

May 2, 2021
Sunday Evening Service
Series: 2 Thessalonians
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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MAY GOD MAKE YOU WORTHY 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12

Speaking of sanctification, the 1689 London Baptist Confession says, “In this war, the remaining corruption may greatly prevail for a time. Yet through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part overcomes. So the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. They pursue a heavenly life, in gospel obedience to all the commands that Christ as Head and King has given them in his Word.”

Sanctification is a major doctrine taught throughout Scripture. The Old Testament word *kaw-dash* means to make holy, purify, dedicate, consecrate or appoint. God required that all the priests and Levites connected with the work of the tabernacle be made ceremonially holy or purified. That means they were to be set apart from the mundane. The same was true regarding the inanimate objects connected with the tabernacle and the temple. Anything or anyone in the Old Testament system of worship that was sanctified was set apart from typical use in the world and to God’s use for His glory.

In the New Testament, the word sanctified is generally the Greek word *hagiazo*. That word also means to make holy, dedicate, consecrate, separate or to purify. The word aptly describes setting something or someone apart from the norm for God and His glory.

The idea of sanctification in all its nuances is fleshed out well in the New Testament. We learn that at the moment a sinner is born again by the miracle of regeneration, God sets that person aside for Himself. We are brought into relationship with Him and out of relationship with the sinful world. Furthermore, we learn that for the rest of his life, the redeemed saint is being conformed more and more

to the character of Christ. Sanctification is the process of washing the saint clean from the defilements of the world, the person’s natural tendencies and propensities of sin. Finally, we also learn that the moment the redeemed saint is with Christ in heaven, he or she is instantly, fully changed into the character of Christ forever. We call that final sanctification or glorification.

Our text speaks to that idea of sanctification in verse eleven. Then when we come to verse twelve we discover the purpose or goal for sanctification. When a sinner is washed from sin and is being conformed to the character of Christ, it shines the light on Christ, not on the person who is being sanctified. God is glorified when people who naturally live in and according to sin begin to live more and more like Jesus.

David wrote how all nature declares the glory of God: *For the choir director; a psalm by David. The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky displays what his hands have made. One day tells a story to the next. One night shares knowledge with the next without talking, without words, without their voices being heard. Yet, their sound has gone out into the entire world, their message to the ends of the earth. He has set up a tent in the heavens for the sun, which comes out of its chamber like a bridegroom. Like a champion, it is eager to run its course. It rises from one end of the heavens. It circles around to the other. Nothing is hidden from its heat” (Psalm 19:1-6 GWV).*

God created us to do the same. Sin separates us from God and causes us to glorify God’s enemy Satan. But God’s work of making us worthy of our calling changes all that. As we are being conformed to Christ’s character, we are moving back toward God’s original intent for us to glorify Him.

A God-Honoring Prayer (v.11).

One sentence comprising two verses at the end of this first chapter spell out a prayer from Paul that God would make His people worthy. *To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling (v.11a).* This sounds a lot like something Paul had written to these people in the first letter, “Pray without ceasing.” Was the statement “always pray” hyperbole?

Paul often confessed that he prayed for a lot of people. For example, he assured the folks in the church in Rome, *For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I mention you always in my prayers (Roman 1:9-10a)*. He wrote to the church in Ephesus, *I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers (Ephesians 1:16)*. To the church in Philippi Paul wrote, *And it is my prayer that your love may abound more and more, with knowledge and all discernment (Philippians 1:9)*. He said the same kind of thing to the church in Colossae, *And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding (Colossians 1:9)*.

In fact, Paul had already mentioned to the church in Thessalonica his practice of ceaseless prayer. *As we pray most earnestly night and day that we may see you face to face and supply what is lacking in your faith (1 Thessalonians 3:10)*. It means that Paul did not expect the Christians in Thessalonica (or us) to do something he did not do himself, which is, *pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17)*.

Surely this practice contributed in a large way to the stress Paul felt for the churches. We remember in the second letter to the church in Corinth how Paul, having listed several stressful aspects of his ministry then wrote, *Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure (2 Corinthians 11:24-27)*. And immediately after that list he wrote, *And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches (2 Corinthians 11:28)*.

But here it is clearly not just Paul who prayed without ceasing, but Timothy and Silas also (**we**).

The much praying was for God to do His work of sanctification in individuals. We should pray for each other like Paul, *that our God may make you worthy of his calling (v.11a)*. The question is a matter

of being worthy of God's calling. God's righteous judgment deemed the people worthy of being part of the kingdom of God (1:5). Here the calling of God is that about which they need to be made worthy.

The idea of God's calling is a prominent theme in Paul's writings. Often, as in our text, the calling is the effectual call of God that initiates conviction of sin and results in faith unto salvation. This call is God drawing us sinners to the Savior with a call as certain as Jesus walking by the seaside and calling James and John to follow Him (Matthew 4:21). It is the call we read about in Romans where we are loved by God and called to be His saints (Romans 1:7).

This calling is the eternal decree of the Godhead, it is irrevocable. *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified (Romans 8:28-30)*.

Okay then that call begs a question: "How valuable is that calling?" Or we might ask, "What does being worthy look like?" Whatever price you come up with, the final conclusion is the same. You cannot make yourself worthy. The standard is pretty high.

Paul gave a good description and therefore a hint at the value of this calling in his letter to the Christians in Ephesus. *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith – that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen (Ephesians 3:14-21)*.

