

Ultimate Perfection.

Text: 1 Thess. 5:14-24

Suggested Hymns:

485, 345, 357, 285, 494

- 1) To Reach Ultimate Perfection
We Must Suppress Evil.
- 2) To Reach Ultimate Perfection
We Must Follow That Which Is Good.
- 3) We Must Trust That God Will Do For Us
All That We Cannot Do For Ourselves.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Thessalonians 5:14-24, ***14 Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all.***

15 See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all. 16 Rejoice always, 17 pray without ceasing, 18 in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not despise prophecies. 21 Test all things; hold fast what is good. 22 Abstain from every form of evil.

23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

The close of the Church Year is fast approaching. At this time of year we consider the last things and the end of time and the joy of eternal life in heaven. Today is the 3rd last Sunday of the Church Year. Over these 3 remaining Sundays we will in turn consider ultimate perfection, ultimate perseverance and finally ultimate victory.

There is a saying that goes, *“All’s well that ends well.”* Experience teaches us to consider the final outcome of anything which we are doing.

We need to ask the question, *Where will the course which we are following take us in the end?*

If the habitual drunkard could see the end of the road, he might stop in his course and turn around. Napoleon won many wars, but in the end he came to Waterloo and a miserable defeat. Hence always “look to the end” or “consider the end.”

What lies at the end of the road of our Christian life? The Scriptures answer: Perfection, absolute perfection.

On Judgement Day we shall be holy, without sin, and completely sanctified. It is a blessed and joyful thing for a Christian to look to the end of the road.

But we are so often tempted to turn aside from the road that leads to that goal. This fact prompts us to ask: *What Shall We Do to Reach Ultimate Perfection?* This is our theme for today. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. To Reach Ultimate Perfection

We Must Suppress Evil.

There is a negative side to the Christian life. Eight of the Ten Commandments are worded negatively.

You shall have no other gods. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain. You shall not kill. You shall not commit adultery. You shall not steal. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour. You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his manservant, or his maidservant, or his cattle, or anything that is your neighbour's.

We are evil by nature and therefore we must strive to suppress all evil inclinations.

Our text says ***warn those who are unruly***. In almost every congregation there are those people who will not live according to the commandments. They do not strive to conform themselves to Christian principles. They have turned aside from the goal; they are headed the wrong way.

If we are not to lose ultimate perfection, we must follow after holiness now. We read in Philippians 3:12, ¹² ***Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.***

We are to warn those who are going the wrong way. This is the duty not only of the pastor but of every member. Members are often in a better position to do so.

Scripture tells us how to warn an erring brother in Matthew 18:15–17, ¹⁵ *“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. ¹⁶ But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ ¹⁷ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.*

Our text continues, ¹⁵ *See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone.* Our old Adam longs to “get even” but we must suppress this desire. It is not a holy or a godly ambition. God does not deal that way with us. He is patient and long-suffering. He speaks words that will work repentance, so that He can forgive. He makes His sun to shine upon the good and on the evil. In the same way we must we deal with our fellow-men if we want to be godly.

We read in Romans 12:19–21, ¹⁹ *Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰ Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.” ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.¹*

We must repay evil with good as we learn from 1 Peter 3:8–9, ⁸ *Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; ⁹ not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing.*

If we cannot lead people to repentance, we must leave them to God. *“Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.*

Remember the Philistines, as we read in Ezekiel 25:15–17, ¹⁵ *‘Thus says the Lord GOD: “Because the Philistines dealt vengefully and took vengeance with a spiteful heart, to destroy because of the old hatred,” ¹⁶ therefore thus says the Lord GOD: I will stretch out My hand against the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethites and destroy the remnant of the seacoast. ¹⁷ I will execute great*

vengeance on them with furious rebukes; and they shall know that I am the LORD, when I lay My vengeance upon them.””

Our text has more to say on this subject, ²² *Abstain from every form of evil.* Paul does not list all the evils here. Rather he emphasises “abstain.” When we fail in our struggle for perfection, it is usually not because we did not know the evil but because we did not suppress it.

Compare this to the weeds in your garden. If we expect a good crop of vegetables or an abundance of beautiful flowers, we must hoe out the weeds. How foolish is the farmer who neglected his crop and then found puny, withered kernels of grain at the time of harvest!

True, we will not overcome all sins. But we dare not permit them to gain supremacy; we must grow in godliness, gradually overcoming sins. *“First the blade, then the ear, then the full grain in the ear.”*² When Jesus said that, He was speaking about gradual growth of the Christian in faith, and in fruitfulness which is called sanctification. However, Sanctification is partly negative.

