

A Deep Work of Grace

By Dr. Steven J. Lawson

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Bible Text: 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24
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OnePassion Ministries
5622 Dyer St, Suite 200
Dallas, TX 75206

Website: www.onepassionministries.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/onepassion

I invite you to take God's word and turn with me to the book of 1 Thessalonians 5 and tonight I want to speak to you on "A Deep Work of Grace." I want to begin by reading the focus, the passage to which we will draw our attention to this evening, it is a prayer that Paul has for the believers at Thessalonica and this prayer is a prayer that we should pray for ourselves and that we should pray for one another, it is a prayer that is focused upon that which is at the very center of God's will and work for and in our lives.

1 Thessalonians 5:23,

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, and He also will bring it to pass.

For each of us who know and follow the Lord Jesus Christ, we want him to do an ever-deepening work of grace within our own lives, and by that we mean we do not merely, we do not want merely a shallow or superficial relationship with the Lord or reality of him in our lives, that is to say we do not want a mere surface work that merely addresses external things in our lives, rather we desire God to work within us at the deepest part of our being and we want God to be working from the inside out. How easy it is just to paint the exterior of our lives and be at Bible study and be at church and be with Christian friends and to have the vocabulary and to say the right things and to come across the right way, that's on the outside, but when we cut through the outward veneer and the facade, down deep on the inside we want God to be mightily at work within us, do we not? And we want God to be conforming us into the image of Jesus Christ. We want to be growing in grace thoroughly and we want to be being sanctified in every area of our lives.

That is really at the heart of what Paul is praying for the Thessalonians, and what should strike us is this is a great church. Earlier in chapter 4, verse 1, Paul commends the Thessalonians for the fact that they are actually walking their talk, they are actually living up to their confession in Christ and Paul says, "The only thing I have to say to you is that you excel still more." That implies that they are already excelling in their Christian walk, they are an excellent body of believers. So despite this, there is still much room for the believers in Thessalonica to grow just as there is with you and me.

So as we look at this prayer that Paul makes for the Thessalonians, it serves as an excellent outline for us tonight to understand something of sanctification. You'll note the word in verse 23, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you," it's a prayer for their sanctification and so this whole message tonight will revolve around this central theme of sanctification in the Christian life. I want you to note several things, if you would: first, the Author of sanctification. Paul begins in verse 23, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you." There is clearly stated that the Author, capital "A," of our sanctification is God. And when he says God here, it's clear that he's referring to God the Father.

You'll note earlier in verses 18 and 19, a mention of all three members of the Godhead, "in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. Do not quench the Spirit." There in verse 18 God clearly refers to God the Father who is to be distinguished from Christ Jesus at the end of verse 18, and is to be distinguished from the Holy Spirit in verse 19. And so as our eye comes down the page and as we come to verse 23 after this Trinitarian distinction in verses 18 and 19 when he says, "Now may the God of peace Himself," there's no question as to which person of the Trinity the reference is being made here to, it is God the Father.

Sometimes we have the idea, I think, that God the Father is simply the architect of our salvation and our sanctification but that it is the Spirit and the Son who are more intimately involved, but the truth is that all three persons of the Godhead are at work in our sanctification and I think that speaks to the fullness of the work of God in our lives that all three persons are working within us to bring about this growth in grace. We could put it this way: the Father is the producer of sanctification, the Son is the pattern of sanctification as we are being made more and more like him, and the Spirit is the power of sanctification, he is enabling us to resist temptation and to pursue obedience and to convict us of sin that we might confess it and repent of it.

All three persons of the Godhead are at work in our sanctification but here in verse 23, the emphasis is upon God the Father. We are responsible to live in obedience to God's word and to choose the path of holiness, but it is God who must be at work within us and to sanctify us. That's very clear in verse 23. Also the word "Himself," I hope your English translation has the word "Himself." "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you." "Himself" draws an even greater emphasis upon God the Father. In other words, he has not delegated this out to the angels or to one of the apostles, but that God himself, this is a hands-on project, we are, as God is at work in our lives. And he is identified here as the God of peace. This refers to the peace that we have with God through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. God the Father initiated this peace in reconciliation by sending his Son to be the propitiation for our sins, and moreover it is God the Father who is initiating our sanctification as well.

