

A Solemn Benediction

By David Harrell

Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28
Preached on: Sunday, May 8, 2016

Let's continue to worship the Lord with respect to this great salvation that we've just sung about. I would invite you to take your Bibles and turn to 1 Thessalonians 5 and here we come to another passage of Scripture that speaks of the incredible work that God does in the life of a believer. In a few minutes, we will be looking at verses 23 through 28 but let's wrap our mind around the reality of what is happening even right now in this room. Here in this auditorium, we have assembled all manner of people to worship the Lord our God. Undoubtedly, some of you are self-deceived, you are a religious pretender, you profess to know Christ but you really don't love him, but the vast majority of us here do truly know the Lord and we do love him in varying degrees despite the fact that we were once by nature enemies of the very God that we praise this morning. Once our most noble deeds were motivated out of self-glory, not the glory of God. Once though we claimed to be worshipers of God we, in many cases, were living in active rebellion against him. Before we came to Christ, we were blinded by unbelief. We were dedicated to passive indifference to the things of God. We once stood condemned before a holy God, a frightening thought. But because of his great mercy and because of his grace, God has rendered a verdict upon us of not guilty. It's staggering when you consider it. Not only that, he has declared us to be righteous, not because of anything that we have done on our own but solely on the basis of what Christ has done on the cross for all who have placed their hope in him, their faith in him who died in our place as our substitute and he alone satisfied the just wrath of God that should have been poured out upon us. Therefore the Judge has imputed the righteousness of Christ to our account and that is the great doctrine of justification.

The Apostle Paul speaks of this in Romans 5:1, he says, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." But, dear friends, you must understand something that many times Christians fail to realize. This legal declaration says nothing about our character. Yes, as believers our status is now not guilty, we've been declared righteous, but we are still in need of becoming in practice who we are in position. We are still a sinful mess. Oh yes, we're no longer slaves to sin and I rejoice in that but we are still incarcerated in this unredeemed humaneness. In fact, the Apostle Paul tells us at the end of Romans 7, he describes the law of sin that is still in the members of our body, still a part of our flesh, that wages war against the desires of our mind to obey the law of God. There is a battle that still goes on but no longer is there a battle between us and God, that war is over. So sin still remains but it no longer reigns therefore we are in desperate need for something to happen to us, something that we cannot accomplish on our own. We are in desperate need of a renovation to take place

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and when we were born again, the Holy Spirit took up residence in a very filthy, dilapidated, unkept house filled with years of junk and all manner of foul and decaying things; wickedness like termites that were eating away at the very foundation that we weren't even aware of and only he can renovate that house and that process is called sanctification. The great Puritan, John Owen, said of sanctification that it is the universal renovation of our natures by the Holy Spirit.

You see, dear friends, God must see to it that we become what we have been declared and this is a magnificent work. Do you realize that right now as you sit here that work is happening? God is at work in you renovating your house. Said differently, he is transforming your innermost being: your heart, your mind. He's not only cleaning out all of the remaining sin but little by little he's making you hate it. He is making you more and more like Christ. He is empowering you to do all that he has commanded you to do. Just think of all the sin and all of the sorrow that is represented in here today. None of us have our lives all together, right? I know I don't. If you spend around three hours around me, especially when I don't think anybody is looking or when I don't think anybody is hearing what I'm saying and you'll find, "Boy, pastor sure doesn't have it together. I thought he was sanctified, right?" Oh no. The same thing could be said of you. Frankly, every imaginable sin is represented in this room right here today in one way or another. But the good news is that gradually God is causing us to see it, to hate it, to leave it, to kill it so that we can one day reflect perfectly the image of the Lord Jesus Christ who has saved us and to whom we have been united forever.

Some of you this morning may be experiencing some guilt over sin in your life, your relationship with God is strained, you seem to love your sin more than you love him and you know it. Your conscience is convicting you right now but do you realize that God is going to do whatever it takes in your life to deal with that sin because of his great love for you and because of his great desire to bring glory unto himself? Some of you are probably in this room and you are lonely; you feel as though you have no friends and you are confident that you share none of the blame for any of that but do you realize that God is using your pain right now to gradually conform you into the image of Christ? Some of you are probably angry, maybe depressed, confused, quite certain that you have been unjustly treated and utterly oblivious to your contribution to your own situation. Do you realize that God will use even this to reveal your sin and to renovate your house for his glory and for your great joy?

