

**1 Thessalonians 5: 22 and 23; "Blameless at the Coming of our Lord",  
Sermon # 33 in the series - "A Persevering Faith", Delivered by  
Pastor Paul Rendall on February 22nd, 2009, in the Afternoon  
Worship Service.**

This is the second sermon that I am preaching to you on this passage. In the first sermon I opened up the phrase, "The God of Peace". I told you that God is the God who is faithful to make peace and to give peace. This afternoon I would like to speak to you about the second point in relation to God's faithfulness; that He is the faithful God who works to preserve His people blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the whole Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit who work toward this end in our sanctification. The prayer of Paul here, for the Thessalonian believers is that they would be sanctified completely. It is a complete sanctification, in that body, soul, and spirit are all worked upon by each of the members of the Divine Trinity. And it is complete in that it will have a glorious end and issue in the coming Day of Christ. Since these aspects of our sanctification are so certain and sure, we must begin by asking ourselves the question; why verse 23 is worded as a prayer? "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely." If God is faithful, and we know He is; this verse says that He is; then why is there need for prayer concerning His certain work? I believe that it is worded that way because although God's work is sure and definite and certain in beginning, continuing, and consummating our sanctification; that the outcome of the believer's work in sanctification is not always the same in every person. So we want to look at this subject of complete sanctification in this light, as Paul prayed for it in the lives of the believers in Thessalonica. It is the work of God, and yet we pray that the work of God will be prevailing over the remaining indwelling sin and corruption of our hearts . Let's look at God's work in making us and sin's work in unmaking us. Then we will look at God's work in making us more like Christ. And then we will look at the culmination of all of His work in our death and resurrection.

**1st of all - God's work in making us and sin's work in unmaking us.**

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless." God created man in the beginning and He created him blameless in both soul and body. Then came the Fall, and everything changed. But let's think about man as he was then and as he is now. Genesis chapter 2, verse 7 says, "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." Over the years there has been much talk as to whether man is bipartite or tripartite in his being. I believe from my study of the Scriptures, and thinking about what many men have said, that man is bipartite. He is composed basically of two parts; a body, the material part of man, and a spiritual part which is described for us in various places as the soul or spirit.

That is the description given to us in the verse that I just read to you from Genesis. It is because there has been such great difficulty in understanding the difference and distinction between the soul and spirit, that people have had these disagreements over whether man consists of two or three parts. It appears from verse 23 that there are 3 parts to man. But the truth of the matter is that there are two parts within the immaterial part. There is a distinction to be made within that second part between soul and spirit.

Turn with me over to Hebrews 4 and you will see that this is true. The writer to the Hebrews is telling His Jewish readers that they must enter God's spiritual rest of salvation through Christ in order to be saved. In verse 11 he says, "Let us therefore be diligent to enter that rest, lest anyone fall according to the same example of disobedience." "For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." "And there is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account." Now, although many commentators and not a few preachers of the word of God have thought to interpret this phrase "The word of God" as referring to the written word of God, it is apparent that in the first place that it refers to the Son of God Himself in terms of His discernment of men's hearts and minds and all that takes place in them. It is true that He tests and tries and knows the hearts and minds of every man in relation to His own written word, but it is He Himself who is the One who is living and active and sharper than a two-edged sword in His discernment of their true state and condition. In His holy and wise discernment he is able to penetrate all the way to "division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow." What is meant by all this? Well, the joints and marrow are two things in the human body, unseen to the outward eye, which both perform a vital function for living and moving. The Lord can see these things clearly in our body, even if we cannot. So too, the Lord can therefore also see and rightly divide what necessarily needs to change in either soul or spirit can they can function properly.

