

## **Equipped To Obey**

Hebrews 13:20-21

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It is so good as always to see you here, to worship our Savior and to sit under His inspired word. We are back in Hebrews, if you would turn to Hebrews 13.

We have just this Sunday and next, Lord willing to finish this wonderful book that we have been studying now for a couple of years. It has been a wonderful journey through this great letter.

I do want to mention this morning to keep praying for our kids that are away at camp. We are thankful for those serving with them. If you are wondering why it is a little lighter in attendance today, there is like 65 people gone to camp. So be in prayer for them as they are hearing the word this morning too.

Today we are in Hebrews 13, specifically verses 20 and 21. As I was preparing this week, I was thinking about the different inventions and machines that God has allowed us in His grace to build that are a benefit to human society.

These inventions are a testimony to God's image within us. God is glorified when we maximize His creation and steward it well. It is intriguing to think about the fact that all of these things that we use on a daily basis, these very sophisticated machines began simply as raw materials in God's created world.

Take for example just the computer. Its physical components are made up of what were once raw materials that had to be harvested from the earth usually by digging different metals or rubber or plastic materials that had to be harvested and then melted down and shaped into a certain form. Then those usable parts had to be meticulously fitted together to create this new object that we now call a computer.

But even still, that computer is useless unless it has a power source. So God's even allowed us to create or to invent, rather, from His creation, this electricity and use it to now power that machine. So once plugged in, we might say it is fully equipped to do what it was designed to do.

In the same way, we as human beings are made with a certain design. God created us with the end of glorifying Him and enjoying Him forever. And yet we are wholly incapable of doing that apart from His help because of our sin.

What we need is a similar transformation. We need, first of all, to be saved, to be regenerated, made new, a completely new creation in Christ. But even then, we are still in need because we need to be filled with His Spirit and His strength and His enabling to be able to be what it is that He has called us to be.

But by God's grace, He's done exactly that in Christ. He has redeemed us and made us new. But even then, He does not simply make us a new creation and give us commands on how to live and send us out to do that in our own strength.

But He equips us and empowers us to do the things He calls us to do. And that's going to be the great message from our passage this morning in Hebrews 13, verses 20 to 21. But let me just remind us quickly of where we've come from.

**The Superiority of Christ** is the grand theme that stands over this entire letter. Even today, we will see a reminder of the fact that He is the chief Shepherd. He is over all. He's the great Shepherd, and He's superior to every aspect of the Old Covenant and everything in existence.

Then we have been studying now these applications of the superiority of Christ in chapter 13, these practices that should be ours if we are those who follow this sovereign and exalted Lord, Jesus Christ. Eleven practices to be specific.

If we are in Christ, we should practice **brotherly love, intentional hospitality, compassionate care, marital honor, contented trust, faithful imitation** of the leaders who have gone before us. We're to **reject error and false doctrine**. We're to live lives filled with **sacrificial praise** and **sacrificial obedience**. We're to offer **intentional submission** to faithful church leaders. And then last week, as we saw, we're to **faithfully pray** for church leaders and for one another. All of those eleven practices grow out of our commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ, the superior Lord Jesus Christ over every aspect of the Old Covenant.

But how can we as sinful people ever even hope to do those eleven things or any of the other commands in Scripture? Well, the author reminds us where our hope and where our help comes from this morning in this great benediction. What we have in verses 20 and 21 is what we call a benediction. And then next week in verses 22 to 25, simply his closing remarks.

But let's read this wonderful benediction together. Hebrews 13:20 and 21:

*"20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, even Jesus our Lord, 21 equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."*

The simple message of this wonderful benediction is this, that **God equips believers to accomplish His will through Christ for His glory**. God equips believers to accomplish His will through Christ for His glory. And in these two verses, as I've said, we have what we call a benediction. That simply means a prayer of blessing. It is calling upon the Lord to do good to the one being prayed for.

