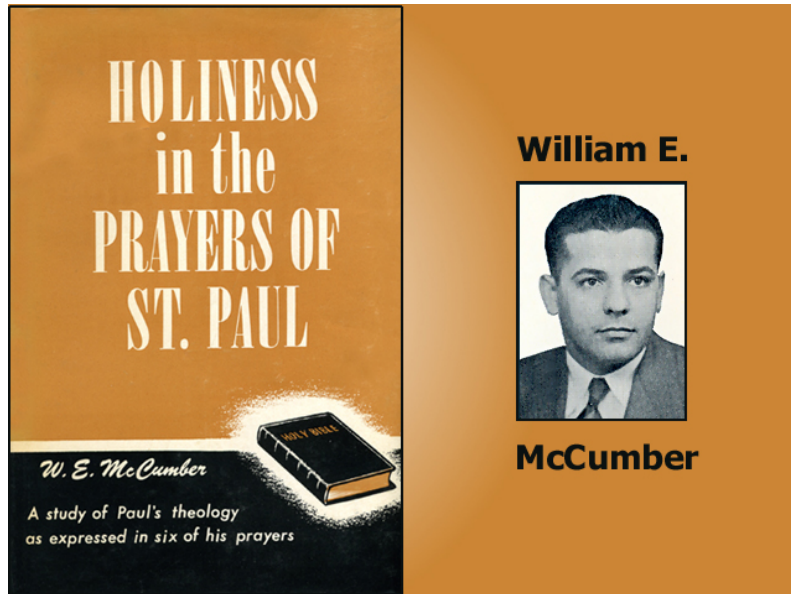


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HOLINESS IN THE PRAYERS OF ST. PAUL
By William E. McCumber



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DEDICATION

To my wife, Doris, this book is lovingly dedicated. My indebtedness to her for spiritual help and comfort and inspiration is exceeded only by that I owe to God.

* * * * *

INTRODUCTION

"Paul's prayers are the best expositions of his theology." This sentence, from a book by Samuel Chadwick, clung like a bur to my mind for several years. Finally, the day dawned when I was able to begin an intensive study of holiness in the prayers of the Apostle Paul. Every commentary or book I could lay hands on was eagerly read for relevant material. Some two years were spent, purchasing every odd moment I could from a typically busy ministry, in gathering, comparing, sifting, and rejecting notes. I especially sought out authors who are not considered as exponents of "second-blessing holiness." Indeed, but two proponents of the Wesleyan position are cited, Clarke and Chadwick.

The work was undertaken solely for my own benefit. Some friends, both laymen and preachers, who saw my notes and heard some of these studies concisely and simply given from the pulpit, have urged me to make them available to others who might profit thereby.

Passages most widely disputed are accorded more quotations than some others. It is my desire to set forth conflicting interpretations fairly, and then draw my own conclusion as to which, if any, are correct. Abundant quotations, too, will furnish the reader with statements from writers who are considered authorities in

the field of exegesis, which I certainly am not. Too, it will give him the material compactly, where I had to ransack volumes to collect it. No apology is offered for borrowing generously from the best minds of the passing Christian centuries.

Each study has been prefaced with the entire contextual paragraph of Scripture, and with an outline of the expositional procedure.

To eliminate repetitious references, it will suffice to explain here that all quotations from Adam Clarke, Matthew Henry, and H. A. W. Meyer are from their commentaries on the particular passages. Quotations from Lunemann are from his sections of Meyer's commentary. Those from Conybeare are from his translation of Paul's Epistles in Life and Letters of St. Paul. Those from Geo. R. Berry are from his interlinear New, New Testament. Those from Phillips are from his admirable translation of the Epistles, Letters to Young Churches.

Acknowledgment of deepest appreciation is expressed to the Macmillan Company, New York, for permission to quote from Letters to Young Churches, J. B. Phillips, 1950; to Raymond MacKendree for valuable assistance in typing the manuscript; and to the congregation at Arcadia, Florida. It was during my five happy years as their pastor that this volume was conceived.

* * * * *

01 -- THE PRAYER FOR ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION

Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.

See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow, that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it. -- I Thessalonians 5:14-24

Introduction

A standard exalted (vv. 14-22)

A dynamic furnished (vv. 23-24)

I. Points upward for encouragement. "The God of peace, himself... " The divine nature necessitates holiness.

II. Points backward for encouragement. "The God of peace, himself..." Only the justified have "peace with God." Sanctification is a second work of grace.

III. Points outward for encouragement. "The God of peace, himself..." Emphatic contrast to human effort.

1. God, the Cleanser: "Sanctify you wholly..."

2. God, the Conserver: "Be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

3. God, the Caller: "Faithful is he that calleth you..."

And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it (I Thess. 5:23-24).

It is obvious, from just a casual survey of verses 14 through 22, that the apostle has levied upon the Church the demands of a life so morally and spiritually lofty as to seem inaccessible. In the face of such exacting standards, one of two attitudes was quite likely to be adopted. Some would be inclined to think the standard impossible, therefore impractical, and would be indifferent to it. Doubtless, others would feel that they were just as weak as the standard was high, that God demanded more than they could deliver, and they would be discouraged by it.

Forestalling these twin evils of sloth and dismay, Paul quickly refers them to a source of power outside of and superior to themselves--to God, whose provision to sanctify wholly affords an adequate dynamic for the life commanded. The Greek reads, *autos de ho theos tas eirenes*, "the God of peace, himself"!

I. Thus, the apostle points upward for encouragement. "The God of peace, himself..."

The possibility of being entirely sanctified lies with God because the necessity of it lodges with God. He is the God of peace. His nature demands peace, and He must loathe the inward principle of sin that fosters dispeace in the hearts of His unsanctified children. Carnality is a lurking rebel, rearing its ugly head and shaking its huge fist at the will of God for our lives. It is a continual, unrelenting disturber of the peace. "The carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."¹

A part of that challenge to holy living we just discussed is, "Be at peace among yourselves."² We cannot be at peace among ourselves until we are at peace within ourselves! The carnal mind, which divides, confuses, and frustrates within the individual Christian heart, is the noxious source of all the quarreling and

sundering which spoils the life and worship of the collective group. Paul laid the blame for the schisms at Corinth directly before the door of their unsanctified hearts. "Whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal?"³ This dispeace God despises, and therefore exerts the omnipotent energies of His own nature to destroy carnality and bestow perfect peace.

Quite often I hear it preached that the necessity of our being sanctified wholly is grounded in man's nature. Man is unholy and must be made holy. He is polluted and must be purified. He is divided and must be integrated. But the deeper truth grounds the necessity of being sanctified wholly in the nature of God. If it were not for who He is, it would not matter what we are. Unless He were a holy God, who loves righteousness and hates iniquity, who desires harmony and despises enmity, it would not matter how carnal, contentious, and corrupt our natures were. But just because He is "the God of peace," He has poured the tremendous and thunderous forces of Omnipotence into the execution of a plan and the unleashing of a power that can bring purity and peace to the carnal, strife-filled heart. Thus Paul points upward to Him whose nature furnishes the necessity and whose grace affords the possibility of holiness.

II. He points backward, also, for encouragement. "The God of peace, himself..."

The appellation, "God of peace," stirs the memory of a previous deliverance. It identifies Him as "the God who communicates Christian peace"⁴; or, as Clarke comments, "That same God who is the author of peace, the giver of peace." It is a finger pointing back to their conversion, when "being justified by faith" they began to enjoy "peace with God." Only to the justified is God revealed as "the God of Peace." To the sinner He is revealed as a God of holiness, justice, wrath, mercy, and love, but not peace. "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked."⁵ Peace is a revelation based upon a relationship. When enmity ceases, the penitent sinner halting his stubborn rebellion and surrendering to Christ, peace results. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."⁶ (See Notes, 1.)

When God commissioned Joshua to lead Israel into Canaan, He encouraged the general with this promise, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee."⁷ Joshua understood these words to include an assurance that the miracle of parted waters wrought at the Red Sea would be repeated at the Jordan River. He said to the people, "The Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above; and they shall stand upon an heap."⁸ After the crossing of the miracle paved river-bed highway, that valiant warrior exclaimed in celebration, "The Lord your God dried up the waters of Jordan from before you, until ye were passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea."⁹

The same principle of encouragement is used here. Plainly, the experience of justification did not supply a sufficient dynamic for the life Paul outlined. But he points them back to that initial and wonderful transformation to stimulate hope and faith. The God who led out of Egyptian bondage will lead into Canaan's freedom. The God who justified freely will sanctify wholly. If He did that, He can do this!

Here we may point out the futility of quibbling against a "second blessing." If the work of entire sanctification is wrought by "the God of peace," it must follow, in point of time, "being justified by faith."

III. Yes, the apostle points outward for encouragement. "The God of peace, himself..."

This phrase Lunemann properly interprets as an "emphatic contrast to the efforts of men." From first to last the experience of entire sanctification is a divine operation.

It is more than consecration. Men are commanded to consecrate. "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."¹⁰ Entire sanctification is the divine response of cleansing to the human act of consecration. The latter conditions but God executes that work of grace.

Too, it is more than growth in grace. We are enjoined to do that. "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."¹¹ Entire sanctification is the divine weeding of the garden of the heart that conditions it to produce the fruit of the Spirit beautifully and symmetrically. It is not achieved; it is received. It is not attained; it is obtained. It is not by striving; it is by yielding. It is not by trying, but by trusting. God does it. (See Notes, 2.) The entire passage exalts God. He is extolled as (1) the Cleanser: "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly..."; (2) the Conserver: "And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless..."; (3) the Caller: "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."

1. God Is The Cleanser

After all, a man does not know his own heart. "The heart is deceitful... who can know it?"¹² How then could man cleanse it? "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?"¹³ But God both knows the disease and can effect the remedy! "God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost... purifying their hearts by faith."¹⁴ We are not made holy by our faulty wisdom and puny efforts, but by the sanctifying energies of the Spirit of God. Human effort can make Pharisees, but only God can make saints. As "the God of peace," He directs the vast forces of His holy nature into the destruction of carnality. Thus He would terminate our inner strife and bring us perfect peace.

Here we anticipate our next thought. To the God of peace the appeal is made to "sanctify you wholly." Here the apostle casts his fervent petition into the mighty stream of intercession made by our Lord himself. The Master prayed for His disciples, "Father, sanctify them."¹⁵ That which constituted the burden of Paul's heart and Christ's heart ought never to be lightly or optionally regarded by any Christian. To ignore or belittle the experience of entire sanctification is to trample with dirty feet the sacred prayers of dead saints and the living Saviour. This is holy ground; tread it reverently!

The verb "sanctify" is from the Latin sanctus -- "holy," and facere -- "to make." That is precisely what the Greek verb hagiasai implies, "make you holy." It is a strong word, binding together the Old Testament emphasis on separation to God and the New Testament meaning of cleansing from moral defilement. There are some who insist upon restricting the verb to the Old Testament emphasis. They insist upon a dedication of all the life forces and faculties to God, but reject the fact of any actual cleansing from inbred sin. We are initially, legally, officially, positionally, and partially sanctified when we are justified. We are then "sanctified in Christ Jesus." His righteousness is imputed to us. But we are actually, inwardly, personally, and entirely sanctified as a second crisis experience. We are then "sanctified by the Holy Spirit." The righteousness of Christ is imparted to us. No man is better than his heart. It is idle to talk of being truly holy until the heart is pure. Neither can the strong and repeated demands of the New Testament for perfect love be met by a carnal heart.

The ministry of Jesus is characterized by a strong interior thrust. In His preaching the emphasis is upon the heart condition. He dealt largely in the realm of affection, intention, and motive -- with the hate that led to murder, the lust that prompted adultery, the greed that robbed aged and needy parents of lawful support. That was what harassed the Pharisees. This Man had a way of cutting straight through the veneer of a religious exterior and exposing all the ugliness and rottenness of their impure hearts. His words are always disturbing to those who want to keep their relationship to God on judicial and external levels.

This being true, who can believe that when He prayed, "Father, sanctify them," He had in mind nothing more than a positional relationship that left the polluted heart quite untouched? No! He was praying for the cleansing of the temple of human personality, that His promised Spirit might find a worthy residence. And in the gift of the Holy Spirit that cleansing power was abundantly furnished. "Giving them the Holy Ghost... purifying their hearts."

The verb under consideration has a deeper meaning than separation from the world and dedication to God. It embraces purification from sin! To this larger significance the commentaries and dictionaries almost universally agree. Indeed, the Greek verb is derived from the privative ha -- "un," and the noun gee -- "earth." It is literally, "Unearth them." It brings to mind the promise in Isaiah: "I will turn my hand upon thee, and purely purge away thy dross."¹⁶ And the similar promise in

Malachi: "He shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver."¹⁷ It points to the utter destruction of that "earthly, sensual, devilish" principle of carnality that robs the heart of peace, by the separating, purifying, unifying ministry of the Holy Spirit. It was a glorious occasion when Moses sprinkled the Tabernacle with blood, but most glorious when the temple of the human heart is cleansed by the Blood of the Cross.

The adverb "wholly" is the Greek holoteleis. This is its only occurrence in the New Testament with reference to that which is perfect, "to which nothing belonging to its nature is wanting."¹⁸ It is regarded by some very able critics as ethical in significance. Thus it would mean "morally complete, pure and blameless." However, most scholars accept it as an adverb of quantity, relating it closely to humas ("you") and interpreting it in the light of the ensuing sentence. It would then refer to the whole personality of the Thessalonians, and would be interpreted "in your entire extent, through and through." In that strain J. B. Phillips translates, "make you holy through and through." The comment of the always careful Clarke is emphatic: "Leave no more evil in your hearts than his precepts tolerate in your conduct. The word wholly, holoteleis, means precisely the same as our phrase, to all intents and purposes. May he sanctify you to the end and to the uttermost." Certainly the word points to a complete moral renovation, the utter extinction of all sin!

2. God Is The Conserver

This emphatic moral purity is given further imperative as the apostle continues his prayer. "And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless..." These words constitute "a fuller repetition of the wish already expressed."¹⁹ (See Notes, 4.) "Whole" is the Greek holokleros, and means comprehending all the parts of anything. Its gender is governed by pneuma ("spirit"), that being the closest noun, but it also modifies psyche ("soul") and soma ("body"). "The apostle prays that this compound being in all its parts, powers, and faculties, which he terms their whole, comprehending all parts, everything that constitutes man and manhood, may be sanctified and preserved blameless until the coming of Christ."²⁰

Incidentally, this passage presupposes the old theological formula, the fall of man. It has been vogue for years to sneer at the doctrine of innate depravity, that man is born with a corrupted nature, victim of a racial taint that darkens the intellect, deadens the heart, and degrades the will. But there is no other adequate explanation for all the sights and sounds of sinning, sorrowing, and suffering that we daily see and hear on all sides. Man is totally depraved -- not that he is as bad as he can be, but that every department of personality has been affected by the Fall. God, in His infinite wisdom and grace, has provided a renewing and refining which fully restores the ruined temple! The whole man, "spirit and soul and body," is to be recovered from the dominion and pollution of sin. Total depravity is remedied by entire sanctification.

The spirit is the higher and spiritual side of the inner life. It is the source of life to the body and the soul. It is the seat of reason and intelligence. It is that element of personality which is immaterial and immortal. The spirit is made and kept blameless when it is yielded to and governed by the truth, or more accurately, "the Spirit of truth."

The soul is the lower side of the inner life, the frontier where the spirit comes into contact with the senses. It is the seat of the passions and appetites and affections. Its deranged appetites and misguided propensities are corrected and cleansed by the sanctifying Spirit, and preserved blameless so long as He controls and directs them into channels of legitimate and moderate gratification.

The body is the agent of the soul. Flesh is material substance and, therefore, neither moral nor immoral in and of itself. It is blameless when it is not allowed to become the instrument of shameful and sinful actions.

From this prayer of Paul for the sanctification and preservation of the whole man, Adam Clarke deduces three facts that somewhat sum up our remarks: (1) Body, soul, and spirit are debased and polluted by sin. (2) Each is capable of being consecrated in all its powers to God and made holy. (3) The whole man is to be preserved blameless till the coming of Christ, that body, soul, and spirit may then be glorified forever with Him. (See Notes, 5.)