So God is the Author of sanctification. This becomes even more clear if you would turn back to the book of Philippians just for a moment to Philippians 1 in verse 6, a verse with which you are very familiar. In Philippians 1:6 we read that Paul writes to the church at

Philippi, "For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." This really encompasses the whole of salvation. He began this work really in eternity past. He began this work at the death of Christ. He will continue this work on into eternity future and it is all seen to be coming from God the Father who is the initiator and the architect of our so great salvation, but in verse 6 when we read the word "He," we would ask the question: who is "He"? Who is at work within us who will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus? Well, one thing is certain, it's not Christ Jesus. The "He" in verse 6 is to be distinguished from Christ Jesus. The antecedent for "He" is in verse 3, "I thank my God in all my remembrance of you," and we certainly know who God is in verse 3. The previous verse, verse 2, makes the identification of God abundantly clear, "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ."

So in verse 3, "I thank my God," the reference is to God the Father and when we come to verse 6, "I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you," the reference is clear, it is God the Father who is the Author of our sanctification, who is at work within us. In fact, look at the next chapter in Philippians 2 and verse 12, especially in verse 13, but Paul underscores this message again, and here we see in verses 12 and 13 that there is, it's like a railroad track, verse 12 is our human responsibility, verse 13 is God's initiative and God's work in sanctification. So verse 12 says, "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." He's not saying to work for salvation, he's saying work out the salvation that has already been given to you, and that is a call to be active in our sanctification. To work out our sanctification is to take definite steps in our daily Christian lives to study the word of God, and to pray, and to confess our sins, and to resist temptation, and to remove ourselves from the love of the world, all of these things that promote our growth in Christ-likeness.

So he says in verse 12 that it's imperative that we be working out our salvation and we are to take it very serious, he says with fear and trembling. It is only when we feel the weightiness of the responsibility of becoming and pursuing holiness will we see it realized in our lives. But now verse 13, "for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." That God is at work within us speaks of his work of sanctification within us as believers, and lest any of us think that God here might refer to God the Son or to God the Holy Spirit, if you would look at verse 11, we see that God is designated as God the Father, and we see it again in verse 9, "God highly exalted Him," God the Father highly exalted the Lord Jesus Christ. So here in Philippians 2 and in Philippians 1, we see the truth of what Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:23.

So to begin our look at this text, first of all, the Author of sanctification. What an encouragement this should be to us tonight, that God is not just far away on a throne of grace, God is spirit, that means he is omnipresent, he is everywhere present in the fullness of all that he is. He is not more present in some places than he is in other places. The entirety of God's being fills up everything and God is on his throne of grace for sure, but God is also within us and God is at work within us. He is intimately involved in the details of our lives and specifically he is personally and closely involved in our

sanctification. It is God as the vine-dresser who is pruning things out of our lives. He's hands-on in our Christian life. And it is God who is coming along and encouraging us and strengthening us and nurturing us.

So this is what we see first, the Author of sanctification. In this text, it is God the Father. Other texts would say God the Son and other texts would say God the Holy Spirit. All three, sanctification is a Trinitarian work but let us not neglect nor forget the activity of God the Father in our lives tonight.

Second, not only the Author of sanctification but I want you to note, second, the activity of sanctification. Here is God's sanctifying work in the lives of the Thessalonians and it is his work within us. As we come back to our text, 1 Thessalonians 5:23, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you." Here God is the active agent in sanctification. The word "sanctified," this is what God is doing in our lives. This is what God is day and night actively involved in our lives, he is sanctifying us. This word "sanctify" means "to set apart," it means "to separate," and there is a separation that is going on in your Christian life, there is a separation that is to be going on in your spiritual walk with the Lord. It's a heads and tails of the same coin. We are to be separated from something and we are to be separated or set apart unto something. The first is negative, the second is positive, and both elements must be at work if we are to be being sanctified.

