

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

A Prayer for Sanctification 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 Part 1

Let me ask you a question. What percent of Americans say that they are Christian? What would you say? George Gallop a well known pollster was curious and discovered that 80% of Americans make that profession. That is a very large percentage. But what does it show us? Does it show us how spiritually minded America is or does it reflect how spiritually ignorant America is? I would categorically without hesitation say the latter.

To reinforce my own personal conviction George Gallop went on to ask other questions related to spiritual matters. He asked the same group of people if they were church members and 70% said that they were. This is still a very high percentage. But then he asked the group who preached the Sermon on the Mount. Only 40% were able to answer correctly. If you happen to be wondering the correct answer is Jesus. He asked could they define and defend their faith and only 5-10 % felt that they could.

These statistics are very sobering. We live in a nation that is not spiritually enlightened but rather spiritually ignorant. Americans as a whole have a very low view of the faith that they say that they have embraced.

Hopefully as we very slowly but methodically approach the conclusion of the Epistle of First Thessalonians we will more fully appreciate the dynamics of the faith that we have embraced. Let us turn in our bibles to **1 Thess. 5:23,24** and read a prayer by the Apostle for the Thessalonian Church: **“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. (24) Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.”** The Apostle Paul in his prayer for the Thessalonian church is praying for their sanctification.

This morning we will begin to consider this wonderful biblical theme. My hope is that as we consider this particular theme that our appreciation of the positive dynamics of our salvation will be significantly enhanced.

THE NATURE OF SANCTIFICATION

The word “sanctify” (HAGIAZO) means “to separate.” In this context we would have to understand that it is Paul’s wish, his desire, his prayer that the Thessalonians be separated from sin to holiness. This is the burden of Paul’s heart. People tend to value all kinds of things but neglect this. But certainly Paul understood what is truly important.

This same word in varying forms is used many times throughout the epistle (1:5,6; 4:3,4,7,8 ; 5:26,27). Why was this thought so prevalent? Because this is what is really important. What should we desire for our church above all else? That we would be striving to be separated from sin to holiness.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

In your prayers for Valley Bible pray for this. Certainly Paul was doing this for the Thessalonians. In fact he not only prayed for it here in **1 Thess. 5:23,24** but he had prayed for it in essence earlier in the epistle in **1 Thess. 3:11-13**. There he prays “**Now may our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you; (12) and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another, and for all men, just as we also do for you (13) So that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.**” There are three basic elements of sanctification.

Positional Sanctification (Heb. 10:10)

This element is past. When we accepted Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior we were sanctified. **Heb. 10:10** tells us this very clearly. It says, “**By this** (Referring to Christ fulfilling the will of God to the uttermost) **we have been sanctified** (Not are being sanctified, not will be sanctified but have been sanctified) **through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.**” Because we have been sanctified, because we have been separated or set apart from sin to holiness through the offering of the body of Christ once for all, it is now possible for us without any further sacrifices to continuously enter into the Lord’s presence.

In a sense we can picture ourselves at the moment of our salvation receiving a robe of righteousness. This robe of righteousness makes it possible for us to come into the Lord’s presence and enjoy fellowship with Him and to offer up worship that is pleasing to Him. Without this robe we would not be found acceptable.

How did we get this robe of righteousness. We got it from Jesus. In **2 Cor. 5:21** “**He made Him (Jesus) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.**” When we accept Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior transferring our trust from ourselves to Jesus Christ alone for our salvation the benefits of Christ's death are applied to us. We in effect have this robe of righteousness placed on us.

This covering of righteousness is pervasive, it is powerful, In **Thess. 4:7** it says, “**For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.**” Notice the wording. It does not say that he called us “for sanctification” although that is true. But it says that he called us “**in sanctification.**” Positional Sanctification becomes the sphere in which we live (1 Thess. 4:7). Seeking to help you understand this in terms of a visual picture it would be like the robe of righteousness that we receive from Christ is incredibly huge. So huge that it actually is a constraining force. Our positional sanctification is a force so powerful that we will find it increasingly more difficult to move toward sin and away from righteousness.

