

Prayer - Hebrews 13:20, 21, Part 3

by A.W. Pink

A.W. Pink's sermon emphasizes the necessity of prayer for holiness and the believer's dependence on God's grace to fulfill His will.

Scripture: Hebrews 13:20

Topics: "Holiness", "Prayer"

Description

A.W. Pink emphasizes the significance of prayer in seeking God's perfection in our good works, highlighting that it is through the 'God of peace' and the resurrection of Jesus that believers are empowered to fulfill God's will. He explains that the everlasting covenant not only secures salvation but also promotes holiness and obedience among God's people. Pink stresses the necessity of divine assistance in performing good works, as human efforts alone are insufficient. He encourages believers to pray for restoration and spiritual vigor, recognizing that true peace comes from living in accordance with God's will. Ultimately, he concludes with a doxology, ascribing glory to both God the Father and Jesus Christ for their roles in our salvation and sanctification.

Transcript

"Now the God of peace. . . 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." As previously intimated, there is a very close connection between this verse and the preceding one. Here we have the request that the apostle offered up on behalf of the Hebrew saints, whereas the contents of the previous verse are to be regarded as the plea upon which he based his request. Just how appropriate, powerful, and moving that plea was, will readily be seen. The appeal is made to "the God of peace." As the One reconciled to His people He is besought to grant this blessing (cf. Rom 5:10). Moreover, since God had brought again our Lord Jesus from the dead, that was a most proper ground upon which He should quicken His spiritually dead elect by regeneration, recover them when they wander, and complete His work of grace in them. It was in the capacity of "that great Shepherd of the sheep" that Our Lord Jesus was raised by His gracious Father from the prison of the grave, in order that He might be able, as One alive forevermore, to care for the flock. Our great Shepherd is presently supplying every need of each of His sheep by His intercession on our behalf (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25). By this efficacious means He is now dispensing gifts to men, especially those gifts that promote the salvation of sinners such as we are (Eph. 4:8ff). Furthermore, the same everlasting covenant that promised the resurrection of Christ also guaranteed the glorification of His people. Thus the apostle calls upon God the Father to perfect them according to that engagement.

A Prayer for Holiness and Fruitfulness

"The God of peace. . . make you perfect in every good work to do his will." Substantially, this request is for the practical sanctification and fructification of God's people. While the everlasting covenant has been suitably denominated "the covenant of redemption," we must carefully bear in mind that it was designed to secure the holiness of its beneficiaries. We do well to reflect upon the prophetic, Spirit-filled cry of Zecharias, that "the Lord God of Israel . . . [should] remember his holy covenant;...That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our [spiritual] enemies might serve him without [servile] fear, In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life" (Luke 1:68, 72, 74, 75, brackets mine). And while it has also been appropriately designated "the covenant of grace," yet we must also remember that the Apostle Paul said, "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men [Gentiles as well as Jews], Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; looking for that blessed hope. . . ." (Titus 2:11-13, brackets mine). The grand purpose of the everlasting covenant, as of all the Divine works, was the glory of God and the good of His people. It was designed not only as a display of the Divine munificence, but also for securing and promoting the claims of Divine holiness. God did not enter into that compact with Christ in order to set aside human accountability, nor did the Son fulfill its terms so as to render unnecessary for His redeemed a life of obedience.

Christ agreed not only to propitiate God, but to regenerate His elect. Christ undertook not only to meet all the requirements of the Law in their stead, but also to write it on their hearts and to enthrone it in their affections. Christ engaged not only to take away sin from before God, but to make it hateful and heinous to His saints. Before the world began, Christ undertook not only to satisfy the claims of Divine justice, but to sanctify His seed by sending forth His Spirit into their souls to conform them to His image and to incline them to follow the example that He would leave them. It has been far too little insisted on, in recent times, by those who have written or preached upon the Covenant of Grace, that Christ engaged not only for the debt of His people, but for their duty, too: that He should make a purchase of grace for them, including a full provision to give them a new heart and a new spirit, to bring them to know the Lord, to put His fear into their hearts, and to make them obedient to His will. He also engaged for their safety: that if they should forsake His Law and walk not in His judgments, He would visit their transgressions with the rod (Ps. 89:30-36); that if they should backslide and stray from Him, He would assuredly recover them.

