

God Is Faithful; He Will Do It

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[0 : 00] 1 Thessalonians 5, 23 and 24. 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. Amen. I want to open this morning with a question. If you're a Christian, do you think when you wake up tomorrow morning, you'll still be a Christian?

Think about it. Meditate on that for just a second. If you're a Christian today, do you think that tomorrow you still will be?

Now I don't want to make too many assumptions in that question. I recognize that not everyone here may be a Christian. I suspect that most of you at least understand yourselves to be.

[1 : 11] Why do you believe you will be one tomorrow? Why do you expect that despite significant doubts, that I would imagine at least some of you probably wrestle with, I wonder why you would expect that with significant doubts that you'll still believe tomorrow.

Why do you suppose that the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of sin will not choke out your desire to believe and obey Christ?

And the truth is maybe you don't have much confidence about that. You're just trying to hang on as tightly as you can.

And I have been there certain points in my life and in my faith where I didn't know if the next day I actually would wake up and still believe or still want this.

You're just trying to hang on as tightly as I can. And maybe you're at a place now or maybe you at least can relate to something like that. There's been a time in your life where you just thought, I'm just trying to hang on and hope for the best and hope that I can still hang on tomorrow.

[2 : 29] But I suspect that if you think yourself a Christian now, you'll probably go to sleep tonight expecting to wake up tomorrow still being one.

But the question is, why do you think that? Why would that even happen when there seems to be so much that's working against us? So much working against us even maybe that's within us?

We even think about Galatians 5 that we just read a moment ago. We're at war all the time?

Essentially is what Paul is saying there. There's really only one true answer to the question.

There's only one reason why you'll wake up tomorrow and still be a Christian. It's not because you have the willpower to keep going when others fall away.

Remember that's what Peter said? Then Jesus, right before he goes to the Garden of Gethsemane, he tells the disciples, he says, you're all going to forsake me. And Peter says, no, Lord.

[3 : 33] And he acknowledges the other 11. He says, those guys may do it. I'll never do it. He thought he had the willpower. He thought that he had all that it took to persevere in and of himself.

And Jesus says, no, actually, you're going to deny me three times before even the alarm clock goes off tomorrow. Three times. And, of course, we read our Bibles. We know that's exactly what happened, isn't it?

It won't be because you've got the willpower to just make it through when other people fall away. It won't be because you've personally reached a point of no return.

It won't be because you're so spiritually mature that you're so in love with Jesus that you're beyond any temptation to turn back from him. It won't be for any of those reasons.

If you're a Christian, there's only one reason you'll still be one tomorrow. And it's because God is faithful to keep you to the very end.

[4 : 37] Jesus said it plainly in John 6. That's actually his mission. This is the will of him who sent me, Jesus said. That I should lose nothing of all he has given me, but raise it up on the last day.

For this is the will of my Father, Jesus said. That everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him, that they should have eternal life.

And I will raise him up on the last day. That's Jesus' mission. Sent here by the Father to secure salvation for his people.

And he will lose none of them. But like us, the Thessalonians, if we've studied this letter, they had all kinds of struggles that could have resulted in abandoning the faith.

In fact, there's even a time in the letter, you'll remember back in chapters 2 and 3, where Paul was concerned that maybe the persecution and the cares of this world they were facing might have caused them to abandon the faith that they had once professed.

[5 : 52] So he sent Timothy, remember, Timothy sent to check on them and secure the gospel witness in the church. You remember. Some of them had doubts about the return of Christ, which caused incredible grief and confusion.

Some of them battled with the attractiveness of serious sins that might have easily consumed them.

We read about that in chapter 4. The cares of this life, the persecution of the Jews and their neighbors had the potential of shipwrecking a faith that they had at least professed to have.

And yet, despite all of those things, when we get to chapter 5 and we understand the letter as a whole, they continued to endure. They were even growing.

They were gaining maturity. They were gaining faithfulness. Yeah, they had some sins, but they were progressing through it. Why? How?