We are, first, to be being set apart from the pursuit of sin, to be set apart increasingly from the practice of sin. There is a sense in which as long as we are here upon this earth, we will always be struggling with sin. Romans 7 makes that abundantly clear. But there should be nevertheless an increasing separation in our lives from the entanglement that we have had with sin. It also involves being set apart from the pattern of this world, to be set apart from the thinking of this world, from the philosophies and the ideologies of this world.

We are to be increasingly be set apart from but it's more than just the negative, there must be the positive in our being set apart unto our consecration to God. Think of it this way: it's a two-edged sword, there must be both cleansing and consecration. Negatively, cleansing, the removal of the pursuit of sin in our lives but also then consecration as we are to be ever and always giving ourselves more and more to the things of God. Do you see this at work in your life? Do you see God at work within you both cleansing and consecrating you in an ever-increasing way?

This is exactly what we see, for example, in Isaiah 6. You remember that epic scene in which Isaiah upon the death of King Uzziah comes into the temple and he sees the Lord sitting on a throne lofty and exalted, with the train of his robe filling the temple. He's caught up in this heavenly vision and he sees the seraphim above God with six wings and they're calling out to one another, "Holy, holy, holy," and the very thresholds of heaven are shaking. What's the result in his life? What would be the result in your life or in my life if we were to have such a dramatic encounter with the holiness of God? Well, it's a twofold response and it's the same twofold response: there's a negative and there's a positive, and there is a cleansing and there is a consecration that happens in this Isaiah 6

confrontation that Isaiah has with the holiness of God. First, there is the cleansing. First, there is the negative. When he sees the holiness of God, Isaiah sees his own unholiness, right? As he stands in the light of God's holiness, he becomes painfully aware of his own unholiness and in verse 5 he cries out, "Woe is me, for I am ruined! Because I am a man of unclean lips." And verse 6, "one of the seraphim flew to [him] with a burning coal in his hand, which he had taken from the altar with tongs [and] touched [his] mouth with it and said, 'Behold, this has touched your lips; and your iniquity is taken away and your sin is forgiven.'" There is the separation that Isaiah is experiencing in yet another increasing level of sanctification as he has now repented of his sin and confessed his sin, and it has been, quite frankly, a painful experience as the hot coal is pressed to his lips and he feels the intensity of the heat of the coal. But then there's also the positive consecration and we read in verse 8, "Then I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?' Then [Isaiah] said, 'Here am I. Send me!'" That is a man, and we can include a woman, who is consecrated to the Lord, given fully, unreservedly to the will of God and to the work of God and to the purposes of God.

That is what a work of sanctification looks like. Obviously there are many other aspects in the details, in the nuances that could be added, but big picture, as Paul is praying for the sanctification of the believers in Thessalonica, he is praying that the Author of sanctification, God the Father, will carry out this activity of sanctification in their lives and continue to set a wedge between them and their sin, them and the world, and to be setting them apart yet more and more in consecration to God, and we would add, and in conformity to God and in communion with God. All of this is involved.

Do you see God at work in your heart and in your soul this way? Do you see an increased sensitivity toward sin in your life? Do you know what it is to be under conviction of sin and know that you have to make a matter right? Husbands, are you more quick to ask for your wife's forgiveness? Wives, are you more quick to withhold saying certain things that you know would be provocative and would not be gracious and loving? Do you see yourself being given to God increasingly more and more to serve him and his purposes? Do you see yourself growing in deeper communion and fellowship with the Lord? Do you see that to know him is a part of being set apart unto him?

