

5/30/21 - 1 Thes. 5:23-24 - “Assurance of the Gospel”

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- [0 : 00] A.W. Pink writes, Normal Christian experience is a progress in practical holiness. Where there is life, there is growth. And even when growth ceases, there is a development and maturing of what is grown unto increasing fruitfulness or usefulness. Church, each one of us sitting here today, as complex as our lives and whatever life may hold for us today, and after last night, there is quite a bit that life is holding for a family within our church. Each one of us are on various stages of maturity in our belief, or if you're not in Christ, in your unbelief. And some of us have been Christians for some time. And while some are still sort of being rooted and instilling those essential doctrines of what it means to be a Christian, some of us on this side can probably sense the Spirit's movement and promptings in their lives.
- [1 : 28] And it's like you're just firing up a nice, well-machined, oiled engine. That upon one turn of the ignition switch, you are just ignited and you are on fire. While others, if we want to be real, are kind of like a winterized tractor that's coming out of hibernation throughout the winter season that takes a couple extra turns and a couple sputters of the exhaust and smoke everywhere, maybe a spark plug shooting out, all the while trying to get moving in life. If what the Bible says is true regarding the progressive nature of the Christian life, even as A.W. Pink speaks of, then we can only understand that it is not the level that you have arrived that is most important to be grasped, but rather it's that slow and steady nature of what God calls us to do through His Word of being obedient in sanctification. Meaning that there's no levels of tiers of Christianity. Christianity, at the foot of the cross, there is level ground of which we have been bought. From the moment you place your faith in Christ until the moment your dead body is placed in the ground, God is sanctifying His church whether you like it or not.
- [2 : 58] For us. And today, for us. We are in, this is the 17th message in this small book of 1 Thessalonians. We as a church have spent 10 and a half, nearly 10 and a half hours studying this book. Think about that. Over the last several weeks, Paul has been sort of winding down in the conclusion of his letter to this church and his closing thoughts and summarizing and re-hitting on some aspects that he included in his book and also kind of reigniting a forward focus of thinking in order to endure life's challenges. So let's pray as we dive into God's Word today, as we enter into the second to last message that we have in the book of 1 Thessalonians and plead with God to show us who He is today. Let's pray. Father, we are coming to You helpless on our own.

Father, we could have every degree that there is. We can be the most astute of all professors in life. But without the Holy Spirit working actively in our lives, we know nothing about You.

[4 : 28] Father, we lean upon, into Your Word right now, trusting that Your Holy Spirit will make known what is unknown, to sharpen what is known in our lives, and to even highlight areas of our lives that need to be corrected or readjusted or fixed.

Father, when we come to Your Word like this, I pray that by the power of Your Spirit leading this church, that You will speak boldly, sharply, and precisely what we need to hear for this season in life.

So I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. So I'm going to break this passage up into two sections.

Who would have guessed? Two verses, two sections. But I'm actually going to split the first verse into two. So let's look at the first section today. And this is to meet today the God of peace.

The God of peace. There it is. Verse 23 says, Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely.

[5 : 45] Within such a passage, when stripped away from its neighboring verses, this can often find its hearers in quite a conundrum of distinguishing what is error and what is truth and how we are to live out God's Word.

But before we get into that too much, we must understand this God of peace. We have to understand who this God of peace is and exactly how vital it is that we know both sides of peace.

In other words, where there is peace, we know that there was probably war. In order to know peace is to know war. In order to know war is to know peace. You can't have one without the other.

And so we see peace in this passage. God of peace. This is indicating the harmonious relationship and free of disputes of the God of peace that He has with man, especially during the absence of war.

Thinking of tomorrow, if you haven't been awake thus far, tomorrow is Memorial Day. And as Pastor Les has indicated, this is a day that's no stranger to anybody who might be on social media.

[7 : 10] You're going to see the social media posts and everything. You're going to probably smell the barbecues throughout the neighborhoods going. And this day, regardless of the barbecues, regardless of that, is a day that's marked by war.

However, many soldiers have given their lives for the noble task of sacrificing their lives for this country and the citizens within. And so, just thinking back, even just not even 10 years ago, the war in Iraq and Afghanistan ended.