The Bible is actually filled with examples of benedictions. The Old Testament and the New Testament. Almost all of the New Testament letters, for example, end with some kind of benediction.

The most famous benediction in the Bible probably is one that comes from the Old Testament. In Numbers 6:24-26:

*"25 The Lord bless you, and keep you; The Lord make His face shine on you, And be gracious to you; 26 The Lord lift up His countenance on you, And give you peace."*

But this benediction here at the end of Hebrews is truly a masterpiece. Really, on the surface, it's actually quite simple. We could summarize the entire prayer request in just a few words. Essentially, this is what he prays for: May God equip you to do his will. That is the summarization of the prayer. May God equip you to do his will. And yet bracketing that simple request on both sides are rich theological truths and statements that fill that out for us. And how that equipping is going to take place.

Really, this benediction is a call to remember and to apply everything we've learned in Hebrews. It acts as a kind of capstone to the letter as a whole. And yet even more than that, it's more glorious because what's happening in this benediction is not the author calling on us to by our own strength obey all of these things. Instead, he's calling upon God Himself to equip and empower and strengthen us to obey all of these things. There's a great instruction for us on how the whole process of sanctification works from beginning to end.

Really, he's praying that we would grasp the implications of the superiority of Christ and then be equipped by God's grace to do these practices he's outlined in chapter 13. So to help us get our hands around this passage, we're going to break it into two parts. The first is what we'll call **The Reminder: God's Work of Redemption**. God's work of redemption, this is verse 20. He begins:

*"Now the God of peace..."*

He gives us this title for God, *the God of peace*. And I would say a better translation would be to add the word "may" after the word "now". *Now, may the God of peace*. The main verb that we're going to come to actually doesn't appear until verse 21. It's the verb "equip". And it's used in a way that expresses a wish or a desire, a prayer request. So it's appropriate to say *"now may the God of peace equip you."*

But before he gets to that primary verb, look at all of these truths in verse 20 that are sort of front-loading this prayer request. First of all, consider the title he gives to God itself, the God of peace. Not God's peace, but the God of peace. Here, specifically referring to God the Father. And he will get to God the Son in verse 21, or at the end of verse 20 rather.

The right way to think about God is to think of Him as a God of peace. That's not to minimize that He is holy and He is just and He will exercise His justice on those who refuse to repent and believe the gospel. But it is to highlight the fact that throughout the scriptures, God defines Himself as a compassionate and gracious God. A God of peace.

We know that from several things. Even just looking back to the beginning when man fell into sin. There in the garden in Genesis 3. God does not immediately wipe them from the face of the planet or destroy all of creation and start over again.

Instead, what we have in verse 15 of chapter 3 of Genesis is this plan of redemption beginning to unfold in which God will do the unthinkable. The thing that we could not do, God will do. That plan of redemption is not a payment plan in which we pay back to God what we owe. But rather, it is a payment plan in which God Himself will pay the price. His own Son would redeem us from our sin. That's how we know from the very earliest days of creation. Our God is a God of peace. A reconciling God. A rescuing God.

God has purchased the price of our redemption with the blood of His own Son. And he goes on now to remind us of this God of peace by describing Him in this next phrase. He is now the God of peace *“who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep”*

It was Jesus clearly who died for our sins on the cross. Obviously, He is a God of peace. But being one with the Father and one with the Spirit, the Father too is a God of peace. And he reminds us of God's act towards our redemption. One of those acts of raising Jesus from the dead.

Now let's consider this. How does the Father raising the Son from the dead connect to this title, the God of peace? And even more than that, how does all of this tie together to the larger theme of the superiority of Christ? Let's begin by answering the second of those questions. We see the superiority of Christ sort of reemphasized here in the title given to Jesus:

*“20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep...”*

Notice, not just the Shepherd, but the great Shepherd. There are other people in Scripture referred to by the title of shepherd. We know pastors and elders are called to shepherd the flock of God. In the Old Testament often, particularly in the prophets, their leaders of Israel are called shepherds. Sometimes in the negative sense because they're failing to shepherd well. But others in Scripture are referred to as shepherds.

