

The Pursuit of Holiness

by John Murray

The pursuit of holiness requires the engagement of our whole personality to the utmost extent in the discharge of our responsibility to become fully conformed to the image of Christ, which is made possible by God's work in us.

Duration: 38:47

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 4:24, Ephesians 5:27, Philippians 2:12-13, Philippians 4:8, Hebrews 13:20-21

Topics: "Holiness"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of living a life that is pleasing to God. He mentions the virtues that are expected of believers, such as love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance. The preacher highlights the ultimate goal of believers, which is to be presented before God without any blemish, fully transformed into the image of Jesus Christ. He emphasizes that believers should work out their own salvation with fear and trembling, understanding that it is God who is working within them to accomplish His will. The preacher warns against turning the grace of God into laziness and emphasizes the responsibility of believers to actively participate in their own spiritual growth.

Transcript

Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 13, verse 21. I shall read from verse 20. 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, with only glory forever and ever.

Amen. And also in connection with verse 21, the words of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 2, 12 and 13, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure. When Paul in that epistle to the Philippians says, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, he does not mean that we are to put ourselves in a saved state and condition by our own working.

That would contradict one of the basic principles upon which the gospel which Paul was commissioned to proclaim, rested. It is Paul himself who says, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us, by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. And in another epistle, by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God.

And if I should paraphrase that last text I quoted from Philippians 2, 8, it would be something like this. For by grace are ye in the condition or state of being saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. If we were saved by works, then we would not be saved by grace.

Otherwise grace would no longer be grace. And consequently it is a basic tenet of the faith of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that we are placed in a state or condition of salvation wholly by the grace and by the action of God, particularly by those actions of which God, and God alone is the agent, effectual calling, regeneration, justification, and adoption. The word salvation is often used in the scripture in a broader sense than that of being in a state and condition of salvation.

It is used in the sense of the continuance, and particularly the completion or consummation of that state of salvation in which the people of God are placed by the grace of God. The consummation, the completion of that whole process that has its origin and its animating cause in the grace of God. The apostle Paul uses the word salvation in that very sense in the epistle to the Romans when he says of Romans 5.10, If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, how much more being reconciled shall we be saved by His life? Now when he says there, we shall be saved by His life, he is thinking of something that is to be realized in the future with reference to those who are already contemplated as being in a state of reconciliation and salvation.

If when we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, how much more being reconciled. They are contemplated as being reconciled and therefore in a saved state and condition. But Paul says, how much more shall we be saved by His life? And therefore he is thinking of a salvation that is yet to be accomplished or realized.

And that is the salvation of full fruition. Now the sense in which he uses that is made plain by the preceding verse, Romans 5.9, because there Paul says, much more than being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. And that is, we shall be saved from the wrath that will be manifested at God's final judgment.

What we may call the eschatological wrath, the final manifestation and execution of wrath, being now justified in His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath that is the final execution of wrath through Him. The guarantee with reference to the future. It is therefore salvation from the wrath that will be revealed.

And Paul in another epistle uses the same kind of expression with reference to the same thing when he says, God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to the obtaining of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. Now he is talking to those who are already in a saved state and condition, who have already been called and justified and regenerated and adopted, and with reference to them he says, God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation, and that must be the eschatological salvation. That is the final fruition of salvation, the consummation of the whole process of salvation, when it will reach its full fruition in the manifestation of the glory of the sons of God.

It is the same thought that we have in the Apostle Peter when he says, kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation. And he informs us what salvation he is thinking of, because he defines it as the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. In the last season, in the final appointment of God, there is a salvation to be realized, a salvation to be bestowed, and the people of God are kept by the power of God through faith unto that salvation.

That simply means that the continuance and the completion of the salvation is something in connection with which the activity of the persons concerned is engaged. When Paul says in this text, walk out your own salvation with fear and trembling, he is not thinking of the salvation as a state and condition that is possessed here and now, but he is thinking of the salvation as it will reach its final fruition and consummation. And when he says, walk out your own salvation, he means what he says, and that is that the activity of the person concerned is to be engaged in that process that will reach its final fruition in the consummation of salvation.

You see how in this particular text, in Hebrews 13, 21, that is involved, the writer prays that the God of peace will make them perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight. And you see there are three things implied there, as engaging the heart and mind and understanding and conscience and will and purpose of the persons concerned. Good work.

What is the good work? It is something which they work, and which is good to do his will. And is that what a doing of the will of God? Then there is that which is well-pleasing. That doing of the will of God is just the doing of that which is well-pleasing in God's sight, and therefore the doing of something which elicits the good pleasure, the favor, the delight, the complacency of God.