Paul was convinced that God would secure and sanctify them until Christ's return. A magnificent, glorious, encouraging truth that he underscores here at the end of the letter.

[7 : 15] And it's through this amazing benediction here at the end that I want to just present you once again with the faithful God who promises to preserve and to purify his people to the very end.

First, I want you to see a prayer of blessing. A prayer of blessing. Look with me at verse 23. 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.

This is the last of two major benedictions in the letter. The first one was in chapter 3, if you just look at it. Chapter 3, verses 11 to 13. There's similarities between the two.

Now may our God and Father himself, our Lord Jesus, direct our way to you. May the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all as we do for you, so that he may establish your hearts blameless in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all his saints.

That sounds very similar to this last one, isn't it? In the first one, Paul prays for God to establish their hearts blameless in holiness at the coming of the Lord.

[8 : 49] And that blessing, it closed a section that was focused on the Thessalonians' persevering faith. So using similar language here in the second and final benediction in the letter, Paul prays for their progress in sanctification, their progress in holy living.

And again, the prayer is for God to purify and to preserve his people until Christ returns. And it's a fitting conclusion to this section.

But it's also, I think, the climax of the whole letter. Everything beginning at chapter 1 all the way to this point, everything has been pushing forward to this idea here at the end.

It contains the final note of certainty that Jesus will return, which now we can understand to be by far the most prominent theme of the whole letter.

Jesus is coming back. He's coming back soon. They were living as if it could be any moment. As should we.

[10 : 13] Listen, all of creation, it is headed toward the climactic moment of Jesus' coming when he will complete his saving work in his people and he will bring final judgment on everyone else.

And the issue of preparedness for that moment comes to the surface again here. And we have to ask, are you ready?

He could come today. Are you ready? Are you prepared? Will he find you believing and pursuing holiness as a result of that faith?

Or will you be judged with the unbelieving who pursue self and sin instead? Now, Paul's prayer for the Thessalonian Christians was that God would, quote, sanctify them completely.

Sanctify them completely. Now, we understand that God will complete this work in us when Christ returns. But Paul is primarily concerned here with their present sanctification, not their future

glorification.

[11 : 36] Now, I'm not going to go into all the differences there. We understand that's the implication of the text, right? It is all indeed moving to the end at which time God will glorify his saints. That is, he will free us entirely from sin and death and disease and all the things that are promised for us in Revelation 21.

That's coming. I don't think that's what Paul has primarily in mind here. I think he's praying specifically for the Thessalonians presently in that moment, in this life, their sanctification. We should understand completely here in verse 23 in the sense of thorough, of whole. We might read it, Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you thoroughly. May he sanctify you wholly, entirely.

And this becomes even more evident when we get to the second part of the prayer when Paul refers to spirit, soul, and body. What's he mean?

[12 : 44] What's he saying? He's praying that until Jesus returns, their whole being, everything about them, what they do, how they think, the nature of their worship, both in private and in public and in corporate worship, that all of those things, that God would make them and keep them blameless.

In other words, he asked God to make these Christians thoroughly faithful, mature, and holy people prepared for the Lord's coming.

Listen, holiness of spirit, soul, and body, of our whole being, it must be your earnest desire.

And if you're a Christian, it will be your earnest desire. We don't understand Paul here to mean perfect when he says blameless.

In other places, in the New Testament, he says that, for example, you're to have elders and pastors in your church that are above reproach and that are blameless.

[14 : 05] He says in another place to one of the other churches, referring to himself, that in his preaching and in his living before the churches, he himself was blameless. And yet, we go to a place like Philippians chapter 3 or Romans chapter 7, and we find that Paul at no point considered himself to have reached a state of perfection or sinlessness.

He understands that all of us are awaiting that at the return of Christ. So when he says blameless here, he's not speaking of a kind of perfection or a sinlessness. He's just speaking of holiness, a characterization of thorough righteousness in our whole being.

And if you're a Christian, part of the work that God does in you is he sets this as your desire. You want to please him, you want to love him, and you want to live in a way that is worthy of the call that he's put on your life.

