

1 Thessalonians 5: 23 and 24; "The God of Peace", Sermon # 32 in the series - "A Persevering Faith", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on February 15th, 2009, in the Afternoon Worship Service.

God; our God, is described for us here as the God of peace. And it says here that He is the author of our sanctification. Sanctification is not only our being set apart to God and His purposes, but it is also making progress in holiness, and it is looking forward to the completion of the process of our transformation when we shall see the Lord Jesus face to face, and are made like Him. To become more and more holy we must, as believers, die more and more to sin and live more and more to God. In order to live to God more and more we must by faith develop a relationship of fellowship and communion with Him in our heart, praying to Him that we would so be changed and transformed that we would desire in every respect to love Him and keep His commandments, and thus bring glory to His name. The Apostle Paul is praying for the Thessalonian believers that God Himself would sanctify them completely. It is only He who can do it, even as everything related to our great salvation from sin is from His power and grace. As believers, we are recipients of Christ's great grace, and we are made participants in all that God is doing through faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. He gives grace and we come to Him. He gives a greater grace and we turn away from vanity and pride and we learn to walk with Him. But making progress in sanctification and holiness is not automatic, and Paul knows this. You must not only be a willing participant in the process; you must be an active and even an eager participant. You must respond to what He has done, and what He is doing in supplying you with grace, by learning to think about what He wants you to become, and you must respond to it by a sincere and deliberate obedience to Him. You must learn to overcome the world and your flesh, and the Devil. You must be transformed to be more and more like Christ. If you think, as a Christian, that you cannot do this; that you cannot become more and more like Christ, then you need this sermon this afternoon. For verse 24 says, "He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it." So the truth that you should latch on to here is this. God is Faithful. The only way that you, as a believer can learn to pursue holiness and to become more like Christ in all of your behavior is if God Himself is faithful to sanctify you completely. But, our text says, God is faithful, and He will do it. The work of God in our sanctification is a faithful work in these 2 ways. 1st - He is the Faithful God who makes Peace and gives Peace. And 2nd - He is the Faithful God who works to Preserve His people blameless. We will only take up the first point this afternoon, but I hope that as we do, that you will see just how much God is involved in your sanctification.

1st - God is the Faithful God who makes Peace and gives Peace.

You can see from the way that verse 23 is worded, that there are several things that you need to understand if you are to make real progress in sanctification. First, you must be reconciled to God. "Now may the God of Peace Himself sanctify you...."

God can only sanctify you if He is at peace with you. And God can only be at peace with you if you are reconciled to Him. You and God must be brought to a better relationship with each other than the one which you were born with. You were born as one of His divine creations. He is your Maker. It is He who has made you, and not you, yourself. But, even though He made you, you were born in sin. This was not God's fault. And neither was your being born in sin your doing; it was Adam's doing. He was the first man created by God. He sinned in the beginning, and in so doing, he passed on to every man two terrible things. He passed on a nature to all of his descendants which is fallen from its original righteousness in which God created it. And He passed on the curse which came upon him from breaking the covenant of works. Let's think about these things that he has passed on to us. Nature first. It is Adam's fallen nature that is passed on to each of us when we are born. We may or may not know this, but it is Adam's sin working in our nature, which from our birth produces in us a deep-seated enmity to God Himself. We do not fight against this sin in our nature; instead we fight against God. We fight against doing God's will and we do not want any of His ways. He is not in all of our thoughts. We do not want Him to rule over us and tell us what we should and should not do. We think that our freedom is realized when we can believe what we want to believe, and do what we want to do, independently of Him. Our hostility to God is sinful, but He has a righteous hostility toward us, as well, when we are unrepentant sinners. He hates sin and must punish it at the judgment, if we do not repent of it in this life. He cannot give the spiritual blessings of salvation to any man without this enmity being taken out of the way. How can He sanctify a person who is fighting against Him? He cannot do it, and so He had to find the way to remove it. He found that way in Christ. God sent Christ, and He so lived and died as a sacrifice and substitute for sinners, that He has made peace through the blood of His cross. He has taken away God's enmity in His being nailed to the cross instead of our being nailed there in the justice of God. This is the first reason that He is called the God of Peace. Do you have peace with God? Have you been reconciled to Him? Then praise God for His great gift of His Son to you. And realize that since you are accepted now, by God, for Jesus' sake; now God can and He will work with you as He does with all of His adopted children. All of your sins before conversion are taken away. All your sins after conversion are covered, and washed in His blood as you confess them. This work God is faithful to do continually for all of His Elect. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1: 9) This you need to understand in order to make progress in sanctification. As you look at your heart and your life after you become a Christian you are going to see much that falls short of your glory. You will be disappointed in yourself; disappointed in your sins of omission; not doing what God has commanded. And you will be disappointed in yourself in terms of your sins of commission; that is, the things that you should not have done which are contrary to God's word. A great part of your making progress in sanctification over time will be found in remembering

that God is Faithful and Just to cleanse you from all sin. You should review your heart and your life frequently in your mind to see where it is that you have sinned and confess these things to God. Most of what you will be confessing are things that other people do not see, or if they do see it, their love for you is covering it. In Proverbs 19: 11 says, "The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, and his glory is to overlook a transgression." But God's glory is that He is also slow to anger and abounding in lovingkindness to all who call upon His name to confess their sins to Him. He sees all that men do not see in your heart, and He is faithful to forgive if you will confess.