In the light of these strong petitions and assurances the necessity and perpetuity of sin in the life of a believer cannot be defended on any ground, physical, psychical, or spiritual! The Cleanser is also the Conserver. The sanctified life is not lived by the power of consecrated manhood, noble as that is, but in the power of indwelling Godhead! "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.²¹ The moral standards of sanctified living are lofty and severe, but we reach them, not by unaided struggle and resolve, but by letting the power of the Holy Spirit release itself through human personality. "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."²²

The grand purposes of our being sanctified wholly are two, one immediate and one ultimate. The immediate purpose is suggested by the phrase discussed, "preserved blameless." It furnishes an adequate dynamic for daily holy living, and thus precludes 'the necessity of daily sinning and nightly repenting. It makes consistent Christlikeness possible and practical. The ultimate purpose is designated in the words, "unto the coming of... Christ." The coming of Christ will initiate the judgment and inaugurate His kingdom upon earth. Entire sanctification readies us to meet the coming Judge in peace and hail the coming King with joy. We shall pass His judgment and share His kingdom. "Blessed and holy is he that

hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years."²³

Digressing briefly, the reference to the appearing of Christ, like the appellation of God here used, serves to indicate the time for the fulfillment of the prayer for entire sanctification. It is after we find peace with God and before we go to meet Christ. It is after spiritual birth and before physical death. It is after we are justified and before we are glorified. In short, it may be now! One need not wait for death or growth, only for faith. When one can believe, God will bestow! "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."

3. God Is The Caller

Here we have reached the final words of the prayer for entire sanctification. The Cleanser, who is the Conserver, is also the Caller. He calls to holiness by pointing out the danger of worldliness: "God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness. This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication."²⁴ **He calls to holiness by lifting up the cross of Christ: "Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach."**²⁵ **He calls to holiness by reminding of the integrity of himself: "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."**

"Paul knows that he does not implore God in vain. God is faithful; He keeps what He promises; if He called the Thessalonians to a participation in His kingdom, He will preserve them pure and faultless even to its commencement."²⁶ **(We would prefer to substitute blameless for faultless. It is less disturbing to hairsplitting critics of holiness.) God does not tantalize. He creates no hunger He will not satisfy. He does not challenge to inaccessible heights. He will not minister to either indifference or discouragement. No! He will grant the experience to which He calls! "His having called you to holiness is a pledge of His desire for your complete sanctification."**²⁷

The final clause, "who also will do it," is translated by Conybeare, "He will fulfill my prayer." In the mind of Paul no shadow of doubt existed concerning God's ability or willingness to entirely sanctify and constantly preserve His people. Nor should there be in ours! If we do not possess the experience, neither enjoy the life it enables, let us not hesitate to apply in faith to a faithful God, imploring Him to cleanse us from all sin and preserve us from all evil, and believing that He does it! It is equally foolish and perilous to reject the call of God to be made holy. "God hath... called us unto... holiness. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his Holy Spirit."²⁸

Notes

1. "No one can ever be sanctified who does not first accept the message of reconciliation. It is not possible to become holy as God is holy, until, being justified by faith we have peace with God... This is God's way of holiness, and that is why the apostle presents this prayer for the sanctification of the Thessalonians to the God of peace." (James Denny, The Expositor's Bible.)

However, some scholars differ, regarding the designation as indicating, not the fact that justification, which brings peace with God, must precede sanctification, but as indicative of the truth that peace is a consequence of sanctification. Thus Olshausen: "God is here called theos tas eirenes because sanctification is the condition of outward and inward peace; God, therefore, who carries peace in himself, will also impart it to men through sanctification." In similar strain, H. C. G. Moule, "His peace bears fruit in our perfection."

Holiness writers have long insisted that justification brings "peace with God"; sanctification brings "the peace of God." Both positions noted are valid and supplementary.

2. "'The God of peace himself' -- working in independence of your exertions and by exhortations -- 'sanctify you wholly.'" (James Denny, The Expositor's Bible.)

3. "To sanctify is to set aside or to separate for the service of God, to consecrate, but also to purify, to make fit for such service and to free from all fault." (C. R. Erdman, Expositions, 1st Thessalonians.)

4. "From the degree of holiness desired it passes to its range, from its intension to its extension." (H. C. G. Moule, Cambridge Bible.)

5. It would be difficult to find a stronger comment on this passage than that of the Calvinist, Matthew Henry: "We should pray God to perfect his work, and preserve us blameless, free from sin and impurity, till at length we are presented faultless before the throne of his glory with exceeding joy."

* * * * *

02 -- THE PRAYER FOR TRANSPARENT HOLINESS

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you,

Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy,

For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now;

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.

For God is my record, how greatly i long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.

And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;

That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;

Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God. -- Philipians 1:3-11

Introduction

The object of prayer, "your love"

I. The education of love. "That your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment."

1. Epignosis-mental cognition

2. Aisthesis -- moral illumination

II. The regulation of love. "That ye may approve things that are excellent..."

1. Discrimination

2. Approbation

III. The perfection of love. "That ye may be sincere and without offence... "

1. "Sincere" -- transparent in holiness

2. "Without offence"

a. Actively, not causing to stumble

b. Passively, not caused to stumble

IV. The manifestation of love. "Being filled with the fruits of righteousness..."

1. The meaning, fruit of right relations to God

2. The measure, filled full (pepleromenoi)

V. The consummation of love. "Till the day of Christ..."

Love confident and triumphant at the judgment

And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God (Phil. 1:9-11).

"And this I pray"! Surely all that follows ought to be heavily underscored, for the apostle to the Gentiles never prayed for trivialities. That for which he poured out his soul in fervent prayer should engage our fullest attention. If his earnest intercession concerns some lofty spiritual experience at which we have not arrived and which we do not enjoy, we ought to seriously and instantly set out in quest of it. Let us see.

The subject of his prayer was their love, "that your love may abound." Top-ranking commentators hold various opinions concerning the object of this love. Two views have chiefly prevailed. (1) That it means their love to Paul. Exponents of this position link the "love" of verse 9 to verse 7, where Paul affirms, "Ye have me in your heart." (The King James rendering, "I have you in my heart," is not accurate.) Such noted scholars as Chrysostom, Grotius, and Bengel advance this interpretation. (2) That it refers to their love for one another, a view argued by the great German exegete, H. A. W. Meyer, who relates the "love" of verse 9 to the "fellowship" of verse 5.

A famous American theologian, Timothy Dwight, adopts a mediating position, regarding it as the love which, operating as a power in their individual lives, brought them into the fellowship of gospel service, of which their kindness to Paul was a typical expression. (See Notes, 1.) This seems to be the fuller and truer interpretation. We may regard "your love" as significant of their love for Jesus Christ, which is both the foundation of the Christian fellowship² and the motivation of the gospel ministry.³

The object of this prayer is fivefold, a quintet of petitions cumulative in interest and intensity.

I. The first petition is for the education of love in spiritual knowledge.

"That your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment..." The Greek *eti mallon* is equivalent to the English "still more." But it is not, strictly speaking, a prayer for more love, as some interpret, including J. B.

Phillips, who translates, "that you may have still more love." A careful reading of the passage should uphold the comment of Meyer that "Paul had in mind, not the growth in love, but the increase in epignosis (knowledge) and aisthesis (judgment) which the love of the Philippians was more and more to attain." The words "more and more" modify, not the antecedent, but the subsequent nouns; not "love," but "knowledge" and "judgment."

The word "abound" is from a Greek term (*perisseue*) which portrays a river out of banks, flooded to overflowing. The river of love flows through the channel of knowledge and judgment. Technically, then, while it is for the increase of knowledge that Paul prays, ultimately it means the increase of love, for "to know Him is to love Him." The better we know Him, the more we love Him. The deeper we cut the channel, the fuller flows the river.

"Knowledge" (*epignosis*) is generally agreed to mean "the penetrating cognition of divine truth, both theoretical and practical; the true knowledge of salvation."⁴ However, the force of the word "judgment" (*aisthesei*) is slightly obscured by some translations which fail to give proper emphasis to the ethical significance of the term by making it practically equivalent to the former noun. J. B. Phillips translates it with "insight"; Conybeare, with "understanding"; and Berry, with "intelligence." Meyer distinguishes more carefully, referring the "knowledge" to mental cognition, and the "judgment" to moral discrimination, "an activity of moral perception which apprehends and makes conscious of good and evil as such." (See Notes, 2.)

This ethical value is clearly accented by Adam Clarke, who comments on the word "judgment" -- "In all spiritual and moral feeling; that you may have the clearest perception and fullest enjoyment of those things which concern your salvation, that you may not only know but feel that you are of God." Timothy Dwight sums the truth accurately and concisely: "Paul's prayer was that their love might abound in full accurate knowledge and in moral perception along all lines."

It is a prayer for increased knowledge of salvation; not intellectually only, but experientially chiefly. It is not enough to know the truth. We must take hold of it, and by the apprehension of faith realize it in personal experience. The command of the Apostle Peter was, "Grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Not the knowledge about, but the knowledge of! The petition of Paul is for the education of love by a mental and moral illumination in spiritual matters. Love is not to be blind. We are as surely directed to love God with all our minds as with all our hearts. God save us from the folly of mindless loving and heartless thinking!

II. The second petition is for the regulation of love by spiritual discernment.

"That ye may approve things that are excellent..."

There are two major interpretations of this clause (Greek: *eis to dokimazein humas ta diapheronta*), both of which may be supported by an impressive list of scholars. The first would translate it, as does Meyer, "in order to approve that which is morally excellent." To this agree Chrysostom, Erasmus, Grotius, Bengel, and others. Those embracing the second interpretation would translate it with Clarke: "That ye put to proof the things which differ." On this side stand Theodoret, deWette, Weiss, Alford, and others.

Meyer contends for the first view, that of moral approbation, on the ground of a greater consistency with the context. He thinks the context demands that this clause be regarded as the aim of the increased knowledge and judgment. According to him moral discrimination is the function, but moral approbation the aim of epignosis and aisthesis. Knowledge and judgment discriminate in order to approve the good and reject the unworthy. However, he admits the other position "in point of usage is correct."

Among those who view the words as descriptive of moral discrimination is Dwight, who marshals three strong arguments in its support. (1) The original meaning of the verb and participle favors the interpretation of things morally different. (2) The primary function of the perceptive faculty in the moral sphere is just such testing. (3) The other two passages of Scripture most nearly parallel to this one are best explained in this way.⁵

In *The Expositor's Bible*, Robert Rainy adopts both views. "The expression implies both. It implies such a putting to proof of that which is presented to us, as to make just distinctions and give to each its proper place—putting silver on the one side, dross on the other. What is the whole life and business of the Philippians, of any Christians, as Christians, but that of following out perpetually a choice, on given principles, among the multitude of objects that claim their regard?" His mediating position is well taken. After all, the excellent cannot be approved until discerned, and the whole point of discernment is to give such approval to the excellent.

The petition is for a spiritual knowledge and moral perception that enables discrimination between good and evil and gives approbation to the morally excellent.

Keen spiritual discernment is valuable in two realms especially. (1) In the realm of good and evil, because many times evil is carefully disguised and passes for good at a casual glance. Evil is often presented to us cleverly counterfeited as good. It isn't difficult to recognize the adversary when he roars like a lion, but often he garbs himself as an angel of light. On the summit of the mount of transfiguration Peter cried, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." He wanted to stay. But the will of God, and the need of man, and the path to the Cross lay in the valley of humiliation. It would have been wrong to avoid them! We must sharpen our faculties of moral

perception until we can discern between that which is actually good and that which only appears good.

And not only is it true that evil can wear the livery of good, but in a life challenged by the stern duties of cross-bearing and self-denial, and subjected to persecution, the good may come so roughly dressed as to be rejected as evil. The Psalmist found occasion to say, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."⁶ We must educate love to "distinguish good from evil"⁷ and regulate love by approval and acceptance of the good thus discerned.

(2) A second realm where spiritual discernment is invaluable is the good and the best. Often the good is a greater enemy to the best than outright evil would be. Not the good only, but the "excellent," we are called upon to approve. We must learn "to recognize the highest and best."⁸ There are many Christians whose lives are minor tragedies, not because they left the paths of good, but they failed to discern and do God's first and highest will for them. We want God's best!

III. The third petition is for the perfection of love.

"That ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ..."

Our English translation is forceful. "Sincere" is a strong word, reaching into the inner realm of motive and intention. It signifies simplicity of purpose and singleness of heart in carrying out that purpose.⁹ The dictionaries define it chiefly by synonyms, such as true, frank, honest, etc. But in one college dictionary is found this challenging definition, "being in reality as in appearance." To be sincere is to strike a perfect correspondence between inner character and outward conduct. "He that hath clean hands, and a pure heart"¹⁰ is a sincere Christian.

It was this lack of sincerity that characterized the Pharisees, whom Jesus denounced as "hypocrites." The word hypocrite comes from a Greek term that was given to the masks worn by the actors on the stage. The Pharisees wore religion as a mask. Christ called them whitewashed sepulchers, outwardly beautiful and inwardly filled with corruption. They were not in reality as in appearance. "When we are really what we appear to be and mean honestly, then we are sincere."¹¹

But if the English translation is strong, its Latin origin is stronger still. According to some philologists, sincere is derived from the Latin *sin*, "wholly," and *cerno*, "separated." To be spiritually sincere is to be wholly separated from evil. It is to be utterly divorced from the spirit and practice of the world, and utterly wedded to the spirit, ideals, and aims of Jesus Christ. It is to "put off the old man with his deeds; and... put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him."¹²

However, other language authorities give as the origin of "sincere" the Latin *sine*, "without," and *cera*, "wax"; without wax. If it is a "metaphor taken from

clarified honey," as Adam Clarke declares, it carries a terrific impact, being a prayer for a life transparent in holiness. If, as others suggest, the metaphor points to the practice of early sculptors, who covered up the flaws in their material and workmanship with a special kind of wax, it becomes a prayer for a life in which nothing is covered up, nothing evil is secretly indulged or permitted. No ugly and obscene pictures hang on the walls of the imagination, where one's eyes alone could see them.

And if the Latin origin of the English translation is impressive, the Greek word used here is strongest of all. It is positively breath-taking in its spiritual implications. The word is *eilikrineis*, compounded from *eile*, "the splendor of the sun," and *krino*, "I judge." It refers to a thing "which may be examined in the strongest light without the possibility of detecting a single flaw."¹³ "The test of this sincerity is that a man shall be honestly willing to let light shine through him, to evince the true character of his principles and motives."¹⁴

The Oriental shops had dim lights, low ceilings, and few windows, making close inspection of wares difficult and often impossible. Prospective buyers would take cloths from the vendors and step out into the street to examine them in the sunlight. As the cloth was held up to the sun and stretched out, the light streaming through would detect and expose any broken or discolored threads or other serious flaws. It was proved in the sunlight. (See Notes, 3.)

With this background of thought, Clarke makes a very forceful comment. "Be so purified and refined in your souls by the indwelling Spirit, that even the tinge of God shining into your hearts shall not be able to discover a fault that the love of God has not purged away."

It is a prayer for a life so transparent in holiness, so inwardly and outwardly pure, that it fears no exposure to the searching lights of truth, conscience, and the judgment! "The soul that is sincere is the soul that is without sin."¹⁵ "Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as he is, so are we in this world."¹⁶

"Without offence" is the translation of *aproskotoi*, which is defined actively, not causing to stumble; and passively, not caused to stumble.¹⁷ Conybeare thinks the word is used here intransitively, and he renders it, "Walk without stumbling." So also does Rainy, who writes, "This is the character of the man who walks without stumbling." Meyer, on the other hand, regards it as the "practical proof of the *eilekrineia* (sincerity) in reference to the intercourse with others." He cites I Cor. 10:32, where Paul used the word actively. Lightfoot, Ellicott, and Alford object to Meyer's position on the ground that a relation to others is out of place here, the question being one solely of their fitness to appear before Christ's tribunal. But Dwight justly dissipates this objection by pointing out that our attitude toward others is a part of that which will be passed on at the judgment.

Clarke utilizes both senses: "Neither being stumbled yourselves, nor the cause of stumbling to others." Similarly, Matthew Henry writes, "Not apt to take offence and very careful not to give offence to God or their brethren." Wesley's brief note is also comprehensive, "Unblameable in all things."¹⁸ Such blameless conduct is possible only to unmixed motive, and that is possible only to the sanctified heart. It is a prayer, inferentially, for entire sanctification.

Being "without offence" is the proof and result of being "sincere." The sincere Christian does not intentionally give nor easily take offense. Purity ministers to charity. The sincere person will be careful of his example and influence, lest others find in him an occasion for stumbling. Purity ministers, also, to stability. The sincere believer will not permit his loyalty and love to Jesus Christ to be governed or measured by the steadfastness or unfaithfulness of others. Whatever others do, he will be true. In the midst of apparent hypocrisy and appalling apostasy he will remain loyal to his Lord and Saviour. The sincere Christian will maintain "a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men."

