

LSB 1 Thess. 5:23 - 28 Pt. 3 *Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.* Ppn. 3:1 Our third time reading this passage of scripture together.

16 Rejoice always; 17 pray without ceasing; 18 in everything give thanks, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

19 Do not quench the Spirit; 20 do not despise prophecies, 21 but examine all things; hold fast to that which is good; 22 abstain from every form of evil.

23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Faithful is He who calls you, who also will do it.

25 Brothers, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. 27 I implore you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

This morning of course we are concentrating on finishing 1 Thessalonians together and we'll be looking at the words and conceptual thoughts behind vss 23 - 28 specifically.

What I love about verse by verse exposition is that sooner or later you cover every important biblical doctrine. In depth.

Skimming over those 6 final verses here are the doctrinal possibilities to understand, in sort of a quick outline. Here's what I see just skimming over the surface. Sanctification. Holiness. Blamelessness. The 2nd coming of Jesus. The Lordship of Jesus. The faithfulness of Jesus. The power of Jesus. Prayer. Fellowship with affection for one another. The canonicity and authority and inspiration from God of apostolic authorship. The grace of life for those who know Jesus intimately.

That's what's in just 6 short verses in Paul's final signature and post script. And you should be saying, "and you're only going to give us one week, 40 minutes to cover ALL of that???!!" Kind of a gyp. Right.

Actually, how this works is, I study and meditate and listen to other preachers on these topics during the week after last Sunday's service, and then when I sit down and begin typing out the manuscript for this weeks study, I never quite know where the Holy Spirit will lead me.

It's an adventure and an honor to be in this pulpit. So if we don't finish the book this morning, and it pleases God for us to all still be on earth after the picnic next Sunday, we'll finish when we finish. I'm wide open.

That's our introduction, let's dive right in!

vs. 23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Oops. Already missed one in my short list of doctrines above. *Now may the God of peace*

The God of peace? There's a topic for you. If you read this book, it seems that God is at war with this world and with everyone in it. He is a God who cannot tolerate sin and who purges sin and sinners away from His presence.

God is a God who is at war with sinners and with the source of all sin, Satan who is just as real a person as God, and who has brought God's perfect creation, this planet we call earth, into chaos and ruin and defilement.

When Adam sinned with Eve, the whole world came under the power and authority to reign of the evil one. 1 John 5:19 *We know that we are of God, and that the whole world lies in the power of the evil one.*

Therefore we can state and support biblically that Satan is the ruler of this present rebellious world that is at war with God. And we know that everything here is defiled, fallen, laid waste by Satan, and abhorrent to God in it's sinful state. God is at war with this world.

Our scientists are horrified at an unprovable 2 degrees celcius temperature rise and jumping out of 3rd floor windows in panic while God tells us He's coming with fire to purge the whole unholy mess. Don't worry about 2 degrees celcius, worry about an angry God who has declared war on this world in the pages of this book.

How then does Paul call the Almighty God, the God of peace? The answer is two words away, but first I have to pause at the pronoun; Himself. God identifies in all of the pronouns that are gender specific as male.

The very idea infuriates this fallen world. The rebellion in my lifetime, indeed in actually a small portion of my ever lengthening lifetime, the rebellion of the rebellers on this planet is busy delineating and stating it's rebellion against the creator.

Male gender; bad. Assigned genders by the Creator who owns everything; bad. Authority to rule over His creation as Patriarch; very bad. God is the oppressor to this world who hates Him and rejects even the DNA they can't change. The world is shaking it's little fist at God and saying don't you tell me I have an assigned gender. Don't you dare. And don't you limit me in whatever berserk crazy way I decide who I am and what I'm going to engage sexually with.

Psalms 2 says God is in the heavens laughing. But it's sort of like me laughing at the fly that was irritating me who has landed on the table in gunshot range and is about to get swatted. This world is furious with God. And they're doing everything in their power to rage against Him, His ownership, His authority to reign as opposed to Satan, His Lordship, His morality, His holiness.

It's no accident that the LGBTQ++ movement has taken the rainbow, God's promise to never again judge the world with water, and made the rainbow their symbol of rage and rebellion against God and all of His claims.

