

## Hebrews 13:18-25

### Appropriating a Rich Benediction

*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.*

As Paul brings his epistle to a close he bestows upon his readers one of the richest benedictions in all of Scripture. A benediction, simply put, is a prayer in which God's blessing is invoked upon a people. And since we have this benediction recorded for us and inspired and preserved, we can say the same thing about this benediction that I've often said about the prayers of the Bible – they show you beyond all doubt the will of God for your lives.

This is why you need to utilize the prayers of the Bible in your own prayer lives. Praying doesn't have to be a hit or miss kind of thing that we often make so far as the will of God is concerned. There is a way to pray in the will of God with complete assurance that you're praying in the will of God and the way you do that is to utilize the prayers that are recorded and preserved for us in Scripture.

The Psalms, especially, can be utilized to that end. Learn to pray the Psalms. Let them guide you in how you worship and petition God. I know I've shared with you what Dr. Cairns shared with his congregation a number of times how he made it his practice to pray through a Psalm a day. This is a good practice and one that can guide you in such a way that you're praying in God's will.

Now when we come to this benediction at the end of this epistle to the Hebrews, I think it's good to see it in its' setting. Paul's arguments are done. He has been striving to prove to the Hebrew believers that they need to go on with Christ. It wasn't time to give up on Christ it was time, rather, to go on with Christ. And so we've seen throughout this epistle how Paul's desire for the Hebrews to go on with Christ is manifested over and over again through his arguments for the superiority of Christ.

He is the brightness of his Father's glory. He is seated at the right hand of God. He is better than the angels. He is greater than Moses. He is superior to the Levitical priests. His sacrifice of himself is greater than all those Old Testament animal sacrifices that could never take away sin.

As we near the completion of our studies of this epistle I hope you've been able to come away with a higher estimation of the glory of your Savior. And I hope you've been able to come away with deeper appreciation of the greatness of his salvation. Now Paul's arguments are completed. There's a sense in which he could say – *What more can I say?* We serve a great Savior and are subjects of a great King. You must, therefore, believe in him. You must, by faith, do what a great cloud of witnesses have done before you which is to cleave to him and never let go of him.

Having presented his arguments and in a sense delivered his burden, it is time now, in closing, for Paul to express his desire to God for them. It's as if Paul is saying – *here is how I pray for you – here is what I want God to do for you*. I want him to work in you and work through you in such a way that you are perfected in every good work. Far from desiring that you forsake him, I want you to serve and enjoy and glorify him.

What a blessing, then, that such a benediction has been inspired and preserved for us. You may make the application of this benediction to your own souls by hearing it not so much as a desire of Paul for his Jewish brethren, but you may take it to be the Holy Spirit's personal desire for you. And it becomes your part, then, to lift your hands to receive such a benediction which is an outward expression of the spiritual exercise of opening your heart to it.

Here, indeed, is a manifestation of Christ himself knocking on the door of your heart, calling upon you to open your heart to the glorious truths that express God's will for your life in this benediction. Listen to it again and as you hear it open your heart to receive it - *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.*

That you may open your hearts the more in order to receive this benediction, I want to bring to your attention a simple and practical lesson in which I want to raise and answer the following question:

## How Do We Receive and Appropriate This Rich Benediction?

Consider with me first of all that if you would receive and appropriate this rich benediction:

### I. You Must Understand Its Essence

You have in this benediction some tremendous statements about God and about Christ. God is the God of peace. Christ is that great shepherd of the sheep. We also have a statement that speaks to us of the work that was done by God toward Christ. It was God that raised him from the dead. We also have one the greatest statements in all the New Testament that pertains to the grounds for every blessing we receive from God. It is *through the blood of the everlasting covenant*.

That statement is a study in itself and could undoubtedly occupy our minds and hearts for weeks and months and perhaps even years. Now I point out these statements about God and about Christ here because there is a sense in which we have to set aside these statements, only temporarily, in order to get to the heart or the essence of this exhortation.

If you would care to analyze it in a simple sentence form then you would have to say that the subject of the sentence is God – the God of peace, the God that brought Christ from the

grave – simply put – God. And the object of the sentence is *you*. God make *you* perfect in every good work. There it is in a nutshell. This benediction, simply put, is a prayer for God to make you perfect in every good work. The phrase *make you perfect* is a single word in Greek which means literally *to render, to fit, to complete*. This definition has led translators of other English versions to translate the word *equip*. *May God equip you in every good thing to do his will*.

What does this benediction in its essence teach us, then? It teaches us very plainly that God's will for your life is that you do good works for his glory. You could say that he saved you for that express purpose. This is exactly what Paul writes in Titus 2:14 where, referring to Christ he writes that *Christ gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works*.