But this is no ordinary shepherd. This is the great Shepherd. That is, He's a shepherd all on His own in a different category of a different nature. The great Shepherd, the Shepherd above all shepherds. This is the one who's known as the good Shepherd in John 10:11 and the chief Shepherd in 1 Peter 5:5. He is, of course, none other than the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is a way of reminding us yet again that He is superior above all. But how does this tie into specifically the title that God the Father is a God of peace? How does the resurrection tie into that? Well, we see that in the next phrase. We begin to piece this together. He says: *“20 Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant,”*

You see, the Father's resurrection of Jesus, the great Shepherd, is intricately connected to this New Covenant that we have studied throughout Hebrews. The New Covenant ratified by blood, the blood of Jesus Himself. This is why it surpasses the Mosaic Covenant. It's not a temporal covenant. He says here it's an eternal covenant purchased by the blood of Christ.

Remember, we see this in Hebrews 9:11-12:

*“11 But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; 12 and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.”*

There it is. Eternal redemption. Once and for all redemption. And this is the connection point that we're coming to now. How does the sacrificial death of Jesus connect to the resurrection of Jesus? How do both of these play into our justification?

Well, Paul describes this connection in Romans 4, verses 23-25. He's coming off of a section in Romans where he's talking about Abraham being justified by faith. So here in verse 23, he's coming off of that discussion:

*"23 Now not for his sake only (that is, not for Abraham's sake only) was it written that it was credited to him, 24 but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, (Now listen to verse 25) 25 He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification."*

Notice we have two things here. We have Jesus being delivered over for sin, that is crucified on the cross to pay for our sins. But then we have God the Father raising Jesus, and Paul says that resurrection was for our justification.

Now how do those two things tie together? Typically, when we think about being justified, by the way, the word justification is a reference to the fact that God has declared us to be righteous on the basis of faith. Not our own righteousness, but Jesus' righteousness credited to us on the basis of our faith. That's what we're talking about with justification. Normally when we talk about our justification, we think about the cross, and we should. But Paul says we should also think about the resurrection.

Now why? Why does the resurrection of Jesus play into our justification, and not just His substitutionary death on the cross? It is because the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the Father's affirmation. It is a public declaration from the Father that the payment that Jesus made on the cross to the Father was accepted. So that when Jesus says on the cross, *it is finished*, and then dies for our sins, it's as if the Father says amen by raising Him from the dead.

So we have these two public witnesses, Jesus on the cross dying for our sins, and the Father raising Him from the dead to say yes, His payment has been received in full, and it really has been finished. Sin has been done away with for all who are in Christ. And so in that sense, the resurrection ties into our justification, and it's because of that that he says here that God is a God of peace.

And he proves it by saying because he raised Jesus from the dead. That is affirming. Reconciliation has happened in His Son. This is a theological masterpiece. And just in case we miss who he's talking about, this great Shepherd of the sheep, he says it very clearly now at the end of verse 20, *even Jesus our Lord*. That's who He raised from the dead.

It was Jesus our Lord who secured this eternal covenant in His own blood. Notice, though, even in that short phrase, there's instruction for us on how we should think about Jesus. He says even Jesus our Lord. That's how we're to think of Him. He is our Lord, our Master, our God. You know, the Bible makes no separation between following Jesus as our Savior and following Jesus as our Lord. They are one and the same.

When Jesus says follow me, it's inclusive of both of those ideas. To come to Jesus, we have to come recognizing we are sinners who deserve His wrath for our sin and to recognize that only Jesus' substitutionary death is the payment sufficient to pay for our sin. But also to come to Jesus, we must come recognizing who He is as the God-man and therefore that He is Lord and He's worthy of our allegiance and He's worthy of our worship.

