

"God always gives you what you would have asked for if you knew everything that He knows."

—Tim Keller

30-Oct-15

Snapshots (Part Three)

As the [book of Hebrews](#) ends, the author—likely Paul—pens this benediction:

Now may the [God](#) of [peace](#) who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, *make you complete in every good work to do His will*, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through [Jesus Christ](#), to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen. ([Hebrews 13:20-21](#); emphasis ours.)

This passage begins with the word "may," but Paul's statement is not a mere wish. It is closer in construction to a prayer—at the very least a confident [hope](#). He expresses a desire that these Hebrews be complete in every good work to do God's will, but as we have already seen in Parts One and Two, what Paul desires in this passage he states with confidence in his epistle to the Philippians ([Philippians 1:3-6](#); [2:12-13](#)). He is expressing, not a wish that God would make them complete, but a desire that he knows full well is possible, and thus is there for the asking. Just as Part Two explained that we have to cultivate the salvation that is already taking place, so Paul implies

that God's work of completing the Hebrews was already in progress. Their task would be to submit to their parts within it.

This is not to say that their ultimate salvation was a foregone conclusion. Paul had previously written some electrifying things to these people, urging them to beware of hubris or spiritual complacency and to take heed to themselves to get back on course ([Hebrews 6:4-8](#); [10:26-31](#)). While the Bible contains many statements of confident expectation regarding our salvation, it does not support the popular notion of "[eternal security](#)." Just as many balancing verses appear in Scripture, admonishing us to continue in faithfulness. In fact, a number of clear warnings show it is quite possible for Christians to [fall away](#).

The passages in Philippians and this one in Hebrews reveal that everything necessary for God's good work to be completed in us either has been or will be provided. There is no good reason for our perfection to be thwarted—but it can be, if that is what *we* choose. Through little choices that lead to indifference or complacency, we can let this great salvation be cut short. One thing is true: It will *never* be because God withheld something good from us.

Consider the rhetorical foundation Paul lays in verse 20. He begins with the God of peace—the God who will bring ultimate peace when all things are in Christ. The Hebrew concept of peace—*shalom*—is far more expansive than the English one. It can generally be described as the presence of all that is good and the absence of all that is bad. Paul alone uses the title "God of peace" in his epistles, and it refers, not only to what the Most High is within Himself, but also to what He is drawing all of mankind into. Jesus Christ is called our peace ([Ephesians 2:14](#)) because His sacrifice is the means of our reconciliation—our state of peace—with the Father.

Next, Paul mentions the resurrection of Christ, reminding his readers that even death has been overcome. His resurrection is also the sign that He is the Messiah ([Matthew 12:39-40](#)), and just as the Father did not leave His Son in a state of physical death, He is working to bring us out of spiritual death. Just as Jesus was raised to life, so those baptized into Christ are raised to "walk in newness of life" ([Romans 6:4](#)).

The apostle continues with a reference to the "great Shepherd of the sheep." This evokes images of guidance, care, and watchfulness by One who never sleeps or grows weary ([Psalm 121:4](#); [Isaiah 40:28](#)). God not only wields all the power in the universe, but He does so for the benefit of individuals whom He knows personally. Because of the Shepherd's care for His sheep, He lays down His life for them—He has already demonstrated how far He is willing to go for those whom the Father has given to Him ([John 10:11](#), 15; 15:13). As Jesus says of His sheep in [John 10:28](#), "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand."

Finally, Paul brings in the precious blood of infinite worth, which not only cleanses us of [sin](#), but is also the ink Christ used to sign the covenant, with all of its promises. On His final [Passover](#), as He passed the cup, Jesus tells the disciples, "This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many" ([Matthew 26:28](#)). He gave His life to demonstrate His seriousness and solid commitment to the covenant, an agreement between God and His chosen ones in which He does nearly everything ([Hebrews 8:10-12](#)).

In that covenant, He essentially asks us to yield to His work in our lives, and in return, He faithfully promises to engrave His way of life—the way He lives!—on our hearts ([Jeremiah 31:33](#); [Hebrews 10:16](#)). He guarantees us that He will be our God, and we will be His people ([I Peter 2:10](#); [Hosea 2:23](#)). He assures us that we will *know* Him, which is the essence of eternal life ([John 17:3](#)). And He declares that He will take care of the problem of sin ([Isaiah 27:9](#); [Romans 11:27](#)), the source of all of our problems, since it separates us from the Source of all good ([Isaiah 59:2](#)).

After Paul pulls all these overwhelming, divine elements together, he writes, "May [this] God . . . make you complete in every good work to do His will." While His will can include many particulars, His overriding purpose is to create man in His image ([Genesis 1:26](#)). He will make us complete in every good work, so that He can complete *His* good work. *Our* work is to believe, with all that entails ([John 6:29](#)).

Among the greatest challenges we face is not to let a bad snapshot—or even a whole progression of them—convince us that the journey is not worth continuing to its end. When God is finished with His good work, we will be

able to see the whole picture. We will finally see how all the snapshots fit perfectly into place.

- David C. Grabbe

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Going On to Perfection](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Even though everything we need in this quest has been given to us, our spiritual growth is largely dependent to the extent that we believe (and act upon this belief) in these promises of receiving His Divine Nature. We need to use or exercise these gifts God has provided to attain the stature of Christ, striving and straining against our vile human nature, moving through the purifying or sanctification process leading to glorification. God will use whatever it takes to accomplish His purpose for our attaining the same composition and nature as He is (God-kind), enabling us to see Him as He is, following the example of our Elder brother (in whose image we have been conformed), the firstborn of many brethren. We are to seek or strive for the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, doing as God does, seeking the quality of life God lives.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Living By Faith and God's Grace \(Part Two\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

God's grace is so wonderful and undeserved that, to many of us, it is almost unfathomable. Perhaps we have such a hard time understanding it because we tend to think of it as a "thing" that God dispenses. John Ritenbaugh shows, however, that "grace" is a term that represents God's awesome generosity toward us, His continuously flowing blessings and saving acts.

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).