Thinking back 30 years ago, to the Gulf War, to the mid-1900s, the World War II leading to the Korean War, and even in the early 1900s, World War I, which is interesting.

Because if you're alive today, I think most of the middle schoolers are downstairs. But if you're alive today, you know war. You know war. And specifically, we know the peace that sort of follows when war is resided.

Now, that's from a common standpoint. You don't have to be a Christian to know war and know peace, but this comes all the more vital when you turn to God's word and you see something so profound that says, God of peace.

[8 : 33] Because as Christians, we ought to know rebellion. We ought to know the war against God very well because we were once acquainted with God's wrath.

Since sin had entered into the world through Adam, mankind is inherently at war with God. We see this in passages, as I'm going to spit out a couple passages for you.

Romans 5.12. Sin came into the world through one man and death through sin. And so death spread to all men because all sinned.

By the one man's disobedience, the many were made sinners. Isaiah 53.6. All we like sheep have gone astray. We have turned everyone to his own way.

And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. Second Chronicles 6.36 attests, there is no one who does not sin. Jeremiah 17.9 talks about a sinful heart.

[9 : 45] The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately sick. Who can understand it? And in Matthew, it's spoken similar to that. In Matthew 15.19.

For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander.

Romans 3.23. For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. And not too long ago, church, in Titus 1.15. To the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their minds and their consciences are defiled.

And as 1 John 1.8 says, if we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.

If we say we have not sinned, we make God a liar and his word is not in us. Yes, this is all bad news.

[10 : 49] War is bad news in and of itself within our modern society. But war with God is something very serious.

This is complete war apart from Christ. Utterly broken relationship with the Creator beyond what His original intention was to be.

If there's an absence of that harmony. But God, Romans 5.8, shows His love for us, that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Now we read, now may the God of peace Himself. This means to the church in Thessalonica and the church today that that harmony of our relationship with God has occurred outside of ourselves that we cannot accomplish on our own.

May the God of peace Himself, we are justified by Him, not by our own efforts. This brings into this big theological Christianese word called justification.

[12 : 05] It's definitely, if you're not familiar with that word, become familiar with that word. It's an important word. Just as we talked about progressive revelation last week.

Justification comes by the Greek concept of declaring one righteous. Declaring one righteous. It's going into the courtroom with all the offenses against you that there's no way you're going to make bail.

There's no way you're going to get off. And then at the hit of a gavel, the judge says, you're free. And you should have been given the death sentence. It's justification.

And it happens outside of our own works and our own doing. And this is the legal act, justification, wherein God pronounces that the believing sinner has been credited with all the virtues of Jesus Christ.

In other words, we are clothed with the righteousness of Christ. It's nothing within ourselves. There is no one righteous. No, not one. So it can only be understood that God's salvation is a free gift towards us only through the penalty that Jesus suffered on our behalf during his crucifixion.

[13 : 19] The judge was looking for the ransom. Jesus stepped right up and paid the ransom, gave both of his arms and his feet and said, I'm going to take it. When Christ died, our sins laid upon him.

Full atonement, just as we talked about, nothing but the blood of Jesus today, as we say. Full atonement. Everything required in order to make that an adequate, sufficient sacrifice was accomplished through the blood of Jesus Christ, through his life, death, and burial, and resurrection.

We see that when Christ rose by our faith, we are risen with him. Romans 5.1 says, therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God.

Peace with God. Not in ourselves, but Romans 5.1 says, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Church, hello.

Justification. This is essential to our faith, isn't it? It's quite a good word indeed. You should start writing it down and studying it.

[14 : 37] Jesus Christ accomplished in and of himself being perfectly obedient in his flesh as both God and man, and we are justified through that sacrifice upon the cross.

Amen? Now, look back. Now, may the God of peace himself sanctify you through the all-sufficient sacrifice of the God of peace, meaning justification, we become recipients of his promise and become sanctified.

This changes our pattern and our way of life. It does not happen in reverse order as if we justify ourselves in order to enter into our peace.

Jesus Christ, through God's forgiveness, Jesus Christ has cleaned us up. We are clothed in righteousness. We are free of sin.