How then can Paul simply say; *Now may the God of peace Himself* if in fact God is at war with a raging rebellious planet that hates Him and rejects His authority?

The answer is in the next word Paul says; *23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely,*

God is in fact at war with every rebel born in sin on this earth. But the good news of the gospel is that God sent His own Son, Jesus, and spilled the blood of Jesus to pay for my sins. The retribution that was completely due to me was spent on Jesus, and not just that, but Jesus righteousness was credited to my account.

Suddenly the war with me . . . is over. I tearfully bow the knee to His Lordship in gratitude for the costly purchase of me . . . wait for it . . . out of this world.

God has not only declared peace with me, through the blood purchase of His own Son, but He has taken me out of this world's rebellion and placed me in His kingdom. I now belong to God and my delight is to serve Him with my whole heart.

God has placed me under His authority to reign, and the peace of His kingdom is beyond understanding. God is at war with this world, but for me, there is peace and blessedness, and if I read a little bit, wealth beyond imagination waiting for me in the next world, where I will dwell with Him in glory forever.

That's how the God of Armies who is at war with this rebellious world can also be the God of peace to His elect. I was chosen and transferred out of the rebellion and into His ownership where there is peace. The world

rages, I'm at peace.

Beloved, that is the very definition of the next word. Sanctified. It's an old english word not used much these days with all kinds of incorrect religious overtones.

To be sanctified is to be set apart from the world that is at war. It is to be purchased and removed out of Satan's rebellion and to be then placed under the peaceful ownership of Creator God who loves you enough to pay for you with His Son's blood on a cross.

I've been thinking this week about the so-called Lordship Salvation Controversy. A ridiculous idea. That you can accept Jesus as saviour but not as Lord? Impossible. Jesus is going to shed His blood to purchase me but I'm not going to be transferred into His kingdom, His authority to reign?

So in other words, Jesus will save me, some day, ultimately, but for now, thank you very much, I'll be pleased to remain in Satan's camp with his armies? That's absurd. Yes on the fire insurance, No on the Lordship. I'd like to rage with Satan in the rebellion for a while longer if it's all the same to you, but please save me from hell at the end?

That doctrine is from the pit of hell. It's impossible to be in Satan's camp raging with this world at war **with** God, and also be purchased **by** Him. That purchase is total. Lordship salvation indeed. The absurdity is that Jesus states that He is Lord, period. Whether you rage at war against Him or whether you come into His kingdom of peace, forgiven, either way, HE IS LORD of everything.

You don't make Him Lord of your life, He IS Lord of everything, including you, and you either are at war with Him or at peace with Him depending on this word Sanctify. To set apart.

Sanctification is the mechanics of the transfer. Let me show you the word

in a couple of other uses, but first, let's unpack the greek itself a little bit.

Verb *hagiazó* (hag-ee-ad'-zo)

Definition: to make something holy by separation. Separate unto holy use.

That's why sanctification is the very definition of our salvation. We are purchased out of this world and separated from the children of wrath to become God's own children, made holy with the imputed righteousness of Jesus.

Ephesians 2 expands sanctification.

1 And you were dead in your transgressions and sins, 2 in which you formerly walked according to the course of this world, according to the ruler of the power of the air, the spirit that is now working in the sons of disobedience, 3 among whom we all also formerly conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, doing the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest. 4 But God, being rich in mercy because of His great love with which He loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with Him, and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the ages to come He might show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

We were children of wrath like the rest. But God in His mercy quickened us from the dead and made us alive together with Christ.

At salvation, we were separated out of the children of wrath and into the kingdom of God. Separated unto holiness. Made acceptable to God. Given the righteousness of Jesus as a gift.

You say, you don't know me very well, do you Jim. That isn't really describing me. It's describing who I long to be, but I fall OH so short. So do I. We're going to talk about that too.

Sanctification at salvation is a positional truth. God transfers us out of this sinful rebellious world into His kingdom. But we still live here in this mess, right.

God will only allow sinless perfection in His presence. I can only be included if the righteousness of Jesus is imputed to me, and all of my messy sin, past, present, and future is imputed to Him at the cross.