It is to humble ourselves before Him, confessing our sins and our need to be washed in His blood for forgiveness for salvation by grace through faith. By the way, let me just stop and say, is that true of you this morning? Have you come to know the Lord Jesus Christ? Have you confessed your sins, your need for forgiveness and have you confessed Jesus Christ is Lord? Paul says this actually is the proper response for one who is responding to Jesus.

Romans 10:9-10, you may have this one memorized:

*"9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation."*

And so it is that our God is a God of peace. He has shown that to us in raising the Son. The Son, the great Shepherd of the sheep has shown us He is a God of peace by dying for our sins, sealing this eternal covenant with His own blood. This is the reminder.

This is really a climactic statement on the superiority of Christ. It's as if all of Hebrews has led us to this moment so that when we now hear that Jesus is the great Shepherd of the sheep, we know exactly what that means. The One high and lifted up, the priest above all priests, the great high priest who intercedes for His people even now at the right hand of the Father.

But having given us that reminder, he now gets to his actual prayer request. All of that was just an appetizer. The point is really here in verse 21. This is the **Prayer Request** and it's **God's Work of Sanctification**. And so look with me at verse 21: Now may the God of peace *"equip you..."* That's the prayer request. May the God of peace *equip you*. The word "equip" is defined this way: It is "to cause to be in a condition to function well." It's used in many contexts to refer to believers being disciplined or maturing in their faith.

This reference in Luke 6:40 really makes the meaning clear. It says:

*"A pupil is not above his teacher; but everyone, after he has been fully trained (That is the same Greek word for equip. So everyone after he has been fully equipped, fully trained), will be like his teacher."*

This idea of being caused to be in a condition in which we function well. This is the author's primary prayer request. But before we get into sort of unpacking this, just notice a couple of things.

If you were with us last week, what was the author's command to these Christians for him? He asked them to pray, right? Pray for us. And now he turns right around in the very next verse and what is he doing for them? Praying. He's returning the favor and it's a glorious prayer.

But secondly, the content of his prayer should fill us immediately with encouragement and joy. This verse in verse 21 is one of the most encouraging verses in all of the Bible. I hope you'll agree by the time we're done studying it together.

And the reason for that is because the author reveals for us his thinking about our obedience and how it is that we will fulfill the things he's called us to do here in Hebrews throughout the book. You know, some Christians struggle when it comes to the commands

of Scripture because they have a hard time reconciling the idea that we're saved by grace through faith and yet there are all these commands in the Scripture that Christians are supposed to do and they struggle to mesh those two together. But the author's prayer here reveals that those two ideas are not in conflict and they're not in contradiction.

The Bible's clear from cover to cover that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone and sanctification is the process that begins right after salvation so that we are in this process of being made more and more like Christ, more and more holy. And sanctification is where these commands come to bear on our life. Not to add to our salvation but as a natural fruit of that salvation.

But here the author encourages us because this prayer is really about the inner workings of sanctification. How does it work? How do we actually mature in the faith? How do we grow in holiness and win the battle against sin? And what he reveals here for us in this prayer is that if we're going to make progress in sanctification, I mean even an inch, it's only going to be by the grace and strength of God. He reveals our need for God's help to grow.

The author knows that the commands he's just given them, those 11 practices, they're not going to be able to do those in their own strength. They're going to need the equipping of God, the strength of God, the power of God in their lives. Just like that computer, you can put all those pieces together and sit up there on your desk and type away. Nothing will happen if it's not equipped in the sense of that electricity being put in place to fill that computer.

Only by the equipping of God can any Christian ever hope to grow in sanctification. So how does that happen? How does this equipping take place? Well, if you look at the rest of verse 21, what we have here are **Four Descriptive Statements** that explain more fully how this equipping ministry of God happens in the life of the Christian. And each of these encourage us to give our effort towards obedience.