And it's because of who God is that determines who we become, because of who God is. This verse says, may sanctify us. This is a very biblical word, as we spoke about earlier in this series, actually.

[15 : 54] And it means to be dedicated to God. And this is either in becoming more distinct, more devoted, or more morally pure.

And so, sort of recapping last week, we see something that can often trip us up when we read a passage like today, especially when we see sanctify us completely.

Because over the last few weeks, we've had 13, actually, if you've counted them all, 13 commands that we've been steadily going through.

And I felt compelled by the Holy Spirit that He desires this church to slow down for a bit. And just like a nice warm meal that you spent way more money than you probably should have, and so you just want to make every bite count, essentially.

You know what I'm talking about? Any steak lovers in here? You get the filet mignon? That's what I'm talking about. And so, as we've been able to observe over the last several weeks, if you are anything like me, taking time like this has actually given me an opportunity to observe my failure, my failings, the areas that I'm terrible in, the areas that, yeah, I could probably improve, but I'm not terrible in.

[17 : 21] But most of all, you know, we're doing okay, especially when we got to that quenching of the Holy Spirit due to our failings.

But we understand something according to the recapping of the last 13 commands starting in verse 12, that our failures do not define God's forgiveness.

This should have been reiterated. If you've left church on Sunday morning feeling completely deflated and distraught because of your failures, I think I might be forgetting to include something within the sermons because our failures don't define God's forgiveness.

God has forgiven us, and wherever you land in that sanctification process is all determined by God's will and Him alone. Some will be striving and be leaps and years, and you'll think that they're ahead in spiritual maturity and more spiritual elites, or you might feel like you're just like an infant, a baby Christian still on a bottle.

But His Word makes this true, that our failures don't define God's forgiveness. And through the entirety of Scripture, we see the storyline of God's forbearance, His salvation, His grace towards His wayward people, and that should encourage us today because He has given us the Holy Spirit as a sanctifier in our lives.

[18 : 45] And this is a special work of the Holy Spirit. In fact, since we ourselves are not holy, but rather we're quite unholy, I don't know if that's news to you, if it is, welcome, but we are not very holy in and of ourselves.

And so we can understand that our relationship with the person of the Holy Spirit is vital in terms of sanctification. sanctification. He is our sanctifier, church.

And so, sanctification, we've studied it and I've reiterated for the sake of us understanding that sanctification is the process at the moment you place your faith in Jesus Christ is a process that begins when you place your faith in Jesus Christ and leads all the way at varying levels of degree until death.

this is the promise of God that never fades. And this is the recap, the last commands over the last several weeks immediately. But this passage, this is, this isn't the direction of this verse in the passage, which is often mistaken because it's not in our lives now.

Paul is trying to lift, he's made them evaluate, this church has evaluated their lives through the commands and directions, but now, he's turning their eyes out of the mirror and looking ahead.

[20 : 17] And upon the landscape of life, you see, see eternity that awaits. And so, we understand that this is not justification being complete in our lives here and now.

There is actually a heresy, a false teaching that exists within our days as if we are recipients of the person of Holy Spirit that we become like gods. But we have to understand that these are the same whispers in the garden that you can become like God.

So we have to be beware of false teaching like that. You see it a lot in Word of Faith, in the prosperity gospel, in the art of positive thinking and things like that. It's very popular in our day to day.

We have to be wary of that false teaching because when we see sanctify us completely, we know that Paul is saying something and directing their attention a little bit further out in life of a time where this project will be complete.

And so this verse isn't offering some sort of entire sanctification here in this life as if you've arrived, you're the aura of holiness, you walk into a room and everyone's saved and just touching your robe.

[21 : 29] That's not the case. We will not become like God in this life. We will start to reflect Him as we get better.

We will never arrive in perfect distinction and perfect devotion or perfect moral purity. So the Holy Spirit dwells in the believer by quenching or fanning the Holy Spirit, the person of the Holy Spirit in your life.

But that doesn't mean that you become God in that sense. In accordance with the context of the work of the Holy Spirit in the church of Thessalonica and today, the Holy Spirit helps the church progress in God-like character, not in God-like being.

So it must be stated. And so there's a couple words that I'm going to pull out of the second section of passage today. And there's two words that have contextual importance that you can check me on.