John makes it plain for us in 1 John chapter 2 verses 3 through 5. He writes, and by this we know that we have come to know him. We are made certain of and assured of our salvation if we keep his commandments.

Whoever says, I know him, but does not keep his commandments, John says, is a liar. The truth is not in him, but whoever keeps his word in him, truly the love of God is perfected.

[15 : 36] It is brought to maturity. It is completed. It is made whole. Sounds a lot like what Paul is saying in 1 Thessalonians 5. By this we may know that we are in him.

Whoever says he abides in him ought to walk in the same way in which he walked. But back in 1 Thessalonians 5, I want you to notice in verse 23, in Paul's prayer, who is doing the sanctifying and keeping?

Those are the verbs. Sanctify, be kept, but who's the subject? It's the God of peace himself that is the subject.

Must we willfully pursue holiness? Yes. But our sanctification, like every other facet of our salvation, is ultimately the work of God's grace.

Our sanctification flows out of our justification. That is, when God saves us, he sets us on this divine, gracious path of pursuing purity and holiness.

[16 : 52] It is his work of grace. He is the acting agent here. There's no other way to understand what Paul's saying. He asks God to sanctify them.

He asks God to keep them. Why? Not because he wants to let them off the hook. No, because he understands that fundamentally, this is a work of grace.

God does this work in us. This is the testimony of the scripture. Ephesians 2 and verse 10, we read it a moment ago. For we are his workmanship.

Do you remember the song? Maybe you sung it as a kid. He's still working on me to make me what I ought to be. It took him just a day to make the moon and the stars, the sun and the earth, Jupiter and Mars.

How loving and faithful he must be to still be working on me. We sing that as kids, right? Is that not what Paul means? We are his workmanship.

[17 : 55] We're his project. Created in Christ Jesus. That's a reference to our conversion. You don't create yourself.

That's a work of grace. Created in Christ Jesus for good works, holiness, righteousness, blamelessness, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

2 Corinthians 3 and verse 18, and we all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed into the same image.

That is the image of Christ. We are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. What is he saying? He's saying this is a progressive work of grace that God is doing in our lives.

He is transforming us. We might say in relationship to our justification that we have been saved, but when we think about our sanctification, we would change that. We would say we are being saved.

[19 : 00] Our justification guarantees our sanctification that we are being saved, which will result in our glorification that one day we will say we will be saved at the coming of the Lord.

finally, it's complete, it's done. What is he saying in 2 Corinthians 3.18? That right now we're being transformed. We are being saved. We are being transformed to the image of Christ from one degree of glory to another.

We're making progress. And then he says this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit, the Spirit of God working in the people of God to conform them to the image of the Son of God all for the glory of God.

Now how does God accomplish this work? He sanctifies us not by anything extravagant. last weekend I got to spend an extended weekend four or five days with a group of other pastors at Capitol Hill Baptist Church in Washington, D.C.

in the opening session Jonathan Lehman some of you have been reading his books Jonathan Lehman he said I want to just make clear here what you're going to see this weekend and what you're not going to see.

[20 : 26] He said you will not see this weekend anything extraordinary. He said all you're going to see this weekend is an ordinary church led by ordinary elders according to the ordinary means of grace because that's the way that the Lord does his extraordinary work.

You know how he's going to sanctify you? It won't be through anything extraordinary. He may use some unusual circumstances from time to time but his sanctifying work by and large it won't be through anything extraordinary.

You know what it's going to be through? An ordinary church with an ordinary pastor with ordinary Christians who love each other are committed to one another who are committed to the ordinary means of grace the scriptures prayer worship the ordinances discipleship that's how he does it. That's how he does it. Now if you're not growing in holiness if you're not progressing in sanctification determination you know what I mean it's not wise to take a small sample of your life and try to make that determination.

It's like baseball is about to start we're finishing up spring training. One of the phrases you'll hear over and over if you care anything about baseball right now is this is a small sample size we have no idea if this is indicative of what the season is going to be like right?