**Description Number One**, we're going to begin each of them the same way. **May the God of peace equip you... in every good thing.** May the God of peace equip you in every good thing. Now there's some debate about how this first descriptive statement is to be applied and it's because the Greek text is left open-ended. Literally it's translated this way: in every good. It ends with the word good and so we're left to piece together exactly what the meaning is. I think the ESV actually gets it right here. They translate it this way: *"May He equip you with everything good."*

Because I think the meaning here is the author's praying for God to graciously do an internal work by His Spirit to equip us with every gracious gift we need to succeed in sanctification. To give you the gifts, the strength, the wisdom, all of those internal good things that you need. That's what he's praying for. May God equip you with every good, everything good that you need to do what He's called you to do.

William Lane says it this way: "The line of thought is clear. May God Himself fill and support the community with every good grace, enabling them to do His will." That becomes even clearer as we march through these other descriptions.

**Description Number Two**, just taking that next part of verse 21. **May the God of peace equip you... to do His will.** May the God of peace equip you to do His will. Now this is the next verb in the verse, and it's a modifying verb helping to explain equip, this equipping ministry. What's He equipping us to do? To do the will of the Father. The Bible's clear that one of the distinguishing factors of a true person who has come to redeeming faith is their love for God evidenced in their obedience to His commands.

Take 1 John 5:1-5:

*"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of Him. <sup>2</sup> By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey His commandments. <sup>3</sup> For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.*

*<sup>4</sup> For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith. <sup>5</sup> Who is it that overcomes the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?*

Clearly there, to love God is to obey God.

Ephesians 2:8-9, this wonderful passage on salvation by grace:

*"<sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; <sup>9</sup> not as a result of works, so that no one may boast. (But verse 10) For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."*

And so you see the progression. We are saved by grace alone through faith alone, and yet salvation is never alone in the sense that it always produces new spiritual life on the other side of that salvation.

What we see here with this phrase, *to do His will*, is that sanctification, unlike salvation, is a cooperative process in the sense that we are called to give our effort towards sanctification. Salvation, we are dead in our sins. We have nothing to add. We cannot bring ourselves to God or offer some good gift to God, some good work that he would save us. We are wholly dependent. In sanctification, we are new creations. We are creations equipped by God, gifted by God, filled with the Holy Spirit, and we are called then, to give our effort towards obedience. That's highlighted here in this verb. May he *equip you...to do his will*.

You know, some Christians, I think, are tempted to think that the difference between salvation and sanctification is this. Salvation was all of God, and sanctification is all of me. This is not biblical. This is not the way the Bible describes sanctification. Biblically, here is the balance. Salvation is all of God. Sanctification requires me to give my maximum effort, but it is God who equips, gifts, strengthens, and causes me to bear fruit in the giving of that effort.

Paul, of course, says the same thing in Philippians 2:12-13:

*"<sup>12</sup> Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling, (That is to say, give your effort towards sanctification, but, verse 13) for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure."*



So this is the point. When we put these phrases together here, that He's equipping us in every good thing, all that we need to succeed, but we are to do the will of God. That's what the equipping is for. Give your effort towards obedience. But then, sort of, this phrase, *to do the will of God*, is sandwiched between two wonderfully encouraging phrases that describe the work of God within us.

And I think this **Third Description** may be one of the most encouraging phrases in all the Bible. It says this. **May the God of peace equip you...working in us that which is pleasing in His sight.** Working in us that which is pleasing in his sight. Notice the author now includes himself. He recognizes he needs this. Working in us what is pleasing in His sight.

Have you ever wondered if you're going to be able to finish the Christian race? You know, it gets hard sometimes. Circumstances get hard. The battle with sin gets hard. I mean, let's just be honest. Temptation is hard. And let's also be honest and admit that we don't always win the battle. We are sinners still. Every day we have to repent to the Lord and often to one another because of our sin.

So how can we have any legitimate hope that we're really going to grow and mature? How can we ever really have hope that we're going to win the battle, brought home safely to be with the Lord? Well, this verse, this phrase, reminds us it's because God Himself is working in us those things that please Him. We are not alone in the battle. We're not alone in the war.

