

May God Do You Good • I Thessalonians 5:23-24

In some cultures it's what you have that really counts; in other cultures it's who you know that really counts. I suppose if we had to make a choice as to which is most characteristic of our American society we would say possessions are most important. We may even sacrifice friends, family and just about everything else in order to have possessions. But there are parts of our world, particularly in many third world cultures, where people consider who you know to be far more important than what you have. They would be willing to give up home, possessions, money and savings in order to have friends and family and relationships.

Maybe a good example of this is in facing old age. Generally, in America we think we must have enough money and possessions so that when we reach retirement we can still take care of ourselves and provide for ourselves even if family and friends and all of the other relationships around us crumble. We want to still have enough money to pay our own way.

In other cultures that would be considered a foolish approach because you can never quite count on possessions; you can count more on people. Therefore you need lots of children, lots of family, lots of friends and when you reach old age you can be assured that, even if you are flat broke, they will take care of you.

But the Bible goes one step further. The Bible does not just deal up to old age; the Bible goes on into eternity. And in the Bible the principle is clear: Money and possessions for eternity mean nothing. You can't take it with you! On the other side of the grave it's who you know that means everything! Knowing God is the determining factor for how and where we will spend eternity.

In fact, knowing God is the best way for now as well as for ever. A personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ beats being a billionaire. It's not what we have but who we know. And when we know God we can be assured that he will always do us good.

Near the end of the New Testament book of I Thessalonians the apostle Paul writes a benediction. "Benediction" comes from two Latin words: "bene" which means "good" and "diction" which means "saying". So, a benediction is a good saying. And this one really is! It is a really good saying constructed of two prayers and a promise.

The prayers are in I Thessalonians 5:23. Prayer number one says this: "*May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.*" Sanctification is the setting apart of something or someone for God's exclusive use. The whole idea is that God wants full ownership and control of our lives. God has no partners. God is not willing to have a minority or even a majority share in who we are. He insists on holding 100% of the stock. Therefore, much of God's activity in our lives is about getting control. Share by share . . . piece by piece . . . bit by bit.

In the Wooddale Church office, like many offices where you work, we have what is called a "dedicated circuit" for our computers. That means that from the power source to the computer there is a direct line that cannot be used for anything else . . .

no lights or toasters or microwaves. A dedicated circuit is set apart for one exclusive use.

That's what sanctification is. Our lives are set apart for God's exclusive use. Our circuitry is not divided between him and anyone or anything else.

For most people it's not that way. Some people don't have a single outlet for God to plug into. For some it's a fifty-fifty deal. For others it may be 80/20 or 60/40. A few have no space for God at all. All their outlets are filled with themselves all week but they unplug one line for a few hours on Sunday and plug God in for just a little while.

The apostle Paul prays for change. He prays that God will sanctify us through and through until we all become fully dedicated circuits for the power and the presence of God.

Sanctification is God claiming and cleaning every square inch of our lives until he has us clean through and through.

We might think this would be an instant thing, like flicking on a light switch. But that's not the case. Becoming sanctified doesn't happen instantly. It takes a long time . . . usually a lifetime. It is a process. But God is set on doing it no matter how long it takes.

We often think God's job is to make us comfortable. But the truth is that God's job is to make us sanctified. Sometimes part of that process requires that we be made uncomfortable. Sometimes he has to pull a lot of plugs to do it. We may get upset when he pulls the plug on a relationship or a job or a dream or a sin. But sometimes that's what he has to do in order to sanctify us through and through.

It is so important that we understand the concept of sanctification even if we don't use that particular word, so maybe another analogy would be helpful. Let's compare it to a house. Picture your life as a house purchased by God. He owns you. The price was very high. It was the life and blood of his Son. He has begun the process of claiming and cleaning what he has bought. Some of our houses of life are a mess. Some are dirty, broken, cluttered and worse. So, God starts by going room by room throwing out junk, cleaning up the mess, tearing out some of the plumbing and remodeling as he goes. Then God puts down new carpet, applies fresh paint and brings in his furniture. This is called sanctification and he's doing it "*through and through*".

By the way, how's it going? Which rooms are done? Which rooms haven't been started yet? Which rooms of your life have you kept locked and guarded? Isn't it now time to open wide for God to come and sanctify through and through? Some of us have a lot of sins that need to be cleaned out, a lot of space that needs to be changed. Sanctification is God claiming and cleaning every square inch of our lives until he has us clean through and through.

