Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

A Prayer for Complete Sanctification
Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24
Code: 52-35

As we come to the wonderful time in our worship when we turn to hear from the Lord Himself, we're privileged again to turn to Paul's letter to the Thessalonians, 1 Thessalonians chapter 5. This morning we're going to be looking at verses 23 and 24, 1 Thessalonians 5:23 and 24.

Paul writes: "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. Faithful is He who calls you and He also will bring it to pass."

George Gallop, the famous American pollster has been in a sort of continuous effort to try to dissect the religious patterns of Americans. Some of you will remember an earlier poll some years back when his survey indicated that 80 percent of Americans say they are Christians. That same poll indicated that 70 percent of Americans say they are church members. Very recently he has completed another poll which shows up in a new book, following up that initial poll and endeavoring to try to discern the level of Christianity that exists among these 80 percent who claim to be Christians.

He determined in the poll that only 40 percent of those who say they're Christians knew who wrote or preached the Sermon on the Mount. In case you're wondering, it was Jesus. He also found in his later studies that about five to ten percent of Christians are prepared to articulate and defend their faith. Five to ten percent of those who claim to be Christians can define what it means and defend it. He also concluded that less than ten percent of those who claim to be Christians fall into what he called, quote: "High spiritual faith." He said that is a category of deeply committed Christians who live their faith. In fact, he called them, quote: "The quiet saints in our society who have a powerful impact," end quote.

And that is interesting to me because originally when the Gallop poll first came out, everyone was kind of excited to find out that 80 percent of the people in America were Christians. Everybody assumed that this meant there was a massive revival in this country and that many were now claiming and naming the name of Christ. Well, even the pollster, George Gallop, wanted to find out what that claim meant and has now come to the conclusion that less than ten percent of the people who claimed to be Christians can defend what Christianity is and live at a high spiritual level of commitment. What he is basically identifying or attempting to identify is who is really a Christian. A true Christian is not one who claims to be a Christian but one who lives like a Christian. It's not the sayers, Jesus said, but the doers in the Sermon on the Mount. So even George Gallop is concerned

to identify true Christians and sort them out of the larger mass of people who make the claim.

What he is really identifying is sanctification. That's a big theological word but that's really what he's talking about. There are some people who have been transformed. Sanctification, we believe, is inseparable from justification. Justification refers to the very salvation event whereas sanctification refers to the process of spiritual development. And we believe that justification and sanctification are inseparable so those who were truly justified are being sanctified. Those who experienced the saving event are in spiritual progress and it shows up in their life.

The issue of sanctification then is central to the reality of the Christian faith. George Gallop is finding it out. We hope that many others will find it out as well. Certainly the Apostle Paul knew it. He knew that sanctification was central to Christian life and experience. And so his prayer, really the sort of benediction prayer at the end of this epistle, is that the God of peace Himself will sanctify you.

Now that introduces to us this matter of sanctification. There is, believe it or not, an awful lot taught about sanctification in these two simple verses, and we'll try to extract as much as we can in the limited time we have this morning. But I want you to do with me a little bit of a study on sanctification. Let's start with point number one, the nature of sanctification.

When we talk about being sanctified, when we talk in the terms of Gallop Poll about "high spiritual faith," when we talk about deep commitment, what are we really talking about? What is this sanctification? What does it mean?

Well look at the verse, verse 23, and please note the word "sanctify" here is a verb. It is a verb. It defines action, activity, process, progress. You will notice the little word "may" is included, "May God sanctify you." Later on in the verse, "May your spirit, soul and body be preserved complete." That little word "may" takes us into the Greek language to a form of Greek verbs called optative, that simply means it expresses a wish...a wish or a prayer. So here you have Paul's wish for the Thessalonian believers and for all believers that comes out in a prayer, his prayer wish, "May God sanctify you." And he thus introduces us to the burden of his heart that believers be sanctified, that they be in the process of being sanctified.

Now the word "sanctify" here, the verb, is a common one, hagiazo. It is used a number of times in the New Testament because this is a very common and basic principle of Christian life. Noun forms of it appear also. The noun form hagiostranslated usually by the word "holy". The verb means "to separate," to separate, to set apart from. And in this case to set apart from sin to holiness. So when we see sanctify or sanctification or holy or holiness, all of those come from the same root. They all have the idea of being separated, set apart. Sanctification then is the process of being set apart from sin unto holiness. It is as if you have sin on the one hand, holiness on the other hand, and you are moving in progression away from sin to holiness. That's Paul's prayer burden, that there may be a

decreasing attachment to sin, an increasing attachment to holiness, that there may be a decreasing incident of sin and an increasing incident of holiness, that there may be a decreasing frequency of sin and an increasing frequency of holiness. That's the path of sanctification.