I want us to note, third, the areas of sanctification because Paul makes an emphasis now in this brief request that he makes of the Father on behalf of the Thessalonians. Notice he says, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you," note the next word, "entirely," and then he fleshes out the word "entirely" and he speaks of spirit and soul and body being "preserved complete." What he is praying for is a deep and thorough work of God the Father in the depths of the souls and at the center of the lives of the Thessalonians, not to do just a work that is superficial and on the exterior of their lives, but to do something in their spirit, to do something in their soul, to do something in their body. And all three of those really collectively come together to be subcomponents of this adverb "entirely," and this word "entirely" has the effect of meaning "all the way through; or through and through." It would be a penetrating and permeating work of God the Father in their lives. This word "entirely" is really two Greek words that are joined together to form one word and the two words are "hole," h-o-l-e, and "end or finish," and

when they're brought together, they really have the idea of God doing a work all the way through to the very depths of their being.

Isn't that would you desire for the Lord to do in your life? I think within the heart of every true Christian and every believer who's walking according to the Spirit, there is this desire. In other words, the whole of one's life is to be sanctified. Not just the outward actions but the inward attitudes behind those actions. And not just the outward choices that we make, but the inward motives behind those choices. Not just the words that we say, but our inner heart condition behind those words.

That is what he is praying for regarding the areas of their sanctification and this prayer then has three categories: spirit and soul and body, and I think in reality it's two categories. Spirit and soul really join together and speak of the inner person, and body refers to those deeds done in the body.

Maybe let's start with the body, that you would be sanctified in your body. He's referring to deeds done in the body. It would be important for us to know that at this time the prevailing Greek culture had a dominant pagan philosophy that was known as dualism, and it had its roots in Gnosticism, that there's a distinction between the inner person, their soul and their spirit, and their body to the point that the spirit and the soul is good, and the body is bad, is not good. That's why they denied the Incarnation of Christ, the Gnostics, because they could not conceive of God taking on a human body and that's why they denied the crucifixion of the Lord Jesus Christ because they could not imagine that the human body of the Son of God would be put to death, and that's why they denied the resurrection. How could there possibly be a literal bodily resurrection? But that kind of thinking had an influence upon even Christians after they were saved, they still brought some of that Hellenistic philosophy with them and consequently there was this prevailing idea that it really doesn't matter what you do in your body. You can just live however you want to. Your body is inconsequential. And we have people like that today who I would call hyper-grace people, who really just think it doesn't matter you do in your body, God forgives. And so as a result of that, there was a moral catastrophe that was taking place in the culture as well as some of it in the church and it gave rise to sexual immorality and adultery and drunkenness and gluttony, and whatever sin would be done in the human body, it was downplayed, it was no big deal.

So consequently as Paul prays here for the Thessalonians, he throws in the body. The reference here is not our glorified body in heaven, the reference here is right now to the body in which we are living, that we will keep our bodies pure and clean before God. I know that sounds old fashioned. I know that sounds almost like fundamentalist talk, not enough fun, too much damn, not enough mental, fundamentalist. But it's right here in the Bible and please understand we will never give license to anyone to pursue sin and to give the idea that it is inconsequential in a person's life. That is an Antinomian position and that is a quick death to any spiritual vitality in one's life.

Paul would say to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 6:19, "do you not know," and what he says that, the implication is, "If you're breathing, you know this." "Do you not know that

your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit [of God] who is in you, whom you have from God, and that you are not your own? For you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body." Whatever involvement, your physical body whether it be your eyes, what you see and what you're looking at, what you're observing, whether it be your ears, what you are listening to, whether it be your hands, what you're touching, whether it be your feet and where you are going, to any extent it is a participant in sin, Paul says, "I'm praying to God for you for the sanctification of your body, of your bodily appetites, of your fleshly desires."