Listen, if you're a true Christian here this morning, God is at work in you. God's at work in you right now by the power of His spirit working through His word to work in you the things that are pleasing to Him. Isn't it such a comfort to know that God does not just give us commands but He equips us to do what He tells us to do. He equips us to become who He tells us we must be. He is at work in us.

This is why we often say that a true Christian will inevitably grow in spiritual maturity and bear fruit over time. That's not a works-based gospel. It's the implications of this passage. When God saves you, He goes to work on you to conform you to Himself, to His image, and when God sets out to do a thing, He doesn't fail in that thing. As Paul says, He will complete what He began in you in Philippians 1:6.

Now we have the balance sandwiched between these two works of God, these phrases. We are told we are to do the will of God. When we combine those, we begin to understand biblical sanctification. Donald Guthrie says it this way, "the complementary ideas that you may do His will and that of God working in you that which is pleasing in His sight show a combination of human and divine action." That's the biblical balance.

Let me ask you, what do you do most often when you're discouraged in the battle with sin? Personally, how do you typically respond in that situation? Do you beat yourself up? Do you give up trying to fight? Do you give up hope of ever changing? One of the implications of this passage is that when you're discouraged in the battle with sin, one of the best things you can do is pray. Pray to the One who has committed Himself to be at work in you. Ask for His help. Ask the One who is at work and you confess your sin to Him, yes, but also confess your

genuine desire, God, help me. I want to grow. I don't want to lose the battle to this sin one more day. God, strengthen me. You're not just casting words out into the air.

The author says, this is who God is. He is at work in you, so believe it when you say that, God, help me, that He is a God who is at work to help you by His Spirit. Also, by the way, this is not only the response we ought to have when we're discouraged in our own sanctification. It's the response we should have when we're discouraged with someone else's sanctification, when there's a particular sin that they're struggling with that is very inconvenient for us. What do we do? We pray. Pray for them. Pray if they're lost, that God would save them, and if they're in Christ, that He by His Spirit would strengthen them with every good thing that they need, that He would work within them Himself the things that are pleasing to Him. Pray.

That brings us then to the Fourth Description. **May the God of peace equip you... through Jesus Christ.** *"working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ,"*

This is yet another reminder that all of it, salvation, sanctification, glorification, is dependent on the Lord Jesus Christ. It is He who has secured this eternal covenant in which we stand.

The implications and the benefits of that covenant are always then played out towards us through Christ, the one who secured it by His blood. The Father works in us by His Spirit always through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We see this in many places, these implications of the ongoing work of Christ. One of them comes in the passage we read most often in speaking of husbands and wives, but it actually teaches us about the love of Christ for His bride, which is what I want us to focus on when we read it this morning. Ephesians 5:25-27:

*"25 Husbands, love your wives, (Now look at the work of Christ) just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself up for her, (what was the goal there?) 26 so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, 27 that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless."*

What that means then, the implications of this phrase, "through Jesus Christ", is that salvation is not the only act of God that happens to us through Christ, but all of our spiritual lives, sanctification and future glorification also are through Jesus Christ.

As we've seen in Hebrews, Jesus Christ actively ministers on our behalf unceasingly, even today. Remember Hebrews 7:23-25:

*"23 The former priests, on the one hand, existed in greater numbers because they were prevented by death from continuing, 24 but Jesus, on the other hand, because He continues forever, holds His priesthood permanently. 25 Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them."*

Jesus Christ, even today, lives to make intercession for us, His people. What a Savior we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. What a high priest. What a Lord. What a King. What a gracious God we serve, this God of peace, committed daily to equipping us to be who we must be to please Him. You know, we would be hopeless without Him, and yet, in Christ, we are never without Him, nor will we ever be.