Now this same word in its varying forms is used on a number of occasions in this epistle, too many to read to you. But it appears in one form or another all throughout this epistle. For example, chapter 1 verses 5 and 6, chapter 4 verses 3, 4, 7, 8, chapter 5 here, later on in verses 26 and 27. The word is commonly in this epistle because there is a great concern on the part of the Apostle that the believer be committed to holiness.

In verse 3 of chapter 4 he says, "It is the will of God even your sanctification," chapter 4 verse 3. God wants you sanctified. That's God's will. That is therefore Paul's great and passionate concern for the true believer, that he move along the path of decreasing frequency and incidents of sin to increased frequency and incidents of righteousness, decreasing attachment to sin, increasing attachment to holiness. That is his prayer.

Now there is earlier in this epistle a very similar prayer. Go back to chapter 3 verse 11, this is almost a direct parallel, the words are somewhat different, the thought is the same. Again he uses that form of the Greek which puts it into a prayer wish, "Now our God," he says, "May our God and Father Himself and Jesus our Lord direct our way to you and may the Lord cause you to increase and abound in love for one another and for all men, just as we also do for you, so that He may establish your hearts unblamable in holiness before our God and Father and the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints." Now there's a prayer for the same thing. It is a prayer for an increase and abounding of love, a heart established unblamable in holiness...holiness, sanctification, same basic word group. So there in chapter 3 he was praying for their sanctification, praying for their holiness and here again at the end he prays again along this line.

Now this matter of wanting believers to move along the path of spiritual progress toward holiness is really not a new concept. Separating from sin unto God is a very old concept. To take you back to some of its roots is to take you back to the Old Testament where you have in the Old Testament a very commonly applied principle of separation for holy use. Some things in the life of those in the Old Testament were set apart for holy use. For example, at God's commandment Moses sanctified the people prior to the giving of the law at Mount Sinai in Exodus 19, setting them apart for holy use to God. In Exodus chapter 13, all the firstborn of man and beast were sanctified and set apart unto God for His use. Aaron and his sons were sanctified to minister to God alone in the priestly office, according to Exodus 28.

In Ezekiel 37:28 God even set apart the nation Israel as a special people to belong to God. IN a day of spiritual peril not only is a congregation sanctified but a fast was sanctified and even war was sanctified as set apart unto God. Read the first three chapters of the prophecy of Joel. Job himself

sanctified his sons, setting them apart unto God through an offering of a sacrifice in Job 1 and verse 5. Samuel sanctified Jesse and his son David with a sacrifice, according to 1 Samuel 16. And even before his death that noble prophet Jeremiah was set apart by the divine will for the sanctified or separated work of a prophet, according to Jeremiah chapter 1.

In Exodus chapter 19 Mount Sinai was set apart for God's holy use, and no one was to go near that place. Genesis 2:3, the Sabbath day was sanctified, or set apart unto God. The tabernacle was set apart, the vessels of the tabernacle were set apart in Exodus chapter 30. The temple in Jerusalem in 2 Chronicles chapter 7 was set apart unto God. All the cities of refuge were set apart for holy use in Joshua chapter 20 and verse 7. Houses and fields could be devoted to God and given to Him, according to Leviticus 27.

You come in to the New Testament and according to John 10 even Christ was set apart unto God. Go in to Paul's writing to Timothy, 1 Timothy 4, he says, "Everything, every created thing is sanctified through the Word of God and prayer, set apart unto God."

So this concept of setting things apart to God is a very old one. And we come into the CHristian life, we come into the same concept. God says, "All right, I've bought you, I've paid a price for you, I've redeemed you, you now belong to Me, set yourself apart to me." That's why in Romans 6 Paul says, "You no longer are slaves to sin, you are now slaves to God, therefore do not any longer yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness but yield your members as instruments of holiness." God bought you and He wants you set apart to His use. Little different, is it?, then when a man takes a wife who may have had a number of suitors and even a number of lovers but is now set apart holy and only unto him...that is God's design. That is being sanctified.

Now it is basic for us to understand some of the more simple elements of sanctification so we can get a grip on its significance in our life. First of all, there are several aspects to sanctification, three of them, and I want you to understand them.

