

A Life Worthy of God...

1 Thessalonians 2:9-13

As I began preparing for this message I thought of a recent funeral that I attended. It was a friend of my father and mother who lived to be 101 years of age. As I sat at her service I began to think of what made her so special in the eyes of her family, church and community. She was mother, mentor, and faithful servant. She was a doer, and not just a hearer of the word of God.

Paul exhorts the converts to put the gospel they have heard into practical service: "lead a life worthy of God, who calls you" (v. 12). We are immediately reminded of the words of Jesus: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father" (Matt. 7:21). As James put it, "Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers" (Jas. 1:22), and "faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead" (Jas. 2:17). Obviously James did not mean that our works earn our salvation, but he is very clear that if we say we have faith, there should be some evidence (works) to verify our claim.

To live a life worthy of our God, we must be totally committed and faithful, as Paul said to Timothy: "I have kept the faith" (2 Tim. 4:7), or, as *The Living Bible* paraphrase renders this verse, "I have kept true to Jesus." Phillips Brooks, a Boston preacher of the nineteenth century, elaborated on that idea. One of his biographers tells us that he meditated on that verse of Paul's for a long time and then concluded that no faith can be kept without obedience. We are familiar with the old, but true, cliché that we are called not to be successful but to be obedient.

In urging his "spiritual children" to be worthy, faithful servants, Paul was insisting that their labor should not be slovenly or halfhearted. Perhaps you have heard it said that if you go halfway with me and I go halfway with you, the world

will be a better place. Perhaps you have used that slogan yourself. You can look all your life for that verse in Scripture: "You should go halfway." It is not there! What *is* there is the forceful call of Jesus, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me" (Mark 8:34). The cross is not a halfway thing. It is when we take up our cross that we are truly able to "lead a life worthy of God" (v. 12).

Taking up the cross, leading a life worthy of God, is the highest of all incentives by which Paul charged the Thessalonians. It is imperative to live empowered by the Holy Spirit. One section of the Pentateuch is called the Holiness Code because of a recurring refrain: "You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy" (Lev. 19:2). In the New Testament, holiness is a gift from God: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you" (Acts 1:8). As the people of God live by the gift of that power, we are enabled to display the character of God. By faith the Thessalonian Christians were already heirs of God's kingdom and glory. Therefore, in that relationship with God they were to lead lives of holiness worthy of that heritage and of the God who called them to share in it. **William N. Jackson**

Paul called us to be pure, upright, and blameless, allowing ourselves to be sanctified. This is the act of setting apart for a special purpose, and we are made holy by fulfilling our purpose. It is important that we accept this calling and act accordingly. Grace makes a difference in our lives, and we are called to be different from this world as we are set aside to carry on a different task. We need to love people for who they are and try our best to do what is holy. This is a difficult calling to fulfill, but God's word is at work within us and can transform us to live a holy life. To be worthy of God, we must live in intimacy with God, which is secured through Christ. Jesus is God, and we can foster a fellowship with God through Jesus.

When God enters our lives, we will be transformed. We can then help transform and change the world for God. According to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Christ is the form, and we are to be transformed like Christ. Formation comes only by being drawn into the form of Jesus Christ. This is not achieved by our efforts to become like Jesus, but when the form of Jesus Christ itself works upon us in such a manner that it molds our form into his likeness (Gal. 4:19). Christ alone shapes people into conformity with himself as a way to transform the world. It is not Christian people who shape the world with their ideas; it is Christ. **Grace J I-Sun Kim**

Paul stressed, like a father, he had been laboring night and day. He was also laboring, "urging and encouraging [them] and pleading that [they] live a life worthy of God, who calls [them] into his own kingdom and glory" (v. 12). In other words, Paul was inviting his children and us to receive the glorious relationship into which God had called them and has called us.

Ways that we can live lives worthy of God is to live as one who is pure, upright, blameless, devout, selfless, and just. Live as one who gives guidance and instruction. It is always of great value to identify our spiritual parents, to see how they have faithfully instructed and influenced us. When Sidney Poitier came to the United States, his first job was as a houseboy at a hotel in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania. Only one person, an older man at work, took time to help the young aspiring actor learn the nuances, colloquialisms, and customs of Poitier's new homeland. On the *Tonight Show*, after receiving several major awards, he told Johnny Carson that while he could not remember the older man's name, there was something of that man in everything he did. It is equally important for us to remember those we know by name and those whom we do not—parents, mentors, teachers, colleagues, and encouragers who are a part of everything we do.

As believers, we should pray regularly for that gift of faith and power in the Holy Spirit. Dag Ham-marskjöld, in his book *Markings*, has just the prayer to help

us seek that gift and power: "Give us pure hearts that we may see Thee; a humble heart that we may hear Thee; a heart of love that we may serve Thee; a heart of faith that we may live Thee." God's answer to these prayers captures the full essence of today's passage. **William N. Jackson**

Our honest prayer is that God will welcome us with the words: "Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into my rest" because we have lived worthy of God's call on our lives.

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