That's why the writer of Hebrews says; *Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.* Hebrews 12:14

Paul makes no bones about this. Being a christian is ultimately a separation unto holiness.

9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, 10 nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers, will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. 1 Cor. 6:9 - 11

There is NO unholiness ultimately in the kingdom of God. In the next world. That kingdom. After Satan is deposed and locked in prison and Christ rules on this earth in perfect righteousness. Do not be deceived. The unrighteous will not be present in that kingdom. Only the santified, the washed, the cleansed and separated unto holiness will inhabit that kingdom, and ultimately the new heavens and the new earth with God forever.

So then the God of peace is only the God of peace to those whom He has chosen and purchased and washed and sanctified, separated out of this world into His kingdom. To everyone else, He is the God of Armies. That's what the Lord of hosts means. God of armies. The God who is at war with sin and sinners.

OK, we've defined terms, and it's pretty black and white, right? Now let's get back to Paul's closing words to the Thessalonians and I hope what he tells them so briefly makes new sense to you.

23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This is actually a prayer. Paul prayed this for the Thessalonians, and by extension which we will see in a couple of verses away, for you and for me.

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely . . . which begs the question, is it possible to not be entirely sanctified. And the answer is both yes and no.

I believe that's a clue to what Paul prays next. *and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*

OK, let's talk about this. Sanctification is a separation unto holiness that is both pleasing and acceptable in God's presence. We are IN Christ. We are clothed with Christ. We will have garments of fine linen, white and clean, in His presence, clothed in the righteousness of His Son.

That's why in that parable the wedding host finds someone at the wedding that isn't in the wedding attire and they get thrown into outer darkness. Sanctification is separation unto holy use for a holy dwelling.

But this is the nasty now and now, and when I compare myself to these lofty things, there's a gap. Positionally I am sanctified entirely. It's a done deal. I have the promise, the earnest payment of the Holy Spirit dwelling in me that secures my inheritance. Positionally it's done. The indwelling Holy Spirit is my proof, my downpayment, my engagement ring for the future marriage.

I think the reason Paul prays; *and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ* is perhaps a key for us. It's the only place besides Hebrews 4 where soul and spirit are dichotomized.

Here's what I have believed for over 50 years about sanctification. In 3 parts. Body, soul, spirit. This body is hopeless. It's decaying at a frighteningly rapid pace at this point. Tomorrow will be my 70th birthday. I'll begin my eighth decade.

I've got bad news for you. This body I'm in isn't going to get any better. The prognosis is it will continue to decay until my soul and spirit exit. But, that's not the end of a physical me. When Jesus comes in the rapture, I'll either be changed in a twinkling of an eye to a new perfect, sinless, resurrection body, or I'll come out of the grave with a new body and meet y'all in the air.

So I don't get all worked up about this body, this old clay jar at the moment. It smells and soon it'll smell so bad you'll want to dig a hole and cover it up. In the next world I'll have a new one. Actually it's to my discredit that I don't get worked up enough. Paul said he beat his sinful body into submission so that he wouldn't be disqualified.

It's a stinking smelling sinful mess but we are responsible to hold the members of our bodies in submission. 1 Thess. 4:3 *For this is the will of God, your **sanctification**: that you abstain from sexual immorality; 4 that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, 5 not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God;*

And again in Galatians Paul simply says; *For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.* Gal. 5:17

Let's talk about my Spirit next. That's the part of me that was dead until

Jesus quickened me to life. On the day that He called me out of darkness and into His light, my dead spirit, dead because sin had killed it, actually, born dead, the sin came later, but that part of me was dead and then quickened to life. That part of my sanctification is complete.

That leaves my soul. And unfortunately, my soul has been a work in progress since the Holy Spirit came to live inside me. That part of separation unto Godliness is a long process. As long as I'm alive.

Little by little by ever so precious, sometimes hardly even conceivable little my soul is being transformed into the image of God's son. My inner old me is being transformed into a Christlike me.

Much has been written about the dichotomy of soul and spirit. Think of it this way perhaps. My Spirit is the transformed part of my soul that wants to fellowship with God, wants to be holy and pleasing to Him. While my soul is the part of me still connected to this sinful body that craves every kind of evil.