Number one is what we can call positional sanctification, positional. Or we could call it official sanctification. Or sanctification of one's state before God. This feature of sanctification, this component or element is past...it's a past aspect.

You say, "What do you mean by that?" Well, when you were saved you were sanctified. At the moment of your salvation you were set apart from Satan unto God. You were set apart from darkness unto light. You were set apart from death unto life. You were set apart from hell unto heaven. You were set apart from the dominion and from the destruction of sin to the dominion and the glory of God. You were set apart. There is an element of sanctification that occurred at your salvation.

Furthermore you received a new nature. "Old things were passed away and behold, new things have come." You now have the life of God within you. That holy life resides in you, the indwelling Holy Spirit has taken up residence in you. You have the holy life of God within. You have become a partaker of the divine nature. So you have in a very real sense been set apart unto God. You now love what is right and hate what is wrong. You find yourself desiring to obey the will and the Word of God. That is because you have a new standing. You have with that new standing a righteous nature.

Furthermore for the remaining unrighteousness in your life, not to offend God, He covers you with the robe of Christ's righteousness so that when He sees you He sees you as righteous in Christ. As Isaiah said, "You have the robe of righteousness." You are now in Christ. "He was made sin on the cross, that you might become the righteousness of God in Him." So you bear the very righteousness of Christ. You are therefore declared righteous.

You are declared holy and you are set apart unto holiness. That is why you can be called a holy one. Sometimes that word is translated "saint." It's the same word. Every true Christian is a saint, you are a saint. When Paul wrote to the Romans in chapter 1 verse 7 he says, "To all who are beloved of God in Rome called saints." When Paul wrote to the Corinthians he called them saints, sanctified he said, sanctified saints. Now when you think of the Corinthians, you don't think of a sanctified saint, but they were. When he wrote to the Ephesians he called them sanctified...sanctified. His second letter to the Corinthians chapter 1 verse 1, again he calls them saints. Now that was achieved as a positional reality through Christ's provision on the cross.

Look at Hebrews chapter 10, very important text in order to fix this in your mind. In Hebrews chapter 10, the writer, of course, is looking at the cross of Christ and what it accomplished, and he says about the cross that through it, verse 10, "We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all, we...past tense...have been sanctified." That's a past tense event, obviously with continuing significance. Down in verse 14 he says it again. "For by one offering," that is the offering of Christ, "He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified."

So we have entered into one dimension of sanctification through Christ, through His death. When you believed, you were set apart unto God. You were given a new and sanctified and holy impulse and you have the resident Holy Spirit taking up His place in your life so that you are His temple and you have the robe of Christ's righteousness covering you on the outside so that God sees you in Christ as righteous as He sees Christ. That's your position.

Now if you look at 1 Thessalonians, our epistle, chapter 4 for a moment and verse 7, it might help. First Thessalonians 4:7 says, "God has not called us for the purpose of impurity." When God called us, and here is an efficacious call to salvation, not a gospel call, not in the sense that you just call a

lot of people to be saved. He's talking here about calling us into salvation. When God called us for the purpose of salvation, it was not that we would be impure. But look, "He called us not for the purpose of impurity but in sanctification." Not for sanctification but in it. That little Greek preposition "in" indicates the state resulting from the calling, it indicates the sphere in which we live. The call to salvation places us in a sphere of sanctification. We are holy as to our position, as to our official status. He called us in a sphere of sanctification. By His sacrificial work on the cross He has set us apart unto Himself, gave us a holy nature, an indwelling Holy Spirit, covered us with a robe of Christ's righteousness and therefore we have holiness. We are sanctified therefore we are holy, therefore we can be called saints.

This aspect of sanctification is fixed. It is fixed. It causes us to desire God's will, to love God, to hate sin and to long to obey.

Now there is a third, and I'll skip the second and come back, a third aspect of sanctification you need to understand, we'll call it ultimate sanctification...ultimate. It takes a look at sanctification in another way. Ultimate sanctification is a future aspect. Positional sanctification was past, ultimate is future. It is established at our glorification. The first was established at our justification. This at our glorification. The moment we are translated out of this world into the presence of God, we enter into ultimate sanctification. That's...that's when we lose this vile flesh, this unredeemed fallen humanness and we are absolutely sanctified body and soul and spirit, in every part. That is when this mortal puts on immortality, when this corruptible puts on incorruption, according to 1 Corinthians 15:52 to 54. That is when, to borrow the words of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 3:21, "God will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory." That's when we become like Christ for we see Him as He is. That's at that glorious moment when we are presented as a bride without spot and without blemish, glorious in holiness, to our bridegroom. That's future.