You know, I'm often overwhelmed when I study the word of God and I see how far short I fall of what he would ask me to do and it causes me to celebrate grace all the more but sometimes there's that feeling that, "My Lord, I will just never be able to do all that you

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have asked." You know, the reality is he knows that. I can't do it on my own but I also know and he tells us as we are going to see, that he is up to something in our lives to make that happen. He is at work in us to help us do what on our own we cannot do because there is right now in the life of every believer a supernatural demolition and recreation of every aspect of our existence and that is the topic before us today, the words of the Apostle Paul who is passionate in his desire for these ancient Thessalonian believers to become more like Christ and by implication, God's desire for each of us.

So here at the end of his first epistle to the Thessalonians, the inspired apostle closes with what I would call a solemn benediction, a final prayer for their sanctification and their preservation followed by three final requests and in these final words, the Spirit of God has given us great nourishment for our souls and so we want to take it all in and I've divided his final prayer here into four sections for our edification and encouragement. We're going to see the substance, source, scope and security of our sanctification. Now, beloved, before we look at this, may I remind you of something that we tend to forget: our greatest need right now if we truly know Christ, our greatest need is our sanctification and this should be the dominant theme of our prayers. "God, help me to become more like Christ so that it can be visible in every expression of all that I do and say, all that I think, all that I desire, so my husband, my wife, my children, my family, my friends, can see Christ in me."

Now, let's be reminded of what has happened here in this first epistle. Bear in mind that Paul has exhorted them to do many, many things. In summary he has said: abstain from sexual immorality; don't defraud your brother; love one another; lead a quiet life and attend to your own business; be alert and sober; put on the breastplate of faith and love and as a helmet, the hope of salvation; encourage and build up one another; appreciate and esteem your leaders; admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with all men. I mean, already you're feeling like, "Oh, I need help." But he was just getting warmed up. Don't repay another with evil for evil but always seek after that which is good; rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; do not quench the Spirit; do not despise prophetic utterances; examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good; abstain from every form of evil. "Oh Lord, I need help! How can I possibly do all of this?" Well, the Spirit of God knew that we would ask that question and he has not left us without resource and the answer is found here in verses 23 and 24.

23 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

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coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.

Oh, this is wonderful news. The one who called us unto himself, the one who was faithful to save us is the one who is faithful to sanctify us. But how does this work? Is it all up to God? Am I to be passive in this whole situation? Am I to do basically nothing? Am I to just celebrate the Gospel and not be concerned about my sanctification? Am I to, as many people say, just let go and let God? Well, again, as we look at what we have before us, we see that God answered these questions very clearly.

First, I want to explain this word "sanctify." We want to understand as a foundation here the substance of sanctification. That word "sanctify" really has two meanings that are overlapping. The first meaning is "to set apart; to dedicate; to consecrate so that something or some person is reserved for God alone." We see this all through Scripture. We can see in Genesis 2 that God set apart, he sanctified the seventh day and rested from his created work. We can see in Exodus 19 that God set apart Israel as a holy, a separated nation, and then he gave them the Ten Commandments. And we can that when the Israelites were in the wilderness, God sanctified Aaron and his sons for the priestly office. He later set aside the tabernacle. He set aside the temple. He sanctified all of its vessels for sacred purposes. We see that Jesus set apart the 12 apostles from the ranks of all the other disciples that followed him. And God has set apart you and me, all that have been saved by his grace. In fact, Peter describes us in 1 Peter 1, beginning in verse 1, he says that believers "are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit," the setting apart dedicating work, the consecrating work of the Spirit that you may "obey Jesus Christ." So we have been separated from sin unto God, set apart, dedicated, consecrated to him but the second overlapping meaning has to do with making something holy. It means "to make holy." You will recall that holiness is the attribute that God uses of himself the most and it is a term that basically describes the consummate sum of all of his attributes so to make holy is to transform the very nature of a person so that they might manifest the likeness of Christ and more fully reflect the image of God.

Now, in Christian theology, there are three distinguishable phases of sanctification and I've taught this before and I feel it bears repeating. First of all, there is what we would call positional sanctification. This was fully accomplished at the moment of our salvation. This has to do with the deliverance from the penalty of sin. We've been set apart from sin, set apart unto God. By Christ's atoning work, God has delivered us from the dominion of sin and he has transferred us from the domain of spiritual darkness into the kingdom of his beloved Son. We have received a new nature; the Holy Spirit now takes up residence

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within us. So this is positional truth. This has to do with our judicial standing before a holy God. 1 Corinthians 6:11, "you were washed, sanctified, justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ." Hebrews 10:10, "we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all." So for this reason God no longer sees our sin; we are hidden in his beloved Son; he sees us clothed in the righteousness of Christ; so God declares us to be holy. He even calls us holy ones or saints.