Prayer number two in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 reads like this: "*May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*" In this prayer Paul sticks with the topic of sanctification but looks at it from another angle. He recognizes that sanctification takes a lifetime, so he prays for now and then. "Now" is this side of eternity; "then" is the other side in eternity. He asks God to keep us now and through all eternity.

Going back to the house analogy, Paul wants to affirm that God is not going to sell us off or trade us in when the remodeling gets really tough. No matter how difficult it is to fix us up, no matter how bad the disrepair, he will never sell us off and when he finishes the task he will never give up ownership. God will keep us intact . . . spirit, soul and body.

While the Greek in which the apostle wrote says "spirit, soul and body" which would seem to call for a plural verb, the fact is that the verb "keep" is a singular verb. That's because (like a house) we may have different parts but we are really one unit. God is going to hang onto every part of us through this life and through this sanctification process. The goal is that we be blameless when we someday appear before God.

Let me summarize this and see if you can track with me on it. In this second prayer Paul is asking God to hold on to Christians through the remodeling process of sanctification and then to have a perfect product ready for eternity at the return of Jesus Christ.

Our son Brian and I were in Florida. One rainy Saturday we couldn't go to the beach so we decided to visit a car museum. They had a Stanley Steamer, an Edsel, a Delorean and a Corvair. But two cars at the museum were of special interest to me. One was a 1965 Mustang hardtop; the other one was a 1964 Pontiac Bonneville convertible. The reason they attracted my attention was that Charleen and I owned both of those types of cars. We honeymooned in a 1965 Mustang hardtop. We later drove west and went to graduate school in Denver in that car. We have many wonderful memories associated with it. We also had a huge 1964 Bonneville convertible with power seats and windows. It was a show-off type car that was great fun, especially in warm weather with the top down. The visit made me wonder what my old cars look like today. Of course, there is no way to know because I didn't keep them.

If I had kept them, I'm sure they would need a lot of refurbishing before they would be in condition for a car show. They probably would need cleaning and sanding and painting and reupholstering and a list of repaired and replaced parts. It would take a lot of work to make them perfect for a show.

That's what prayer number two is asking. It asks that God keep us and refurbish us until we are perfect (*blameless*) for the show that will be held when Jesus Christ comes back. The word that is used here—blameless—is what sanctification is all about. *“May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Paul adds a promise to his two prayers in verse 24. He writes: *“The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.”* The God whom he asked to sanctify us and keep us and make us perfect is the God who is faithful.

He is the God who is absolutely dependable. He finishes what he starts. We can always count on him.

This is extraordinarily good news! Many people are not faithful; many are not dependable. We cannot

always count on our friends. Even professionals fail us. Promises that are made are often not kept . . . in marriage, in business, in friendships. Sometimes it's because people are unable and sometimes because they are unwilling. But God is different. He does what he says. He is always there. He never gives up on us no matter what. God is faithful!

Australian author Leon Morris says it well: *“It is profoundly satisfying to the believer that in the last resort what matters is not his feeble hold on God, but God's strong grip on him.”* How very good to have a God who hangs on to us no matter what. He is the God who will never let us go. He is the God who is faithful!

But there is still more to the promise. God is not only faithful, but he does it! Or, to be more literal, *“he will do.”* There is no “it” in Greek, although it is obviously understood. The emphasis here is on God doing rather than what God does. This is a little hard to understand and communi-

cate. It is saying that God is not passive. God is active and effective in our lives. He is always doing. And **who** is doing is more important than **what** is being done!

Sometime ago I went with my father to the hospital where he was to have surgery. I asked him what they were going to do and he had only a very general description. I discovered that he had asked few questions. He really didn't know much about the procedure. But he had a great deal of confidence in his surgeon. He had signed a consent form so that the doctor could do whatever needed to be done.

While I'm not sure I could be so trusting with a physician, I know we can be so trusting with God. It is more important “who” than “what”. God is faithful and wise and good and he is the one who “does” in our lives. He does whatever needs

to be done to sanctify us, to keep us, to have us blameless and ready for eternity. I trust him enough to sign my consent form for him to do whatever he—God—wants to do. How about you?

You know, most of us can always use good in our lives, real good—not passing comfort but eternal refurbishing. Well, this is the real stuff! Paul's benediction for the Thessalonians is my benediction for you:

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through.

May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.

Amen.

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