So, we already have the past-positional sanctification. We are guaranteed the future-ultimate sanctification. That leaves us with the second one, the middle one, experiential sanctification. And that's where we live, folks, right now. We are in between the two. The first is fixed, inviolable, permanent, and eternal. We will always bear the righteousness of Christ, that is an eternal gift. You cannot lose that. The second is fixed and inviolable, we will be glorified, we will enter in to ultimate sanctification...the one in the middle fluctuates.

It would not be wrong to say then that we are in the process as Christians of the coming what we really are and what we shall be. What we are is sanctified. What we shall be is sanctified. And in the middle we're trying to really be sanctified, we're trying to live up to what we are in position and what we will be ultimately. This is what Paul is dealing with in 1 Thessalonians. His prayer here is not for a sanctification that is past, his prayer here does incorporate the hope of a sanctification that is future at the coming of Christ. But the focus of it is that here and now, spirit, soul and body, we would be being continually conformed to holiness. That's his passionate prayer for the Thessalonians and for

us, that we would be, as Paul put it to Timothy, sanctified and fit for the Master's use. True justification gives us the hope of glorification which should cause us to pursue sanctification. That's the goal of the Christian life. "Be holy as I am holy," Peter quotes God in 1 Peter 1. "Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect," Jesus said in Matthew 5:48.

So this is the goal of Christian living. This is the very core of our life. We are in this process period between past sanctification and future sanctification, being sanctified which is the decreasing frequency and incidents of sin and increasing holiness. I love the definition of the great Puritan writer, Thomas Watson, in His body of divinity, which is the old name for a theology. He said this, sanctification, quote: "Is a principle of grace savingly wrought whereby the heart becomes holy and is made after God's own heart. A sanctified person bears not only God's name, but His image." That's good. That's the difference in the Gallop Poll between the 80 percent and the less than ten percent. Lots will take the name but don't bear the image. So Paul can call Christian saints and holy ones, despite the lack of actual holiness in conduct because of what they are in Christ, because of what they possess in the new nature and because of what they will become in glory. And then he calls them on the basis of all of that that God has done to increasingly show the character of holiness in their lives.

Now let's look at the second point in our text then. We saw the nature of sanctification, let's look at the source of sanctification...the source, verse 23. "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you." Not too difficult to discern the source here. The source is God of peace. He is the source, the strength and the power for sanctification.

Having concluded now all the exhortations that Paul has been giving here, he turns to the source for fulfilling them. And there have been a lot of them. If you go back in to the book you could identify a number of exhortations, primarily they start in chapter 4. And through chapter 4 there are a number of exhortations. You come in to chapter 5 and there are a number more of exhortations in the first 11 verses. You hit verse 12 and all the way from verse 12 to 22 is a rapid-fire kind of staccato list of exhortations and commands that believers are to follow to make their daily spiritual duty. So he's been piling it on and it's accelerated and accelerated and come more rapidly and more rapidly until finally you hit verse 16 and it's just, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks, don't quench the Spirit, don't despise the revelation of God, examine everything." And he's giving command after command after command and he has to recognize, at this point, and have us recognize that even with all of these commands which call for our duty and our responsibility and our effort and our dedication and our discipline and our devotion it is God alone who can really make it happen.

And so he leads us to the great reality that fulfilling all the divine exhortations and commands is frankly not within the power of human effort alone. Zechariah 4:6 gave that great principle, "Not by might or by power but by My Spirit, says the Lord." First Corinthians chapter 2 Paul says, "Look,

when I came to preach to you," verse 4 and 5, "I didn't preach men's wisdom, but I preached to you the truth of God. And not only did I preach the truth of God, but I was dependent upon the power of God." He says, "I wanted your faith not to rest in the wisdom of men but on the power of God." He made his best effort, nobody would question Paul's effort, nobody questioned his diligence, his hard work, his discipline or his devotion, but he knew that it was still the work of God. Paul says in Colossians chapter 1, that wonderful, wonderful text that gives us his pastoral heart, he says, "I labor and I strive, I work to the point of sweat and exhaustion and I agonize, but it's according to His power which mightily works within me." There's always that symbiosis of the Christian working at a maximum level, and yet all the credit goes to God whose power alone can sanctify. No human effort can sanctify. And yet mysteriously it takes all that we have. It's a marvelous, marvelous principle. "Now unto Him," Paul said in Ephesians 3, "that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all you can ask or think, according to the power that works in us." It's Him, it's His power, but it's in us. And so, sanctification is God's work in us and through us.