Paul Turns Messianic Prophecy into Prayer

"Make you perfect. . . to do his will." It was with the contents of the Covenant in his eye that the apostle offered up this petition. In the preceding chapters it has been shown that Old Testament prophecy presented the promised Messiah as the Surety of a covenant of peace and as the "Shepherd" of His people. It now remains to be demonstrated that He was therein portrayed as a Shepherd who would perfect His sheep in holiness and good works. "And David my servant shall be king over them; and they all shall have one shepherd" (Ezek. 37:24). Here the LORD declares that Messiah, the great Seed of David, shall in days to come unify the Israel of God as their King and shall shepherd them all without rival. In the same verse He further declares, "they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them." Thus, having owned God as "the God of peace," who has delivered our Lord Jesus from death's dominion "through the blood of the everlasting covenant," Paul makes request that He work in His sheep "that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ." For though God has promised to do this, He declares, "I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel" (Ezek. 36:3 7). It is ever the bounden duty of God's covenant people to pray for the fulfillment of His promises (witness the various petitions of

the Lord's Prayer). We see, then, that this Spirit-indited, comprehensive prayer is not only an epitome of the contents of this entire Epistle, but also a summary of the Messianic prophecies.

Faith in a Reconciled God Produces Desires for His Glory

"Make you perfect in every good work to do His will." Such a petition as this can be rightly offered only as one contemplates God as "the God of peace." Faith must first regard Him as reconciled to us before there will be any true desire to glorify Him. While there be any sensible horror at the thought of God, any servile fear produced at the mention of His name, we cannot serve Him nor do that which is wellpleasing in His sight. "Without faith it is impossible to please him" (Heb. 11:6), and faith is quite opposite to horror. We must first be assured that God is no longer an Enemy but our Friend, before love's gratitude will move us to run in the way of His commandments. That assurance can only come to us by realizing that Christ has put away our sins and satisfied every legal claim of God against us. "Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). Christ has made a perfect and eternal peace "through the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:20), in consequence of which God has made with those who surrender to Christ's yoke and trust in His sacrifice "an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure" (2 Sam. 23:5). This must be apprehended by faith before there will be a confident seeking from Him of the grace necessary thereto.

From yet another angle we may perceive the appropriateness of this request being addressed to "the God of peace," that He would now perfect us in every good work to do His will. For the doing of God's will is most essential for our enjoyment of His peace in a practical way. "Great peace have they which love thy law" (Ps. 119:165), for Wisdom's "ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace" (Prov. 3:17). Therefore it is utterly vain to expect tranquility of heart if we forsake Wisdom's paths for those of self-pleasing. Certainly there can be no peace of conscience while any known sin is entertained by us. The road to peace is the way of holiness. "And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them. . . ." (Gal. 6:16). Unless we genuinely resolve and strive to do those things that are pleasing in God's sight, there will be a state of turmoil and unrest within us instead of peace. There is a deeper spiritual significance than is usually perceived in that title "the Prince of peace," which pertains to the incarnate Son. He could say, "I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29), and therefore an unruffled calm was His portion. What emphasis was there in those words, "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you" (John 14:27, ital. mine)!

Paul Prays for the Strengthening of the Saints in Their Duties

"Make you perfect in every good work to do his will." This petition sets before us, by clear implication, the human side of things. Those things for which the Apostle Paul made request on behalf of the saints were concerned with those duties that they were obligated to perform, but for the performing of which Divine assistance is imperative. The everlasting covenant anticipated the entrance of sin, and it thus made provision not only for the putting away of it but also for the bringing in of everlasting righteousness. That righteousness is the perfect obedience of Christ by which the Divine Law was honored and magnified. That perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed to all who believe, but none savingly believe in Him until His Spirit has implanted a principle of righteousness in their souls (Eph. 4:24). And that new nature or principle of righteousness evidences itself by the performing of good works (Eph. 2:10). We have no right to speak of the Lord Jesus as "The Lord our righteousness" unless we are personal doers of righteousness (1 John 2:29). The everlasting covenant by no means sets aside the necessity of obedience on the part of those who partake of its benefits, but supplies the most affecting and powerful motives to

move us thereto! Saving faith works by love (Gal. 5:6), and aims at pleasing its Object.

The more our prayers are regulated by the teaching of Holy Writ the more they will be marked by these two qualities: the Divine precepts will be turned into petitions; and the Divine character and promises will be used as our arguments. When the Psalmist, in the course of his meditations upon God's Law, declared, "Thou hast commanded us to keep thy precepts diligently," he was at once conscious of his failure and said, "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!" (Ps. 119:4, 5). But He did more than just lament the hindrances of indwelling sin; he cried, "Teach me, O LORD, the way of thy statutes;...Make me to go in the path of thy commandments; for therein do I delight" (Ps. 119:33, 35). So also, when seeking the establishment of his house before the Lord, David pleaded the Divine promise: "And now, O LORD God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said" (2 Sam. 7:25, ital. mine; see also 1 Kings 8:25, 26; 2 Chron. 6:17). As we become more familiar with God's Word and discover the details of the exalted standard of conduct there set before us, we should be more definite and diligent in seeking grace to perform our several duties; and as we become better acquainted with "the Father of mercies" (2 Cor. 1:3) and His "exceeding great and precious promises" (2 Peter 1:4), we shall count more confidently upon Him for those supplies.