IV. The fourth petition expresses positively what the third has implored negatively. It is a prayer for the manifestation of love.

"Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."

Sincerity is the inward reality and righteousness the outward activity, answering to one another as cause and effect, as root and fruit. Karpos dikaiosunes is the fruit "which proceeds from a right moral state."¹⁹

Righteousness here refers, not to justification by faith, but to that righteous conduct which proceeds from and expresses truly our being justified and sanctified. (See Notes, 4.) Olshausen writes, "Karpos dikaiosunes must be understood fruit of righteousness in the sense of product thereof; and dikaiosunes does not express so much the justification, as rather the new moral habitus of the man, which is given along with it."

However, Olshausen's comment does not carry the thought quite far enough. Being filled with the fruit of righteousness is the product also of being sincere, of being cleansed "from all unrighteousness." As long as carnality lives it will seek and find occasion to act. Until we are transparent in holiness we cannot be filled up with the fruit of righteousness. Thus it is that the Father purges the fruit-bearing branch, that it may bring forth more fruit.²⁰

Clarke, perceiving this necessity of being sanctified wholly as well as justified freely in order to successfully and consistently live such a life, comments: "By righteousness we may understand, here, the whole work of the Spirit of God in the soul of the believer; and by the fruits of righteousness all holy tempers, holy words, and right actions. And with these they are filled... the whole soul and life

occupied with them, ever doing something by which glory is brought to God, or good is done to man." (See Notes, 5.)

The word "filled" is the Greek *pepleromenoi*, "filled up, filled full." "A tree that bears any fruit is alive. But one that is filled with fruit glorifies the gardener's care. 'Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit.'"21 It is a prayer for a life of holy activity, a life wholly given to good conduct, in which heart and life nothing evil is operating. Being filled with righteousness implies being emptied of all unrighteousness. That possibility of grace is distinctly promised.22

This life of abundant spiritual fruitage is "by Jesus Christ." Apart from the power of Christ by the indwelling Spirit, the man who aspires to such living is only mocked by the demands of law and the weakness of nature. Such a life is produced only by Jesus Christ, "who brings it about by virtue of the efficacy of the Holy Spirit."23

This He taught His disciples in a farewell address before going to Calvary. "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."24 Through the cleansing and enabling energies of the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, that standard of righteous living is gloriously possible and practical.

It is this life of active and constant holiness that delights and honors God; "unto the glory and praise of God." Men neither glorify God nor incite others to praise Him by a weak, anemic, or worldly religious life. God's glory is secured when "the work of His grace appears to men in the fruits of righteousness."25

Meyer declares that the glory of God is manifested "in the moral perfection of believers," and adds, "The glory of God is the ultimate aim and constant refrain of all Christian perfection." Clarke expresses a like thought: "Every genuine follower of God has his glory in view by all that he does, says, or intends." And Paul wrote, "Do all to the glory of God."26 Jesus, also, exhorts us to "let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."27

It is a prayer for a life in which the glory of God is the greatest motive and the praise of God is the grand result. How many lives of professing Christians fall miserably short of such description! Small wonder, though, when they vigorously oppose or carelessly ignore that experience of cleansing and strengthening which alone supplies a sufficient dynamic for righteousness!

V. For the fifth petition we return to a phrase we did not consider at its occurrence in the passage:

"Till the day of Christ." It looks to the consummation of love, when, His tribunal passed, the soul shall be joined to its Saviour in immediate and uninterrupted fellowship for all eternity.

Some translate "for" rather than "till"; "for the day of Christ, when ye are to appear pure and blameless before the judgment seat."²⁸ Others prefer the King James rendering, "till"; "till He comes to judge the world, or till the day in which you are called into the eternal world."²⁹ The emphasis is the same, a preparation now for judgment then. It is a prayer that they may be sincere and without offense, transparent in holiness and blameless in conduct, "unto that day and at that day."³⁰

We are to so place our lives under the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit that we may live to the longest and last day of our earthly sojourn without offending our Father or our brothers. That may look and sound impossible, but not when our perspective is from Calvary, where the mighty cleansing tide of Christ's blood deals effectually with all sin.

It was a challenge which Paul was constantly flinging out to men no wiser, greater, or stronger than ourselves. Indeed, this was the grand purpose of God's grace. "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works."³¹

The life of purity, charity, stability, and victory is to be preserved unto and prepare for the day of Christ's judgment.

Paul's burning heart inspires, and inspired pen records, a prayer that love may be educated in enlarged spiritual knowledge, regulated by quickened moral perception, perfected by the exclusion of sin, and manifested in righteous conduct. By such character and conduct, produced by the blood of Christ and the power of the Spirit, the glory of God shall be revealed before man and the praise of God elicited from men. And that life will stand the test of judgment in "the day of Christ."

It is not ours to cavil at the intensity of the apostle's language. It is ours to avail ourselves of the grace and power lodged in the Saviour's provision and promise!

Notes

1. "The love that has been awakened in them through the preaching of the gospel, which has regard first of all to the Lord, but then along with him, to all that belongs to him and his service, is the root of the Christian life." (Olshausen.)

"He meant it of their love to God, and one another, and all men." (M. Henry.)

2. Aisthesei is clearly and concisely defined by H. A. A. Kennedy as "quickness of ethical insight." See Expositor's Greek New Testament.

3. Three derivations are suggested for the word. Alford suggests an agricultural one: "That which is proved by rapid shaking, as in sifting." Lightfoot favors a military one: "The orderly separateness of marshaled ranks." Moule adds, "Another, and commoner, is solar; from the detection of pollution by sunlight, with the thought of the clearness of what has passed such a test well."

Alfred Barry significantly comments that the words "sincere and without offence," "although there is some uncertainty as to their derivation, undoubtedly signify purity tested and found clear of all base admixtures." (In Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers.)

4. "That "dikaiounes' is here used in its ordinary, not in its peculiar Pauline sense, is admitted by almost all recent commentators. The correctness of this view is made apparent by the clause which precedes. This moral rectitude or conformity to what is right, however, is defined as that which begins in the soul at its entrance into the new life by faith. Faith works by love and result is right living. The fruit of righteousness grows more abundantly as the love abounds more and more in knowledge and all perception, until a man appears at the tribunal full of this fruit." (Timothy Dwight.)

5. Matthew Henry, eminent Calvinist commentator, regards sincerity as "our gospel perfection," and therefore describes the fruit of righteousness as "the evidences and effects of our sanctification, the duties of holiness springing from a renewed heart, the root of the matter in us."

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03 -- THE PRAYER FOR PERFECTED GOODNESS

We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;

So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure:

Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer:

Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you;

And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels,

In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ:

Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power;

When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power:

That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ. -- II Thessalonians 1:3-12

I. The Calling: "This calling..."

- 1. Christ's coming certain.**
- 2. Their readiness contingent.**

II. The Counting: "That our God would count you worthy..."

- 1. Passively, "judge you worthy."**
- 2. Actively, "make you worthy."**

III. The Completing: "And fulfil all the good pleasure of goodness, and the work of faith, with power... "

- 1. A perfecting work; "fulfil" -- complete.**
- 2. A positive work; goodness and faith are completed; evil and unbelief are destroyed.**
- 3. A powerful work; "with power."**

IV. The Consequences:

1. Glorification. "That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him."

2. Grace: "According to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ."

a. From God in its origination.

b. By Christ in its mediation.

Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power: that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ (II Thess. 1:11-12).

One discovers a great deal of confusion and conflicting opinions when he turns to the commentaries for an understanding of this passage. We shall seek to carefully sift the various theories and thread our mental way along these verses, arriving at an interpretation that will prove consistent with the grammatical construction and immediate context of the prayer.

I. The Calling: "Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling..."

"Wherefore" is a link connecting verse 11 to verse 10, and to that preceding verse we must go for the key that opens this prayer to intelligent interpretation. Verse 10 declares, "He shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe... in that day." That Christ was coming again, to be glorified and admired in His people, was a settled fact in the mind of Paul. Modernism may spiritualize the return of Christ to the point of explaining it away, but the apostles plainly preached His personal, visible, bodily return for His people, and later with His people.

But while the return of Christ was certain, it was not certain that the Thessalonians would be part of the happy host who should greet and glorify Him. Thus the apostle pours out his heart for them in prayer, as he does for the churches everywhere: "Wherefore a/so we pray always for you..."

It is worth noting that the language of the apostle's intercession is irreconcilable with the doctrine of "the unconditional eternal security of believers." If a past act of believing makes salvation a nonforfeitable possession, and therefore a share in the rapture a settled matter, why is that very matter the subject of unceasing intercession ("we pray always") with the apostle? He clearly establishes their position as believers in the parenthesis of verse 10 ("because our testimony among you was believed"). But in that same verse he declares that Christ will be

glorified and admired "in all them that believe... in that day." He certainly seems to imply that one may believe in one day and not believe at a later day, and by that subsequent unbelief forfeit his part in the rapture of the Church. He surely would not spend (we could say waste) valuable time and energy by praying for something that lay outside the realm of contingency. (See Notes, 1.)

The context (vv. 4-10) is one of the most sober and searching passages in Holy Writ. At the coming of Christ a troubled Church shall enter into rest, but a persecuting and gospel-rejecting world will meet the vengeance of God "in flaming fire" and "be punished with everlasting destruction." In which group we shall stand fully hinges upon our obedience or disobedience to the gospel. "If the gospel, as conceived in the New Testament, has any character at all, it has the character of finality. It is God's last word to men. And the consequences of accepting or rejecting it are final; it opens no prospect beyond the life on the one hand, and the death on the other, which are the results of obedience and disobedience. Obey, and you enter into a light in which there is no darkness at all: disobey, and you pass eventually into a darkness in which there is no light at all... The difference between those who obey, and those who do not obey, the gospel, is not a difference of a little better or a little worse; it is the difference of life and death... It is not a question of less or more, of sooner or later, of better or worse; what is at stake in our attitude to the gospel is life or death, heaven or hell, the outer darkness or the glory of Christ."¹

The fervent and constant intercession of Paul for a people who have believed and obeyed the gospel clearly indicates the awful possibility of subsequent unbelief and disobedience, of turning from light into darkness, of losing life and tasting death, of forfeiting one's place in the future earthly and heavenly kingdom of Jesus Christ. It was the passion of Paul's heart to prepare a people for Christ's coming, and his tender affection for the Thessalonians intensified his concern that they should be in that number. "For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For ye are our glory and joy."²

With this certainty of Christ's coming and the contingency of the Thessalonians' readiness for that glorious event as the foundation of his intercession, Paul reveals the content of his prayer: "That our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power." "That," the Greek *ina*, expresses "the contents of the prayer in the form of a purpose."³

II. The Counting: "That our God would count you worthy..."

That our God would! Men may esteem those worthy of the coming Kingdom whom God would reject as unworthy. "Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart."⁴ It was a proverbial saying in the time of Christ that if only two men entered heaven, one would be a scribe and the other a Pharisee.

But Jesus uttered His most withering invectives against them, calling them "hypocrites" and "children of hell." When John Wesley was brought news of the death of a certain man, he remarked about the ecstasies that person would enjoy in heaven. He was reminded by the startled informant that he and the deceased had never gotten along very well. Surely he did not think the man was in heaven. Wesley's sage reply was that God, who is infinite in wisdom and patience, could doubtless get along with some whom Wesley could not.

Years ago I read a poem cautioning the reader that when he got to heaven he would probably see some whose presence there would be a shock. He was advised to say nothing about it. He was warned not even to stare, for doubtless others were going to be surprised to see him there.

Our limited knowledge and faulty judgment should serve to make us charitable toward others and fearful of ourselves. In the Greek "you" is emphatic. Instead of judging others, let us be sure we ourselves are ready for the Lord's return and eternal glory. God does not need us on the judgment seat. Our proper station is the mercy seat.

"That our God would count you worthy of this calling." The word "count" is the Greek *axioun*, and its meaning is disputed by scholars of equally brilliant minds. Luther, Grotius, Ewald, Olshausen, and others interpret it "make you worthy." Against this Lunemann, following Grimm and Meyer, who render it "judge you worthy," strongly objects. From this interpretation he argues that the calling (*klesis*) "cannot express the act of divine calling already belonging to the past, but must denote something future. *Klesis* is accordingly to be understood, as in Phil. 3:14, in a passive sense, as that good thing to which we are called, i.e., the future heavenly blessedness of the children of God."⁵

Dean Alford, great English exegete, objects to this position, taking *klesis* (calling) in an active sense, and understanding it to mean "not merely the first act of God, but as the enduring state produced by that act, the normal termination of which is glory." Clarke's view is similar: "It is our earnest prayer that God would make you worthy, *axiosei*, afford you those continual supplies of grace, by His Holy Spirit, without which you cannot adorn your holy vocation." Clarke also relates the calling to the Church. "You are called to the Christian Church, and to be proper members of the mystic body of Christ... implies that you should be holy as he who called you is holy."

Our understanding of the "counting" depends upon our conception of the "calling." Whether we interpret *axioun* passively, "judge you worthy," or actively, "make you worthy," clearly hinges upon the nature of *klesis*- "this calling." That it does not refer to their being called to the Church, as suggested by Clarke, seems quite apparent. We have already observed that their position as believers is confirmed in verse 10. That being true, they were members of the body of Christ, and Clarke's view would have the apostle praying for an already accomplished fact.

On the other hand, the context (vv. 4-10), which deals with the coming of Christ and the glorification of the Church, seems to us to have the force of canceling out Alford's position that a previous act and enduring state of gospel vocation is meant. The context supports Lunemann's interpretation of the calling as our heavenly prospect. It refers to the eternal glory we shall share with Jesus Christ, the deathless body and the perfected spirit joined to inhabit a "city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." We commend the translation of Phillips: "In view of this prospect, we pray for you constantly, that God will think you worthy of this calling."

The calling is related to the prospect, and "count you worthy" is an adequate rendering. (See Notes, 2.)

III. The Completing: "And fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power."

Of course God judges us worthy or unworthy on the basis of reality, and only His grace can establish that reality in our hearts and lives. It is true that God must make us worthy if He is to judge us worthy. Thus Paul goes on to pray, "And fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power..." "Paul adds, logically considered, the means which is to lead to the result of being judged worthy."⁶ We are considering now the experience of grace and condition of heart that are necessary to qualify us for the heavenly calling. May we look well to our own hearts as we proceed!

The word "fulfil" is the Greek *plerosei* and signifies "to bring to completion or perfection." This is to be done "with power," *en dunamei*. Lunemann relates *en dunamei* to *plerosei*, as taking the place of an adverb -- "thus powerfully." Conybeare adopts the same construction and translates, "That our God may... mightily perfect within you all the content of goodness, and the work of faith." (See Notes, 3.)

Concerning that which is to be inwardly and mightily brought to completion, the commentators are a bit confusing. "All the good pleasure of his goodness" (Greek, *pasan eudokian agathosunes*) is referred to God by Calvin, and others, who interpret it as divine decrees of election. Still others, as Theophylact, refer it partly to God and partly to the Thessalonians. Against both positions Lunemann brings a grammatical objection, contending that *agathosunes*, "goodness," is never used by Paul with reference to God, and further, that *ergon pisteos* ("work of faith") forms an additional accusative to *plerosei* ("fulfil"), which undoubtedly refers to the Thessalonians. His conclusion is: "The exclusively correct meaning is to be understood both *eudokian* and *agathosunes* of the Thessalonians. Defining *agathosunes* as moral goodness, he renders the phrase "every satisfaction in moral goodness." To this the translation of Conybeare is agreeable, "perfect within you all the content of goodness."

Clarke refers the phrase to God, but not in the sense of denoting decrees of election. His "goodness" is "his own innate kindness [which] led him to call you into this state of salvation." The "good pleasure of his goodness" is to "save you unto eternal life." To the mind of Clarke it is a prayer that God, in whose kindness their salvation had its origin, will bring that salvation to its completion.

Olshausen and Bloomfield refer the goodness to the Thessalonians and the good pleasure to God. "May He fill you with all the good which is pleasing to Him." Similarly, Phillips translates, "He will effect in you all that His goodness desires to do." And M. F. Sadler, great Anglican commentator, writes, "The good pleasure of God respecting any creature is that he may be as good and holy and happy as he is capable of being."

While all that these learned commentators predicate of God's good pleasure is true, yet, on the strength of grammatical construction and contextual consistency, we must regard the entire phrase, "the good pleasure of goodness," as related to the Thessalonians. It is the good pleasure of their goodness, just as it is the work of their faith, which is to be perfected. (See Notes, 4.) The translation of Berry, from the Textus Receptus, is faithful: "That God... may fulfill every good pleasure of goodness."