But then, secondly, there is progressive sanctification. Now, this does not have to do with the deliverance from the penalty of sin but from the power of sin and this really speaks of that renovation process that I described earlier. This is the experiential aspect of our sanctification; that process of spiritual growth whereby we become increasingly set apart from sin and set apart unto God until we are ultimately conformed into the image of Christ. So this is conditional truth dealing with the believer's actual spiritual condition. 1 Peter 1:15 we are commanded to "be holy yourselves also in all your behavior; because it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'" Jesus prayed in John 17:17 to the Father saying, "Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth." So he knows that the word is going to cause this process to occur.

Now, this is an astounding thing when you think about it. By the Spirit's power, he causes us to voluntarily strive for holiness. Don't ask me to explain that, it's an inscrutable mystery. We see this all through Scripture even in our justification, in our regeneration. It is God who causes us to be born again. We can't do it ourselves and yet we are responsible to believe. So the Spirit gives us a new nature. He energizes us with a zeal for holiness, a supernatural principle here that animates our will to effort. He writes his law in our hearts which results in an inner desire to obey God. We have an inner compulsion, if you will, a true hungering and thirsting for righteousness, a godly disposition toward obedience. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3:18 that we "are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."

Then, finally, there is perfected sanctification which is the consummation of the process of sanctification and it's accomplished at the moment we are ushered into the presence of our Lord. Having been delivered from the penalty and the power of sin, this speaks of the deliverance from the presence of sin for all eternity. This is an eschatological truth. It relates to the coming consummation of the salvation of those who have in this life trusted Christ. Paul says in Philippians 3:21, he "will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory."

Now, with that background, today we are looking at the middle one, progressive sanctification. The old Westminster Catechism describes it as the work of God's free

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grace whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness. You see, again, although in regeneration the governing disposition of our soul is made holy, there still remains a tendency to evil within our body, within our soul so God must do something supernatural and it is that great work of sanctification that he does and what a humbling thing it is. Folks, don't think for one moment that when you were reconciled to God by his grace that you were suddenly delivered from every area of disobedience in your life; that you were suddenly brought into perfect submission to the lordship of Christ. It just didn't happen. No, there is much work to be done. If we look at our lives, we will see that there are many pockets of mutiny that will continue to rise up in both private as well as public rebellion against a holy God and so God must do something.

So we move now from the substance of sanctification to, secondly, the source of it. Notice verse 23, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you." A fascinating statement. What does this mean, the God of peace? Well, as I read earlier, Romans 5:1, "Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." So this is the God who makes peace with us by his grace when he saves us. When we place our faith in Christ, the war that we once had with God is over. You might recall that in Paul's epistle to the Romans he took 67 verses in the first three chapters to explain the condemnation of man that makes him subject to the just wrath of God. In chapter 5, verse 10, he describes man as an enemy of God. And Jesus declared in John 3:36 that the wrath of God abides upon sinners. But when we are justified, the war is over. We are suddenly at peace with God. No wonder when the angel announced the birth of the Messiah to the shepherds on that hillside, he said, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased." Dear friends, let this sink in. We will have no peace with God until our sin has been dealt with. You see, grace must always precede peace and for those of us who have placed our faith in Christ, the God of peace has justified us, we have been reconciled to him and now it is that same God himself, the God of peace, that is at work in this great process of sanctification so for this reason, we can join in with the angels and say, "Glory to God in the highest."

So you ask yourself, "Well, if God is the source of my sanctification, does that mean I do nothing?" Well, not at all. As we look at Scripture, we see that God gives us many commands, many exhortations that he expects us to obey, and by the power of the indwelling Spirit, we are convicted; we are energized to be obedient to his will. God addressed this very thing with his prophet Zechariah. You remember in Zechariah 4:6, God says, "'Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, but by My Spirit,' says the LORD of hosts." And Paul has already addressed this in terms of how we need to be involved in the process of sanctification by virtue of our obedience to God. He's already

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addressed this in 1 Thessalonians. Remember in chapter 4, verse 3, he gives us an example. He says, "For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality." So he gives one illustration of that which we need to be concerned about.