A Prayer for Restoration to Spiritual Vigor

"Make you perfect in every good work." The original Greek word here rendered make perfect is *katartizō*, which James Strong defines as to complete thoroughly, that is, to repair (literally or figuratively), to adjust (see no. 2675 in the Greek Dictionary of Strong's Exhaustive Concordance). Contrast this with the word *teleioō*; used in Hebrews 2:10; 10:1, 14; 11:40, which according to Strong means to complete, (literally) to accomplish, or (figuratively) to consummate in character (see no. 5048 in Strong's Greek Dictionary). The word in our text, *katartizō*, is used to describe the activity engaged in by James and John, the sons of Zebedee, when Christ called them: they were "mending their nets" (Matt. 4:2 1, ital. mine). In Galatians 6:1, the Apostle Paul employs this word by way of exhortation: "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; . . ." (ital. mine) It was, therefore, most appropriate that this term be applied to the case of the Hebrew Christians, who after believing the Gospel had met with such bitter and protracted opposition from the Jews at large that they had wavered and were in real need of being warned against apostasy (Heb. 4:1; 6:11, 12; 10:23, etc.). As stated at the beginning of our exposition, this prayer gathers up not only the whole of the doctrinal instruction but also the exhortations of the previous chapters. The Hebrews had faltered and failed (Heb. 12:12), and the apostle here prays for their restoration. The lexicons (such as Liddell and Scott, p. 910) tell us that *katartizō*, here translated make perfect, literally has reference to the resetting of a dislocated bone. And is it not often so with the Christian? A sad fall breaks his communion with God, and none but the hand of the Divine Physician can repair the damage wrought. Thus this prayer is suited to all of us: that God would rectify every faculty of our beings to do His will and right us for His service each time we need it.

Mark how comprehensive this prayer is: "Make you perfect in every good work." It includes, as Gouge pointed out, "all the fruits of holiness Godwards and of righteousness manwards." No reservation is allowed us by the extensive rule that God has set before us: we are required to love Him with our whole being, to be sanctified in our whole spirit and soul and body, and to grow up into Christ in all things (Deut. 6:5; Luke 10:27; Eph. 4:15; 1 Thess. 5:23). Nothing less than perfection in "every good work" is the standard at which we must aim. Absolute perfection is not attainable in this life, but the perfection of sincerity is demanded of us--honest endeavor, genuine effort to please God. The mortification of our lusts,

submission to God under trials, and the performance of impartial and universal obedience are ever our bounden duty. Of ourselves we are quite incapable of discharging our duties, and therefore we must pray continually for supplies of grace to enable us to perform them. Not only are we dependent upon God for the beginning of every good work, but also for the continuance and progress of the same. Let us emulate Paul, who said, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; . . . Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:12-14).

Divinely Revealed Knowledge Requires Obedience

"Make you perfect in every good work to do his will ." May He who has already fully acquainted you with His mind now effectually incline you to the performing of it, even a continuance of solicitous attention to your duties as redeemed people to the end. It is not enough that we know His will; we must do it (Luke 6:46; John 13:17), and the more we do it, the better we shall understand it (John 7:17) and prove the excellency of the same (Rom. 12:2). That will of God that we are to exercise ourselves to perform is not God's secret will but His revealed or perceptive will, namely, those laws and statutes to which God requires our full obedience (Deut. 29:29). God's revealed will is to be the sole rule of our actions. There are many things done by professing Christians that, though admired by them and applauded by their fellows, are nothing but "will worship" and a following of the "commandments and doctrines of men" (Col. 2:20-23). The Jews added their own traditions to the Divine Law, instituting fasts and feasts of their own invention. The deluded Papists, with their bodily austerities, idolatrous devotions, and impoverishing payments, are guilty of the same thing. Nor are some Protestants, with their self-devised deprivations and superstitious exercises, clear of this Romish evil.

"Working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight." These words confirm what was just said above: only that is acceptable to God which conforms to the rule He has given us. The words "in his sight" show that our every action comes under His immediate notice and is weighed by Him. By comparing other Scriptures, we find that only those works are wellpleasing to Him that He has enjoined us to perform and that are performed in His fear (Heb. 12:28). He will accept only those that proceed from love (2 Cor. 5:14), and that are done with an eye singly set upon glorifying Him (1 Cor. 10:31). Our constant aim and diligent endeavor must be nothing short of this: "That ye [we] might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work. . . ." (Col. 1:10, brackets and ital. mine). Nevertheless, we must receive Divine enablement in order to do this. What a blow to self-sufficiency and self-glory is this little phrase, "working in you"! Even after regeneration we are wholly dependent upon God. Notwithstanding the life, light, and liberty we have received from Him, we have no strength of our own to do what He requires. Each has to acknowledge, "for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not" (Rom. 7:18).