Nothing can be pleasing to goodness which is not good. Hence the prayer is for the full realization of inward purity. True goodness cannot acquiesce in the presence of evil. For fullness and exactness the translation of Conybeare, previously referred to, is the best we have found: "That our God... may mightily perfect within you all the content of goodness, and the work of faith."

The "work of faith" is a phrase which recalls Paul's commendation of the Thessalonian believers in his first Epistle to that church, for their work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope." What that was we learn from the closing words of that commendation: "Ye turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven."⁸ After the turning, and during the waiting, God is to carry forth the work of preparing for the coming. As we have seen, Paul did not regard the fact that they had believed and turned to God as providing a foregone conclusion that they would continue believing on and clinging to Christ until the Second Advent. So he earnestly prays for the "fulfilling" of the "work of faith," which is to be immeasurably augmented by the destruction within them of all opposed to moral goodness.

Summing up these mechanical paragraphs, the prayer of Paul is that God would inwardly and mightily bring to completion or perfection the believer, satisfying the demands of moral goodness, and thus preserving them in faith and preparing them to stand with the ransomed throngs who shall greet and glorify Jesus Christ at His coming. That perfection of goodness and faith, logically, would necessitate the utter destruction of everything within them that was evil and opposed to goodness and faith -- "an evil heart of unbelief." The prayer petitions

positively what is negatively implored in I Thess. 5:23: "And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly, and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The intercession is the same. Both plead for the preparation of believers to meet Christ, the latter negatively by the destruction of evil, and the former positively by the completion of good.

IV. The Consequence: "That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him... "

Christ is glorified in the believer; the believer is glorified by Him. The supreme purpose of man's redemption is the glory of Christ. Clarke aptly comments, "He is glorified by your salvation from all sin." He is most surely glorified in the lives of those who enjoy the experience of Christian perfection, in whose hearts goodness reigns unrivaled by evil, and faith operates unhindered by unbelief.

Those who glorify Christ will be glorified by Him; "and ye in him." Conybeare, in the footnote of his translation of this passage, writes: "The glory of the Lord at His coming will be manifested in His people (v. 10); that is, they, by virtue of their union with Him, will partake of His glorious likeness (Rom. 8:17-19). And even in this world this glorification takes place partially, by their moral conformity to His image (Rom. 8:30; 2 Cor. 3:18)." Being justified freely, and sanctified wholly now, by faith, we shall be glorified then, when we behold Him at His appearing. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure."9

The closing words of the prayer point the believer, challenged to ready himself for the Lord's return, to the sole and sufficient fountain of cleansing and dynamic for righteousness -- "According to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ." The glorious prospect to which we are called, and the wondrous power by which we are fitted, are through "the grace of our God," in whom it originated, and Jesus Christ, through whom it is mediated. Vain are the wisdom and energy of man to effect within himself this perfection of goodness; but in this, as in all things pertaining to our salvation, God assures, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

Jesus Christ is coming for His Church, and to establish His kingdom of righteousness upon the earth. To that glorious prospect we are called by God, and for it prepared by God, whose grace, through faith, mightily and inwardly operates to effect the destruction of sin and the completion of good. Let God "make you worthy," that He may "judge you worthy" of this calling!

Notes

1. A. J. Mason writes: "But have they not been called to glory already? Yes, and had obeyed the call; and God was still calling them hourly, but that was no security that they would remain worthy of that last decisive call." (Ellicott's Commentary for English Readers.)

2. So also, Moffatt: "Klesis is 'the position you are to occupy,' 'your vocation' as heirs of this splendid future." (Expositor's Greek New Testament.) "No less than the inheritance of saints is the hope of our calling. Nothing less than the enjoyment of that glory and felicity which shall be revealed when Christ Jesus shall be revealed from heaven." (Matthew Henry.)

3. This is the common interpretation. "En dunamei, in power, refers to the whole clause, 'that he may fulfill, etc.,' and is to be taken adverbially, 'in a powerful, efficacious manner.'" (Olshausen.)

4. "The prayer is for success to every practical enterprise of faith, as well as for the satisfaction of every aspiration and desire after moral excellence." (Moffatt, Expositor's Greek New Testament.)

Alford renders it, "bring to fulness in you all possible right purpose of goodness" (New Testament for English Readers).

Erdman, in his splendid exposition, writes: "Every desire of goodness means every desire which goodness prompts. 'Every work of faith' denotes every work which faith undertakes."

Goodness will surely prompt strong desires for the eradication of all that is bad and evil. And faith happily undertakes the work of embracing the provision and promises of God to cleanse 'from all [inward and outward] sin.'

* * * * *

04 -- THE PRAYER FOR DIVINE FULLNESS

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,

That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man;

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen. -- Ephesians 3:14-21

Introduction

To the universal Father (vv. 14-15)

For all the children

I. The Aims

- 1. Immediate. "To be strengthened with might... in the inner man..."**
- 2. Intermediate. "To comprehend with all saints," etc.; "and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge..."**
- 3. Ultimate. "That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."**
 - A. Present experience (aorist tense).**
 - B. Progressive experience.**

II. The Means

- 1. Divine. "His Spirit in the inner man." "That Christ may dwell in your hearts..." The indwelling Spirit:**
 - A. Empowers (Acts 1:8).**
 - B. Establishes. Peter at Pentecost.**
 - C. Enlightens (John 14:26; 15:26; 16:13-14).**
 - D. Enthrones Trinity in heart (John 14:18, 23).**
- 2. Human. "By faith..."**
 - A. The reception of a gift. "That he would grant you..."**

B. The realization of a promise. "He is able."

III. The Resources

1. "According to the riches of his glory."
2. "According to the power that worketh in us."

For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen (Eph. 3:14-21).

"I bow my knees"; familiar posture with Paul, who was constantly pouring out his heart in intercession for the churches. Yet, we need not think of him as dropping his pen and falling upon his knees at this point in his Epistle, as some older commentators suggest. Calvin wrote, "A signo rem denotat"; "From the sign he denotes the thing." Jerome makes exquisite mention of the genua mentis, "knees of the mind."¹ He who exhorted others to "pray without ceasing"² would be constantly upon his knees in thought and purpose, would maintain a spirit of prayer at all times, in all places.

The apostle addresses his prayer to "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named." The word "whole" is properly translated "every." This phrase is used by Paul only this once, and its point is largely obscured in translation. "The Greek word for family (patria) is based upon that for father (pater)."³ Anciently, the name of a famous father identified and ennobled his tribal descendants. Scriptural examples are "the sons of Israel" and "the sons of Aaron." The thought of fatherhood, universally, refers us back to God because "God is the pater (father) of all these patriai (families)."⁴

Two classes of "sons of God" are mentioned in the Scriptures, unfallen angels and redeemed men. Thus, most commentators interpret "every family in heaven" as the various ranks and orders of angels, and "every family in earth" as believers in all places, from all nations. Meyer, however, rejects this limitation of the earthly families and extends it to all nations. "God is certainly characterized as universal Father, as Father of all angel classes in heaven and all peoples upon earth."

This is in keeping with Paul's exultation over the inclusion of the Gentiles in the gospel covenant.⁵ He constantly opposed those who affirmed that God had but one family on earth, the Jews, and therefore a Gentile must become a proselyte to Judaism to be saved. Every nation was a family of God creatively, and every convert to Christ a child of God spiritually.

F. W. Robertson, adopting the Authorized Version's rendering of "whole," regarded the members of the family in heaven as the Church Triumphant, and the members of the family on earth as the Church Militant.⁶ But He expanded the Church to include the redeemed of all past ages. Clarke's view is similar, relating the words "is named" to Jesus Christ. "Christ gives the name of Christians to all the real members of his Church upon earth; and to all the spirits of just men (saved since his advent, and through his blood) in heaven."

However, the usual interpretation is angels and believers. "The church of believers in the Son of God constitutes the 'family on earth named' from the same Father, who gave His name to the holy angels, our wise and strong and brilliant elder brothers. They and we alike are God's offspring. Heaven and earth are kindred spheres."⁷

Paul's prayer is for an experience so spiritually lofty that he closes it with a vivid reminder of God's limitless powers lest his readers despair of possessing that experience. So here, he opens the prayer by addressing God as One to whom the earthly and heavenly families look for the supply of every needed grace and power and blessings, as the universal Father.

Having so designated God, Paul pours forth as sublime a stream of intercession as ever fell from human lips. And he has written as difficult a passage to adequately and lucidly interpret as ever flowed from mortal pen. Perhaps we can best survey the passage by considering in turn (1) the aims of his prayer, (2) the means by which the aims were to be realized, and (3) the resources which guarantee the means to be effectual.

I. The Aims. "For this cause..."

A survey of the entire prayer reveals an immediate aim, leading up to a climactic and ultimate aim, with two definite intermediate aims expressed between them.

1. The immediate aim is empowerment: "That he would grant you... to be strengthened with might... in the inner man..." The apostle has exhorted them against becoming discouraged through the pressure of persecution. "I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you."⁹ "The strengthening of which he speaks is the opposite of the faintness of heart, the failure of courage deprecated in verse 13."¹⁰ The Greek phrase is *dunamai krataiothenai*, an instrumental dative -- "with power to be strengthened." Paul employs the same term in his exhortation to the

Corinthians: "Quit you like men, be strong [krataiousthe]."11 "He desires for the Asian believers a manful heart, the strength that meets battle and danger without quailing."12

The empowerment is for "the inner man." Out of the heart "are the issues of life." If this citadel is strong, the entire life will be victorious. Against the believer rage the hellish powers of invisible demon forces and an opposing, persecuting world. If he is not to faint in the holy conflict, he must possess an inward power equal to and greater than the outward pressure. Paul possessed it, and faced physical privation, social ostracism, and spiritual persecution crying, "None of these things move me." "Beneath the toil-worn frame, the mean attire, and friendless condition of the prisoner Paul -- a mark for the world's scorn -- there lived a strength of thought and will mightier than the empire of the Caesar's, a power of the Spirit that is to dominate the centuries to come."13 Let every wavering disciple echo the prayer for inner power!

2. The intermediate aims are two, establishment and enlightenment.

A) He prays for their establishment. "That ye, being rooted and grounded in love..." Paul, "in the vivacity of his imagination," employs a double metaphor, the first taken from agriculture and the second from architecture. He regards the Christians as a tree, and the soil in which they are planted is love. He conceives them as a building, and the foundation upon which they are erected is love. When Christ comes to the heart to abide, "love enters with Him and becomes the ground of our nature, the basis upon which our thought and action rest, the soil in which our purposes grow."14

Bengel refers en agape ("in love") to "the love of Christ," as in verse 19. Meyer objects, urging against it a strong grammatical argument. "In the very mention of love along with faith (1:15; 1 Cor. 13) the absence of a genitival definition is decisive." He interprets it to mean "Christian brotherly love." Meyer is right in insisting that the love, as the faith, must be predicated of the Ephesians. But he is wrong in restricting it to brotherly love. Eadie well insists that, "if it be the grace of love which is here specified, then it is love to Christ, and to every creature that bears his image." But even this is unnecessarily restricted. En agape refers, not to the love of Christ for the Ephesians, but to their love for Christ, for one another, and towards all men -- "love generally."15 In this rich soil they are to become "rooted," "firmly fixed in love."16

B) He prays for their enlightenment. "That ye... may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."

The phrase, "may be able to comprehend," is the Greek hina exischusete katalabesthai, which Clarke declares to be "so exceedingly nervous and full of meaning, that it is almost impossible to translate them." Exischusere is

compounded from *ex*, an intensive, and *ischue*, "to be strong"; "that ye may be fully, strongly, thoroughly able." *Katalabesthai* is compounded from *kata*, intensive, and *lambano*, "to catch, take hold." Phillips translates it, "may be able to grasp." Berry renders it, "may be fully able to apprehend," as does Meyer also. Matthew Henry employs it as signifying "more clearly to understand, and firmly to believe."

That which Paul desires them to strongly grasp is "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height." He does not say precisely of what these dimensions are predicated, and speculation is rife. Meyer refers it to "the love of Christ to men (v. 19), the boundless greatness of which is depicted," and quotes approvingly the remark of Luther, "that nothing is so broad, long, deep, high as to be beyond the power and help of Christ." Others have predicated it of "the Christian church," "the mystery of the cross," "the love of God," "the divine nature," and "the wisdom of God."¹⁷

Apart from the view of Meyer, Calvin, and Luther, that the love of Christ is meant, another had chiefly prevailed: that the dimensions refer to the "work of redemption." This position has been held by Chrysostom, Olshausen, Bleek, Beza, and others. To this agrees G. G. Findlay, writing in *The Expositor's Bible*. He declares it to be the divine plan, as expounded in the Epistle to the Ephesians: "This object [God's great designs for mankind] so much absorbs the writer's thoughts and has been so constantly in view from the outset, that it does not occur to him, in verse 18, to say precisely what that in whose 'breadth, and length, and height, and depth,' the readers are to measure. The great building stands before us and needs not to be named; we have only not to look away from it not to forget what we have been reading all this time. It is God's plan for the world in Christ; it is the purpose of the age realized in the building of His church, This conception was so impressive to the original readers and has held their attention so closely since the apostle unfolded it in the second chapter, that they would have no difficulty in supplying the ellipsis which has given so much trouble to the commentators since."

We would say that these dimensions are predicated of the plan of salvation, as originated in the boundless wisdom of God, mediated by the limitless love of Christ, and manifested in the global character of the Church.

The clause, "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height," is necessarily a figurative expression. Paul, astounded by the metaphysical magnitude of God's redemptive scheme, expressed it as a mathematical one, *somatikois schemasi* -- "in corporeal characters."¹⁸ It is "a sensuous illustration of the idea, how great in every relation."¹⁹

The widest and wildest speculation has attached to these dimensions, but Meyer well says, "Every special attempt at interpretation is unpsychological, and only gives scope to that caprice which profanes by dissecting the outpouring of enthusiasm." (See Notes, 1.) Those who care to consult some of these fanciful speculations may find them in Appendix III.

This love-plan of God's we are to apprehend *pasi tois hagios*, "with all saints." Only saints can grasp it. "It was 'revealed to His holy apostles and prophets' (v. 5); and it needs men of the same quality for its bearers and interpreters."²⁰ The prime requisite for spiritual knowledge is "a pure heart." Paul declared that the confusion and ignorance of the Jews respecting Christ was the result of reading Moses with "the veil... upon their heart."²¹

From the task of measuring the immeasurable the prayer passes to the task of knowing the unknowable: "And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge." It is interesting to observe the various ways in which scholars seek to solve this paradox, and to dissolve the seeming contradiction in the apostle's words.

Findlay does it by giving to the word "know" (*gnonai*) a progressive, not possessive, signification. "Amongst the Greek words denoting mental activity, that here employed signifies knowledge in the acquisition rather than possession -- getting to know."

Clarke suggests for the term "a sense in which it is frequently used in the New Testament, to approve, acknowledge, or acknowledge with approbation... We can acknowledge and approve of that which surpasses our comprehension."

Luther sought to resolve the paradox by interpreting the clause as a contrast in value of different kinds of knowledge; "to love Christ is much better than all knowledge." This is the sense given in Berry's translation: "to know the surpassing knowledge love of the Christ." Clarke also favors this idea, referring "knowledge" to "science in general, and particularly that science of which the rabbins boasted, and that in which the Greeks greatly exulted... To know the love of Christ infinitely surpasseth all other science."

Certainly there is an element of truth in all these comments. Our knowledge of Christ's love is continually to be expanded. We do, as Christians, gladly acknowledge and heartily approve the revelation of incomprehensible love. And truly, to know the love of Christ is the most satisfying form of knowledge we can acquire; regeneration is better than education.

But as to whether any or all of these positions will adequately interpret Paul's wish, we leave for you to decide. The comment of Meyer is the most satisfying to my mind. Since he regards the dimensions in verse 18 to be predicated of the love of Christ in verse 19, he must regard *gnonai* ("know") as a parallel to *katalabesthai* ("comprehend"). Thus, he writes: "An adequate knowledge of the love of Christ transcends human capacity, but the relative knowledge of the same opens up in a higher degree, the more the heart is filled with the Spirit of Christ, and thereby is itself strengthened in loving (v. 17, 18) -- which knowledge is not of the discursive

kind, but that which has its basis in the consciousness of experience." (See Notes, 2.)