Don't you see, this is one of the most encouraging passages in the Bible? The author of Hebrews has labored diligently to get our eyes again on Christ, to assess Christ rightly and His superiority, and then he's called us to act on what we have learned and being conformed to His image, and now he sums all of that up in this wonderful prayer to remind us it is ultimately God who is at work in us to hold us fast, to keep our eyes on Christ, and to keep us growing in Christ.

What that means is that there is unending hope in Christ. Don't believe the lie, Christian, that you are powerless against sin and temptation. Don't believe the lie that you cannot win the victory over that nagging sin that keeps rearing its ugly head. Instead, choose to believe that the God of peace is truly at work in you today by His Spirit through Jesus Christ, and He will not fail to hold you fast and to conform you to His image. And because all of this is so clearly dependent on the work of God, guess who gets the glory in the end? Let's read it again. The end of verse 21.

*"to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen."*

This eternal covenant paid for by Jesus' blood has resulted in unending glory for the Son.

As Paul would say to the Philippians, there in Philippians chapter 2, that He would be exalted to the highest place and given a name that's above every name that at the name of Jesus Christ every knee would bow and every tongue would confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. Understand that Jesus did not become glorious after the resurrection. He has always eternally been full of glory, but in the resurrection and in salvation and in His earthly ministry He revealed his glory to us to greater depths.

That's why we began in the beginning of chapter 1 in Hebrews that in these last days He's spoken to us in His Son who is the radiance of His glory, the exact representation of His nature. He has shown us His glory so that we now forever can rejoice in His glory. We take joy in His glory.

Forever we will behold Him. I was thinking of this this morning when we were singing. This isn't in my notes, just forgive me, but I was singing and I'm tempted always to close my eyes when I sing which is not wrong to do, but I thought you know in glory I'm never going to be tempted to do that. I'm never going to want to blink because I'm just going to want to look at Jesus full of glory and we will say with joy in our hearts, glory be to Jesus. I'm only here because of Jesus. Look at how He has sustained me. Look at what He has done and forever I will have the joy of fellowship with Jesus and all the saints because of what He has done. Glory to Him forever. Amen.

It's a reminder that we're never to take credit for any ounce of fruit that's produced in our lives. When you look at your spiritual life and you say man, praise God. That sin, that pesky sin that was knocking me down. This year I've been so much better with anger or lust or pride. I could see how God has grown me in that. What should be the next statement? Glory be to God.

Our marriage, man, it's stronger than it's ever been. We're really both growing in Christ. What should we do? Not pat ourselves on the back. Glory be to Christ. That fruit has only been born by the grace of God.

And so as we draw this to a close and seek to more pointedly apply this specifically to our lives, let me just remind you of three points of application that we've already mentioned but just let's think about them a little more pointedly.

Number one, **Depend on God's Spiritual Resources.** Every good thing that He gives us spiritually. Depend on those spiritual resources. You know, it's easy to fall into the trap of trying to please the Lord in our own strength. Of trying to grow in our own strength, in our zeal to do our part and give our effort. We forget that actually we can do nothing apart from the grace of God.

I think one of the great warning signs that we are seeking to grow in our own strength is to move through life prayerlessly. Prayerlessness is one of the great symptoms that we have forgotten how dependent we really are. The more we grow in Christ and the more we understand that our growth is wholly dependent on Christ, the more we will pray. Before we do something, while we're doing it and after we're done. In this continual cycle of prayer as we mentioned last week on that topic. Listen, confess your need for God's help. Confess your inability to obey Him and also confess your desire to obey Him and ask Him to strengthen you as you seek to give your effort in obedience.

Let me say, when we don't feel like praying, that's the time we need to pray the most. Pray even to God about your prayer life. God, I don't feel like praying. Strengthen me. Warm my heart again towards You. Remind me again why I need You. Help me, Lord, to long for fellowship with You as I should. Pray about praying.