The word for spirit in the Greek is the word, "pneumatos". It means breath. It is that spirit-life which was originally breathed in to the nostrils of Adam in the beginning and which gave him life. It is this spirit that was created by God in the beginning having the image and likeness of God upon it. The spirit in Adam had all the rational powers necessary for him to love God with all of His mind. The word for "soul" here is the Greek word "psukes" which also means breath and by implication "spirit" but it is defined as the feelings and will of man. If there is a difference between soul and spirit, one could say that the spirit of man is that highest part of his being; that part which contemplates with his mind, the God who made Him, and why he is here upon the earth and what God would have

him to do with his life. It is related to his highest ideals and thoughts, and his worship. This spirit was perverted by the fall to consider primarily earthly and selfish things, or even God in a wrong way. All idolatry and false religion flowed from the corruption of this faculty. The soul of man is that part of his being in which is his essential animal life with its self-realization of physical abilities, its feelings and desires in relation to thoughts, which in Adam were created to be used to glorify God; these were perverted by the fall so that he gives himself over to the earthly and the sensual, and to what is selfishly most satisfying.

So if I am not mistaken, the spirit refers to the higher powers of man's mind and heart, and the the soul to the lower powers of his perceptive life and being; his passions and desires. John Brown in his theological Dictionary of the Bible says that soul "signifies that spiritual, reasonable, and immortal substance in men, which distinguishes him from the beasts, and is the source of our thoughts and reasonings; and so men's glory may be called his soul." (Psalm 57: 8) "Awake my glory, awake harp and lyre!" "I will awaken the dawn." He also says in a secondary definition that the soul is the human life, which is begun by the infusion of the soul into the body and the physical life of that person ceases by the departure of it." He says thirdly that, "It is affection or desire: so Johnathan's soul was knit to the soul of David". (1 Samuel 18: 1) He says, "When the soul and spirit are joined, the soul may denote the will and affections, and spirit may denote the understanding and the conscience." This is how I understand these two terms and this is how it is related for us in this text in Hebrews 4: 12. Because it says at the end of verse 12 that the word of God "is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart". Both spirit and soul are related to the heart, but the spirit is more related to the thoughts and the conscience and the soul is related more to the intents of the heart. The verse is saying that our Lord Jesus sees all of our inner being in all of its constituent parts. He is able to see perfectly and clearly, our thoughts on any given subject; how we feel about it, how our conscience interacts with it, and what our passions and desires are, whether for good or evil. He sees that there is very much that needs to be changed in each one who becomes a Christian

### **Secondly - Let's look at God's work in making us more like Christ -**

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely..." To "sanctify us completely", this good work must have a beginning. It is begun at the time of the believer's being born again. It cannot take place without our being born again. A person must be born again in order to see the kingdom of God spiritually, and to enter that kingdom. (John 3: 3 and 5. In the new birth each sinner receives a new nature; he receives new life in Jesus' name. He receives a new spirit and new direction to the eternal soul he was created with. The object in view in regeneration is to begin the process of making us over into the image of God's Son, Jesus Christ. The image of God has been damaged and is fallen down from

where it once was in the creation. It must be lifted up once again. But this cannot originate from man's self-effort or determination. It is not possible for man to remake himself. It must come from God Himself. Once the gift of life and grace is given, then power to live the Christian life comes with it. Turn to Ephesians chapter 4 and verse 20. After Paul describes the condition of an unbeliever in verses 17-19 and exhorting the church at Ephesus not to walk and live their lives in this futile way of giving themselves over to lewdness and uncleanness, he says in verse 20, "But you have not so learned Christ, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught by Him, as the truth is in Jesus: that you put off, concerning your former conduct, the old man which grows corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness." Here is the re-making of the man. It is learning Christ, being taught by God Spirit and being re-created in our soul and spirit. It is to have our mind and heart and emotions and feelings all made new. It is being re-created in true righteousness and holiness and then learning by His Spirit to pursue those things in every way, every day.