That latter statement deserves special emphasis. Only those "rooted in love" can "know the love of Christ." This desired knowledge is not intellectual but experiential. "Love must learn to measure Christ's love. It is revealed to the heart rather than to the head."²²

Paul's prayer is for a deeper knowledge of God's plan and Christ's love, growing out of a deeper experience of that love-inspired salvation.

3. The ultimate aim is infillment: "That ye might be filled with all the fulness of God."

Unquestionably, Paul refers to an experience presently possible, an "experienced divine fulness," as Meyer writes. The tense is aorist, denoting singleness of act, "indicating a crisis and new attainment." But the petition points also to an experience progressively expanding. "There can be no bounds set to the saving influence which God will dispense to the heart of every believer."²³ We are filled to capacity, but the capacity is constantly being enlarged as we "grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."

Nearly every standard commentary regards this fullness as a charismatic fullness, a fullness of gifts and graces bestowed by God. Thus Meyer; "That ye may be filled with divine gifts of grace to such extent that the whole fulness of them (Paul has the emphasis) shall have passed over upon you." Thus Grotius: "The gifts wherewith God is accustomed to fill men." Thus Clarke: "By the fulness of God, we are to understand all of those gifts and graces which he has promised to bestow upon man, and which he dispenses in the Church." Thus Findlay: "He wishes them to gain the total sum of all that God communicates to men." And Moule: "Whatever, being in Him, is spiritually communicable to the saints."

It is difficult, however, to ascertain what they mean by "gifts" and "graces." If they refer to the "gifts of the Spirit," the pneumatika discussed in I Corinthians 12 -- 14, they only cloud the issue; for Paul expressly teaches that, while no individual is destitute of such a gift, still no individual possesses all the gifts, the Spirit "dividing to every man severally as he will." In that sense, then, no single person can be "filled with all the fulness of God."

And if they refer, by "graces," to the "fruit of the Spirit," cataloged in Gal. 5:22-23, we must remember that these are always produced as the Spirit indwells the heart.

It seems preferable, then, to regard it as a petition that they might be filled, not with the gifts and graces of God, but with the God of the gifts and graces. "May you be filled through all your being with God Himself!"²⁴

While this petition is climactic, it is also, in a sense, repetitive. The apostle has prayed for the indwelling of the Spirit and the abiding of Christ in their hearts, and now subjoins a petition for their filling with the fullness of God. He would have them to know that he refers to a greater experience of Christ and the Holy Spirit than they had previously received. They were to be possessed by God in His fullness. (See Notes, 3.)

The petition carries a strong negative implication. It is true that "Satan and his angels will endeavor to fill what God does not."²⁵ And just as true that "what God fills, neither sin nor Satan can fill; consequently, it implies that the soul shall be emptied of sin, that sin shall have neither dominion over it nor a being in it. It is impossible for us to understand these words in a lower sense than this."²⁵ Peter clearly testified that the infilling of the disciples with the Holy Spirit purified their hearts.²⁶

This negative implication is no stronger than the positive petition. To be filled with God is certainly a greater thing than to be emptied of sin. Faith may easily include the lesser in the greater!

Having surveyed the aims of the prayer, let us study the means by which they are to be effected.

II. The Means: "By his Spirit... by faith..."

The means are twofold, a divine provision and a human condition.

1. The divine provision. "His Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith..." The strengthening of the inner man by the Spirit and the abiding of Christ in the heart are parallel truths. The two experiences occur simultaneously. When we are "filled with the Spirit" Christ comes to reside in the heart. The residence of Christ, as Calvin writes, "declares the nature of that strength which belongs to the inner man." "In the Holy Spirit, which is the Spirit of Christ, Christ fulfills the promise of his spiritual presence in the heart."²⁷ (See Notes, 4.)

The word "dwell" translates the Greek *katoikesai*, "intensely and constantly dwell."²⁸ It signifies the taking up of permanent residence, in contrast to a temporary visit. (See Notes, 5.) "He is never again to stand at the door and knock, nor to have a doubtful and disputed footing in the house. Let the Master come in and claim His own. Let Him become the heart's fixed tenant and full occupier."²⁹

Such an arrangement clearly necessitates the utter eviction of "the old man" of indwelling sin. Christ will not share the residence with a principle so antithetical to His spirit and aims.

This is the divine means of accomplishing the aims of the prayer, the infilling of the believer with the Holy Spirit.

To be filled with the Spirit is to be empowered. Jesus promised, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you."³⁰ When, at Pentecost, "they were all filled with the Holy Ghost," at once they evangelized the very crowd they had evaded. They faced the men from whom once they fled. They had received "the Spirit's inner reinforcement"³¹ and neither priests, pagans, nor prisons could quench their zeal, or muzzle their witness, or thwart their cyclonic progress.

To be filled with the Spirit is to be established. It is "this grace wherein' we stand... because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."³² How clearly this is illustrated in the experience of Simon Peter! He was a profane, impetuous, and vacillating fisherman, always dodging the cross, and failing Christ in the crucial test. But he became a rock ribbed, iron-nerved apostle, with granite convictions. Jesus Christ had said to him, "Thou shalt be a rock!" And it was the fiery Holy Spirit, coming at Pentecost, who fused and welded the diffuse and diverse elements of his personality into solidity and stability.

To be filled with the Spirit is to be enlightened. Concerning the promised Spirit, Jesus Christ declared, "He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you."³³ And again, "The Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me."³⁴ And again, "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth... and he will shew you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you."³⁵

These promises make it unmistakably plain that the incoming and, indwelling Paraclete becomes the Revealer of all spiritual knowledge. "At that day" (the day of the Holy Spirit's coming), said Jesus, "ye shall know." Especially does the Spirit's ministry of teaching embrace the things of Jesus, and thus includes "the love of Christ," which Paul is anxious for them to know in increasing experimental fullness.

Finally, it is by the infilling with the Spirit that we become, to the extent of our human capacity, "filled with all the fulness of God." When the Spirit comes, Jesus Christ comes to the heart. Framed in His promise of the abiding Comforter are the words, "I will come to you."³⁶ And, in the same context of promise is the enlarged truth, that the Father comes, also, as the Spirit takes up His abode. "If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."³⁷

That the temple of human personality shall be the residence of Trinity, of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is certainly to "be filled with all the fulness of God." This concept surpasses in excellence the charismatic fullness, for it is infinitely better to have the Giver than the gifts.

From the divine side, then, all the four aims of the prayer of Paul are realized in the experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit.

2. The human condition. "By faith..." The infilling with the Holy Spirit, with its attendant and consequent blessings we have studied, is vouchsafed to the believer as a promised gift, and becomes real in personal experience when faith receives the gift and believes the promise.

Faith is receiving the gift of the Holy Spirit. "That he would grant you... to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man..." The Holy Spirit is a grant, a gift. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"³⁸ He is a gift, ours for the asking and taking! (See Notes, 6.)

Faith is believing the promise of God. The experience outlined is a tremendous transformation. Human nature would shrink back and cry, "Impossible!" But the prayer closes with a promise of gigantic magnitude. He "is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." The hand of faith clutches the promise, looks away from human frailty to divine omnipotence, and echoes, "He is able!" Faith is, hence, "the effectuating and maintaining act."³⁹

Here, considering the divine ability, we make our transition from the means to the resources which guarantee the effectiveness of the means.

III. The Resources. "According to..."

This phrase occurs twice in the passage, suggesting divine resources that beggar description and stagger the imagination.

The first is "according to the riches of his glory." God does not give out of, but according to, His riches in glory. That is, His measure of giving reflects His: immeasurable wealth. "In giving alms it is a maxim that everyone should act according to his ability. It would be a disgrace to a king or a nobleman to give no more than a tradesman or a peasant. God acts up to the dignity of his infinite perfections, he gives according to the riches of his glory."⁴⁰

A God who would supply every need if it required the bankrupting of heaven can surely be trusted to fill us with the Spirit, empty us of sin, and enlarge our minds and hearts to receive an ever expanding knowledge of Christ's love. The second occurrence reads, "according to the power that worketh in us." And that power is specifically stated as "exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think." Paul's petition sounds extreme in its boldness, but he hastens to assure us that so far from exceeding the power and purpose of God, it merely touches the fringe. The prayer, as lofty and challenging as it seems, is merely marginal in comparison with the power that effects the answer.

The vast latitudes of asking or thinking cannot bound the divine resources. He can do still more. "There is an inexhaustible fulness of grace and mercy in God which the prayers of all the saints can never draw dry."⁴¹ Bengel has written, "Cognitatio latius patet quam preces," "Thought takes a wider range than prayers"; a gradation. But not even the highest and fullest powers of thought can conceive of an experience that would exhaust the resources of the Almighty!

Yet, while that is true, Paul focuses definite thought and prayer upon the Spirit-filled life, and so must we. "God's giving surpasses immeasurably our thought and asking, but there must be the asking and the thinking for it to surpass."⁴² It is still true that God gives the Holy Spirit to "them that ask him."

Paul closes with an appropriate ascription of praise, which echoes in the Church, and rings across the coming ages, and resounds throughout all eternity. "Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen." God is glorified in the Church when the Church is Spirit-filled, and the sanctified Church will be His glorified medium of manifesting His grace and glory forever! That is "the glory of his inheritance in the saints," "that in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."⁴³

We have traced a sublime prayer for a Spirit-filled experience; an experience which empowers the believer against the terrific pressure of a persecuting world; which establishes the believer in the grace of love; which enlightens the believer with an enlarged experiential knowledge of Christ's love-plan of salvation; which enthrones the triune God, unrivaled, in the heart! This tremendous and transforming experience is guaranteed by the riches of the glory and, power of God, and is conditioned upon simple faith.

Have you received the Holy Spirit?

Notes

1. "The terms length, breadth, depth, height are introduced with no other purpose than the simple and consistent one of setting forth the surpassing magnitude of Christ's love for us." (S. D. F. Salmond, Expositor's Greek New Testament.)

2. "Here is an object eternally transcending, while it eternally invites, the effort after a complete cognition." (H. G. C. Moule, Cambridge Bible.)

3. "The idea is of a vessel connected with an abundant source external to itself, and which will be filled up to its capacity, if the connection is complete." (H. G. C. Moule, Cambridge Bible.)

4. "He [the Holy Ghost] is to so deal with 'the inner man' as that the presence of Christ shall be permanent in the heart." (H. C. G. Moule, Cambridge Bible.)

5. The Greek verb indicates permanent residence. It is an aorist, denoting singleness and completeness of action, "a new Arrival and Entrance of Christ into the heart."

6. "Faith opens the door of the soul to receive Christ; faith admits him, and submits to him." (Matthew Henry.)

* * * * *

05 -- THE PRAYER FOR COMPLETED FAITH

For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy w.herewith we joy for your sakes before our God;

Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith?

Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.

And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you:

To the end he, may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints. -- I Thessalonians 3:9-13

Introduction

"Praying exceedingly."

1. The intensity of his affection.

2. The importance of his petition.

I. The Lack Defined. "That which is lacking in your faith..."

1. Concerning creed, ignorance of advent truth.

2. Concerning character, imperfect love and holiness.

II. The Need Supplied. "Perfect that which is lacking in your faith..."

1. The instruction of faith (4:13-18).

2. The perfection of love. "The Lord make you to increase and abound in love..."

(1) Love to the Church. "Toward one another."

(2) Love to the world. "Toward all men."

III. The Results Expressed. "To the end..."

1. Immediate result. "He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God..."

2. Ultimate result. "At the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."

Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith? Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you. And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you: to the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints (I Thess. 3:10-13).

"Praying exceedingly"! "Exceedingly" translates the Greek *huperekperissou*. It occurs but twice more in the New Testament: in Eph. 3:20, where it is used descriptively of God's power; and in I Thess. 5:13, where it describes the love and esteem due unto worthy Christian leadership. It is a strong term signifying "beyond all measure, in the highest degree,"¹ superabundantly.

That Paul's intercession here could be thus characterized is indicative of two facts. (1) It marks the intensity of his love for the Thessalonians. "How strong was his affection for this church."² He called them his "glory and joy."³ (2) It marked, also, the vast importance of that purpose which he hoped to achieve by a visit to them: "to see you face to face, and to complete what is wanting in your faith."⁴

Paul found more to commend, less to rebuke, in this church than in any to which he wrote. Nevertheless, the defect in their faith was serious enough to drive the apostle to his knees in fervent and constant intercession, to keep him praying "night and day." It shall be our method in this study to define that lack, outline the means for its supply, and observe the results accruing from its completion.

I. The Lack Defined. "That which is lacking in your faith..."

The burden of the prayer and the tenor of the entire Epistle suggest a twofold defect of faith, an intellectual and a spiritual lack. "Paul understands partly defects

of faith as regards insight (particularly in respect of the impending advent; comp. IV: 13ff) ; partly defects of faith as regards its practical verification in the Christian life (comp. IV: 1if)."⁵ Adam Clarke alleges this dual sense, also, and suggests that the perfecting of faith as a body of truth is in order to the perfecting of faith as a life of truth. "So that the great outlines of truth which you already know may be filled up, that ye may be perfectly fitted to every good word and work."

Indeed, this interpretation is inescapable. He who divorces doctrine from duty does violence both to the Scriptures and to his own soul. We are to know in order to be and do.

We may say, then, that (1) as touching creed, their defect of faith was their ignorance of certain Second Advent truth, and (2) as touching character and conduct, it was manifested, in imperfect love and holiness.

Out of his deep anxiety to see that lack supplied, that faith perfected, Paul yearned to pay this church a personal visit. Thus he proceeds to pray, "Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you." (See Notes, 1.)

"Now God himself" is employed by the apostle to "simply and naturally [contrast] God and Christ to himself."⁶ He realizes that, notwithstanding the urgency of his desire to see them, only as God directs him to them will the desire become actualized. For Satan has power to thwart human desire if it be unaided by divine purpose and power. This the apostle has told them in chapter 2, verse 18: "We would have come unto you... once and again; but Satan hindered us." But "when the kateuthunein (directing) is undertaken by God himself and Christ its success is assured, for then the hindrances of the devil are without power."⁷

And if that be true of a desired visit, how much more of the desire for the perfection of their faith! Human aspiration and effort are not sufficient. Only God can illumine and sanctify. That is why Paul goes on at once to say, "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love," etc. The order in the Greek text is humas de ho kurias pleonasai -- "But you the Lord make..." As if he would say, This prayer for perfecting your faith can be answered "whatever it may please Him to appoint in respect to us and our coming."⁸ Thus Lunemann properly comments, "To the wish as regards himself, Paul adds a further wish as regards his readers." This is similar to his prayer in chapter 5, verse 23: "The God of peace, himself, sanctify you wholly..."; that is, God "working in independence of your exertions and my exhortations."⁹

However, Paul is sure that if such a visit is really needful for their benefit, God will direct (see Notes, 2) him to them. Is not God himself "our Father"? Fatherhood denotes sympathy and assures us that He has the highest welfare of His children at heart. And is not God himself "our Lord Jesus"? Lordship denotes

authority and assures us that He is able to effect the realization of His good pleasure concerning us.

Arguing from the physical to the spiritual, if God would certainly provide any needed visit, how much more will He provide all the light and grace necessary to perfect our creed and character?

From a consideration of what was lacking in their faith, and of the willingness and ability of God to supply it, a natural transition is made to the study of those means by which the defect was to be remedied.

II. The Need Supplied. "And might perfect that which is lacking..."

Since the deficiency was twofold, a twofold remedy is revealed.

1. The defect in creed was supplied by inspired instruction in faith. The Thessalonians were living in expectation of the imminent return of Christ. They fully expected to be part of the throng who should greet and glorify the Lord at His coming. However, some of their number had fallen asleep in death. What of them? Would they miss the rapture? Would they be excluded from Christ's earthly kingdom? Paul answered their questions and dissolved their apprehensions in a passage that remains an invaluable source of comfort to this day. It is chapter 4, verses 13 through 18:

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [precede] them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, and with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

So far from being excluded, the sleeping saints will precede the living saints in the rapture. The resurrection of the dead will occur just before the translation of the living. At the voice of Christ tombstones will split asunder; rocks, dirt, and grass will be rudely flung aside; and the saints will leave their graves, the perfected spirits clothed with deathless, immortal bodies. This, briefly, completed the outline of their faith in the coming of Christ and the home-going of the Church.

Faith was incomplete in yet another respect. It had not grasped the promise and provision of the experience which qualifies the saints to meet the coming Christ.

2. The deficiency in character is supplied by the perfection of love. "The Lord make you to increase and abound in love..."