Now, again, this is an unfathomable symbiosis. This interaction between God and man, between what God does and what we do, we know it's all up to God and yet we are required to be a part of it and he is the one that energizes us to voluntarily do what he wants us to do but his is, yet again, one of those inscrutable mysteries that our minds will never be able to resolve. Paul spoke of it, you will recall, in Philippians 2, beginning in verse 12, "So then, my beloved, work out your salvation with fear and trembling." There is our responsibility, right? Then he goes on to say, "for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." You see, the Apostle Paul didn't even understand it, he just said, "This is how it is. This is it." Colossians 1, beginning in verse 28, Paul testified saying, "I labor, striving according to His power which mightily works within me." There you see both: he is laboring, he is striving but he's doing it according to God's power which works mightily in him. In Romans 6:18 and following, you remember Paul is speaking about how we've been freed from the bondage of sin so now we can become slaves of righteousness and he says in verse 18 and following, "So now," in other words, in light of this, "present your members as slaves to righteousness resulting in sanctification." You see, there's volition that is involved in that.

We are commanded to pursue holiness, aren't we? Paul said in 1 Corinthians 9:27, "I buffet my body and make it my slave." He told Timothy, "Discipline yourself for the sake or the purpose of godliness." In 1 Peter 1:5, Peter says, "make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love for if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." Then later on in verse 11, he says, "practice these things." You don't just sit back and do nothing. If we merely let go and let God, if we merely just celebrate grace with no concern about actively pursuing obedience, all of these passages and so many more would beg for relevance. They make no sense.

So, again, it is the Spirit of God dwelling within us that causes us to strive toward holiness. He animates our new nature with a zeal for the things of God. So there is that supernatural principle within us that causes us to exercise our will towards obedience. He has written that law on our hearts and therefore given us an inner desire to obey God. So, of course, our sanctification requires human effort at some level but, again, that is all

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empowered by the Spirit. And as a footnote, we look in Scripture and we see that it's the word of God that he uses primarily to cause that to happen along with other members of the body of Christ. We come alongside one another with a faithful commitment to one another all of those things that he's asked us to do in Scripture to help each other come into conformity with Christ.

So having looked at the substance and source of our sanctification, thirdly, let's look at the scope of it. Notice again, verse 23, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you," partially. Oh, it doesn't say that, does it? It says, "entirely." In fact, the term "entirely" can be translated as it is in some translations "through and through." That pretty well covers it, right? Through and through. In fact, that is a compound word in the original language that connotes the doing of something completely along with carrying it through to the finish.

He goes on to say, "and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete." Now, notice this phrase, "your spirit and soul," then he says, "and body." Some want to read into this that there are three parts to man. They have an anthropology that is sometimes called a trichotomy, that we are made up of body, soul and spirit. I do not believe that Scripture bears that out for a number of reasons but suffice it to say as we look at this when he says, "and may your spirit and soul," we see that the terms "spirit and soul" are used throughout Scripture interchangeably to describe the immaterial part of man. They both describe that indivisible portion of man's inner nature. In fact, there is no biblical text that assigns different or unique qualities and functions to the spirit versus the soul as some will argue. So he's saying, "and may your spirit and soul," in other words, your immaterial part, "and your body," describing the material part, "be preserved complete." In other words, may this sanctification be preserved in total. That's the idea. "Without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

So what is Paul saying here? Paul is praying for complete and total sanctification for these believers and for all of us through and through so that they reach the full end or goal for which they were saved and what is that? Christ-likeness; that they will be found blameless in moral conduct at the time of the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. So Paul is praying that they will be found complete in holiness without any fault in every aspect of their existence when the Lord returns in his glory. Now folks, practically what this means is that God will renovate every room in our nasty little house in which he has taken up residence including those secret closets that you think nobody knows about; including those secret little drawers that are hidden away that contain things that are vile and wretched and dishonoring to God; including a renovation of those rooms that have a sign on the door that says, "Off limits. Do not enter"; even including the termites of rebellion

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that are eating away at your foundation that you don't even know about. He see it all. He's going to deal with it all.

Perhaps you're under conviction right now. If you know Christ and you're honest with yourself, there is certainly somewhere in your life where this is true, some area in your life where you simply refuse to let God enter and do his cleansing and transforming work. But, dear friends, what we must not forget, he knows what's in those secret places. He knows what's in there. He knows what's in those off limit areas and he will enter them, it's just a matter of time, and he will cleanse them and he will renovate them through and through. There are no off limits for God. How foolish for us to think so and here's the point: we can either open them up and invite him in or we can wait until he breaks down the door but he will sanctify you entirely.