He does this by placing Christ in us and having Him become more and more precious to us so that He finally becomes our all-in-all. Turn with me to 2 Corinthians 12, verse 20. Here we find Paul having had to speak to the Corinthians in chapter 12 about his fears that they were not making progress in their sanctification. "For I fear lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I wish, and that I shall be found by you such as you do not wish; lest there be contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, backbitings, whisperings, conceits, tumults; lest when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and I shall mourn for many who have sinned before and have not repented of the uncleanness, fornication, and lewdness which they have practiced." Now how does Paul face these awful fears and address the Corinthians so that they will think more about their sanctification and how they can glorify God? He speaks to them about Christ. Verse 4 of chapter 13 says, "For though He was crucified in weakness, yet he lives by the power of God." "For we also are weak in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you." "Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith." "Test yourselves." "Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you"--unless indeed you are disqualified." "But I trust that you will know that we are not disqualified." You see that here, Paul is telling them that he fears that they have not put to death their fleshly, earthly, and sinful desires. Does he tell them that they need to repent? Yes he does. But he also tells them something about Christ who will give them the power and the grace to do so. Paul's confidence is not in them; his confidence is in the power of Christ exercised toward them. This is the work of God in sanctification. God applies what Christ purchased with His death. This is why Christ was crucified in weakness; for their sinful weaknesses not only before

conversion, but after it as they are supposed to live a godly life. That is why He was raised with power, so that Christ in them could overcome these fleshly sins and desires. What they needed to do was to examine themselves and to see whether they were in the faith; whether they had Christ or not. That was the all-important thing. It was the image of Christ that was being formed in them by His power. Without Christ they would be disqualified in all their efforts to become more holy.

Now turn with me over to Colossians 3: 8. "But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth." "Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek, nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, nor free, but Christ is all and in all." Do you see the ultimate motivation for putting off all these deeds of the flesh? Do you see why it is that you should not lie to one another? You as a believer have put off the old man and have put on the new man who is renewed; who has been lifted up and given life and strength through Jesus Christ our Lord. It does not matter how sinful or how much of a barbarian you were before conversion. It does not matter what background you came from or whether you were slave or free. Christ is all, and in all. This is how God sanctifies His people completely. He takes them from where they were in their sinful state before conversion and He keeps revealing to them in their inmost being, the power of the grace and truth of Jesus. This affects spirit, soul, and body. In all of these Christ is working. In our spirit, soul, and body, Christ is at work to show us His holiness and His power to produce that same excellent quality of virtue in our lives. He shows us the price which He paid and what it has cost Him to bring us to be more like Him. 1 Corinthians 6: 20 - "You were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's." Ask yourself today if Christ has become your all in all in relation to your becoming holy and making progress in sanctification?

**And then finally - Let's look at the culmination of all this good work.**

..."that your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The culmination of this work will take place for every believer at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not everyone will have an identical outcome in terms of their sanctification on the Day of Judgment. All true believers will be holy then, and they will all will shine like lights in the firmament of heaven. It says so in Daniel chapter 12, verse 3. "Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever." But it is the degree of wisdom and righteousness which a person attained to in this life, which will determine how brightly that person shall shine on that last Day. The Day of the coming of

the Lord will reveal it. That Day upon which Christ raises all those who believe in Him from the dead, will make it clear. As it says in 1 Corinthians 15: 41, "One star shall differ from another star in glory." Everyone who has believed will all have a perfect spirit, they will all have a glorious resurrection body, but their rewards will not be the same. The reason that their rewards will not be the same is because some believers will have been more faithful in their obedience and in their work and service for our Lord than others will have been. 1 Corinthians 3: 11 says, "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ." "Now if anyone builds on this foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become clear; for the Day will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and the fire will test each one's work, of what sort it is." "If anyone's work which he has built on it endures, he will receive a reward." "If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire."

The culmination of all this good work will be that all believers shall be saved, but some, who have compromised the good work of God in their sanctification will suffer loss. If they have made Christ their all in all; they will not only be saved, but they shall have a reward. The Day when Christ returns will reveal all. The words of verse 18 of 1 Corinthians 3 are appropriate for us to close with. "Let no one deceive himself." "If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise." "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God." "For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their own craftiness'; and again, 'The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.'" He is talking about worldly wisdom and craftiness. "Therefore let no one boast in men." "For all things are yours: whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or things present or things to come--all is yours." "And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's. Is Christ your all in all? Will you be preserved blameless at the coming of Christ? If you are trusting in Him, He will do it.