[21 : 59] If you try to evaluate your Christian life by taking a small sample size just a couple weeks or a couple months it's probably not going to be very useful to you. we're looking at the trajectory of our lives right?

You look at the trajectory of your life an extended amount of time and you say yeah there's not really a lot of progress happening there in a spiritual sense. There's only two explanations for that. The first one is that you're just not a Christian. Our justification guarantees our sanctification in some form. Now God does his work differently in everybody.

We're all at different places. We're all working according to God's working in our lives right? We understand that. When you look at the trajectory of your Christian life and there's no real sanctifying work sanctifying progress happening it could just be you're just not a Christian.

You've never really been born again by the Spirit of God. Maybe you've made some religious affirmations. affirmations. Maybe you have identified in some way with Christianity but Jesus is neither your Savior nor is he your Lord in any genuine sense of that.

[23 : 15] The other explanation is that you are a Christian who has neglected the ordinary means of grace. If that's the way that God works and you have neglected those means why would you ever expect to notice any significant work being done in your life?

Maybe you've stopped praying and meditating on God's word in any real meaningful way. Yeah you bless your food but come on. I mean real prayer.

Real communion with God. Yeah you bring your Bible to church. Or actually meditating in the scriptures.

Opening yourselves to them day by day week by week. Perhaps you've neglected to regularly gather or at least meaningfully engage in the gatherings of the church for worship.

Maybe it's that your relationships with other Christians are either non-existent or there's really no difference in their nature between your relationship with other Christians and your relationships with non-Christians.

[24 : 35] How can you expect God to do a thorough work in your life when you do not avail yourself to his means? So Paul's prayer of blessing is that God will thoroughly sanctify the Thessalonians in preparation in preparation for Christ's return.

And we should also pray this for one another. And we should pursue that work through the ordinary means of grace.

So we have a prayer of blessing. Second, we have a promise of blessing. A promise of blessing. Look with me again at verse 24. Paul's prayer and encouragement is all anchored here.

It's all anchored here. Many of our prayers do not come with any certainty. We can ask of God, we trust in God, but we also trust that God will do his work his way in our lives.

There's some prayers we pray. We don't know how God's going to work. We just entrust those things to him. But there are some prayers we can be absolutely certain God will answer and this is one of them.

[26 : 01] The basic framework of the promise is simple. He is faithful. He will do it. He is faithful. He will do it.

Who is he? The God of peace. What is it that he's doing? Or that he promises to do? Sanctify you completely. Keep you blameless.

The promise is significant. God will complete his saving work. Again and again the scriptures testify to this.

We know it commonly from Philippians 1.6. I am persuaded that he who has begun a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ. Even more, the promise is predicated not simply on God's power but particularly on God's character.

Do you see it? Look at the verse. He is powerful. faithful. He will do it. That's not what Paul says.

[27 : 14] He is faithful. He will do it. The fact that God can save us comes with no special guarantee that he will.

However, his perfect faithfulness means his people have no reason to doubt the promise or fear Christ's judgment.

So Paul adds a modifier to express the certainty that should comfort us. He doesn't just say he will do it. He says he will surely do it.

It's certain. Our final salvation, our progress until that time is 100% guaranteed by God's perfect record of faithfulness.

He's never broken a promise. He has fulfilled them all. He will fulfill this one. Paul says, trust him Thessalonians.

[28 : 21] Trust him Cornelius. Trust him Christians. He's faithful. He'll do it. But there's another modifier here we have to take into account.

God is perfectly faithful to fulfill his promise. But who is the promise for? Who can claim the promise?

It is for those, Paul says, whom God calls. He who calls you is faithful.

He will surely do it for you. This language of calling has been used two other times in the letter.

Just set your eyes on it. Chapter 2, verse 12. 12. We exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God who calls you into his own kingdom and

glory.

[29 : 33] Calls you to salvation. The second time it's used is in chapter 4 and verse 7. God has not called us for impurity but in holiness.

So he calls us to live in holiness. So this calling language, it refers to God's sovereign call to salvation and the subsequent sanctification that comes along with it.