Then verse 24, "Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass." Haven't we all seen this in our lives before? We've had those places in our lives where we didn't even think there was a problem. We thought it was just okay to act like a jerk to our wife because, after all, she's not what she needs to be. Or whatever it might be. You know, sin is so deceptive, isn't it? It camouflages itself and it appears to blend in with everything that seems normal and we can rationalize and justify it in so many ways. So many times we lack self-awareness; we don't see how our interpersonal style of relating is dishonoring to the Lord and all of those types of things. But the thing we have to bear in mind is that God is going to deal with those things and he is a loving and a merciful God but he will discipline those who he loves. I have seen many times God break down the door of the hypocritical marriage and even expose the wretchedness of all that had been concealed for years by the garments of phony religion and missionary endeavor. I have seen God expose ungodliness and heresy in people that you would have never thought would have held to those things, even bringing them to a point of public humiliation and embarrassment. We've all seen him suddenly confront the adulterer like Nathan confronted David and bring a man or a woman living in sin into open shame because they refused to allow the Lord entrance into those off limit areas in their heart.

Oh, dear friends, God disciplines those that he loves and that discipline can be very painful at times but we must remember that he is faithful to sanctify us through and through. He must and he will do his great work of sanctification and I've learned in my life and in the lives of many other people that we can either do this the easy way or the hard way. We either joyfully and humbly submit to the Lord's will, we either humbly confess our sin when we see it exposed in his word or in the community of God's people as we are in relationship with one another, or we can be like the defiant little child that is stubborn and simply will not obey. It's kind of like what I call Walmart children. Have

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you seen that? Every one of you knew exactly what I just described. Walmart children, they're pitching a fit, they're kicking, screaming, carrying on. Momma has counted to five thirteen times. By the way, that's child abuse to allow a child to be defiant.

But, you know, God in his great love is going to deal with us. I'll never forget the words of that great Puritan, John Owen, he said this, "He will have me like Christ whatever it takes." And what an amazing thing to behold this work of sanctification. I marvel at it in my life and in the lives of so many down through the years to not only be cleansed from the influences and the corruption, the pollution of sin, but then to be the recipient of a new nature which energizes us and motivates us to a whole new way of life and to participate in ways that we could have never imagined in that renovation process. I've seen God bring conviction into the lives of men and women who were well on their way to drug and alcohol addiction and suddenly so overwhelmed them with conviction that they quit cold turkey and they lose their desire for it. I've seen God bring men so low over their addiction to pornography that suddenly they loathe that which they formerly loved. Only God can do that. I've seen God's sanctifying work in the homosexual and the lesbian, the adulterer, the materialist, the thief, the religious hypocrite.

I remember the testimony of a woman and it's interesting, by the way, how many times as I'm meditating upon the word the Spirit of God will bring to my remembrance usually many episodes but some that just really stand out as an example and what I'm about to share with you, I could describe in hundreds of situations similar to it. This woman came to me and gave testimony to how God had delivered her from loneliness and bitterness that had led to severe depression. She described how that she never really enjoyed real oneness with her husband. She felt like no one at church really liked her. She felt like she didn't have any real Christian friends and from her perspective, she shared none of the blame. It was everybody else's fault, she said. She felt the church was unloving and cliquish and it made her mad that virtually no one else shared her conviction and she confessed how she had grown angry with God over the years and her walk with Christ was superficial at best. Then she described with great tears her diagnosis of cancer and she described how in the midst of that crucible of God's grace she became convicted over areas of sin in her life that she had never even seen before, things that she had never been willing to admit, things that had kept others away from her and prevented a real loving relationship with her husband. She began to see her sour, sullen, bitter spirit and how it was hardly conducive to any kind of meaningful relationship. She described many ways how she had quenched the Spirit; how she had grieved the Spirit; how she had tried to find life in everything but Christ but how by his grace he had changed her heart and suddenly she was finding her greatest joy in Christ alone. I remember her saying this,

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"Dave, were it not for this cancer that now threatens my life, I would have never known the joy of being in fellowship with Christ who is my life."

Oh, what a severe mercy, dear friends. What an amazing thing to know and to experience the God of peace sanctifying us through and through, and to know that he is going to use whatever means necessary to accomplish this great work and the more we shove him away, the more we reject him, the more we refuse to let him into those secret places of our imagination and our heart, the more difficult it is going to be when we experience his chastening, sanctifying love.