And they're ordering in this passage's unique and general and specific usage of important restatements of Paul's in this passage.

[22 : 41] And this is given the fact of ultimate sanctification to come. Essentially, Paul gives a timeline. So look with me into section two. We see the God of faithfulness.

And we're going to be in this until the remainder of our time. So we just read, now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely.

But wait, there's more. a restatement. And may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless. These two words of whole and complete in this passage have the same root and the same meaning.

And meaning that there's a contextual element that is being tied together that cannot be separated as meaning that our lives now are to be perfectly ordered where that good Christian who wakes up in the morning on Sunday gets here at 1030 maybe a little bit early to have a cup of coffee and talk.

But what this means for us is that Paul is speaking by way of repetition and clarity for this persecuted church who is suffering among the government's pressure.

[24 : 00] To them, Paul's saying while things are not looking promising to you, around you, you can look around and you see that pressure to defect in your faith, the God of peace has come to you.

You are saved. And since his wrath has been satisfied against your sin, God's word says nothing can remove that pardon.

And the trouble in your life is for your good and God's glory. God is saying to this church, I am sanctifying you, your entire being, material or immaterial, whole spirit, soul, and body, everything.

And that's good news. But you want to know the best news? Is that one day this project will be complete. He gives a contextual timeline here of when that completeness will be experienced.

You can look at, look with me in verse 23, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. In no way, shape, or form are we ever going to arrive on this earth.

[25 : 07] If you think you've arrived, I don't think that would last very long when you compare that disposition to the disposition and the humility of God's word that it puts us in.

But what God has pardoned, no one can unpardon. His promises are trustworthy and his faithfulness is sure. He who calls you in verse 24 is faithful.

And he will surely do it. God's grace cannot be undone. God's grace cannot be undone.

When we say that God is faithful, when we sing songs of blessed assurance, nothing but the blood, God, yeah, sometimes our hearts can't be ready and it's sort of like just mindless, religious piety of just standing up and everything.

You feel like junk. You don't want to be here. Everything in life is sort of crumbling down. It was hard to get out of bed. Amen? And you're just, you're just sort of just stuck in this vortex of just all these things that are trying to keep you away from the truth of God's faithfulness.

[26 : 26] And this is characterized by his steadfast affection and allegiance that God has for his people. This stretches back to Deuteronomy 7. For you are a people holy to the Lord, your God.

The Lord, your God, has chosen you to be a people for your treasured possession. The Spirit himself bears witness, according to Romans, that we are children of God.

And it talks about neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor heart, nor death, nor anything else.

All creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord. In Philippians, Paul says, and I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Man, that's good news today. Church, God calls. He who calls you is faithful. This is important because the return of God's call will never return to him void of his intended harvest.

[27 : 43] That God calls through his word and whether you like it or not, when you know that he's speaking to you as his word, as you're hearing the gospel through his word, you know something's happening and there's nothing you can do and you are compelled to give your life to Jesus Christ.

Paul is saying that just as God called the formless void into creation and called the creation of mankind in his likeness, God has reached his people through the prophets of the Old Testament, through the apostles of the New Testament and is still calling his people through the same word of God today.

He is calling and those who he calls, he will, you can be assured you will remain until the end. Isaiah 55 talks about this, for as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there, but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth.

It shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

This is good news. This is really good news. Because if you're not in Christ, maybe you grew up Catholic.

[29 : 21] That's a very works-based system of transactional faith. But when you come to the gospel of Jesus Christ, that is faith alone, in Christ alone, this might be something that you're hearing for the first time today.

And you know that God is calling you beyond a shadow of a doubt that God is calling you. Come to him. It's as easy as that.

He's already beginning a work in you. Don't be, don't minimize that as if it's just something small and marginal in your life. This is a pivotal moment.

If walking into this building, you were acquainted with God's wrath, this moment in time is a time to be quite acquainted with God's peace. It will come at us as a cost.

For the Thessalonians, this looked like something different. This looked like turning from God, turning to God from serving idols and turning towards the living and the true God and to wait for his son from heaven whom he raised from the dead.