Then another thing you must understand if you are to make progress in sanctification is that the God who has made Peace with us, also gives peace. "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely. In other words, in the process of God's sanctifying us, He will give us peace when we are trying to obey Him and when we are passing through trials and difficulties in which we need peace to establish our obedience to Him and our joy in Him. If we are not trying to obey Him; if we are not keeping His commandments then our conscience if it is doing its duty will be condemning us. Turn with me to Isaiah 48: 17. "Thus says the Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: 'I am the Lord your God, who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way you should go.'" "Oh that you had heeded My commandments!" "Then your peace would have been like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea." You can see from these verses that the Lord longs to be gracious to His people and to give them this peace and blessed assurance of His approval of them and of His care and concern for them in all that they do, but disobedience blocks the flow of His peace to them if they are doing things contrary to His word. But how precious are the words which tell us that "He is the one who teaches us to profit and leads us in the way that we should go." This is how God sanctifies us. He teaches us very practically what the good and right and true and lovely and pure things are; and then he leads us into the real experience of them. We are told by the Lord Jesus in the New Testament that we are to consider ourselves "unprofitable servants" even after we have done what He has commanded us to do. But even then, He give peace like a river when we are doing what is right. Even as it says in Psalm 119: 165 - "Great peace have those who love Your law, and nothing causes them to stumble." If you love God's law, such great peace will come that even in the time of persecution, you will not be stumbled. When you have this kind of peace, nothing will move you away from Christ.

In closing this sermon this afternoon I would like to read you a partial account of the last hours of the life of John Huss as an example of the kind of peace that the God of Peace gives in times of trial. He is a good example of a man whom the God of Peace sanctified entirely; body, soul, and spirit. In Miller's Church History we find these words. "The archbishop of Milan and six assisting bishops performed the inglorious ceremony of degradation." "Huss was clothed in priestly garments, the sacramental cup was put into his hand, and he was led to the high altar as if about to

celebrate Mass." "The devoted martyr calmly observed 'that his Redeemer had been arrayed with royal robes in mockery.'" "The bishops appointed then proceeded to the office of degradation." "He was stripped, one by one, of his sacred vestments, the cup was taken from his hand, the tonsure was obliterated by the scissors, a paper crown, daubed over with demons, was placed on his head with the superscription, Heresiarch. The prelates then piously devoted his soul to the regions of eternal woe." "Accursed Judas, who having forsaken the counsel of peace, and art entered into that of the Jews, we take this holy cup from thee, in which is the blood of Jesus Christ." "But God stood by His faithful servant in a remarkable way, and enabled him to cry aloud, 'I trust, in the mercy of God, I shall drink of it this day in His kingdom.'" "We devote thy soul to the infernal demons,' said the prelates." "But I," said Huss, "commit my spirit into Thy hands, O Lord Jesus Christ; unto Thee I commend my soul which Thou hast redeemed." "In the most awfully solemn mockery and daring hypocrisy, the false church thought to rid itself of the stain of blood by declaring Huss to be cut off from the ecclesiastical body, released from the grasp of the church, and consigned as a layman to the vengeance of the secular arm." "The Emperor now took charge of the outcast, and commanded his immediate execution." "The Elector Palantine, with eight hundred horse, and a great multitude from the city, conducted the martyr to the stake." "They stopped before the bishop's palace, where a heap of his books which had been condemned by the council were burning." "He only smiled at this feeble act of vengeance." "He endeavored to speak to the people and the imperial guards in German, but the Elector prevented him and ordered him to be burned." **"But nothing could disturb the peace of his mind; God was with him."** "He chanted the psalms as he went along, and prayed with such fervor, that the people of the town said, 'What this man has done, we know not; but we hear him offer up most excellent prayers to God.'" "On reaching the place of execution, he kneeled down, prayed for the forgiveness of his enemies, and commended his soul into the hands of Christ." "Even after Huss was tied to the stake, and the wood piled around him, the Elector asked him if he would not now recant and save his life." "He nobly replied, 'What I have written and taught was in order to rescue souls from the power of the devil, and to deliver them from the tyranny of sin, and I do gladly seal what I have written and taught with my blood.'" "The faggots were then lighted; he remained firm and suffered with unshaken constancy, but his sufferings were brief." "The Lord permitted a rising volume of smoke to suffocate his faithful martyr before the fire had scorched him." "With the last feeble accents of his voice he was heard singing the praise of Jesus who did to save him." "His ashes were carefully collected and thrown into the lake, but his happy soul was now with Jesus in the paradise of God." "Thus died, thus slept in Jesus, one of the true harbingers of the Reformation." "It is admitted by historians generally that he was one of the most blameless and virtuous of men..." I pray that you and I will come to experience in our minds and hearts that same kind of peace in our times of great trial and difficulty. "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify

you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." "He is faithful, who also will do it." I will continue this sermon next Sunday afternoon, Lord willing.