Theodoret separates "increase" and "abound," regarding the former as referring to the external increase of the Church, as though Paul meant "increase" numerically and "abound" spiritually. Olshausen relates the two words, but he distinguishes them as cause and effect, the abundance arising out of the increase. Both positions seem strained and the distinctions artificial and arbitrary. A truer, because simpler, interpretation is to regard both optatives, *pleronasai* ("increase") and *perisseusai* ("abound"), in reference to love. "But the Lord make you to become rich and abound."¹⁰

This abounding love has a twofold object, "One toward another, and toward all men." "One toward another" is love in its relationship to the Church, and "toward all men" is love in its relationship to the world. Some good commentators have restricted this meaning, referring *eis allelous* ("one toward another") to fellow Christians at Thessalonica, and *eis pantas* ("toward all men") to fellow Christians in all other places. There is no grammatical reason for imposing such a limitation upon these clauses.

On the other hand, Paul's letters reveal that the church at Thessalonica was suffering persecution. They had "received the word in much affliction."¹¹ A prayer that they might be enabled to love even their enemies would certainly be timely. (See Notes, 3.)

As an example of the possibility and quality of such love the apostle points to himself, "even as we do toward you."

In a passage of affectionate reminiscence Paul declares, "We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children: so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but our own souls, because ye were dear unto us." Again, he writes, "We exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children."¹²

The skill of a nurse, the patience of a mother, and the strong concern of a father, inspiring "labour and travail... night and day"¹³ -- these were the manifestations of that love which Paul bore toward them. And after his ministry in their city was completed, love still constrained him to visit, write to, and intercede for them. Love in that manner and measure he desired to be their own heart's possession.

Such love transcends natural affection. It results only as God works in the heart destroying all that is contrary to love. Thus Paul prays, "And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love." God is the only adequate cause of that

experience. It is the gift of His grace. Phillips' translation is fine at this point. "May the Lord give you the same increasing and overflowing love..."

We need not be staggered by the concept of an experience and life so elevated, because the Lord will make us, will transform and renew us until we "love one another with a pure heart fervently."¹⁴ C. G. Findlay has this encouraging comment: "Christ is invoked as the Lord in his divine authority and power to grant this prayer."¹⁵

It is by the power of God, in the perfection of love, that the lack of faith is to be supplied.

III. The Results Expressed. "To the end..."

The results of this completion of creed and character are two, one immediate and one ultimate.

1. The immediate result. "He may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God..."

This stablishing of the heart is "the final aim to which pleonazein (the increase) and perisseuein (the abounding) are to conduct."¹⁶ It is through love that the heart is confirmed and strengthened in holiness, and it is through love that the heart appears blameless before God, for "love is the fulfilling of the law." (See Notes, 4.)

But if we are to be "holy and blameless in heart,"¹⁷ love must be perfected by the exclusion from the heart of all that is unlovely and unholy. In short, we must be cleansed from all sin. "Holiness is love-mastered life."us Such a life demands the slaying of every rival to love and purity. And that requires the destruction of carnality, for "the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be."¹⁹

Thus it is a prayer, inferentially, for that very experience Paul supplicates specifically in chapter 5, verse 23 -- entire sanctification.

Insisting that "the only New Testament parallel is Jas. 5:8," C. G. Findlay takes the position that "stablish your hearts" signifies "the imparting of conscious strength and denotes here, therefore, not so much a making firm or steadfast in character, but giving a firm confidence, a steadfast and assured heart" in view of Christ's return to judgment.²⁰

However, only by steadfastness of character can we sustain a steadfastness of confidence that it will be well with us when Christ comes. John certainly taught that perfect love and heart purity were essentials of a strong hope. "We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every

man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure." "Herein is, our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world."21

Blameless holiness is to be our portion "before God." A cynical world and a carnal church will always discredit the preaching and profession of perfect love. We may bear their ridicule and suspicion with meekness and patience, reminding ourselves that "it is God that justifieth." God calls us as He did Abraham, saying, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect." We who profess this experience follow the example of Paul, who wrote to the Thessalonians, "Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe."22

2. The ultimate result. "At the coming of... Christ with all his saints."

They had "turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God; and to wait for his Son from heaven." Now he prays that when that awaited advent occurs "they might then appear before the God whom they served... in the perfection of holiness."23

The final clause, "with all his saints," is connected by some with "unblameable in holiness." Thus the sense would be, "that ye may appear blameless on that day with all who are consecrated to God." Others leave the clause in connection with the parousia and understand "saints" (hagion) to mean the angels who shall accompany Christ at His return. Phillips adopts a somewhat mediating position, "with all who belong to Him."

The viewpoint we accept is of no special consequence. Neither alters the essential truth, that to stand before God acquitted, to be ready for the return of Christ, we must be perfect in love and blameless in holiness. (See Notes, 5.) As C. G. Findlay writes, "This blamelessness will be manifest at the coming of the Judge; but it is imparted already and belongs to those whose hearts are filled with love to their fellow men, and so with confidence towards God."24

The burden of the apostle is for the completion of the Thessalonian Christians' faith, the perfection of their love, and thus their preparation for the advent and judgment.

How about us?

Notes

1. Here "our Lord Jesus" is united with "God himself" as the subject of a common verb (kateuthunai) in the singular number. The passage is a strong argument for the plurality of persons in the Godhead, and for the deity of the Lord Jesus Christ. Ellicott insists that it asserts "simply and plainly that the eternal Son

is here distinguished from the Father in respect of His personality, but mystically united with Him in respect of His Godhead."

From the simple fact that prayer is here addressed to both "our Father" and "our Lord Jesus," Matthew Henry declares that Christ is God even as the Father is God.

2. Kateuthunai, used figuratively, means to make straight, that it may be traversed, as a road. "Without a figure: may cause to be realized." (Lunemann.)

3. "For the Thessalonian church, cruelly persecuted, their wider love was peculiarly necessary and difficult. It meant loving their enemies, according to Christ's command (Matt. 5:44)." (C. G. Findlay, The Cambridge Bible.)

4. "As love is the fulfilling of the law, he who is full of love is unblameable in holiness: for he who has the love of God is him is a partaker of the divine nature, for God is love." (Adam Clarke.)

5. "This verse and the last set forth Christian Perfection in two-fold aspect, as constituted at once by an unbounded love to men and a blameless consecration to God." (C. G. Findlay, The Cambridge Bible.)

* * * * *

06 -- THE PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN PERFECTION

Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifices of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. -- Hebrews 13:12-15, 20-21

God works in us, that we may work for Him.

I. The Perfect Workman. "Now... God..."

1. The God of peace. "Now the God of peace..."
2. The God of power. "That brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus... "
3. The God of promise. "Through the blood of the everlasting covenant..."
 - A. Perfection accomplished through the Blood as an atonement
 - B. Perfection assured through the Blood as a covenant

II. The Work of Perfection. "Make you perfect..."

1. A positive experience. "In every good work..."
 - A. Sanctification, a negative destruction of evil
 - B. Perfection, a positive integration of good
2. A relative experience. "To do his will..."
 - A. Not finality
 - B. But fitness
3. A subjective experience. "Working in you..."
 - A. Not external duties or dress
 - B. But internal deliverance
4. A redemptive experience. "By Jesus Christ..."
 - A. As the "great shepherd"
 - B. By the shed Blood

Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen (Heb. 13:20-21).

To the mind of Paul, the Christian was a workman for God and the workmanship of God. To the church at Corinth he wrote, "We are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building."¹ We are God's laborers,

but we are first God's husbandry (Greek, tilled land, farm). God works on us that He might work with us. Similar in his charge to the Philippians, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."² The outworking of God's pleasure is consequent upon the inworking of God's power. God works in and upon us that He might work with and through us.

It is precisely this thought which underlies the prayer for Christian perfection. God is petitioned to make believers perfect by working in them, and the result is their being equipped "in every good work to do His will." The divine ideal is first stamped upon the heart and then wrought out in happy expression in all ethical relations. The prayer is an appeal to a perfect Workman to perfect His workmen by a perfecting work. Indeed, perfection is a dominant note in the entire Epistle. It is written to reveal the perfect Son, who by a perfect sacrifice became a perfect Saviour, affording a perfect salvation.

I. The Perfect Workman. "Now God..."

God is the foundation of the experience of Christian perfection. "We are the workmanship of a perfect Worker, and it would be strange if perfection were impossible to Him."³ The argument for Christian perfection is valid and logical when God is our basic premise. And the experience is based upon an impregnable equilateral triangle: God's peace, power, and promise.

1. The appeal is, first, to "the God of peace." Because He is a God of peace, a God whose nature demands peace, He must be intolerant of every condition in our natures that creates dispeace. As we have previously observed, in our study of I Thess. 5:23, the necessity of holiness is grounded in the nature of God. As a result of the Fall, man, at the very center of his life, is disorganized and maladjusted; all the faculties of body, mind, and spirit are deranged and degraded. Thus he is "out of joint" inwardly with the spirit, ideals, and aims of God. Over this inharmonious and frustrated condition God broods, as He did over the chaotic earth,⁴ intolerant of the confusion and rebellion of the carnal mind, and impatient to rectify and readjust, cleanse and control His child. God's nature refuses passivity in the face of dispeace and depravity. He is anxious to make us perfect, or as the Greek term signifies, "set us in joint."

At this point, two other passages of Scripture are encouraging. To the Colossians, Paul wrote: "Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God."⁵ Again, to that same group he declared, "[Christ] we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus; whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily."⁶ The burden of both Paul's preaching and Epaphras' prayers was the perfection of believers. Now, if the fervent intercession of Epaphras and the divinely energized ministry of Paul would

strongly argue the possibility of that experience for which they gave such sweat and tears, how much more the fact that God devotes the tremendous energies of His own nature to our perfection!

Adam Clarke wrote: "Peace among the Hebrews signifies prosperity of every kind. The God of peace is the same as the God of all blessedness, who has at his disposal all temporal and eternal good..." It designates a God infinite in resources of grace and power, who gladly applies those resources to the perfecting of His people. In similar vein are the words of Samuel Chadwick: "He gives peace, even perfect peace. There are no antagonisms He cannot reconcile, no dislocations He cannot adjust, no discords He cannot harmonize, no faults He cannot supply. He is the God of peace, and peace is the perfect relation of every part to every other part, and of all the parts to the whole."⁷ "The God of peace" is an appellation which guarantees our deliverance from all that disturbs the soul's tranquillity. (See Notes, 1.)

In passing, we repeat the observation made upon this designation of God in I Thess. 5:23. It establishes the relationship of those for whom the prayer is offered to God. He is revealed to sinners as the God of love, mercy, wrath, justice, and holiness, but as the God of peace only to the justified. "There is no peace... to the wicked." "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." This experience of perfection is for believers, a second work of grace. Here is a prayer for God to complete the salvation begun in the experience which brought them peace. (See Notes, 2.)

2. The appeal is, further, to the God of power. "Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus..." The Greek is anagagon, literally "brought up." "This denotes not to bring again, but to bring up from below, to raise up (Rom. 10:7)."⁸ Jesus was not merely among the dead; He was dead! To quote His own triumphant exclamation, "I am he that... was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore."⁹ And the indescribable power by which that greatest of all miracles was wrought is pledged for our perfection.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ demonstrated the adequacy of God's power to perfect believers. Death was the ultimate outworking of sin. "Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."¹⁰ Therefore, the defeat of death heralded the conquest of sin. When Jesus took up again His own life and strode in calm majesty from the tomb, He symbolized by that emergence an utter and final victory over every form and degree of sin. That authority over sin extends to the extirpation of indwelling sin from the heart of the believer.

The resurrection of Jesus also assures the efficacy of Christ's blood to perfect believers. The death of our Lord was considered an atonement, an offering for sin which propitiated God and reconciled men. Raising Jesus from the dead was God's method of attesting His pleasure in and His acceptance of the sacrifice. It

demonstrated to men the divine readiness to accept and cleanse those who come with that Blood as their plea.

When we think of the depth and strength of the depravity and derangement of fallen nature, by which the inner life is wrenched violently out of joint with the divine will, we could easily join the ranks of those who cry, "Impossible," to the preaching of Christian perfection. But when we stand at Joseph's tomb and see the light that streams from the empty sepulcher, we know "what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward, who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead."¹¹ Then we laugh at impossibilities and cry, "It shall be done." That performance of power assures the possibility of perfection. The resurrection of Christ from the dead is mentioned only this once in Hebrews, and it is cited here as a guaranty of God's power to make us perfect. (See Notes, 3.) "The resurrection of our Lord Jesus is the New Testament standard of measurement for the power of God. It is the big thing by which all other things are measured. In the Old Testament it was the Red Sea. In the New Testament it is the empty grave. This is the example of what God can do. If He did that, He can do this."¹² What stronger pledge could reason or faith demand?

3. The appeal is, finally, to the God of promise. "The God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus... through the blood of the everlasting covenant..." God has promised our perfection. He has entered into solemn covenant agreement to extend our salvation from sin to that innermost and uttermost limit. That covenant has been sealed with the blood of Jesus. His blood has become the security for our perfection. If we believe in the all-pervading and all purifying energies of the Blood, how can we doubt the possibility of this elevated experience?

Some interpret this phrase as the motive for which God raised Him from the dead, i.e., because He shed His blood to procure the everlasting covenant. Others understand it as the means by which Jesus became the great Shepherd; i.e., by shedding His blood to procure and ratify the everlasting covenant. But the clause stands in connection with the following, as well as the preceding, words. The believer's perfection is through the Blood. It is accomplished through the Blood as an atonement, and assured through the Blood as a covenant. By the flowing wounds of our Redeemer's cross-torn hands and spear-riven side does God attest the terrible urgency of His desire to complete our salvation, to bring us inwardly and thoroughly into harmony with His own nature and will. To ignore or distrust that promise is to insult the dying agonies of our Lord!

Mark you, it is the Blood of the everlasting covenant. "The Christian system is termed the everlasting covenant to distinguish it from the temporary covenant made with the Israelites at Mt. Sinai; and to show that it is the last dispensation of grace to the world, and shall endure to the end of time."¹³ "Everlasting" is from the Greek *aioniou*, "age-abiding." God's sole and sufficient method, now and forever, of

making His people perfect is through the Blood. Never by growth, death, or purgatory are believers perfected, but through the Blood, as faith embraces the Blood-sealed agreement.

Upon this impregnable foundation of God, himself-the God of peace, power, and promise -- rests the experience of Christian perfection. The perfect Workman is the adequate ground and cause for the work of perfection.

II. The Work of Perfection. "Now the God of peace... make you perfect..."

The initial implication is this: When we meet God we are not what we should be, but He takes us as we are and makes us what we ought to be. The convicted sinner is aware of how far short he falls only in relation to violated law, in outward conduct. His cry is for pardon. The justified believer becomes acutely and painfully aware of a deeper and inner lack of correspondence to the character and will of a holy God, and he cries for cleansing. To each, facing those vast needs, the promise of Jesus to Peter is valid: "Thou art... thou shalt be ..."14 The atoning Christ bridges the chasm between the actual and the possible, the real and the ideal.

Such formation of sanctified character is just what we may expect upon the foundation we have surveyed. God will make us perfect. And that work of perfection is revealed as a positive, relative, subjective, and redemptive experience.

1. Christian perfection is a positive experience. "Make you perfect in every good work..." It is the positive phase of being made holy, of which entire sanctification is the negative. The latter cleanses the bad, the former completes the good. "The evil things have been done away. It is the good that needs to be perfected."15

The words "make you perfect" are the Greek words *katartisai humas*, which Clarke translates, "Put you completely in joint." F.B. Meyer declares, "Perfection in the closing paragraph, v. 21, means adjustment, the setting of a dislocated bone." The bone is not bad and does not call for removal. It is out of place and calls for adjustment, that it might perform its proper function. The experience of Christian perfection involves the adjusting and rectifying of all the passions and faculties of human personality, which are disordered by sin, so that the body properly serves the mind, the mind the spirit, and the spirit God.

Illustrating the trouble caused by the imperfect good thing, Chadwick reminds us that often the vessel on the potter's wheel was marred, not by the intrusion of some foreign element as stone, glass, or iron, but by a bit of the clay itself, not tempered to its proper pliability, and thus unsuited to the potter's purpose. When any area of life is governed by an appetite or faculty which is blind or perverted, the whole life is spoiled. For a single illustration, zeal is a good thing, and it made Paul, the apostle, a heroic missionary. But zeal, misdirected and

perverted, made Saul of Tarsus a murderer, staining his hands with the blood of saints.