But also, our spirit and soul. Paul prays for the spirit and soul of the Thessalonians in their sanctification and these are yet other areas of sanctification. Spirit and soul refers to who and what we are on the inside. It involves our entire inner person. Let me see if I can flesh this out for us just a bit tonight. Sometimes we hear the word "spirit and soul" and they become words that perhaps lose meaning. When he says "spirit and soul," he's talking about your thought life, your base motives, your ambitions, your attitude, your reactions, your dispositions, your priorities, your focus, your preoccupation, your day-dreaming, your fantasies, your objectives, your purposes, your psyche, your desires, your feelings, your preferences, your demands. All of those words fit under the larger umbrella of "soul and spirit," and in that list which I just read, that goes a long way toward turning on the lights on the inside of our body where our spirit and our soul is identified and Paul is saying that all these underlying aspects of our inner person must be sanctified. He is praying, "God, sanctify them from the inside out." He is praying, "God, sanctify them through and through. God, sanctify them thoroughly and completely and entirely." He is saying, "God, leave nothing unaddressed and unchanged in their lives. God, get beneath the surface and dig down deep so that they will have the joy of being more like You." This is what God desires to do in each one of our lives here tonight, and it is certainly worthy of our meditation and our contemplation, and for us to give careful thought tonight to how God is at work in the depth of our heart and soul, and what God is doing in our lives, and how God wants to do a penetrating and deep work of grace that begins at the very depth of who we are and what we are, a work of grace that is secret to everyone else but is made bare before God.

I want you to note, fourth, the aim of sanctification. What is the goal of our sanctification as we are being set apart from sin unto God? What is the path that we are on and where is this headed? The next words will help us. He says in verse 23, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely," and again that word "entirely" just leaps off the page to me, not partially but entirely, "and may your spirit and soul and body," now here is the aim, here is the target toward which the tip of the arrow is aimed, "be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." The word "preserved" means "to be kept on path." It's the idea of staying in the right direction and God must be at work within us to keep us with tunnel vision and to be myopic that we might be preserved in this pursuit of holiness.

And he says, "be preserved complete." Now the word "complete" here does not mean perfection. That's impossible as long as we are in this body of sin. And when he says "without blame," that does not mean without sin. But he says he is praying to God the

Father that the Father will so sanctify us entirely, body, soul and spirit, that we will be preserved and kept on path, that we will be preserved complete. And this word "complete" means, it really comes into our English language as integrity and synonyms for this word would be total or intact, and here's the idea: a person who has integrity, all the different parts of his or her life are whole or complete. In other words, they're the same person Monday through Saturday as they are on Sunday. They're the same person when they walk into the office as when they walk into their den. They are the same person when they are with their family as when they are with their friends. Every area of their life comes together to form one integrated whole, and isn't that God's desire for our Christian life, that our whole life be lived under the Lordship of Christ? And that there not be any part of our life that would be autonomous, independent, off to the side, as it were, hidden in a closet, that no one else can see? No, the word "complete" here means you're the complete package spiritually. Every area of your life, your public life, your private life, your church life, your work life, your school life, your family life, your recreational life, it all comes together to form one complete whole. That's what Paul is praying for the Thessalonians, that there are no unaffected parts in your life regarding your walk with the Lord; that there are no private areas that are off limits to God; that there is nothing hidden in shame in private; nothing needs to come out in the open, it's all lived coram Deo, as in the presence of God. When he says "complete," another way to put it is "an undivided whole; that there is a unity about your life; that your walk matches your talk," and Paul says, "This is what I am praying to God, that you will be preserved complete."

Then this modifies the word "complete, without blame." This too has the very same idea and, again, it does not mean to be without sin but to be without blame, literally the word means there is no legitimate ground for accusation from someone who would observe your life. They would see all of the areas of your life lived in harmony with the word of God. It's the idea of an elder in 1 Timothy 3:2, an overseer must be above reproach, meaning there's nothing that can be tagged against that elder, there's not an area in his life that is disconnected from his confession of Christ as Lord. This is the aim, that all of the parts of our spiritual life would be brought together and we would be complete, there would be a completeness of Bible study, and prayer, and fellowship, and ministry, and evangelism, and sacrificial giving, and worship, and communion with God, that all the various areas of our spiritual lives would be complete. Not perfect but complete.