He calls us to believe, calls us into his kingdom and glory and those whom he calls into his kingdom and glory he calls to live in holiness.

So the promise is for those whom God calls to salvation and the encouragement is that he will be faithful to keep those he calls until the day of Christ.

To the very end he will keep them. God will be useful. How exactly are we to understand this call to salvation?

[30 : 52] The Bible speaks of it in at least two ways. I think really only two ways. First we understand there is the general call of salvation. The general call.

Sometimes the scriptures speak of God's call as a command for all people to love worship and obey him. He calls all people everywhere to repent.

That's Acts 17 30 and 31. He calls all people everywhere to praise him. Psalm 67. Let the peoples praise you oh God.

Let all the peoples praise you. The psalmist says. Not just the Jews. All the peoples. They're all called to praise. He calls on us to trust Jesus by faith.

All people. That's Romans 10 13. Whosoever will call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

[31 : 53] It's the general call of salvation. It is implicit in the great commission. Christians are to preach the gospel to all people regardless of whether or not we think or know that they will hear it and believe it.

Implicit in the commission is the general call. God calls all people everywhere to repent and praise and trust in Christ. It's the general call.

But it's not the only way that the Bible speaks of God's call. There's also what we call the effectual call. The effectual call or the effective call.

So that the scriptures also speak of God's call to salvation as a mighty work of the Holy Spirit that awakens a dead heart affecting the sinner's response to the general call of the gospel.

We see it in John 3, John 6, 2 Corinthians 4, Ephesians 2, over and over. We see there is another way that the apostles were speaking of the call of God and they didn't understand that to be the general call that God issues to all people to repent and praise and have faith.

[33 : 22] They're speaking of a specific call like in 1 Thessalonians chapter 2 and verse 13 that we read a moment ago. He has called you into his glory. That is an effective call.

It is a call that has actually accomplished something. So that while God calls everyone everywhere to repent and believe, his call comes to some with divine effectiveness leading to their genuine conversion to Christ.

Now I just want to show you one passage and then you can study this out on your own. 1

Corinthians chapter 1 verses 22 to 24. It's on the screen or you can turn there.

It's up to you. 1 Corinthians 1, 22 to 24. Paul says, for Jews demand signs, Greeks seek wisdom but we preach Christ crucified which is a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles.

He's speaking categorically that the gospel is being preached, the call of God is being issued generally to all people, Jew and Gentile, Jew and Greek.

[34 : 48] That's just a way of saying everybody. And Paul says as that general call goes out, the Jews think of it as a stumbling block, the Gentiles think of it as foolishness but then there's this other category.

He says but to those who are called. Well I thought everybody was called in the first part of the verse. Yes they are in the general sense. The general call is going out to all of them but then he uses calling here in a different way.

This is a different category but to those who are called whether they're Jew or Greek doesn't matter. Those who are called Christ and Christ crucified then to them is seen as the power of God and the wisdom of God.

What is that? It's the call of God. Both the general call and the effectual call represented in one passage. The general call goes out to all people but there is this thing that God does, this work of grace that God does when his gospel goes out that he transforms people.

His call is effective. The Old Testament is said this way, the word of God goes out and it never returns to him void.

[36 : 07] It always accomplishes the purposes that he intends for it. To be clear, God does not force anyone to receive him, God does not force anyone to reject him.

One's rebellion against God and rejection of the gospel is truly their willful, volitional rebellion and rejection. God does not make them disbelieve.

The same is true for those who believe. Their faith and repentance are truly their own. God doesn't do the believing for you. He does not force you to believe.

So whether you believe or not, it is truly an act of your will. But that being said, our natural condition is so utterly sinful according to the Bible that no one will ever turn to God apart from his divine intervention.

Romans 3 quoting a string of verses in the Old Testament says no one seeks for God God. No one on their own apart from God's intervention actually wants him.

[37 : 19] They all hate him. They want what they want. We want what we want. It's our rebellion. And nobody's just going to wake up one day of their own volition and decide, you know what, I think I'm tired of serving myself.