The other resource that we often don't avail ourselves of as we should is God's word. It is given to us as a gift. You understand? Revelation is a gift. God didn't have to reveal Himself to us but He has. And He says, this is now one of the graces that I've given you but through my Spirit I'm going to illuminate the Word to you and apply it to you so that you can grow, so that you, like the psalmist says, can hide it in your heart that you may not sin against Me. Avail yourself of the spiritual resources God has given us in prayer, in His Word, and in His people and not forsaking the assembly of ourselves together.

As Jesus said in His prayer, speaking of the word in His high priestly prayer (John 17:17)  
*"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."*

**Secondly: Seek to Do God's Will.** As we rely on His resources, seek to do God's will, meaning, yes, at the end of the day when temptation comes we do have to put our foot in the ground and say, I'm not doing that. I'm going to honor the Lord. I'm choosing by His grace, by His strength to honor Him.

There's no way around the fact that it is a battle and we do have to make choices, real choices in real time when temptation comes knocking to say, no, I am by God's grace putting off my pride and putting on humility, putting on purity and putting off impurity, whatever it may be, but by God's grace I will obey Him. We ought to understand the need to give our maximum effort.

You know, when it comes to really most Biblical principles and especially in sanctification, we are tempted to fall off the trail on the ditch on either side. When it comes to

sanctification, here are the two ditches we need to be careful not to fall into. One is we tend to rely on God's work so heavily that we become lazy in our efforts. We're just, if we're being honest, we're just not really trying that hard to grow.

The other side of that is we get so consumed with our own efforts and sort of spreadsheeting our sanctification, pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps. If I just do these 10 things then I will get the thing on the other side, that we forget how frail we really are and how much we need His strength to grow.

And so I want to ask you, between those two, which one are you most tempted towards? In your personality and your disposition, are you more tempted to rely so heavily on the grace of God that you really aren't putting forth the effort you should or to rely on your own strength to the point that you're forgetting your need for God's grace? Which one is most tempting to you? And then I want to ask you to keep that in mind this week and moving forward as you seek to apply these things that the proper balance is, yes, give your maximum effort, bathed in prayer, recognizing that you desperately need the grace of God if this is ever going to bear fruit.

And then finally, **Number Three: Give Christ All The Glory**. This also, by the way, points back to our prayer lives. We ought not to be guilty of praying heavily, leading up to and in the midst of the battle of temptation only to fail to return and give thanks to God for His strength and His grace. May we not do that. May we remember that the prayer that we need to put on is a prayer of thanksgiving just as much as it is a prayer for need and for help.

When you do make a wise decision, when you do resist that temptation, when you succeed at putting on patience and putting on kindness, don't forget to return to the Lord in prayer and say thank you God because I know myself and my own strength and that was not me. That was your grace at work in me.

And let me tell you, do the same thing as I mentioned for others. Praying for others. Watch for pride in your heart. When another person is not as far along in a certain sin struggle and because of that it's affecting you and your life, is your response to pridefully judge them for not being further along than they are or to humbly pray for them asking God to sanctify them. It ought to be the second.

Realizing the only reason I'm not struggling with that sin right now and the way that they are is because God's been gracious to me. And if God left me to my own devices, who knows what ditch of sin I'd be laying in today. The only reason I am what I am, whatever amount of maturity that I have attained to, I ultimately have not attained to it. It's by God's grace.

So, with that in mind then, let's sum this up with the words of Paul, Romans 11:36:  
*"36 For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen."*

Let's pray together. Lord God, we confess our need. Our need every day, every moment of every day. We are so dependent on You and that's exactly where we want to be because You are a gracious God and You are a dependable God.

You never fail. You're a good and gracious king as we have sung this morning. Help us to strike the right balance in the sense that we do want to be like You, Lord. We long to obey. We long to grow in holiness and help us then to give our effort towards that but never for a moment thinking that we can do that in our own strength. Remind us daily, continually of our need for You but also of Your grace to offer that help to give us every good thing that we need to grow.

We love You. We long for the day when we'll be with You. Until then, God, conform us to Your image for Your glory. In Christ's name. Amen.