As you would consider your spiritual life tonight, in what area would you say the Lord needs to strengthen you? To prop you up? There's not a one of us here tonight that is just like perfect across the board, and that would be an improper picture to set before any of us here tonight. There are areas in all of our lives where God is at work. There is in my life, and I'm sure there is in your life. How we need for God the Father to be bringing about maturation and spiritual development in those areas that are slow and lacking as we would grow in God's grace, and it is God who is the one who by his work within us, would prompt our growth in these areas.

And he says that this is to take place, note, "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Now I need to make a careful distinction here. He's not saying that we will be sanctified

completely at the time of Christ's return. That is true but that's not what this text is saying. This text is saying that when Jesus comes back, may it be so in your life that you are living a blameless life and that you are found complete when the Lord comes back. That's what he is saying. That is the emphasis here, and there should be a certain tension that we all feel because we don't know when the Lord is coming back, and sometimes there can be a rather blasé passive approach to the Christian life and we need a sense of urgency about our Christian growth and development. Yes, it's a process. Yes, it will take time. But what if the Lord were to come back tonight? What if the Lord were to come back before we return back to our homes? There are things in our lives that need to be attended to with a sense of immediacy and urgency and so that's why he adds "at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." And by the way, the word "coming" here, "parousia," is the idea of presence; that the Lord himself will show up and we will see him and his presence.

That should have a sanctifying effect in our lives, does it not? It sounds like 1 John 3:3, "And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, even as He is pure." The previous verse says that we will be made like him for we shall see him just as he is, and everyone who has this hope fixed on him purifies himself. In other words, cleans up his life and more fully consecrates himself to God.

One of the things that I love about our church is our expositor's conference every year, and I love it for many different reasons. One is that every year we have to get everything in order and for one week out of the year, we look perfect. The grass is cut. The sidewalk is edged. Everything's painted. The air conditioner is working. The plumbing is working. The carpet is clean. Stains are removed. Why? Because we know we have our friends and our guests who are coming and they're gonna be here and that just makes you want to get things cleaned up. If it doesn't then there's something wrong. It's the same effect of having family coming over to your house, or in-laws coming over to your house, and you want to get everything clean and get everything ready and present yourself as best as possible. That's not hypocrisy, that's just common sense. Well, so it is spiritually in the Christian life. How much more so with our hearts and with our spirits and our souls and our bodies if the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout and the trumpet of God and the voice of the archangel, and we who are alive and remain will be caught up to meet the Lord in the air. That ought to affect us very deeply in our sanctification. That ought to put some octane in our tank to get on down the road and on down the path in our pursuit of godliness and in our growth in holiness.

So Paul reminds the Thessalonians, "You don't have forever to get your act together. The Lord is coming back and He may be coming back today. He may be coming back tonight." And whatever steps need to be taken in your spiritual life to bring about your sanctification, by God's grace attend to that tonight.

Finally in verse 24, fifth, the assurance of sanctification. Paul concludes this prayer for the Thessalonians, sanctification, by reminding them of the overriding sovereignty of God, in this case, in sanctification. We normally think of the sovereignty of God in election or predestination or regeneration, but here the emphasis is upon sanctification.

He begins verse 24 really with the sovereignty of God in salvation, he says, "Faithful is He who calls you." Every reference to "call" in the New Testament epistles is a reference to the effectual call of God; that irresistible call of God by which we are sovereignly drawn into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. That's a glorious truth, that God overcame our resistance to the Gospel, our hard-heartedness, and God when he called, he gave us ears to hear, and when God called by his Spirit, he laid hold of us and he drew us irresistibly into a saving relationship with Christ. I think of Romans 8:29-30, "those whom He foreknew, He also predestined, and these whom He predestined, He also called; and these whom He called, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also glorified." That's the call that is being referenced at the beginning of verse 24, and God was faithful to himself, he was faithful to his own eternal decree to call you and to call me as the elect of God into a saving relationship with his Son.

But notice how the end of the verse continues, "and." That word "and" means it's inseparably bound together. All whom he calls to himself, "He will also bring it to pass." What is the "it"? The "it" is what he's been talking about in verse 24, God's sanctifying work in our lives. God is faithful not only to bring us to himself, but to make us like his Son. What a glorious thing that is. And even when we are faithless, he remains faithful. He who began a good work in you shall perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus. It's not a matter of me holding onto God but God holding onto me, and he will never ever let go.

