

**1 Thessalonians 5: 23 and 24; “The God of Peace”, Sermon # 32 in the series –
“A Persevering Faith”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on
April 17th, 2016, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

God, our God, is described for us here as the God of peace. And, it also clearly states here, that it is He who 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. Furthermore, the Bible teaches us in many places that it is good for a believer to be looking forward to the completion of the process of their transformation; looking forward to that glorious time when they shall see their Lord Jesus face to face, and are made like Him. To become more holy you will need, as a believer, to die more and more to sin, and live more and more to God and righteousness. In order to truly live to God, you will need to develop a relationship of fellowship and communion with Him in your heart. You will need to be praying that your faith and holy desires would increase; 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 important for each of us to realize that God is the only One who can do this great work; even as He alone is only One who can bring about all the great changes needed to complete our salvation from sin to perfect righteousness.

The truth that I would have you should latch on to, as you listen to this sermon, is this: God is Faithful to do His great work of sanctification in you, the believer, so that you can share in His holiness, both now and forever. There is a beginning to this great work of sanctification, and there is a time when it shall be complete. Our text says, God is faithful, and so, He will indeed perform this work of making you over into the image of Christ. The work of God to sanctify a believer in Jesus Christ is a faithful work in these 3 ways: 1st – He is the Faithful God who makes Peace. And 2nd – He is the Faithful God who gives Peace. And 3rd – He is the Faithful God who will complete His good work in His time, and bring to us everlasting peace. I hope to show you just how much God is involved in your sanctification.

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

As believers, we are recipients of Christ’s great grace. When the Lord saves us, He makes us participants in the process of our sanctification in relation to His imparting grace to us. As we exercise faith in the promises of His word, we will grow stronger to do His will. For He not only imputes grace to our persons, to give us a perfect legal standing in our justification; our being declared righteous in His sight; He also imputes His grace to our works so that they will be accepted by the Father, and rewarded with promotion to greater responsibility and spiritual blessings in this life; and rewarded also on the last Day when Christ will return, and every faithful believer will receive a reward. God imparts grace to the believer’s heart continually to cause us think about what would be the right thing to say or to do in every given situation. He gives the faithful believer a greater grace yet, when they are faithful to obey Him. In John 14: 15 Jesus says: “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” “And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever – The Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.” And verse 21 – “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.” “And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.”

It is this “manifesting” of Himself through the power of the Holy Spirit, in their hearts that brings about the ability to learn to change more and more to do God’s will. When the believer responds to the Holy Spirit’s working by turning away from vanity and pride and learning to walk humbly with the Triune God, He rewards their faith and their obedience. But you should

understand that making progress in sanctification and holiness is not automatic. The apostle Paul knew this. In order to make progress unto a holiness that both God and you will be satisfied with, you will need to become an active, and even an eager, participant. You will need to learn to respond to what He has done for you, and what He is doing for you, in supplying you with grace. You will need to respond to the Lord Jesus by learning to think about what He wants you to become. He wants you to become more like Him. You will need to respond to Him by a sincere and deliberate obedience to His word. He would have you to look outside of yourself to see the needs of others in the church, and to see the needs of people all around you to the know the Lord. You are, after all, learning to overcome the sinful world that leaves God out; and you are learning to overcome your own sinful flesh which would have you to be perfectly selfish in the way that you live your life. And you are learning to overcome the Devil whose schemes and temptations are intent on making you proud and arrogant, a person who will not interact with God in prayer, and who will not spend time with godly believers to grow up and be useful to Christ, but rather selfish, in the way that you live. But the grace of Christ is given to you, as a believer, every day to overcome these enemies to your soul. He will be helping you on in the process of being transformed, to be more and more like Christ.

For verse 24 says, "He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it." You can see from the way that verse 23 is worded, that there are several things that you will need to understand if you are to make real progress in sanctification. First, you need to have faith in Christ in order to be reconciled to God. "Now may the God of Peace Himself sanctify you...." God can only begin to sanctify you in holiness if peace has been established between you and Him. 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. "And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near." (Ephesians 2: 17) Let's think about the problems that bring about agitation in our spirit; no peace and no rest. First there is a fallen nature. It is Adam's fallen nature which 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 (hostility) 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 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 we must understand that He has a righteous hostility toward us, as well, when we are unrepentant sinners. He hates sin knows that He 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 punished forever in the justice of God.

This, then, is the reason that He is called the God of Peace. Do you have this peace with God? Have you been reconciled to Him? Then praise God for the great gift of His Son to you. And realize, that since you are accepted now by God, for Jesus' sake, 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 of your sins after conversion are covered, and washed in His blood as you confess them. This work, God is faithful to continually do for all of His elect people. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1st 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 God's glory, and His expectations of you. You sometimes will be greatly disappointed in yourself; disappointed in your sins of omission; not doing what God has commanded. And 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 slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness, to all who call upon His name to confess their sins to Him. He sees all those things which men do not see in your heart, and He will be faithful to forgive if you will confess them, so that you will have peace.