The modern theory of “self-expression” ignores the facts. It teaches us to bring out the supposed good within us, ignoring entirely the inherent evil. It also ignores Scripture, which teaches us that even Christians must deal with evil.

We read in *Luther’s Small Catechism* that *“The Old Adam is to be drowned by daily contrition (sorrow for sins) and repentance (faith), by which we resist and overcome evil desires.”*³ Otherwise we shall *“quench the Spirit,”*⁴ who will leave us to our destruction.

2. To Reach Ultimate Perfection We Must Follow That Which Is Good.

Our text says, *always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.* The Christian life is not all negative, is not concerned only with prohibitions. To every commandment there is a positive side. **“You shall not kill.”** This means ... *“to help and befriend him in every bodily need.”* Likewise with the other commandments.

We are to fear, love, and trust God above anything else. We are to fear and love God so that we call on Him in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. We are to

fear and love God so that in matters of sex our words and conduct are pure and honourable, and husband and wife love and respect each other.

We are to fear and love God so that we help our neighbour to improve and protect his property and means of making a living. We are to fear and love God so that we defend our neighbour, speak well of him, and explain his actions in the kindest way. We are to fear and love God so that we always help our neighbour keep what is his. We are to fear and love God so that we encourage our neighbour's wife and his workers to remain loyal.

The best defensive is a good offensive. Keep busy following that which is good, and we shall not be so often tempted with evil. What is this "good"?

Our text says firstly, ¹⁶ ***Rejoice always***. Have a happy frame of mind, based on our knowledge of God's grace in Christ. Bitterness is a temptation to many sins. Joy is characteristic of the saints in heaven. We long for the joy of heaven. Let us pursue that attitude now by remembering God's goodness.

Secondly, ¹⁷ ***pray without ceasing***. It is difficult to be joyful at all times. Prayer will help us, giving us confidence in God's unceasing efforts on our behalf. It is difficult to follow that which is good. Prayer changes things.

God will give us His Holy Spirit, who will create in us the desire for that which is good. In praying, let us not forget what our text says, ¹⁸ ***in everything give thanks***. That, too, is a characteristic of the saints made perfect, whose example we "follow after."

Thirdly, ***be patient with all***. We are to follow that which is good in relation to our fellow-men. We warn them, but we do not expect them to become perfect at once.

As long as we are in the world, we all "***fall short of the glory of God.***"⁵ St. Paul confesses in Romans 7:19, ¹⁹ ***For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice.***

We must patiently wait for growth in sanctification in others, just as God (who is perfect) patiently waits for growth in us.

Fourthly, ***uphold the weak***. We are to support the weak. They may be weak in strength, or weak in heart. Do not let them become despondent and think that they have fallen from grace. We read in Hebrews 12:12-13, ¹² ***Therefore***

strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees,*¹³ *and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.

To despise the weak is heathenish and to discourage them is satanic. But to encourage them is saint-like.

Many years ago the then king of England attended a banquet held in his honour during a visit to America. During the banquet he repeatedly referred to a little slip of paper which he took from his pocket. Questioned, he replied, smiling: “Oh, that’s a list of things which I must not do.”

We Christians, too, have a list of things which we must not do. But let us beware of making Christianity only a negative thing. Let us be positive. Rejoice, pray, grow, and help one another to grow in knowledge and service.

3. We Must Trust That God Will Do For Us All That We Cannot Do For Ourselves.

Who is able to keep the positive and negative requirements of the Law? No one! But God has not left us to ourselves in this matter.

God has called us to be saints. Our text tells us that ²⁴ ***He who calls you is faithful.*** The plan of salvation, which includes ultimate perfection, is God’s plan. It is God who sent Jesus, God who laid on Him the sins of the world, God who has preserved the Gospel, and God who has called us to faith.

Will not God complete in us that which He has begun? He certainly will as we read in Philippians 1:6, ***He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ.***

Our text continues, ²³ ***Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely.*** By faith in the blood of Jesus God takes away every sin. By His Holy Spirit He will also help us to overcome Satan, the world, and our flesh.

The final benediction of our text is, ***May your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*** By faith we shall be kept blameless. When Jesus comes, we shall be changed. ⁵³ ***For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.***⁶

We shall be made what we never were before, perfect. We shall be like Jesus.⁷ God made Adam and Eve perfect originally. He will remake us in His own image on the great Day of the Lord. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ See also Deuteronomy 32:35, Hebrews 10:30

² Mark 4:30

³ *Luther's Small Catechism*, Baptism part 4, Q 256

⁴ 1 Thessalonians 5:19

⁵ Romans 3:23

⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:53–54

⁷ 1 John 3:2