We know, of course, that salvation is not by works. We could never earn salvation. But we know with equal clarity that God has saved us for a very specific purpose and that purpose is that you might be engaged in good works – that you might be indeed zealous of good works. The word *zealous* means *burning with zeal*.

Now if this verse comes to your mind and heart the same way it came to my mind and heart then your thought will be – how dreadfully short I fall of such a standard! Think about it for a moment – good works? Don't you find yourself inclined to admit that whenever you think of good works you think of them negatively? In other words you think of them in terms of what is not and could not ever gain salvation? And because salvation is by grace through faith and not of works, don't you find yourself quite content to put works out of your mind altogether so you can bask in the grace of God instead?

Such thinking, I'm afraid, is selfish thinking. It's governed by the wrong notion that the blessings of salvation were meant to terminate on you. It wrongly suggests that you are to be a recipient and nothing more. This is not, however, the case. The blessings of God were not meant to terminate on you. They were meant to flow through you. This is why we sing *Channels only, blessed Master, But with all Thy wondrous power Flowing through us, Thou canst use us Every day and every hour*.

This is the essence of this benediction, then – that God means for you to be engaged in every good work to do his will. But before this clear expression of God's will becomes a burden too heavy to bear or appears to set a standard too high to meet, would you note from the benediction the truth that God will equip you for the task at hand. *The God of peace...make you perfect in every good work to do his will* – or as another version reads – *Now may the God of peace...equip you in every good thing to do his will*.

You know, of course, that you are not sufficient in yourself to do the will of God. It's good to know, therefore, that God will not call you to anything that he doesn't first equip you to do. He will not lay upon you a burden that you can't bear. Christ himself said that his yoke is easy and his burden is light.

So before you make this benediction a millstone that will cause you to sink you should realize that God takes it upon himself to equip his people to do his will. And this leads to

my next consideration from the text. We've seen the essence of the benediction. If you would receive it and appropriate it:

## II. You Must Know How it Works

Verse 21, you could say, shows us the process of this benediction. Note again what we read in that verse: *Now the God of peace... Make you perfect in every good work to do his will*, there's the aim or the essence of the benediction. What follows shows how this aim is accomplished: *working in you that which is well pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom [be] glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Underscore that phrase *working in you*. This is what will equip you for every good work. This is what will motivate you to every good work. It is God working in you. God, the Holy Spirit, actively involved in the process of your sanctification. And how does the Holy Spirit work in you? What exactly should you look for the Holy Spirit to do in your heart?

This is where the formula enters again that you have heard from me in previous studies – the formula that shows you the relationship between theology and practice. And I hope you've noticed – indeed I hope you cultivate the spiritual awareness to note whenever you come across a passage in the Bible that is rich in theology. We such a passage in these two verses that make up this benediction.

Look again at the theology or the statements we find about God and about Christ in these verses. He is the God of peace. He is the God of power. He raised Christ from the dead. And Christ is that great shepherd of the sheep. And Christ is the One who shed his blood for our sins. He is the One who entered into an eternal covenant with his Father in eternity past.

Remember, now, that we're thinking in terms of how the Holy Spirit works in our hearts to equip us to do the will of God. How does he work? What does he do? The answer is found in the theology of these verses. He works in our hearts to bring us the peace that the God of peace has provided for us. Why is God, in this benediction called the God of peace? The answer is, of course, that he is the God of peace because he has made the way of peace for us.

We have not always been at peace with you God. We came into this world as rebels against God. We were at war with God and he with us. But listen now to the words of Col. 1:19-22: *For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven. And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled In the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight.*

Here is your peace – made through the blood of his cross. Here is your peace – being reconciled to God. Here is your peace – the assurance that Christ will present you holy and unblameable and unproveable in his sight. He is able to make such a presentation

because he has borne your sins and clothed you in his righteousness. Do you begin to see how the Holy Spirit equips you to every good work to do God's will? He begins by bringing peace to your heart. We can't possibly begin to serve God without this peace. If you don't have this peace then your service will be a burden. You'll feel a weight that will make you feel more like a slave than a son.

So the Holy Spirit equips you by ministering to you a peace that passes all understanding, a peace that keeps you stable even in the midst of turmoil, a peace that causes your heart to be filled to overflowing because you know that God, on account of Christ, is with you and for you. This is the beginning of the Spirit's work in your heart. He will also illuminate your heart to the truth that Christ is yours and you are his. Notice the words of v. 20 *our Lord Jesus*. Don't you love that possessive pronoun *our*. It's our Lord Jesus that is risen from the dead. It's our Lord Jesus that is that great shepherd of the sheep.