Well, this leads us then to the final aspect of this supernatural work and that is the security of our sanctification. Notice what he says, again, "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. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass." Bring what to pass? Bring to pass his sanctifying purposes to conform you and me into the image of Christ. Folks, do you believe that God is faithful to do this? Certainly you must believe that he was faithful to call you unto himself. He graciously and efficaciously called you to repentant faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He gave you the gift of faith to trust in him and he continues to give you grace to persevere in your faith come what may. Do you not believe he will also sanctify you completely? And if the answer is yes, do you not also believe that he is going to do whatever it takes to accomplish his purposes in your life?

You know, I find such comfort in this, that he will bring it to pass. He's going to make it happen. I especially find comfort when I find my heart wandering away from the things of God and you think, "Oh my goodness, what kind of pastor do we have?" You've got a pastor just like you. I'm a man saved by grace. I struggle like you do, maybe the only difference is the Lord has me on a shorter leash at times but I struggle and then I rejoice when I see the truth of his word and how it applies to my life. You know, we've all got to guard our hearts against being careless with the things of God. I would especially address you young people, this happens so easy with young adults. They begin to get caught up in the things of the world, they get distracted with their schooling and their new career and their new girlfriend or boyfriend or vehicle or whatever the case may be and suddenly their love for God begins to grow cold and indifferent, they even become cynical. We can all think of this, can't we? Sometimes we can look back and see how our hearts that were once filled with enthusiasm for the things of God have become cold. All of that's a distant memory. Like the church at Ephesus, we have left our first love.

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Preached on: Sunday, May 8, 2016

But may I remind you of a great truth? When you experience that reality and you all will, we all do from time to time, may I remind you of what God has said, the promise that we have right before us here. Let me paraphrase it this way: God has said that he is the God of peace and that he, this God of peace, will sanctify you entirely. He is going to purify your spirit, your soul and your body so that you will be blamelessly preserved at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. The one who is faithful will do this. The same one who was faithful to call you is going to bring this to pass. He will conform you into the image of his beloved Son, our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. This is so exceedingly exciting to me. I hope it is to you, to know that his great work of renovation is happening right now as you listen to his word preached; as conviction comes into your heart. And then to know that he is going to continue this until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ and then we will finally be blameless, to stand in the presence of his glory blameless with great joy. We will finally be changed into the likeness of the one to whom we have been united, the one who, according to Titus 2:14, "gave himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed and to," I love this, "purify for himself a people," purify for himself a people, "for his own possession, zealous for good deeds."

Folks, isn't it great to know that he is using all the stuff of your life right now, even your sin, to bring this about? Romans 8:28, "God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." And what is his purpose? To make us like Christ. "For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified." Folks, what an amazing thing to know that despite all that we know about ourselves, God is faithful to do what he has set out to do, to make us become in practice who we are in position.

I hope you celebrate this absolute truth. Paul certainly did. Remember when he said in Philippians 1:6, "For I am confident." I'm sure he hit the pulpit when he said that. "I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." Then he simply closes,

25 Brethren, pray for us.

In other words, pray for my co-laborers along with me: Silas, Timothy. I am aware of my own weaknesses. We are but men, pray for us. I say to you pray for me, pray for your shepherds, let's pray for one another.

26 Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.

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A Solemn Benediction

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That was a symbol of genuine love and affection. Underscore the word "all," even those people that you don't like very much. You love them as well, right? Greet all the brethren. Then he says,

27 I adjure you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brethren.

In other words, "Elders, I want you to make a solemn oath before the Lord that this letter will be read to all of the people in the church publicly so that they can hear and obey the word of the living God." Then he says,

28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

And I too pray that each of you will experience the myriad of ways that God demonstrates his love and his power to all who belong to him so that he can enable us to enjoy all of the blessings that are ours in Christ Jesus.

Dear Christian, may I challenge you to examine your heart today and look at those secret places and ask the Lord to do what he will with you. Do not, as Paul said, grieve the Holy Spirit of God by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. No, don't grieve him. Don't quench him. Instead, humble yourself before him, walk by the Spirit and watch what he will do with you because he will have you to be like Christ no matter what it takes. Amen? Amen.

Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for these practical, soul-penetrating truths. And Lord, for all of us who know and love you, may this be a time that we have spent together that will radically transform how we think about your great work of sanctification in our lives. Lord, use your word to change us a little bit more even this day into the likeness of our precious Savior for it is in his name that I pray. Amen.

We pray you've been edified by this presentation. You have been listening to Pastor, Bible Teacher and Author, Dr. David Harrell. For more information or for other messages from Dr. Harrell, please visit the Olive Tree Christian Resources website at otcr.org.