Like the cartoons of our youth when the good soul is trying to get you to do the good thing and the bad soul is on your other shoulder trying to get you to do evil. We don't see those cartoons any more, do we. Good and evil is a foreign idea now. That's a whole 'nother sermon.

But we all, with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit. 2 Cor. 3:18

What's the mirror? What is it I look into in order for the transforming power to change me? Beloved, it's this book. 40 minutes a week isn't enough. And you folks are sort of lucky, at least you get 40 minutes. I've been in many many churches where the book just sits until the cleaning lady wipes the dust off once in a while.

You meet these folks who are christians and 40 - 50 years into this, they're

still baby christians. Babies are cute. For a while. But then if they don't grow up, it's disastrous. Nobody wants to change diapers on a 40 year old. But that's what we've got.

Let's talk about the positional truth versus the practical truth aspects of sanctification. Separation unto holiness. Holy living here and now.

Positionally it's finished. When God saved me, positional sanctification is complete in Christ. I am clothed with Christ. I am in Him, blameless with His righteousness imputed to my account. It's finished. The indwelling Holy Spirit is my pledge, my downpayment for the completed me.

Positionally my body is hopeless, but I wait for the promise of a resurrection body which will be perfect. Holy. Blameless. Awesome. Finally, I'll be awesome. Meanwhile I take respectable care of this one, but I'm not too worried about it. I won't need it in my completely sanctified state in the next world. I hold it in submission to this book. But it isn't getting any better.

That leaves my soul and positionally, there's work to do. Right now. The practicality is my soul isn't very Godly. Cut me off in traffic, you'll find out. Or just ask Pam, she knows. I'm often a mess. Have been for the entire 52 years I've been a christian.

Before I ever even met Pam, which is getting to be a really really long time ago, I was up in the Sierra's one day, thinking about these things, and just a year or less into this deal, I understood completely that sanctification was something I needed and wanted and I understood fully, even then, how it happens. Spirit filled, and you look into that mirror. I longed to be transformed into the image of Jesus. To be like Him in actuality.

Well, life gets in the way, and you wake up 52 years later and you're really not very far down that road to holiness. I thought it might take a couple of years. These days I look at the old body and figure, well, it's gonna happen one way or the other, and it's looking more and more like the other.

Practical sanctification is increasing Godliness over a lifetime of time spent, in the Spirit, looking into the face of Jesus. How're you doing at that? Paul's prayer for the Thessalonians was for entire complete separation unto holiness, body, soul, and spirit. Do you think about it?

Finally one last word to consider in Paul's prayer for us. *and may your spirit and soul and body be **preserved** complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*

It's the word these translators rendered preserved. All of the best translations including the original kings english in 1611 have preserved. But the word "kept" is also used widely.

We need a nudge to get us where the greek readers would have been immediately. The word means to be guarded. To be watched over and protected by a protector. Preserved doesn't quite get there. Kept sort of does. But the greek word is very strong.

We have a guardian who protects and keeps our salvation until it is complete in heaven. The old reformation doctrine of the perseverance of the saints stems from this word. My salvation is kept, guarded, preserved, secured by someone else who has been entrusted to do that.

I can't mess up my ultimate sanctification because my salvation is being guarded, being kept safe, by another guardian.

24 Faithful is He who calls you, who also will do it.

It's a good thing He's faithful, because if it were up to me . . . it simply wouldn't happen. I am faithless. He is faithful. The person who called you out of this fallen sinful rebellious world in the first place will also finish the work of your sanctification.

No matter where I'm at on that progressive road to holiness, on that day

when Jesus comes, in the sky, and calls His saints home, in the blink of an eye, my sanctification will be complete. *24 Faithful is He who calls you, who also will do it.*

He who quickened me from the dead in the first place is also the person who will faithfully finish the job. If it were up to us, no one would be sanctified, saved, washed, purified, glorified, completed. The one who quickened you is the one who will DO IT.

So, then, do I just let go and let God? Do I just divorce myself from this whole sanctification process. Since the one who called is the one who completes, do I just relinquish and forget about it for now?