You know, it is an awful heresy, a grave heresy to think that because the people of God have become the recipients of salvation by grace and by the grace of God alone, that that eliminates entirely from the whole compass of the prophet by which they attain to the final consummation of salvation the engagement of their own working, of their own willing, of their own doing. It is a heresy of the gravest kind, and I hate it just as much as I do Arminianism, because it is the heresy of hyper-Calvinism. And beware of it, because it has a withering and a devastating effect upon the Christian church and upon the Christian life.

Paul meant what he said, Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God that worketh in you, both to will and to do of his good pleasure. And when the inspired writer here engages in this prayer, that the God of peace would make them perfect in every good work to do his will, working in them that which is well-pleasing in his sight. They boldly, boldly inspired writers, whether Paul wrote this epistle or not, we do not know.

But in bold cases, there is the clear implication that the working of God in this process of achieving the full fruition of salvation, the working of God draws within its scope the engagement of our heart and mind and understanding and conscience and will and determination and resolution to the fullest extent. And it is a privacy of the gospel of grace for us to think of any otherwise. It is to turn the grace of God into slothfulness and turning it into slothfulness, we turn it into the seriousness.

And because the working of God in us draws within its scope the activity of our heart and mind and understanding and conscience and will and resolution to the utmost extent, it is just in connection with the heart and of mind and will that our responsibility is addressed. Responsibility and obligation to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. And of course the question arises, by what energy, by what resource, by what particular agency, by what particular causality, shall we say, are we enabled to do this? And Paul tells us in that epistle to the Philippians, For it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.

And in this particular text there is the same implication. Because the writer here says, Now the God of peace make you perfect, that is to say, thoroughly furnish you unto every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ. You see there is the coordination, the

complete complementation of doing and praying, of doing and praying in reference to that doing.

Prayer without doing is just slothful pioussity, not piety. And doing without prayer is self-sufficiency, self-righteousness, and boldness of the way of godliness. Doing and praying are always coordinated, they are always together.

Hence in our text the inspired writer prays the God of peace to make perfect in every good work. There is presupposed the doing and the doing of every good work. And what a good work is, is defined in this very text to be the will of God and that which is well-pleasing in his sight.

Mark all these elements, how important they are, good work, and a good work defined precisely to be that which is the will of God and that which is well-pleasing in God's sight. Now as we contemplate that which is entailed in the walk and life of the high and holy and heavenly vocation which is implied in this particular text, I say as we contemplate the walk and life of this high and holy and heavenly vocation, and as we contemplate all the virtues that are consonant with it and demanded by it, the virtues, for example, defined by the apostle Paul as love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance, against which there is no law, and those defined by the apostle again in that very epistle, the epistle to the Philippians, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are of good, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue and if there be any praise, think on these things, those things which ye have both heard, which ye have both, both heard or learned and received and heard and seen in me do. For if we think of the catalog which is given us by the apostle Peter, add to your day virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love, as it is translated in our version, charity.

I say as you contemplate these catalogs of virtues, which are the virtues which are consonant with the will of god, and which are well-pleasing in his sight, we are indeed overwhelmed with the demands of this high and holy and heavenly vocation. But it is when we think of salvation as consummated, salvation as having come to its final fruition in the primes of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, when the people of God will be presented faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but holy and without blemish. My friends, it is then that we are just as it were on the very brink of desperation.

It is in connection with precisely that salvation that the apostle Paul says, walk it out with fear and trembling. And it is precisely with reference to that very same subject that the writer of this epistle speaks when he says, every good work to do is well, that which is well-pleasing in his sight through Jesus Christ. What is that that is going to be well-pleasing in God's sight? What is that that is going to elicit his complacency without any alloy whatsoever? It is complete conformity.

To the image of his own Son. Complete transfiguration, both in body and in spirit, to the image of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. And it is when we think that these are the demands of this particular vocation of which Paul speaks, and more specifically, these are the demands of this particular salvation, that the apostle Paul says we are to work out with fear and trembling, that we are simply over the sense of our own complete inadequacy, our own complete incompetence to fulfill anything of the demand entailed in that.

And it is just at that point that that of which the writer here speaks, and that of which the apostle Paul speaks in Philippians 2.13, comes just precisely as the answer to the whole situation. It is this particular text here in Hebrews 13.21 or 20 and 21 that is not only providing us with the answer, but is charged with

assurance that the answer to that particular situation created by our own complete insufficiency and by our own complete incompetence is precisely and perfectly it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure. Work that, for it is God who worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure.