What may have been easy for us to neglect in terms of righteousness and what was so very easy for us to embrace in terms of sin before we became Christians now is dramatically impacted. We are not the same person any longer, God has called us “**in sanctification.**” **POSITIONAL SANCTIFICATION WILL THEREFORE GIVE WAY TO PRACTICAL SANCTIFICATION.**

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

Practical Sanctification (2 Cor. 7:1)

Positional sanctification took place in the past. Practical sanctification which is a natural outflow of positional sanctification is taking place in the present. This is what Paul is working on throughout this epistle. Each time Paul gives an exhortation or command to the Thessalonian church he is seeking to help them along the path of practical sanctification. In fact this is the drumbeat of Paul in all of his epistles. In **2 Cor. 7:1** Paul said, **“Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”** Practical sanctification is our day to day **“perfecting of holiness in the fear of God.”**

Christians are therefore in respect to practical sanctification becoming what they are. Positionally we are holy but practically we are becoming holy. Thomas Watson said referring to this present tense aspect of sanctification said, “Sanctification is a principle of grace savingly wrought whereby the heart becomes holy. And is made after God’s own heart. A sanctified person will therefore not only bear the name of God but also His image. All of this will eventually lead to PERFECT SANCTIFICATION OR ULTIMATE SANCTIFICATION.

Perfect Sanctification (Rom. 8:18-23)

Perfect or ultimate sanctification will not take place until the resurrection of our bodies. This is what is revealed to us in **Rom. 8:18-23** **“For I consider the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. (19) For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. (20) For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope (21) that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. (22) For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now. (23) And not only this, but also we ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body.”** It is at the time of the redemption of our bodies that we will finally be fully and completely set apart from sin and the ravages of sin to holiness.

We are therefore in the present process of sanctification not only becoming what we are but also what we shall be.

SOURCE OF SANCTIFICATION

What does this passage teach us concerning the source of our sanctification. Let us again look at the verse. **“Now may the God of peace sanctify you entirely.”** Paul is telling us that our setting apart from sin to holiness is the work of the **“God of Peace.”**

Throughout this epistle Paul has been giving the Thessalonian Church various commands reaching a crescendo in **1 Thess. 5:12**. The weight of these commands can be overwhelming. How can we do these things. Now Paul makes it very clear that it is through the God of peace alone that these things can happen.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

There is a wonderful verse that I am sure most of us are familiar with in **Zech. 4:6** it says, “.... **Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the Lord of hosts.**” These are the words that we usually quote but there is actually more to the verse. The whole verse says, “**Then he (an angel) answered and said to me (Zechariah), “This is the word of the Lord to Zerubbabel, saying “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, says the Lord of hosts.”** Why were these words spoken to by the Lord to Zerubbabel?

Subsequent to the decree of Cyrus in 538 BC in which the captive peoples of Babylonia including the Jews were permitted to return to their own homes, Zerubbabel was appointed governor in postexilic Jerusalem (Ezra 1:8,11; 5:14). Cyrus encouraged the Jews as they returned home to rebuild the religious shrines that had been destroyed. For the Jews this meant the rebuilding of their temple. But all kinds of problems faced them. Problems from neighboring people groups, to crop failures, to extremely depressed economic conditions. Zerubbabel the governor of Jerusalem apparently had become very discouraged. It was at this point that God raised up the prophet Zechariah to speak these words to this discouraged governor. “**Not by might nor by power, but by Spirit, says the Lord.**”

We need to be reminded of this as well. I am sure that all of you from time to time become very discouraged not with the building of an earthly temple but rather our spiritual temple. It seems that there are problems at every hand but what do we need to understand at those moments of greatest discouragement. It is “**not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord.**” The source of our sanctification is not us but rather the God of peace.

Don't we have something to do with this? Yes. Of course we do. In **Rom. 6:19** “**I am speaking in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness, resulting in further lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification.**” Without the presentation of ourselves and our members to the Lord and to his purposes for our lives sanctification will not take place.

1 Thess. 5:23 makes it very clear that the sanctification process is the work of God. But it is also our work. We have a part in it. I am continually striving, running, fighting but even as I do this with all the strength that I have available to me the victory is ultimately the Lord's.

It reminds me of the story of the feeding of 5000 in **John 6**. A great multitude followed Jesus. And they had become hungry. The disciples who have dismissed this multitude so that they could have returned to their homes to find something to eat. But this was not Christ's plan. Christ's plan was to demonstrate his power by feeding them. How did he accomplish this. He took what they had available that was five loaves and two fishes. And the Lord blessed it and the multitude was not only fed but 12 baskets of food was gathered up that was left over.

Valley Bible Church – Sermon Transcript

We cannot purify ourselves. We do not have the resources to accomplish this. But what we do have we are to bring to the table. Not a part of it but all of it. And if we do so we can be assured that the God of peace will bless us and all that he has promised us in respect to being separated from sin to holiness will be accomplished.

CONCLUSION

LET US BRING WHAT WE HAVE TO JESUS THIS MORNING AND LET HIM BLESS US.