

~Other Speakers G-L: Aaron Hills:

Paul wrote the Thessalonians as Christians, unquestionably declaring them to be such in the first chapter; and in the third chapter he as certainly prays that they may have a second work of grace in their hearts, "to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness" (I Thess. 3-13).

Three verses further on (I Thess. 4:3) he writes: "For this is the will of God even your sanctification." Here is a distinct declaration, not that one may possibly get such an experience, but that God has provided for this experience, and that it is His will, that is to say, His command that each of His children should be sanctified. God's revealed will is nothing less than a command.

I wonder any of my readers pray the Lord's Prayer. How does it read? "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." How is it done in heaven by angels? Perfectly. By whom do you pray it may be done on earth? By yourself, if you pray honestly. You would not dare pray, "Lord, let Thy will be done by the other fellow, but not by me." That would be mocking God. And so, Christian reader, you are confronted by this fact, that your sanctification is God's will; and Jesus taught you to pray, "Thy will be done." To be consistent, you should either stop praying the Lord's Prayer or begin to seek sanctification with all your heart. That is the way Paul felt about it.

Four verses further on (I Thess. 4:7) he writes: "For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness." If we are called to be Christians at all, we are called to be sanctified Christians. God wants us to be at our very best. We cannot afford to be anything less. Through His atoning mercy, by His holy Word, and by the convictions and wooings of His Spirit, He calls us all to this blessing. And God never called a child of His to anything that was not provided for in His grace. The Holy Spirit, by whom Paul says we are sanctified, stands ready to do His work. Jesus, our great High Priest who baptizes with the Holy Spirit and fire, stands ready to do His part. God, the triune God, is ready. The only question is, are we ready?

In the next chapter Paul tells us, "Quench not the Spirit" (verse 19). Why not? Because He sanctifies us (Rom. 15:16; II Thess. 2:13; I Peter 1:2) He cannot accomplish this divine work unless we open our hearts to His influence. To resist and oppose the doctrine of a second work of grace, and fight sanctification, is to quench the Spirit who sanctifies.

This command is followed by a remarkable prayer, four verses later (23): "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless." This is the second prayer in his brief epistle for holiness and sanctification. It is very remarkable for its clear teachings on this subject.

1. "The God of peace" himself does the sanctifying. This rules out completely the idea of self-sanctification by your own pretty living and doing, by your own fasting and praying, and growing. Nobody ever gets the blessing by that route. It is not at the end of that line. In the thirty years of my ministry I have never heard one Christian testify that he got sanctification by growth. God himself does the sanctifying if it is ever done.

2. The verb sanctify is in the aorist tense, denoting singleness of action, an instantaneous completed work, as distinguished from a continuance or repetition. There is no getting sanctified by degrees, by a long process of indefinite length and uncertain continuousness. The work is to be done in a flash of time by the baptism with the Holy Ghost.

3. The God of peace himself is thus to sanctify us wholly, "through and through." This rules out all limitation of the work to any department of our being, or any single faculty. Some tell us, and would have us believe, that all God's commands end in the will; and that when that is correct in its choice or purpose or decision, all duty is met, and God asks no more. This text utterly refutes that idea. God wants the whole being -- intellect, sensibility, and will; body and spirit -- to be cleansed and made fit to be His temple.

4. The prayer continues: And may "your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless." The body (Greek, soma) means our physical organization with all its natural appetites and passions and necessary functions. The soul means the animating principle of the body connected with the senses. The spirit is the higher soul to which the influences of the other world address themselves. It is by this faculty that we know God, and feel His power and presence, and recognize our duty to love and obey Him. This is all to be sanctified, and then preserved so. This is all there is of a man -- body, soul, and spirit. There is nothing else about him but his clothes. And the dress question will easily be settled when the whole being is freed from depravity and the

heart is right with God. What a blessedly complete work God proposes to do for us! Take all the disordered elements out of us -- all the abnormal appetites, all base propensities, all proclivities downward that would draw us away from God and sink us in hell -- and then preserve us in that blessed state of purity and Christlikeness until God calls us to himself! This is what Paul prayed for, and it is enough to make us all shout, "Amen!" and go in for the blessing. It ought to make everybody hunger and thirst for this great salvation, and cause everyone who has it to be filled with an unutterable joy.

This prayer is immediately followed in the next verse by a gracious promise: "Faithful is he that called you, who also will do it." Callesth you to what? Oh, he has just told them that God calls them to sanctification (4:7). And now, right after this prayer for sanctification, he says, "He who calls you will do it." Do what? Why, sanctify you. Nothing else can be made of this blessed and encouraging passage of scripture. The steps, which are six, are as follows:

1. The will of God is that we be sanctified (4:3).
2. God calls to the blessing (4:7).
3. The command. "Quench not the Spirit," whereby ye are sanctified (5:19).
4. The prayer. "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly" (5:23).
5. And may your "spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless" (5:23).
6. Faithful is He who calls you to be sanctified, who also will do it.

A brother once said, "It took two to sanctify me." "Who were they?" "God and I." "What did God do?" "He sanctified me." "What did you do?" "I let Him do it." This is testimony true to life. Anybody can get sanctified who will yield himself to God for the blessing, and seek it with all his heart.

There is one other passage in the epistle, weighted with awful solemnity, which I have purposely reserved to the last. After saying, in I Thessalonians 4:7, that God calls us to sanctification, he adds: "He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit." We are sanctified by the baptism with the Holy Spirit. Jesus administers this blessing, and it is God's will that we should have it. Therefore he that despiseth this blessing, and opposes it, and refuses to have it or to seek it, despiseth not St. Paul, or John Wesley, or Brother Morrison, or Dr. Carradine, or any other teacher of holiness. He "despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit."

The First Epistle to the Thessalonians unquestionably teaches a second work of grace, subsequent to regeneration, called sanctification. It is urged upon you in the most solemn way. Do not reject this truth. By so doing you despise God and quench the Spirit, who has been sent to SANCTIFY YOU WHOLLY.