Adam Clarke, commenting on katartisis, writes: "It is a metaphor taken, also, from a building; the several stones and timbers being all put into their proper places and situations, so that the whole building might be complete, and be a proper habitation for the owner... The perfection or rejoining of the soul implies its purification, and placing every faculty, passion, and appetite in its proper place; so that the original order, harmony, unity and purity of the soul may be restored; and the whole builded up to be a habitation of God through the spirit."

To this agrees the comment of a great Anglican, M. F. Sadler: "If applied to perfecting personal religion in individual members, it seems to indicate the harmony of the various faculties of the soul and spirit, which harmony is destroyed by sin and established by holiness."

Perfection, then, is so arranging and controlling every part of personality until the whole man serves the will of God. We have anticipated our next thought.

2. Christian perfection is a relative experience. "Make you perfect... to do his will..." (See Notes, 4.) Many writers and preachers who oppose our doctrine of Christian perfection insist upon flinging the term contemptuously about as though it were an absolute term, marking the end of all weakness and all progress. One gets weary of hearing it charged that if we are made perfect we cannot sin, cannot grow, cannot be tempted, do not need the Lord's Prayer, etc., ad infinitum, ad nauseum! Repeatedly and emphatically we declare that the term must be used as the Bible uses it, in a very real but relative sense. It is useless to deny that perfection is commanded, illustrated, and promised in the Bible. It is senseless to believe that God levies upon us the demands of absolute, angelic, or Adamic perfection. Perfection is a relative experience. It is not a final nor a flawless perfection. "It does not even imply maturity, much less finality." It is connected with and conditions for the will of God. It is a perfection of fitness. It equips us to do the will of God, and that not necessarily without mistake, but certainly without rebellion and resentment. This is all we mean by the term -- that much, no more, no less.

Christian perfection is glad submission to, full acceptance of, and hearty compliance with, God's will. This certainly implies the crushing of every lurking rebel to the will of God. It demands the destruction of "the carnal mind," for that is "enmity against God."¹⁶ The passage under consideration surely implies this state of grace; "working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight." Our very desires for holiness, and the holiness we desire are wrought in us by God. Phillips translates, "May He effect in you everything that pleases Him." The sight of God must ever be displeased with sin, and therefore sin must be entirely destroyed. The purified heart embraces the divine will "in every good work."

That it is a relative experience, a perfection of fitness, is amply proved by the usage of the word in the Scriptures. Its first occurrence is in Matt. 4:21, where we read of James and John "mending [katartizontas] their nets." They were repairing them, fitting them up to serve their purpose. In Matt. 21:16 we read of "perfected" (katartisco) praise. The word is musical, suggesting the perfection of melody by the elimination of discord. In I Cor. 1:10, Paul pleads that the church "be perfectly joined together [katertismenoi] in the same mind." It is a plea for harmony, all the members in the body functioning in proper relation to one another. In Gal. 6:1, the apostle exhorts, "If any man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore [katartizete] such an one." As in the Hebrew letter, it suggests the adjusting of a dislocated member. In Heb. 11:3 we read, "By faith we understand that the worlds [ages] were framed [katertisthai] by the word of God." The various ages, like the several parts of a body, building, or machine, are set in proper relation and sequence to perform the divine purpose.

Perfection, then, is setting all the faculties of the believer into proper relation to one another, thus equipping him to do the will of God without discord or division, friction or frustration in his heart, where that will is concerned. (See Notes, 5.)

The mended net was a perfected net. It was old, frayed, and repaired, but it was suited to the purpose for which it was manufactured. It would catch fish. That is perfection, the fitting of man inwardly and outwardly to do the will of God, and thus perform life's true objective. "It is complete deliverance from everything that makes the soul unfit for and unequal to the will of God; the adjustment of life to perfect harmony, and the adaptation of all its powers to the purpose of God... It is life so completely saved that there is no defect, no disorder, no discord."¹⁷ It would be hard to improve that definition of perfection.

3. Christian perfection is a subjective experience. "Make you perfect... working in you..." Some months ago we perused a work entitled Christian Perfection which dealt almost entirely with external relationships. But, strictly speaking, Christian perfection is the internal experience of redeeming grace that makes possible peaceful and rightful relations to others and to things. It is not something done by us, but in us. (See Notes, 6.) Of course it affects external relationships, for what we are always conditions what we do. Character determines conduct. Christian perfection molds character.

It is not, then, a matter of external duty. One may bind upon himself the strong religious duties of praying, fasting, and tithing, etc., and the result be, not perfection, but Phariseism. The Pharisees prayed habitually and lengthily, fasted weekly and religiously, and tithed scrupulously and systematically. Yet Jesus denounced them as hypocrites, and warned the crowds attendant upon His ministry, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."¹⁸ Their religion was exhausted in external performance and sadly lacking in essential, that is internal, purity. Jesus said, "They love to pray... that they may be seen of men."¹⁹

Their passion for prayer was utterly discredited by their purpose in praying. Christian perfection validates the act by purifying the motive. It operates in the subjective, interior realm of motive and intention. It destroys the love of self, the fear of men, and the lust for acclaim by adjusting and dedicating all the forces and faculties of human personality to the will of God.

Again, Christian perfection is not a matter of external dress. Too many are prone to judge and accept others on the basis of the dress question. Let us remember that long robes were in vogue with the crucifiers of Christ. One may dress "as becometh holiness" and be disgustingly and disgracefully worldly in attitude and spirit. Much harm has been done the cause of holiness by those who are extremists in dress but critical and caustic in disposition. Long sleeves are commendable but long tongues are terrible!

We do not wish to be misunderstood. While we do insist that external duty and dress are not the essence of Christian perfection, we also insist that they will be the effect of it. No one will be inwardly holy and outwardly worldly. Character and conduct will beautifully correspond in the perfected believer. He will happily and habitually and systematically pray, fast, and tithe. And he (or she) will certainly govern dress by uncompromised principles of modesty and economy. And unless such principles govern the external life, the profession of internal purity and perfection is a shallow mockery.

Essentially, Christian perfection is a matter of internal deliverance, a work of grace wrought in us, by which the whole life is subjected and integrated to the divine will. At deep, subconscious levels the Holy Spirit performs His gracious ministry of cleansing and controlling.

4. Christian perfection is a redemptive experience. "Make you perfect... through Jesus Christ..." And not in the sense of imitation, but of redemption. Men are not saved by the pattern of Christ but by His passion; not by the living, but the dying, Lamb.

Christ is here called "that great shepherd of the sheep," from which designation it is argued that He will perfect them (set them in joint) "as tenderly and gently as possible." The title, however, points primarily, not to His compassion, but to His passion, His death. The title was prophetically conferred upon Him, and personally claimed by Him.²⁰ It was in this character that He died. "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."²¹ It was this atoning death that furnished the ground for our perfection. The primary cause of Christ's death was not our wrong doing but our wrong being. He died, not only to make possible the forgiveness of our transgressions, but also, and centrally, to provide for the cleansing and rectifying of our polluted and twisted natures. We are negatively sanctified and positively perfected by faith in the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, who selflessly sacrificed His life to fully redeem and restore us from sin.

In keeping with this fact is the mention of the Blood: "through the blood... make you perfect." Emphasizing this same truth, from the negative viewpoint, this same author declares, "If the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"²² It is an argument from the lesser to the greater, the blood of animals to that of Christ. It is an argument from the external to the internal, the purifying of the flesh to the purging of the conscience. It is an argument from the prophetic symbolism to the historic provision. From earliest times God made it plain that sin could be dealt with only by "the shedding of blood." It is not by going about doing good but by going forth unto Him without the camp, where Jesus, "that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate."²³ It is realizing in personal experience, by faith in the atoning and cleansing Blood, the promise, provision, and power of God to "make you perfect."

Upon the unshakable foundation of His peace, power, and promise, God proposes to erect the beautiful superstructure of sanctified Christian character. For this the apostle fervently prayed. And this, let all who have not so done, as fervently pursue and possess!

Notes

1. "This attribute of God carries in it the guarantee that a termination shall be made to all misunderstanding, disturbance, and inability to do His will." (Marcus Dods, *The Expositor's Greek New Testament*.)

2. "'The God of peace;' such he is to the Christian, who, by faith in the sin forgiving grace of the Savior, has attained to peace with God." (Olshausen.)

3. "In the Greek there is a play on the words 'to do his will doing in you...'" (Farrar, *Cambridge Bible*.) A similar play on words is found in Phil. 2:13.

4. "To illustrate the illimitable power of God, he refers to the resurrection of Jesus -- the only place in the epistle where he does so. If God could bring up from the dead our Lord Jesus, then we may be sure that there is nothing that is beyond His power and resources; He can furnish men with every good thing for the doing of His will." (T. H. Robinson, *The Moffatt New Testament Commentary*.)

5. "He rectifies the springs of action in the heart, and thus regulates and reforms the life." (Wm. Lindsay, *Lectures on the Epistle to the Hebrews*.)

6. Some expositors refer the whole prayer to the adjusting of relationship between believers, not to a moral adjustment within the believer. It is sufficient to remark that you cannot "be at peace among yourselves" until you have peace within yourselves. William Lindsay, Presbyterian, writes: "En humin does not mean

'among you' as if referring to what God did in the church, but it means 'in you' as descriptive of the inward change which is wrought in the heart by the power of God." (Lectures on the Epistle to the Hebrews.)

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07 -- SOME COMMON DENOMINATORS

That these several prayers of Paul do concern various facets and elements of the same experience is emphasized by a consideration of the common denominators of the prayers.

I. Passion is a common denominator.

To the Thessalonians he wrote, "We pray always for you." To the Philippians he declared that his petition for a life of transparent holiness was included "always in every prayer of mine for you." Again, to the Thessalonians he insisted that he prayed "night and day... exceedingly." As we have seen, this latter word is a very strong term, signifying above measure, superabundantly. Such intensity of language, coming from the pen of a man not given to exaggeration, but speaking the solemn truth, tells us two things.

1. It marks the importance of that experience and life for which he prays. Paul was pouring out his soul in a fervency of intercession few can appreciate in this prayerless age. Surely those tremendous spiritual energies were not expended for anything trivial or even optional. Holiness is proved an imperative for every believer by the constancy and intensity of Paul's pleading.

2. It rebukes the indolence of most professing Christians to that experience and life. That so many who call themselves by the name of Christ can acquiesce in an uncleansed condition, produce so little fruit of the Spirit, and feel so little grief over their wretched spiritual poverty is strangely incongruous with the portrait of St. Paul upon his knees, day and night, tenderly and earnestly pleading for the perfection of the church.

What an insult to the prayers of this pioneer of and martyr for our faith, that in the modern pulpit holiness is seldom mentioned except for the purpose of exposing its advocates to ridicule and sarcasm, while ministers who boast of being Pauline exert more effort and argument to plead for the necessity and perpetuity of sin than for its destruction! May God shame them to their knees in a sincere quest for that purity of heart and passion for righteousness which characterized the thinking, preaching, praying, and writing of the Apostle Paul.

II. Perfection is a common denominator.

Each prayer we have considered is a plea for the experience of Christian perfection, sometimes negatively and sometimes positively but at all times strongly and hopefully expressed. Christian perfection is presented in three viewpoints.

1. As the completion of faith. In the prayers for the Thessalonians he petitions the perfection of "that which is lacking in your faith," and the fulfilling of "the work of faith with power." This latter is translated by Conybeare, "Mightily perfect within you... the work of faith."

Faith was seen to be incomplete as a body of truth and as a life of holiness. Doctrinally, the church of Thessalonica needed further instruction in advent truth. But their deficiency was not alone theoretical; it was also experimental. Faith had not embraced the provision for perfect love and blameless holiness that qualified the believer to meet the Lord at His coming.

The inwardness of this experience, as suggested by Conybeare's translation, forbids our regarding it as a mere intellectual accretion. It is a spiritual renovation wrought by a mighty God in response to man's faith.

2. As the satisfaction of goodness. Paul pleaded that God would "mightily perfect within you all the content of goodness." The King James Version is "fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness." Moffatt regards it as a prayer "for the satisfaction of every aspiration and desire after moral excellence." Erdman writes, "Every desire which goodness prompts." The hand of God was to work redemptively in the soul until goodness was pleased with the total condition of the heart.

The Hebrew prayer was that God would "make you perfect in every good work to do his will." It means the harmonizing and directing of every good attribute of human personality.

3. As the integration of personality. In I Thess. 5:23 the apostle prays that the believer may be put and kept in a condition of blamelessness, body and soul and spirit made holy and governed by God. Man's physical, mental, and moral faculties are to be properly oriented to each other, and all to God.

The prayer for the Hebrews, that the God of peace would make them perfect, is a prayer for this beautiful harmony of all that constitutes man and manhood. The word perfect, as we have seen, suggests the mending of a net or the setting of a dislocated member, that their original purpose may be accomplished. It unfolds the wonderful possibility of being completely adjusted to and harmonized with the will of God, for doing God's will is man's business in life. The appetites, faculties, and passions which were deranged and degraded by sin are to be cleansed and controlled by God.

In all three viewpoints, the negative implications are too patent and strong to be ignored. Faith is not completed until unbelief is destroyed. Goodness is not satisfied until badness is mortified. Personality is not integrated until carnality is eradicated. The prayers are for an experience of entire sanctification that makes one holy by the utter extirpation of all that is unholy. The "carnal mind," the "evil heart of unbelief," is to be dealt with decisively and ruthlessly. It is to be abolished.

III. Preparation is a common denominator.

The prayers of Paul establish the experience of full salvation as the only adequate preparation for the coming of Christ.

He prayed that the Thessalonians might be sanctified wholly and preserved blameless "unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." He prayed that by the mighty, inward perfection of goodness and faith they would be counted worthy of "this calling," which calling the context reveals to be the coming to Christ to be glorified and admired in His people. He prayed that their love might abound and their hearts be established in blameless holiness before God "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The Philippians were to be "sincere and without offence till the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness."

Since Christ is coming to "judge the world in righteousness and truth," the inescapable inference is this: Only by the gracious experience of entire sanctification, or Christian perfection, are we prepared to stand acquitted and approved at the tribunal of Christ!

Finally, the prayers are for an experience that is originated in the nature of God, mediated by the blood of Christ, and instrumented by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The prayer for the Thessalonians and the one for the Hebrews are addressed to "the God of peace" -- that is, the God whose nature demands peace, and who is the Author of that peace resulting from "being justified by faith." The prayer for the Ephesians is addressed to "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

The "fruits of righteousness" with which the Philippians were to be filled are "by Jesus Christ." God was to be glorified in the Spirit-filled church of Ephesus "by Jesus Christ." The work of perfection in the Hebrew believers was to be performed by God "through Jesus Christ." And in the prayer for completed faith, the apostle addresses "God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ," an obvious reference to the deity and authority of our Mediator.

The Ephesians were to be strengthened with might in the inner man "by his Spirit." The fruits of righteousness mentioned in the Philippian prayer are

manifestly "the fruit of the Spirit." He is the unmentioned but ever present Agent of God in the whole process of perfecting believers.

In four of the six prayers it is definitely implied that, in such an experience and life, God and His Christ are glorified.

Whether by the perfection of love, the satisfaction of goodness, the completion of faith, the destruction of sin, or the instrumentation of the indwelling Paraclete, one truth threads the several prayers. Christians may live for Christ victoriously and meet Christ confidently by an experience of grace which delivers them from all sin and empowers for all good.

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APPENDIX II

The authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews, as every student of Scripture knows, is the subject of an endless controversy. Speculation has been rife, and arguments have been vigorously championed for Paul, Luke, Apollos, Barnabas, Aquila, Priscilla, and Clement. It is a question that will never be settled, and it is outside the purpose of this book to enter the controversy. The inclusion of the prayer in Heb. 13:20-21 is not significant of a personally held theory of Pauline authorship. Unquestionably, the thought and theology of the prayer are typically Pauline, and that fact alone governed the selection of this passage.

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APPENDIX III

Here, from random sources, are samples of the varied speculation indulged by scholars concerning the dimensions that Paul writes of in Eph. 3:18.

1. "It is indicated that redemption and the knowledge of Christ were foreordained from eternity (mekos), extend to all (platos), reach even to hell in their efficacy (bathos), and that Christ has ascended above the heavens (hupsos) ." (Oecumenius.)

2. "In height reaching to the angels, in depth penetrating to hell, in length mid breadth stretching itself to all the regions of this world." (Erasmus.)

3. "Most widely does it diffuse itself towards all men, and in its length it extends to all nations, and in its depth frees man from the lowest depression, and elevates him to the highest places." (Grotius.)