No one, not even born again people have the ability to accomplish that growth in knowledge and likeness of Christ Jesus. It

is true that God challenges us to think about, to work at it. *Therefore, brothers, be all the more diligent to make your calling and election sure, for if you practice these qualities you will never fall (2 Peter 1:10).* But, ultimately, only God can make us worthy of our calling. That is why Paul prayed that God will make us worthy. God's grace that calls us also makes us worthy. We confess with Paul then, *But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me (1 Corinthians 15:10).*

This text is a prayer that God will accomplish your good desires. *And may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power (v.11b).* It is a prayer that through His power God will help you accomplish every good desire. Sometimes we think or act like Christians are so helplessly sunk in the power of the flesh that we cannot have godly desires. The word resolve speaks of desire. Not all our desires are bad. In fact, it is our responsibility through the grace that God gives us to hem in and focus our desires on what pleases God. Sanctification is learning how to discipline our desires. This word speaks of what pleases us. Desiring to become more like Christ is a desire that we should pray for God to fulfill.

A second part of the prayer is clearly a request for sanctification, that through His power God will help you accomplish every good work. Likewise, we should pray that God would fulfill in us every good work. Good works are works that bring glory to God our Savior. There are good deeds that honor the doer of the deeds. There are good deeds that benefit the recipient of the deeds. Our works of benefit and kindness should not reflect glory to us but to our God who gives us the grace, the ability, the opportunity, and even the desire to do the work.

It is interesting that in our culture there is much emphasis on doing good for each other. We ought to. But there is a distinction in the motivation for doing what is good and helpful. Our peers and our leaders end up "doing good" for those who don't need it just so they can look good in the eyes of others. That is why Jesus taught us to be careful to do our good deeds secretly so that we will not be tempted to do what we do to be noticed by others.

If we truly desire to do good deeds, we will soon realize that we can only do what we desire to do as God gives us the power. Even our simple good desires should be driven by supernatural power.

A God-Honoring Objective (v.12).

The prayer of our text has a God-honoring objective or purpose. We should be praying for mutual glorification. The text presents mutual glorification as the Lord Jesus being glorified in you and you being glorified in Him. *So that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him (v.12a).*

Notice the prayer is a request that Jesus will be glorified in individuals. It is important to zero in for a moment on the truth that the "name" of our Lord Jesus encompasses His character and work. This idea goes back to the Old Testament where God revealed His work and character in His various names. A couple of examples will suffice to show the connection. For example, the title El Elyon means "God most high." It refers to God's supreme majesty and that He is above all the so-called gods of human invention as well as Satan and his angels. The title or name El Shaddai means "The almighty, all-sufficient God." This title is one of the most precious names in that it reminds us that God is sufficient to meet all our needs. Then of course there is Yahweh (also pronounced Jehovah). This name speaks of God as "the self-existing One." It reminds us that He is eternally self-existing, depending on no one to accomplish His will.

That same idea of the mighty works and character of God are rolled over into the name of Jesus. Therefore, when someone is needed in heaven to take the scroll from the Father's hand and open it, Jesus the "Lamb of God" the "Lion of the tribe of Judah" steps forward. And all the angels and saints in heaven erupt: *"Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created" (Revelation 4:11).* And Mary and Joseph named Him "Jesus" because He saves His people from their sins. Because He is Savior, there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

The prayer is that the name of Jesus will be glorified. More precisely, the desire is that Christ will be glorified in individuals.

That means we pray our desire for people to so order their lives that the character of Christ is seen in them. That is what sanctification looks like. As we take on more and more characteristics of Christ, our lives will manifest His character. That we would manifest the character of our Creator was His intent in creating us. He created us in His image, which speaks of His character not His outward appearance.

Pray that individuals will be glorified in Jesus. This glorification will take place in this life. God declared this important principle to Eli who failed in rearing his family. He told Eli, *“I promised that your house and the house of your father should go in and out before me forever,” but now the LORD declares: “Far be it from me, for those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed” (1 Samuel 2:30).*

Jesus taught the positive side of that statement as a promise to us. *“If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him” (John 12:26).* Ultimately, we will be glorified at the consummation of the ages when we are with Jesus. While we suffer with Jesus in this life, it is good for us to remember that in His glory we will be glorified along with Him (Romans 8:17). The end of God’s work in us is our glorification when we will be just like Christ (Romans 8:30; 1 John 3:2).

All of this sanctifying is according to God’s grace. *According to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ (v.12b).* The statement is a good reminder that we live by grace. We pray according to the grace of God. Apart from God’s favor to us, we are not even allowed to talk to Him. Apart from God’s favor, we do not know for what we should pray. It is through grace that God teaches us how to pray. It is because of God’s favor that He has given us the person of the Holy Spirit who intercedes for us as we pray. *Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God (Romans 8:26-27).* God’s gracious promises even motivate us to pray.

Not only is it grace that drives us to pray for sanctification, but God is busy working in us according to His grace. A reminder that the statement is, *To this end we always pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling and may fulfill every resolve for good and every work of faith by his power (v.11).* Without God’s favor none of that happens. But God’s grace moves Him to provide for us and complete in us every good work.

And also, there is mutual glorification according to God’s grace. We are able to bring glory to Christ only because of God’s favor that makes us like Christ. We will share Christ’s glory only through His grace.

Finally, we see at the end of the sentence a reminder that we are the Lord’s possession. In light of all that God’s grace gives us and accomplishes in us, we should be delighted to belong to Him. Jesus Christ is Lord and head over all. He is Jesus who saves His people from their sins. He is Christ the ordained Messiah. Therefore, He who saves us through the price of His shed blood, who bought us at infinite cost, has every right to be our Sovereign.

That the born again person is becoming more and more like Christ is not an accident. It is God’s plan. Because it is God’s plan, it has to happen, it will happen, it does happen. And that we are becoming more like Christ is all a matter of Him pouring out His unmerited favor on us. Sanctification is not a chore, a duty, a drudgery. It is the privileged consequence of God’s grace on us who He loves.