There is no suspension of our working because God works, and there is no annulment of our working because God works. It is just precisely because God works that we work out, and it is in the working out of our own salvation with fear and trembling that we have the certification that it is God who is working in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure. If we turn to this particular text in Hebrews 13, we see how even perhaps more assuringly there is brought to our attention the guarantee that that which is demanded by the very character of this salvation is secured by Him who is stated in this particular text to be the God of people who brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep with the blood of the everlasting or by the blood of the everlasting covenant our Lord Jesus who is to make us perfect in every good work.

That is to say, the very appellation in terms of which God is specified in this particular text is brought to bear upon the insurance that He will make the people of God perfect in every good work to do His will. Now when the writer here speaks of the God of peace, he is of course referring specifically to the Father because it is God the Father who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus. He is this depression who is spoken of here is of course distinguished from Christ.

And as we found in another connection on Friday night, it is God the Father who is specifically in view when the writer speaks of the God of peace who was brought again from the dead the Lord Jesus. And it is the Father in His capacity in His very identity as the God of peace who is to perform this particular work. And not only is He in that specific character or is He in that specific relationship brought to bear upon the insurance or the guarantee that He will make His people perfect in every good work, but also there is the same relationship in respect of that.

He brought again from the dead the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the everlasting covenant even our Lord Jesus. And all that that is involved in that action of God the Father is brought to bear upon that He will make them perfect in every good work to do His will and therefore bring to full fruition that which He has ordained for them. Now there is just one final observation or one observations that I want to make in connection with these two texts.

And it is concerned with this what precisely is the relationship between our working out of our own salvation and God working in us to will and to do of His good pleasure. What is precisely the relationship? Well of course you could well say that it is because God is working in us to will and to do of His good pleasure that we work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. And that would just be saying that the working of God is the reason.

And that verily is true. It is just for the very reason that God is working in His people that they are working out their own salvation with fear and trembling. Or you might say that the working on the part of God is the cause.

It is as it were the very the very animation and the very causation that is behind all the working on the part of God. And you might say that it is the incentive that is surely also implied in the word of the apostle for it is God who works in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure. It's the incentive.

Perhaps that needs a little expansion. It has reference to the the very motivation that we have in the obedience to that particular command work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. That we are encouraged we are urged to do this because we know that back of it is the working of God Himself both to will and to do and mind and understanding and conscience and will with that which is the doing of the will of God.

The demand Oh, if God is working isn't it offering insult to that which He is doing? Isn't it offering the various reproach unto that which He is doing? Not to yield to that which He Himself is actually working out in connection with the salvation of His people. But after all it would seem to me as if the most important thought in connection with this particular relationship that there is between the working on the part of believers and the working on the part of God within them is that it is the guarantee. The guarantee that we shall work out our own salvation with fear and trembling is the very fact it is God Himself who is the complete order, the complete cause, the complete energy behind that outworking on the part of believers themselves.

It is the guarantee. It is the assurance. It is the authentication.

It is the certification. It is the validation. It is what you might call the very ground for believers to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

But it is the God of peace Himself who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant who makes them perfect in every good work to do His will, working in them that which is well-pleasing in His sight through Jesus Christ to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. O my friends, as we part on this particular occasion, let us realize, if we realize nothing else, what an insult it does to the very identity of God the Father in His capacity as the God of peace, as the one who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus the great shepherd of the sheep and by which He gave the most manifest certainty that He is the God of peace.

What insult it offers unto God the Father in the specific capacity in which He is in terms of the covenant of grace. What insult it offers to Him in terms of that which He has done in pursuance of the provisions of the covenant of grace to turn His very grace into lasciviousness and not to understand and to realize and to entertain that the very principles of the salvation that He has won and the very nature of that salvation which He has given as a state and a condition of His free and sovereign grace entails for us the engagement of our whole personality to the utmost extent in the discharge of that responsibility that we attain to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. In the discharge of that responsibility of the fruition of a complete in the attainment of that great thing of which He has predestinated all His people completely conformed to the image of my friends.

Our conception of the Christian faith is at a very low ebb indeed. Our conception of the Christian vocation, high, holy, and heavenly is of a very impoverished character if we do not know that all that we are in body and spirit, our whole heart, mind, and will, and understanding, and conscience, and purpose, and determination must be brought within the scope of that outworking which in the last outworking of God there is a complete complementation, a complete coordination. And our working is not suspended because God works.

And God's working is not suspended because we work. But at war there is the case that we work precisely because God works in us to will and to do of His good pleasure and the very authentication, the very certification, the very guarantee that by the engagement of our whole personality with the doing of the will

of God, the doing of that which is well-pleasing in His sight is not in vain and is not an insult to His honor, and is not a contradiction of His grace. It's precisely this.

The back of all our working is the working of God Himself to will and to do of His good pleasure.

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