I think I'll serve someone else. Jesus sounds pretty good. Maybe I'll try that. It doesn't work like that. We're too sinful for that. I just don't think we understand the depth of our own depravity.

It's not that we all do the worst possible sins. It's that we're all thoroughly corrupt. And what Paul is praying for in 1 Thessalonians 5 is that God would reverse that.

That he would take the thorough corruption that is our nature and our flesh and that he will make it thoroughly holy and righteous in the spirit of God according to the nature of Christ.

That's the prayer. We are not dying in sin. We're dead. We're not drowning in sin.

[38 : 27] We're drowned. We're not awaiting! We're not awaiting a coming condemnation. Jesus said in John 3, if you do not believe, you're condemned already.

It's your present circumstance. Moving from death to life requires a miracle from God and that is precisely what conversion is.

God does not force anyone to believe but through the preaching of the gospel, the general call, the Holy Spirit sovereignly and admittedly mysteriously works a miracle in the hardened hearts of some who hear.

That is the effectual call and when he does this work of regeneration is the word we use. This work of bringing a dead soul to life, this work of salvation, calling that sinner to believe, it is effective.

He never loses. He doesn't force us to believe but when he awakens your heart you will. Paul says the natural man is blind, he's blinded by the God of this world but when God shines the light of the glory of Christ in their hearts it's as if God is taking the blindfold and he's ripped it off of our faces so then what was in rebellion to God truly our own rebellion now suddenly is truly our own faith and love where once was a human will and rebellion to God it is now a human will that desires to love and obey God this is the work of salvation and it is all of grace it's all of grace this promise in chapter 5 in verse 24 this promise is for those whom God made his own by grace before the foundations of the world it is for all who are born again by the spirit but how can you know if that's you it sounds like we can't know oh but you can if you have turned to

[40 : 43] Christ it is because God has graciously called you to do so if you trust in Christ death and resurrection for salvation and you turn from your sin and from your own selfish desires to follow him as Lord and to submit to him as your God this promise is for you he is faithful he will surely bring your salvation to completion and he will surely sanctify and keep you blameless at the return of Christ you don't have to wonder about your future you're not destined for wrath but to obtain salvation God will be faithful to his promise rejoice he will do it if you're in Christ you will be tomorrow why because he's faithful it won't be because you're better than those who don't believe it won't be because you've done enough good to cover all the bad if that were even possible then

Jesus' death means absolutely nothing at all and we need to stop talking about it if you wake up a Christian tomorrow there's only one reason why because God's faithful and he will continue to fulfill his promise to all he calls to salvation it won't be because you're holding on as tightly as you can to Jesus though you need to do that but that won't be the thing it's because he's holding on tightly to you literally he said it I hold them in the palm of my hand and no one can take them out we sing it all the time no power of hell no sin of man can ever pluck me from his hand till he returns or calls me

home here in the love of Christ I stand

I like the way Andrew Peterson sings it his song rest easy you don't have to work so hard you can rest easy you don't have to prove yourself you're already mine you don't have to hide your heart I already love you I hold it in mine so you can rest easy if you're in Christ loved one rest! easy! Stop trying to prove to everybody that you're a great Christian just be a Christian and be happy to be one stop trying after saying that you're trusting in Christ alone to save you stop trying your hardest and doing your best to make sure that you stay safe rest easy in the gospel of grace pursue holiness yes you don't have to prove yourself to anybody you don't have to prove yourself to God he already loves you he's called you so rest now if you wake up tomorrow and you're not a Christian you don't believe and you're not interested in following him with all the external things that maybe you're trying to do today and you just decide

I don't want it anymore I'm not trying to do that anymore! It won't be because God has forced you to reject him it won't be because God has prevented you from coming to him it will be because you have willfully volitionally denied him and his truth but God is calling and he's calling you now in this sermon with this text now repent and believe turn trust him his work is sufficient he really is the treasure in the field he really is the pearl of great price it really is true believe turn and if you will turn to

[45 : 51] Jesus this promise it's for you it's for you he's faithful he will do it to