

Living Well
1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

Introduction

One of the most cherished truths of the protestant faith is our belief that a man or woman is counted righteous in Jesus Christ by faith. We often call this belief the doctrine of justification by faith alone. Justification refers to God's action whereby he declares believers to be right with Him by virtue of their union with Christ. In other words, by faith, God the Father treats believers the way He treats Christ the Son because we have been adopted into God's family. We belong to God by faith in Jesus Christ. We cannot work ourselves into an acceptable relationship with God. We are accepted on the basis of what Jesus has done, not ourselves.

This glorious and vital doctrine of the Christian faith, however, can be woefully misunderstood and distorted if we are not careful. Some have seen this doctrine of justification, that is, this doctrine that declares that we are considered right with God on the basis of faith instead of our behavior, and they have concluded that our behavior does not matter. They have assumed that all God requires of them is a mental acknowledgment of his existence. Yet, Jesus tells us that even the demons have such a belief about God.

So, what kind of faith is it that truly saves a sinner? It is a faith that "is working through love." That is, it is a faith that obeys Jesus. Is this not what Jesus tell us in John 14:15? "If you love, keep my commands." Thus, those who love Jesus, who believe in Jesus, will also obey Jesus. And those who do not obey Jesus cannot claim to love him or believe in Him.

The doctrine of justification, then, the belief that we are made right with God by faith, does not mean that we do not do good works. No! Faith in God always produces good works. Faith in Jesus is always reflected in our behavior. And if it is not, it is because we do not truly believe Him.

So, this morning, we come to the end of 1 Thessalonians and we might be tempted to confused by Paul's long list of behaviors. We might think, "But I thought I was saved by faith?" And if you thought this, you would be right. You are saved by faith. A faith that necessarily produces good works in your life. And this morning, Paul is going to give us some details about what that life of faith should look like...

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:12-28

Exposition

Paul's final instructions to the church in Thessalonica in are as follows:

- I. Respect and Honor for Spiritual Leaders in Your Life with Peace (Vss. 12-13)
- II. Admonish the Lazy, Encourage the Timid, Help the Weak, Be Patient (Vs. 14)
- III. Do Good to Your Spiritual Family and Others in the World (Vs. 15, 24)
- IV. Rejoice in God with ceaseless prayer and thanksgiving (Vss. 16-18, 25)
- V. Be conscious of the Holy Spirit's Presence (Vs. 19)
- VI. Listen, Discern, and Hold Fast (Vss. 20-21)
- VII. Reject All Evil (Vs. 22)

Conclusion

How are you doing?

Do you have a healthy respect and appropriate honor for the spiritual leaders in your life? Are admonishing the lazy, encouraging the timid, helping the weak, all while being patient with them? Are you seeking to do good to your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ? Are you known for your good works among unbelievers? Do they glorify God because of you? Do you rejoice in God through prayer and thanksgiving? Do you quench the Holy Spirit? Are you conscientious to listen to what people are teaching you, discern whether it is true, and hold fast to God's Word? Are you consciously rejecting all evil?

How are you doing?

Brothers and sisters, if this list of behaviors for the well-lived life stopped at verse 22, I believe I would utterly despair. Who is sufficient for such things? How could we every fully obey?

Praise God for verse 23! Our hope for obedient living, our hope for maintaining a faith that is "working itself out in love," is found in the sanctifying work of God Himself! "Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it."

According to verse 23, how do we pursue obedience to Paul's instruction? How do we have any hope of obedience? The God of peace himself! He will sanctify us! He will make sure that you whole spirit and souls and body will be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ! And how can we trust Him? Because He is faithful! He will surely do it!

And then, as if there is any question about it, he closes the letter by praying for the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ to be with them!

Do you realize that what this means? It means that the very obedience that God requires of us in our faith is an obedience that He enables in us! We are not left struggling to obey, struggling to work our faith out in love in our own strength. God Himself works in us to will and to do His good pleasure.

Must our faith be accompanied by good works in order to be a truly saving faith? Yes. Faith without works is dead, according to James. Yet, the very works that must accompany our faith are works that God has prepared beforehand for us to walk in (Eph. 2:10). They are works that God's Spirit in us guarantees will be present! They are works of obedience that result from God's sanctifying work in us. They are works that reflect that we have truly entrusted ourselves wholly to Christ for salvation and that we are not leaning on our own goodness to save us, but rather, the goodness of another by faith.

Do you have such faith this morning? Do you have a saving faith that has manifested itself in good works to God? If so, are you currently trusting fully in Christ for the completion of the work of salvation that He began when you first believed? Are you pursuing obedience to Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit?

You must believe, and when given the opportunity, your belief must manifest itself in good works.

Have you believed?