And because he is that great shepherd of the sheep you know with assurance in your heart that he will lead you and he will guide you and he will protect and provide for you. He leads you into green pastures beside still waters. He leads you in the paths of righteousness. He is the one that restores your soul. He is the one that can even prepare a table before you in the midst of your enemies and will be with you to guide you even when you descend into the valley of the shadow of death.

What's more, the Spirit works in you the truth that Christ shed his blood for you. You, therefore, belong to him. You were given to him in that eternal covenant. The evidence that you were given to him is found in your willingness to receive him. The Spirit, then, brings to your remembrance all that the blood of the everlasting covenant encompasses. This is the grounds for every blessing bestowed on you. This is the assurance of his love and loyalty to you.

You begin to see, then, how the Spirit works in your heart to equip you for every good work. Simply put – he ministers spiritual illumination to your soul so that these precious truths about God and about Christ become more than just a part of your creed. They become the reality of your spiritual perception.

This is the Spirit's work in you and the way the Spirit's work in you becomes a work that's wrought through you is found in v. 22 *And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation*. Take to heart the word of God so that you will hold fast your profession and you will come boldly to the throne of grace and you will pursue holiness and you will consider one another to provoke to love and good works. You will do these things because your heart will be filled with the love of God and the joy of salvation and the peace of God that passes understanding. You will be driven, not with the cruelty and bondage of servitude but with your heart filled with gratitude.

So there's a work wrought in you by the Spirit of God which amounts to the Holy Spirit ministering Christ to your soul. This in turn leads to works wrought through you as you're motivated by the love of Christ and all that is encompassed in that eternal covenant of

grace that was ratified by the blood of Christ. There is one more point that needs to be made regarding this benediction. We've seen what it is in its essence – we've seen something of how it works. Would you consider with me finally that if we would receive and appropriate this benediction:

### III. We Must Align Ourselves with its Aim

We have seen already under the first point of this message that the essence of this benediction is good works on your part. *The God of peace...make you perfect in every good work to do his will.*

If you would align yourself with this benediction, then, you must devote yourself to good works in the will of God. This is a point that James emphasizes in his epistle. Faith without works is dead being alone, he writes in James 2:17. *Shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works (2:18).*

What this means is that you must overcome and keep subdued the notion that is too easy to settle upon which is that salvation is meant to terminate on you. You must rise to the challenge that this benediction presents by aligning yourselves to good works. I posted a devotional on our website a couple of weeks ago that was based on a text from 1Cor. 16:15 *they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints.* There's a good example of aligning yourself with the benediction of our text.

That verse in 1Corinthians kind of jumps off the page at you with the mention of that word *addicted*. We think of addictions negatively when we think of drug addicts or we think of alcoholics – those who have become slaves to their vices. Here in the text of 1Corinthians, however, is an addiction well worth cultivating – addicting ourselves to the ministry of the saints.

An addict is a person who must have that which he's addicted to. He can't live a day without resorting to his vice. Well, how about a Christian who is so filled with God's Spirit that he can't finish a day without serving other Christians or he can't finish a day without speaking a word for Christ? This is a good addiction for a Christian to espouse – this addiction of ministry.

This is the sort of thing that aligns itself with the benediction of our text. Oh that our minds may become geared to how we may serve instead of only how we may receive. I can't deny that I find myself convicted and humbled when I think in terms of what I've received and compare it to how much I've given. Again, if I could borrow an expression from James epistle – he writes in 3:10 *My brethren, these things ought not so to be.*

But not only must we align our aim with the text as it pertains to good works but we must align ourselves to the aim of the benediction regarding our sanctification. Notice in v. 21 that God works in us *that which is well pleasing in his sight.* Isn't this tantamount to saying that God works conformity to Christ in your life?

Christ, after all, is well pleasing in God's sight. *This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased,* we hear the Father say of his Son. So if God is working in you that which is

well pleasing in his sight then I think it's fair to say that God is conforming you to the image of his Son. God is working in you to be more Christ-like. You should, therefore, align yourself with that aim and pledge before God that you will strive to be more like Christ.

It might be worth mentioning here that when it comes to your sanctification you do play an active role. Sanctification is not like justification. In our justification we do not play an active role. We simply receive it by faith. But in sanctification the Spirit of God works along with us. He works in us to will and to do and it is our part, then, to work out our salvation.

Now when you take these two things together – aiming for good works and aiming for conformity to Christ, I think it could be said that you are aligning yourself with the ultimate aim of God in salvation, which is the glory of God. *To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen* we read in v. 21.

You will find yourself, then, aligning yourself with your chief aim when you align yourself with this benediction. Remember your shorter catechism question #1 What is the chief end of man? Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

We can glorify him when we receive and appropriate this benediction.