In one way that we have the assurance of our salvation is we see the outworking of our sanctification. I can know that I called upon the name of the Lord because I see God at work in my life making me less and less of what I once was and is making me now more and more of what and who I am becoming. That brings assurance of salvation. We see the evidence of a changed life. Others see it as well and it becomes confirmation. That's not me, that's God at work in my life, and that is our faithful God and notice the certainty of this. He said, "He also will bring it to pass." That word "also" is very important. He was faithful to call us to himself and he also will be faithful to sanctify us, body, soul and spirit, entirely. He will conform us into the image of his Son Jesus Christ.

What a wonderful prayer this is that Paul offers to God on behalf of the Thessalonians and it is so precious that he records it in this letter. It's an affirmation of his love for them, to remind them, "I'm praying for you. You're on my heart and I'm carrying you before the throne of grace, and I am interceding with the Father for you." In fact at the beginning of this letter, he says, "I am praying for you always," and among the many things for which Paul is praying in their lives, he is praying for their holiness. He's praying for their sanctification. The word "sanctification" simply means "the process of growing to become more holy, h-o-l-y."

What a wonderful thing it would be for us to pray for one another this very prayer, to be lifting one another up before the throne of grace. For Sunday school teachers to be praying this for their class. For care group, fellowship leaders praying this for their small group. For elders and pastors to be praying for this for the entire flock. For Titus 2 women to be praying this for those for whom they are modeling the Christian life. Or disciples to be praying this for those whom they are discipling. What a wonderful prayer

this is for husbands to pray for their wives. For wives to be praying this for their husbands. For fathers to be praying this for their children and mothers for their children. This is a high mark of spirituality. Paul is not praying for peripheral matters here of secondary importance, Paul is praying this which is of great importance in their lives.

As I would conclude, this also is a prayer that you and I should pray for ourselves, that, "God, You will do this in me." Tonight as you prepare to go to bed, in the morning when you wake up, as you're driving in the car to work tomorrow morning and your thoughts are going to the Lord, how well we pray when we take a passage of Scripture and we use those words and those truths and pray them to God. At times when we are searching for thoughts and searching for words in prayer, at times when our mind is wandering and going to other concerns of the day and we lose our focus upon God as we pray, this text, this passage should be indelibly etched upon our mind and upon our hearts, that we would pray for ourselves that God would sanctify us and this would imply that we would yield our lives to God and humble ourselves under him and invite his work of sanctification in us, and that he would do it at the deepest level, in our spirit and in our soul, and that it would affect the purity of our body. We should thank God for his faithfulness, that having called us to himself, it wasn't over it was just the beginning, and he began to faithfully then mature us and shepherd us into the image of his Son Jesus Christ.

Well, may God use these verses in our own spiritual lives tonight, this week, this month, may this emphasis be strong upon our hearts. And tonight if there are areas in your life of which you have become aware, perhaps even as the word has been preached tonight, I would encourage you and urge you to take responsibility and to act quickly and to confess whatever needs to be confessed to the Lord, to make right with whom ever make that right, and to be a willing instrument in the hand of God in your own sanctification.

If you find yourself here tonight without Christ, I can conclude this message by pointing out that he is the God of peace. Without Christ you're at war with God and God is at war with you, but he offers to you terms of peace, he desires to make peace with you. He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked and the terms of peace are in his Son the Lord Jesus Christ who died upon the cross a sin-bearing substitutionary death for sinners. If you would repent of your sins and commit your life to Christ, you could enter into his peace, and if you do not accept his terms of peace, you will die at war with God and I can assure you that he will conquer your proud soul and cast you down into the pit below. But tonight he offers peace. He is the God of peace. I would urge you to accept his terms of peace in his Son Jesus Christ and to believe with all your heart in him.