4. "The length applies to the upright beam of the cross as far as the cross beam; the breadth, to the cross beam; the depth, to the portion fixed in the ground. He comprehends the length of the cross who perceives that from the beginning to the end of time no one is justified save by the cross: the breadth who reflects that the church in all the earth has come forth from the side of Christ; the height, who ponders the sublimity of the glory in heaven obtained through Christ; the depth, who contemplates the mystery of the divine election of grace, and is thereby led to the utterance (in Rom. 11:32)." (Estius.)

5. "It stretches wide over all the world of the nations, east and west. In its length, it reaches through all time unto the end of things. In depth it penetrates to the region where the faithful sleep in death. And it rises to heaven's height, where Christ lives." (Hofmann.)

6. "Wide as the furthest limits of the inhabited world, long as the ages of eternity through which God's love to His people will endure, deep as the abyss of misery and ruin from which He has raised us, high as the throne of Christ in the heavens where He has placed us." (Bernardine a Piconie.)

7. "By enumerating these dimensions, the apostle designs to signify the exceeding greatness of the love of Christ, which is higher than heaven, deeper than hell, longer than the earth, and broader than the sea." (Henry.)

These are warning instances of how easily good exegetes may flounder in absurdity when imagination is the determinator of interpretation.

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HOMILETICAL SUGGESTIONS -- [VIZ., SERMON OUTLINES]

THE NATURE OF ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION

Text: I Thessalonians 5:23-24

Misunderstanding is rife about the experience of entire sanctification. This text sums up the essential points of the doctrine.

I. It is a divine work. "The very God..."

(1) It is not simply growth. We grow (II Pet. 3: 18), but HE sanctifies.

(2) It is not merely consecration. We consecrate (Rom. 12:1), but HE sanctifies.

(3) It is surely a divine cleansing, making growth possible and consecration acceptable.

II. It is a second work. "The very God of peace..."

(1) Peace is the fruit of justification.

Isaiah wrote, "There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isa. 57:20-21).

Paul wrote, "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Rom. 5:1).

(2) Therefore, entire sanctification is subsequent to justification.

"A second blessing, properly so called" (Wesley).

III. It is a cleansing work. "The very God of peace sanctify you..."

(1) The English verb "sanctify" is from the Latin sanctus -- "holy," and facere -- "to make." Literally, make you holy.

"Make you holy," not count you holy! That would be a matter of judicial and positional holiness. This is an actual and personal holiness!

(2) The Greek verb hagasai is from the privitive ha -- "un," and the noun gee - - "earth." Literally, unearth you.

The figure is metallurgical. As the earth is separated from the gold by a refining process, so human nature is freed from the carnal nature by the sanctifying energy of God. "I will purely purge away thy dross" (Isa. 1:25).

IV. It is a perfecting work. "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly..."

(1) Ethically, the adverb denotes complete moral purity.

(2) Quantitatively, the adverb comprehends the cleansing of the whole personality.

The purifying and rectifying extends to body, soul, and spirit. The whole man is cleansed and controlled. The spirit masters the body and life is rendered "blameless."

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A BRIEF CATECHISM ON ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION

Text: I Thessalonians 5:23-24

Sanctify means to make holy: positively, by dedication to God; negatively, by purification from sin. Our text answers three vital questions about entire sanctification.

I. By whom? "The very God of peace..."

(1) God's wisdom alone can diagnose sin.

Jeremiah said, "The heart is deceitful... who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9.)

Peter said, "God... knoweth the hearts" (Acts 15: 8-9).

(2) God's power alone can destroy sin.

Job queried, "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" (Job 14:4.)

Paul declares God "will do it" (text).

II. For what? "... be preserved blameless unto the coming of... Christ."

(1) Preservation. "Be preserved blameless."

Holiness is power for daily holy living!

(2) Preparation. "Unto the coming of... Christ."

Holiness is a passport for the rapture!

III. Then when?

(1) It is after peace with God and before the coming of Christ. It is subsequent to justification and antecedent to glorification.

(2) Therefore, it may be NOW.

Not by growth, not by death, but by faith are we sanctified wholly. It will transpire when the justified believer trusts the promise, "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."

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THE SANCTIFYING GOD

Text: I Thessalonians 5:23-24

It is God who sanctifies. The text extols Him as the One who:

I. Cleanses. "The very God of peace sanctify you wholly."

To His grace and power all the promises of cleansing point. "From all your filthiness will I cleanse you." "He shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver."

To Him, therefore, all the prayers for cleansing are addressed. "Create in me a clean heart, O God."

II. Conserves. "And I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless..."

As in nature, so in grace; what is created by Him is upheld by Him. He preserves what He has purified. The sanctified life is sustained by the power of God. We simply work out the salvation He works in.

III. Calls: "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."

(1) He calls by peril.

"This is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication... For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness" (I Thess. 4:3, 7).

Here the call to holiness is grounded upon the danger of worldliness.

(2) He calls by purchase.

"Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him" (Heb. 13:12-13).

The appeal to holiness is here grounded in its cost, the sufferings of Christ.

(3) He calls by promise.

"Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."

He is faithful to call, to cleanse, to conserve.

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A HOLINESS TEA PARTY

Text: I Thessalonians 5:23-24

A certain tea concern advertises, "Tea Stimulates!" Here are some truths to stimulate your thinking and living, the "ty's" of holiness. Its necessity, its entirety, and its certainty.

I. The necessity of holiness. "The very God of peace ...

(1) God's nature demands peace.

(2) The carnal nature disturbs peace.

"The carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7).

"Whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal?" (I Cor. 3:3.)

(3) Therefore, God must destroy carnality, and so create inward peace, to satisfy the demands of His own holy nature.

II. The entirety of holiness. "Sanctify you wholly..."

(1) We are made partially holy at regeneration, being saved from the dominion of sin.

(2) We are made entirely holy at sanctification, being saved from the pollution of sin.

The cleansing is from all sin (I John 1:7).

The cleansing is for the whole man. "Your whole spirit and soul and body..."

III. The certainty of holiness. "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it." (1)

(1) He is faithful to us.

God will not mock us by calling us to pursue what we cannot possess.

(2) He is faithful to himself.

God will not deny himself by failing to achieve what His nature demands. His character is our certitude.

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THE GRAMMAR OF ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION

Text: I Thessalonians 5:23-24

I. An adjective which designates the time of it. "Peace." The "God of peace" does the work. Since "there is no peace... to the wicked," and "being justified by faith, we have peace with God," clearly being sanctified follows being justified. It is a second crisis experience.

II. A verb which designates the nature of it. "Sanctify."

Sanctify means to make holy. Not legally, by the imputation of Christ's righteousness, but actually, by the impartation of Christ's righteousness. Not count you holy, but make you holy -- purify you from sin.

III. An adverb which designates the extent of it. "Wholly."

It is an adverb of quantity. The whole man, "spirit and soul and body," is to be delivered from the dominion and pollution of sin.

IV. A preposition which designates the duration of it. "Unto."

Until Jesus comes! "All the days of' our life." Through "this present evil world."

It is not dying, but living, grace -- "grace to help in time of need."

V. An adjective, pronoun, and verb which designate the certainty of it. "Faithful... who... will."

The guaranty of holiness is the integrity of God. He calls to it and will confer it. Here is adequate ground for faith. "God is faithful."

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SUPERLATIVES OF SANCTIFICATION

Text: I Thessalonians 5:23-24

I. The greatest of all purgings. "Sanctify you wholly

II. By the greatest of all powers. "The very God of peace..."

III. For the greatest of all purposes. "Preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ..."

IV. Upon the greatest of all promises. "Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it."

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THE "TENTS" OF HOLINESS

Text: I Thessalonians 5:23

I. The content of it. "Sanctify you..."

II. The intent of it. "Preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

III. The extent of it. "Your whole spirit and soul and body..."

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A LIFE THAT PREPARES FOR JUDGMENT

Text: Philippians 1:9-11

"The day of Christ" is a day of judgment. Paul's prayer is for a life that passes the test of judgment.

I. The life expressed negatively.

(1) A life of purity. "Sincere..."

Sincere is from a Greek word that suggests being approved flawless after exposure to the strongest light! It is to be cleansed from sin.

(2) A life of peace. "Without offence..."

The word means, actively, not causing to stumble; and passively, not stumbling.

It suggests a life of peaceful relations with others.

II. The life expressed positively.

(1) A life holy in conduct. "Being filled with the fruits of righteousness..."

Fruits of righteousness are the right tempers, words, and acts which spring from a heart right with God.

(2) A life holy in causation. "Which are by Jesus Christ..."

The demands of righteousness are too lofty for unaided wisdom and strength to reach. They are made possible and practical by the grace and power of Jesus Christ.

(3) A life holy in consequence. "Unto the glory and praise of God."

God is not glorified by a life of daffy sinning and nightly repenting, but by a life of persistent purity. And thus we are to live "till the day of Christ." Then, having glorified Him, He shall glorify us!

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LIVING THAT GLORIFIES GOD

Text: Philippians 1:9-11

Paul's prayer is for a life spent "unto the glory and praise of God." What sort of living glorifies God?

I. Life filled with holy conduct. "Being filled with the fruits of righteousness..."

(1) No iniquity tolerated

To be filled with righteousness demands our being emptied of all unrighteousness. "One that feareth God, and escheweth evil."

(2) No indolence permitted

"Being filled with the fruits of righteousness" suggests the dedication of every ransomed power to God's service. There is no lazy holy man!

II. Life derived from a holy character. "Sincere and without offence..."

(1) An inner spring of purity

"Sincere" suggests transparency of holiness. It translates eilekrineis -- "a metaphor taken from clarified honey" (Clarke).

(2) An inner spring of tranquillity

"Without offence" has two meanings, not giving and not taking offense, not stumbling over others or causing them to stumble over one's self. It indicates a calm, unruffled spirit.

III. Life governed by a holy conscience. "That your love may abound... in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent."

(1) The discrimination of love

Love is to abound in "knowledge" and in "judgment" -- that is, mental and moral illumination, and perception which discriminates between good and evil.

(2) The approbation of love

Love is to approve the good on the basis of such discrimination. Holy living is not the product of blind instinct or unbridled appetite. It is guided by keen spiritual discernment which approves the right and avoids the wrong, motivated by sincere love for God and others. This is living "unto the glory and praise of God."

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A LIFE WORTH PRAYING ABOUT

Text: Philippians 1:9-11

"And this I pray." Paul never prayed about trifles. The prayer outlines a worthy Christian life. How well do we measure up?

I. A life of purity. "Sincere..."

(1) Sincere originates from the Latin sine -- "without," and cera -- "wax."

Roman sculptors camouflaged defective material and work with a covering of wax. To be without wax suggests having no sin covered.

(2) Sincere translates the Greek eilekrineis -- from eile -- "sunlight," and krino -- "I judge."

It describes something tried and approved flawless after exposure to strong light. To be sincere is to be cleansed from all sin.

II. A life of charity. "Without offence..."

Offense translates a Greek word which means, when used actively, not causing to stumble. A sincere Christian will not cause the weak to stumble by a critical, censorious, mote-picking attitude, nor by a careless example. Rather, he will be charitable and tolerant in his attitude and careful and scrupulous in his conduct.

III. A life of stability. "Without offence..."

Used passively the word means not caused to stumble. The sincere Christian does not wear his feelings on his sleeve. He is not easily wounded or quickly slighted. He bears opposition and persecution sweetly, patiently, and unavengingly. He remains true to Christ in the midst of hypocrisy and apostasy.

IV. A life of activity. "Filled with the fruits of righteousness...

Indifference and inactivity are alike impossible to the heart that deeply loves Christ. The sincere Christian is busily doing something that honors God and helps men. True Christianity is love in action helping others. It is following Him who "went about doing good." And the most effective way to keep from falling into evil is to keep active in promoting good.

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ENDNOTES

CHAPTER 01 ENDNOTES

1. Rom. 8:7
2. I Thess. 5:13
3. I Cor. 3:3
4. Lunemann
5. Isa. 57:20-21
6. Rom. 5:1
7. Josh. 1:5
8. Josh. 3:13
9. Josh. 4:23
10. Rom. 12:1
11. II Pet. 3:18
12. Jer. 17:9
13. Job 14:4

14. Acts 15:8-9
15. John 17:17
16. Isa. 1:25 (See Notes, 3.)
17. Mal. 3:3
18. Lunemann
19. Lunemann
20. Clarke
21. Gal. 2:20
22. Phil 2:12-13
23. Rev. 20:6
24. I Thess. 4: 7, 3
25. Heb. 13:12-13
26. Lunemann
27. M. F. Sadler
28. I Thess. 4:7-8.
29. Italics mine
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CHAPTER 02 ENDNOTES

1. Phil. 4:14-18
2. I John 4:19, 11
3. II Cor. 5:14-20
4. Meyer
5. Heb. 5:14; Rom. 2:18

6. Ps. 119:71
7. Conybeare
8. Phillips
9. Rainy, Expositor's Bible
10. Ps. 24:4
11. Matthew Henry
12. Col. 3:9-10
13. Clarke
14. Rainy, Expositor's Bible
15. Clarke
16. I John 4:17
17. Berry's lexicon
18. Notes on the New Testament
19. Meyer
20. John 15:1-2
21. Rainy, Expositor's Bible
22. I John 1:7-9
23. Meyer
24. John 15:4-5
25. Clarke
26. I Cor. 10:31
27. Matt. 5:16
28. Meyer

29. Clarke

30. Rainy, Expositor's Bible

31. Tit. 2:11-14

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CHAPTER 03 ENDNOTES

1. James Denny, Expositor's Bible

2. I Thess. 2:19-20

3. Lunemann

4. I Sam. 16:7

5. Lunemann

6. Lunemann

7. "His" is not in the Greek text.

8. I Thess. 1:3, 9-10

9. I John 3:2-3

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CHAPTER 04 ENDNOTES

1. In Meyer's commentary

2. I Thess. 5:17

3. Expositor's Bible

4. Meyer

5. Eph. 2:11-22

6. Spurgeon also

7. G. G. Findlay, Expositor's Bible

8. v. 7

9. v. 13

10. Findlay, Expositor's Bible

11. I Cor. 16:13

12. Findlay, Expositor's Bible

13. Findlay, Expositor's Bible

14. Findlay, Expositor's Bible

15. Alford

16. Phillips

17. Bengel, Augustine, Erasmus, Grotius, Matthies, Dewette, in that order

18. Chrysostom

19. Meyer

20. Findlay, Expositor's Bible

21. II Cor. 3:14-15

22. Charles H. Spurgeon

23. Clarke

24. Phillips' translation

25. Clarke

26. Acts 15:8-9

27. Meyer

28. Clarke

29. Findlay, Expositors Bible

30. Acts 1:8

31. Phillips' trans.
32. Rom. 5: 2, 5
33. John 14:26
34. John 15:26
35. John 16:13-14
36. John 14:18
37. John 14:23
38. Luke 11:13
39. Moule, Cambridge Bible
40. Clarke
41. M. Henry
42. Findlay, Expositor's Bible
43. Eph. 1:18; 2:7
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CHAPTER 05 ENDNOTES

1. Berry's Lexicon
2. Clarke
3. I Thess, 2:20
4. Conybeare's translation
5. Lunemann
6. Lunemann
7. Lunemann
8. Ellicott

9. Denny, Expositor's Bible, on 5:23

10. Lunemann

11. I Thess. 1:6

12. I Thess. 2: 7-8, 11

13. I Thess. 2:9

14. I Pet. 1:22

15. Cambridge Bible

16. Lunemann

17. Phillips

18. G. Campbell Morgan

19. Rom. 8:7

20. Cambridge Bible

21. I John 3:2-3; 4:17

22. I Thess. 2:10

23. Timothy Dwight

24. Cambridge Bible, italics mine

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CHAPTER 06 ENDNOTES

1. I Cor. 3:9

2. Phil. 2:12-13

3. Chadwick, Call to Christian Perfection, p. 36

4. Gen. 1:2

5. Col. 4:12

6. Col. 1:28-29

7. Chadwick, op. cit., p. 108

8. Conybeare

9. Rev. 1:18

10. Jas. 1:15

11. Eph. 1:19-20

12. Chadwick, op. cit., p. 109

13. Clarke

14. John 1:42

15. Chadwick, op. cit., p. 107

16. Rom. 8:7

17. Chadwick, op. cit., pp. 31-32

18. Matt. 5:20

19. Matt. 6:5

20. Isa. 10:11; Ezek. 24:23

21. John 10:11

22. Heb. 9:13-14

23. Heb. 13:12-13

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THE END