[30 : 36] Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. Let's wait together. Yes, this will come at a great cost.

We don't naturally want to turn from idols in our lives. We want to build our golden calves, essentially. We want to have idols and different gods. But something within you that the Holy Spirit is very grieved by and quenched by will keep responding to you.

Turn. Turn. Turn. It is the greatest cost that comes with following Jesus Christ. A cost of bloodshed that was uniquely designed to atone for your sin today.

So I ask of you, if that is you today, enter into the peace of God. I got a baptism class. You can respond in faith to that. Come join us after the church service today.

And I invite you to come and share this experience with everyone, the entire church, as we all help you on this journey of faith alone through Christ alone. Enter now into the promise of God, delivering you from his wrath.

[31 : 49] That every tear, every doubt, every pain, and sin in this life will one day be no more as God sanctifies you completely at the return of his son, Jesus Christ.

Let's wait together for that. And now, if you are in Christ today, reading a passage like this today, this verse contains quite a sustaining and persevering nature of God that supersedes any struggle in our lives, any temptation that we can ever experience.

And church, your sanctification is directly related to your cooperation with the person of the Holy Spirit in your life. This has challenged me greatly over the last several weeks specifically.

And so, work with the Holy Spirit to grow in sanctification as Paul expressed to the Philippians. Work out your own salvation in Philippians 2.13 with fear and trembling for it is God who works in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

As Christians, the assurance of the gospel as we see in this passage today, the assurance of the gospel is rooted completely in God's character alone, through his actions alone, and by his promises to the church alone.

[33 : 28] This is our assurance of the gospel. So, come what may, we know the truth. And I understand life is very difficult and very trying at times for this church in Thessalonica.

It posed quite a threat to the continuation of the gospel. The government was against them. Everything was against them. The Jews were against them. The Gentiles were against them.

You had everyone against this church. Who do you think you are serving Jesus Christ? Well, just as this church was encouraged, I believe we can be encouraged as well.

That in our trials, why should we ever doubt God's goodness based upon this passage? Based upon the context of this entire book?

In our loss, why should we ever question his provision? In our worry, why should we ever fear his absence?

[34 : 31] And in our temptation, why should we ever forget his presence? I said it once, let's say it again. Now, may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely and may your whole spirit and body and spirit, 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. Church, there is nothing else that I can hear today that can come close to reshaping my perspective in this life, to realign my assurance, to realign my hope, and I believe the same is the same for you.

Being in my young 30-year-old age today, young whippersnapper up there, I have become quite accustomed to bird watching.

Call it a midlife crisis. It might be. And one thing is when my kids take my binoculars and they realign that focus and realign that lens where I can't, I put them up and I'm just like, can't, you know, just it might be a midlife crisis frustration.

Time will tell. My wife will let you know. Or maybe when Pastor Rick finds out somebody bumped the live stream camera and it's off center and off level.

[36 : 05] we all lose our vision, we all lose our focus from various times in life. And it takes something like this that puts me here to say that I am still working at this just alongside of you all.

That if you want to come to my house as if I have all the things, all life together and we have it all together and we live in this perfect religious elite lifestyle and things like that, I need to let you know that I stand here today as a man without anything to boast about in myself but only in Christ.

And so may the God who sanctifies me also sanctify you through the power and supremacy of his calling word to realign our focus at times according to his word.

not according to the world's standards, not according to our logic and different instances of searching out spiritual highs and things that worked yesterday. This Bible is sufficient to direct our lives and to align our focus.

And so we can rest assured this viewpoint will bring meaning to all the news that we see in the world today. all the chaos that we see in every headline anymore.

[37 : 36] Because how else should we expect the world to act who does not know God, who does not have hope in the next life? So let us realign our focus upon his word as we look through the lens of his scripture at the world today.

And this should motivate us to quite a mission. Let's strive together and allow ourselves to be sanctified until he brings that process to completion and we stand guiltless, faultless before the throne.

Let's pray and remember the words from an old hymn of the 1800s that reads, I hear the accuser roar of ills that I have done.

I know them well and thousands more Jehovah findeth none. Though the restless foe accuses, sins recounting like a flood, every charge our God refuses, Christ has answered with his blood.

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