2nd – God is not only the God who makes peace between Himself and man, He is also the Faithful God who 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 obeying Him. It is in obeying Him that He will give us His peace. When we are passing through trials and difficulties we need peace which will help establish our obedience to God and give us joy, even in the midst of trials. If you are not trying to obey God; if you are not keeping His commandments, then your conscience, if it is doing its duty, will be condemning you. Turn with me to Isaiah 48: 17 and 18. "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. He loves to convey to you His care and concern for you in all that you do; but disobedience blocks the flow of His peace to you, if you 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 will give peace like a river to the person who is 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 to you, that even in the times of persecution you will not be stumbled. When you have this kind of peace, nothing will move you away from Christ.

If you will take a look at Isaiah 26: 1-3 with me, we will see this peace of God's can be conveyed on the national level as well as the individual level. "In that day (that is, in the day of the Millennium, that glorious time period which will last for at least a thousand years before Christ's Second Coming) this song will (then) be sung in the land of Judah: "We have a strong city; God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks." "Open the gates, that the righteous nation which keeps the truth may enter in." "You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You." You can see here that these words speak of God's peace being given to the nation which will keep the truth in that day. The City of God, the Church in that day, will be very great in its strength. God will appoint salvation for walls and bulwarks for her. A nation keeping the truth is a very great thing. And how will this come about? It will come about by the greater pouring out of the Spirit of God in that day. Listen to John Gill on verse 3 – "Thou wilt keep [him] in perfect peace, &c.] Peace with God in Christ

through His blood, in a way of believing, and as the fruit and effect of His righteousness being received by faith; this is not always felt, received, and enjoyed in the soul; yet the foundation of it always is, and is perfect; and besides, this peace is true, real, and solid; in which sense the word “perfect” is used, in opposition to a false and imaginary one; and it will end in perfect peace in heaven: moreover, the word “perfect” is not in the Hebrew text, it is there “peace, peace”; which is doubled to denote the certainty of it, the enjoyment of it, and the constancy and continuance of it; and as expressive of all sorts of peace, which God grants unto his people, and keeps for them, and them in; as peace with God and peace with men, peace outward and peace inward, peace here and peace hereafter; and particularly it denotes the abundance of peace that believers will have in the kingdom of Christ in the latter day; (see Psalm 72:7 and Isaiah 9:7) (End of quote) Dear believer are you experiencing God’s perfect peace in your heart? Are you enjoying this peace in your experience? It will come in those times when your mind is stayed upon God and His promises; for He will be faithful to convey it.

3rd – Our God is the Faithful God who will complete His good work in His time, and bring to us everlasting peace.

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and my your whole spirit soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” Here we find a prayer coming from Paul for the believers at Thessalonica, and all those reading his letter. It is that God may sanctify you completely; body, soul, and spirit being preserved blameless at Christ’s coming. It will be good if we can understand these things rightly. The complete sanctification, or the completion of the salvation of the believer in Jesus Christ, takes place in two major stages. First; at the death of the believer, even though the body and the soul are separated for a time, the spirit continues to live on forever, into eternity. And, the believer’s spirit is, at the time of death, made perfect in righteousness and holiness. The flesh, the remaining corrupt principle, or law, in the believer’s life, that body of death, is entirely done away with the moment that death takes place. In Romans 8: 10 Paul says: “And if Christ is in you, the body (that is the physical body) is dead because of sin, but the spirit is life because of righteousness.” (I believe that it was a mistake on the KJV and NKJV and ESV translator’s parts to put a capital S here in this verse, as if the verse is saying: the Holy Spirit is life because of righteousness.) It is true that the Spirit sanctifies us and brings life, and that He is life itself, as He is God) But I believe that this verse is saying that the Christian’s spirit (small “s”) shall live forever because of Christ’s righteousness, and at death shall be made perfect. All remaining corruption shall be taken away then. The NAS says: “If Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive because of righteousness.

Further proof of this is found in Hebrews Chapter 12, verses 22 and 23 – “But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirit of just men made perfect.” You can clearly see here, that when a Christian dies, his spirit goes immediately to be with God, and that spirit of theirs is made perfect permanently, and forever. And what about the complete sanctification of the body? Well, listen to Philippians chapter 3, verses 20 and 21 – “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.” Our citizenship, as believers, once we die, shall not be anywhere but heaven itself, until the Day when Christ returns. When He returns, all Christians from all generations shall be raised from the dead; their lowly bodies transformed, and conformed to Christ’s glorious body, and Paul prays in our text that your whole spirit, soul, and body will be preserved blameless at His Coming. I pray that this wonderful truth will bring

peace to your heart and a joyful expectation of all that God will do for you who believe in Him, even today.