



Keep on Living Blamelessly Until the Lord Comes

Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not put out the Spirit's fire; do not treat prophecies with contempt. Test everything. Hold on to the good. Avoid every kind of evil. May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. Brothers, pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. (1 Thessalonians 5:12-28)

In the previous verses the Apostle Paul had made it clear that Jesus will return to judge the world at an unexpected time so we should always be ready. So what does a ready life look like? Paul closes this letter with a series of commands and instructions to keep our faith and actions focused on living a godly life until Christ should come. Paul rattles off so many commands, one right after the next, that admittedly it is nearly impossible to keep up. Each one of these sentences and phrases could encompass a whole sermon in and of themselves. So rather than try to speak to each one or cherry pick a few favorites, it might be most beneficial for our purposes of a brief devotion to focus instead on the general principles conveyed in these words.

For starters we see that God wants us to be as reverent and passionate about serving and respecting those inside the church—our spiritual leaders and fellow brothers and sisters in faith—just as much as those who are on the outside. In other words we are not to show favoritism to those inside the family and ignore those without. Instead, we are to “be patient with everyone” and “be kind to each other and everyone else.” This will show the unbelieving world around us that God’s grace and love in Christ create a shift across every spectrum of our lives.

Note also how Paul is not afraid to use absolutes: “be patient with EVERYONE... see to it that NOBODY pays back wrong for wrong... ALWAYS be kind to EVERYONE... be joyful ALWAYS, pray CONTINUALLY, give thanks in ALL circumstances... test EVERYTHING [and] avoid EVERY kind of evil.” When the spirit gains the upper hand in us and wrestles our sinful flesh into submission, our old self still insists on trying to make boundaries, limits, on how far our sanctification should go. It is always looking for exceptions and excuses for why godliness can’t be followed to the very end and to the highest degree. But the Lord allows us no such wiggle room. Scripture always communicates God’s will for us in absolutes because right and wrong are not products of culture or circumstance, but rather expressions of the immutable truth that radiates from the all-holy, almighty, and unchanging God.

But thankfully we Christians don't have to put up the pretense that we humans are good enough and strong enough to carry out God's perfect design on our own, because we aren't. The sinful nature that we've inherited from our first parents has so weakened us that every time we rely on our own abilities to do good it is a recipe for certain disaster. It is only because God has put his Spirit in our hearts through baptism that we are able to struggle and strive and cooperate with the Lord, albeit in great weakness. Paul concludes this section by reminding us that it is God alone who gets the credit for any holy works that happen in our lives. "May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through." He is responsible not only for giving us the power to follow his will, he also purifies our hearts through faith in the blood of Jesus so that our sinful selfish motives are washed clean "through and through." Through Jesus and his Spirit's working within he will keep us blameless until we see our Lord coming on the clouds. We have his promise that HE is faithful to the very end and will fulfill his eternal plan of rescuing us.

And so Paul closes this letter and we close this devotional series just as we had begun: with the grace of God in Jesus Christ, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." Christ is coming soon and then all that he has done for us—his forgiveness, his victory over death, his finding us and keeping us in faith, his perfect holiness and the gift of endless glorified life with God will be ours completely and forever. All by his grace.

Prayer: Precious Savior, keep us in your love and power so that we live faithful and holy lives to your glory while being sanctified and kept in your grace until life eternal. Amen.