Herein Lies a Pride-withering Truth

Herein, indeed, is a humbling truth, yet a fact it is that Christians are, in themselves, incapable of discharging their duty. Though the love of God has been shed abroad in their hearts and a principle of holiness (or new nature) communicated to them, yet they are unable to perform the good they ardently desire to do. Not only are they still very ignorant of many of the requirements of God's revealed will, but indwelling sin ever opposes and seeks to incline their hearts in a contrary direction. Thus it is imperative that they daily seek from God fresh supplies of grace. Though assured that God shall surely complete His

good work in us (Phil. 1:6), that does not render needless our crying to Him "that performeth all things for me [us]" (Ps. 57:2, brackets mine). Nor does the privilege of prayer release us from the obligation of obedience. Rather, in prayer we are to beg Him to quicken us to the performance of those duties He requires. The blessing of access to God is not designed to discharge us from the regular and diligent use of all the means God has appointed for our practical sanctification, but is meant to provide for our seeking of the Divine blessing on our use of all the means of grace. Our duty is this: to ask God to work in us "both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13); to avoid quenching His Spirit by slothfulness and disobedience, especially after we have prayed for His sweet influences (1 Thess. 5:19); and to use the grace He has already given us.

"Working in you that which is wellpleasing. . . through Jesus Christ." There is a double reference here: (1) to God's working in us; and (2) to His acceptance of our works. It is by virtue of the Savior's mediation that God works; there is no communication of grace to us from the God of peace but by and through our Redeemer. All that God does for us is for Christ's sake. Every gracious operation of the Holy Spirit in us is the fruit of Christ's meritorious work, for He has procured the Spirit for us (Eph. 1:13, 14; Titus 3:5, 6) and presently is sending the Spirit to us (John 15:26). Every spiritual blessing bestowed upon us is in consequence of Christ's intercession for us. Christ is not only our life (Col. 3:4) and our righteousness (Jer. 23:6), but also our strength (Isa. 45:24). "And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace" (John 1:16). The members of His mystical Body are completely dependent upon their Head (Eph. 4:15, 16). Our bearing fruit comes by means of having fellowship with Christ, by our abiding in Him (John 15:5). It is most important that we have a clear apprehension upon this truth, if the Lord Jesus is to have that place in our thoughts and affections which is His due. The wisdom of God has so contrived things that each Person of the Godhead is exalted in the esteem of His people: the Father as the Fountain of grace, the Son in His mediatorial office as the Channel through which all grace flows to us, and the Holy Spirit as the actual Bestower of it.

Christ's Infinite Merits, the Basis of God's Acceptance of Our Works and Prayers

But these words "through Jesus Christ" have also a more immediate connection with the phrase "that which is wellpleasing in His sight." Even though our works are good and are wrought in us by God, they are yet imperfect since they are marred by the instruments by which they are done--just as the purest light is dimmed by the cloudy or dusty lamp shade through which it shines. Yet though our works be defective, they are acceptable to God when done in the name of His Son. Our best performances are faulty and fall short of the excellence that the requirements of God's holiness demand, but their defects are covered by the merits of Christ. Our prayers, too, are acceptable to God only because our great High Priest adds to them "much incense" and then offers them on the golden altar before the throne (Rev. 8:3). Our spiritual sacrifices are "acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:5). God can be "glorified through Jesus Christ" alone (1 Peter 4:11). We owe, then, to the Mediator not only the pardon of our sins and the sanctification of our persons, but also God's acceptance of our imperfect worship and service. As Spurgeon aptly said in his comments on this phrase, "What nothings and nobodies we are! Our goodness is none of ours."

A Doxology

"To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen." The glory of God was what the apostle eyed. And how are we to glorify Him? We are to glorify Him by an obedient walk, by doing His will, by performing those things that are wellpleasing in His sight, and by adoring Him. The construction of the whole sentence permits us

to regard this ascription of praise as being offered to either the "God of peace," to whom the prayer is addressed, or to "that great shepherd of the sheep," who is the nearest antecedent to the pronoun. Since the grammar allows for it and the Analogy of Faith instructs us to include both Father and Son in our worship, then let glory be ascribed to both. Let God be praised because He is now "the God of peace," because He brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, because He is faithful to His engagements in the everlasting covenant, because all supplies of grace are from Him, and because He accepts our poor obedience "through Jesus Christ." Equally let us adore the Mediator: because He is "our Lord Jesus," who loved us and gave Himself for us; because He is "that great shepherd of the sheep"--caring for and ministering to His flock; because He ratified the covenant with His precious blood; and because it is by His merits and intercession that our persons and services are rendered "wellpleasing" to the Most High. "Amen." So be it! Let the praises of a redeeming and propitious God ring throughout eternity!

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