leading that will at last be realized in the day of the Lord when he completes his work in us.

Here is the difference: the defeated are striving, praying, sweating, working *for* victory, and so are frequently defeated. Those, whose lives are centered in and directed by their union with Christ, live their lives *from* victory, the victory won by Christ and given them by the Spirit. We are not called to *take* the hill of holiness. We can never do that. We are called instead to *hold* the hill that Christ has taken and entrusted to us. We have the high ground, we have God’s Spirit within, and we are in union with Christ. Now it is ours simply to live from this perspective and no longer yield to the things that once brought us defeat and death.

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

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