I don't think so. Paul apparently doesn't think so. Listen to the dualism in what Paul says to the Philippians;

*12 So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, **work out your salvation with fear and trembling**; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.* Phil. 2:12,13

We work salvation out while God works inside of us. Don't be confused. This isn't working FOR salvation. This is salvation working out it's sanctification, it's separation unto holiness, right now. We work on our sanctification but it's actually God working in us.

People who are not moving forward, who are complacent, who are happy to just languish in this fallen world . . . I worry about that, about them. If God is at work in you, how can you be stalled for 20 years? 30 years? How can there be no movement. That concerns me.

Paul had this driving force, he was compelled to get us slackers, us lagers as far along that journey of practical santification as he could possibly get us. He longed to present us to Christ as a holy bride.

Does it seem hopeless to you? Daunting? Take a little encouragement from Paul himself who wrote;

12 Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. 13 Brothers, I do not consider myself as having laid hold of it yet, but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, 14 I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Ppn. 3:12 - 14

There is this sense that we share with Paul that in this life time experience we never stop pressing on towards practical sanctification. We must never cease to daily daily daily look into the mirror of this book and be being changed.

If there's nothing in your heart moving you forward towards that lofty goal, I'm worried about you. If there's no movement, no care, no concern, no drive to move more away from this world and more closer to heaven, that's cause for concern.

And then Paul says; *20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 **who will transform** the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by His working through which He is able to even subject all things to Himself.*

Ppn. 3:20,21

That day is coming, but until that day, it's normative for christians to long for growth, for progress, for sanctification, separation away from this world and towards actual holiness.

25 Brothers, pray for us.

Need me to unpack that for you? Pray for me. I'm as close to a Paul as you're gonna get right now. Pray for those who have custodial charge over your souls. Pray for the team, that's all of us, who continue to make this

tiny church bump bump along. We're still here. Pray for us.

Paul needed his people everywhere to pray for him. He was on the front line lobbing grenades at the world and the world was trying to take him out. Constantly. He was in peril constantly. Satan wanted Paul dead. Not a hair of his head perished, until it did. God was sovereign over Paul's survival. And then in God's perfect timing, Paul was poured out as a drink offering. He needed the prayers of the saints, and we do too.

Beloved, we're in a battle. God is at war with this world and we are enemy combatants in God's army in this world. We're about to see the war escalate. We will have to get a lot less complacent about prayer.

26 Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

This goes hand in hand with prayer. Value. We have affection for those we value. Greet the brothers. A warm handshake is fine in our culture. As the war heats up, how much more valuable are the people in the trenches with us. We value our fellow enemy combatants in the war along side of us. And we pray for those we affectionately value.

27 I implore you by the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

There is a reason for this statement. Paul understood, in the moment in which he lived, and wrote, that what himself and the other apostles and close associates of the apostles wrote down, would become inspired scriptures. God breathed words. Paul knew that. Peter knew that.

Peter says this. Listen to 2 Peter 3:14 - 16. Actually I'll just let Peter preach my whole sermon all over again. Listen to what he says about waiting for the day of our ultimate transformation;

14 Therefore, beloved, since you are looking for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, 15 and consider the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as also our beloved brother Paul,

according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you, 16 as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.

Did Peter just say that what Paul wrote was scripture?? Yes. He did.

We're almost done, but first, I have a homework assignment for you. I listened to a talk this week, a lecture sermon, a learnmon, about the canonicity of scripture. Who and what and why was what is in our canon put there. It was excellent. So rather than keeping you in your seats for another hour, I'm going to trust you to find the talk and listen to it.

It's part of a summer series at Grace Community Church called The Wonder of the Word. All of the talks are by Master's Seminary Professors and lecturers. This particular talk is titled; The Canonicity of Scripture: How We Know the Bible Is Complete by Nathan Busenitz

<https://www.gracechurch.org/sermons/19978>

When I post this sermon at the web pages there will be a link to get you to the page. gracechurch.org slash sermons slash 19978

Paul implores the Thessalonians to preserve and have this letter read. They did. That's why we're studying it today. That didn't happen by accident. God Himself oversaw every word, and we have them intact.

28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

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