Here He is called the God of peace. Why? Well He's called the God of peace many times...Romans 15:33, Romans 16:20, Philippians 4:9, Hebrews 13:20. You can check 1 Corinthians 14:33 also when it talks about Him as a God of peace and not confusion. Second Corinthians 13:11. Why is God often called the God of peace? Because peace is the best word to sum up His gospel work. The God of peace, that is the God who brought peace through the blood of the cross of Christ, the God who made peace with sinners. That's why the gospel is called the gospel of peace. So the God of peace, not here some tranquility of mind, but here the God who brought salvation, the saving God, the justifying God, the God who brought us salvation that sanctifies. The sum total of gospel blessing can be best expressed by that word eirene, peace. The God who brought peace through Christ. The God who brought justification is the God who brought sanctification.

And so he says, "Look, I'm praying to You, God, that You'll sanctify these people. You, the God who brought the sanctifying process all bound up in the saving work, do it." In fact, the kind of radical holiness that God requires, requires God. You understand that? The kind of radical holiness that God requires, requires God. How does God do it? Well John 17:17 Jesus said, "Sanctify them with Thy truth, Thy Word is truth." So if the Father's going to sanctify us, He's going to do it through the Word. First Peter 5:10 says He uses sufferings and trials to do it. That's how He perfects and strengthens and establishes us.

So God takes the Word and the circumstances of life, empowers them in us to move us along the path of sanctification. And He does it...look at this...Himself...Himself. I'm so glad that that word is there, that word "Himself." That is the powerful pronoun. It isn't that God is just up there saying, "Somebody do this." He doesn't delegate it. Don't you love that? God does not delegate the sanctifying process. He does it Himself. It doesn't happen by decree, it happens by His own action. He's involved in your life and mine. He doesn't say, "Now may the God of peace send out a few angels to work you over." He doesn't say, "Now may the God of peace send you some strong

Christians to bring about your sanctification." He says, "May the God of peace Himself do it." He takes up residence in us and He does it. What a marvelous reality.

That power pronoun there is emphatic. It is in the front of the sentence. It is in the front of the sentence...that's the overwhelming reality here. It's Himself that is doing this. He's involved in our lives sanctifying us. He's the source.

You say, "Well now wait a minute. Don't we have something to do with this? Don't we have a part?" Yes...yes. Romans 6:19 says we have a part, it says, "Don't yield your members as instruments of impurity and lawlessness, but present your members slaves to righteousness, resulting in sanctification." You have to present your bodily parts, your physical flesh, your physical capacities, capabilities, intellect and all of that, you have to present yourself, as Paul says in chapter 12, as a living sacrifice in order to come to sanctification. He says if you don't present your members it won't result in sanctification, Romans 6:19, a very important verse. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9, "I'm liable to be defaulted, I'm liable to be defected as a minister, I'm liable to be disqualified if I don't beat my body and bring it into subjection." Paul says in 2 Timothy 4:7, "I fought the fight, I ran the race." He was a fighter and a boxer and he was one who beat his body into submission and he enslaved himself to God and he disciplined his life every way he possibly could. Peter said, "Add to your faith virtue," and all these other things that are listed in chapter 1...excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, love. And when you add those qualities, you're going to move on the path of sanctification.

We have a part, no question. Dedication, commitment, self-discipline, all those we must put into place.

You say, "Well now wait a minute. I don't know how that works together with God." I don't either. But Isaiah 55:9 God said, "My ways are not your ways and My thoughts are not your thoughts." I don't have to figure it out, I just have to be obedient. Deuteronomy 29:29 says, "The secret things belong to the Lord." There's a symbiosis here of the two that you can't split, you can't divide. Both must be understood. And that's consistent with Scripture. First Corinthians 15:10, listen to this, Paul says, "I am what I am by the grace of God and His grace toward me didn't prove vain." Whatever I am, God's grace. Then he says this, "But...he says...I labored even more than all of them, yet not I but the grace of God with me." He said whatever I am is the grace of God, but I worked harder than anybody else...it takes both. Galatians 2:20, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I but Christ lives in me." Who is it? Is it I or is it Christ? You can't separate it. Colossians 1:29, "I work to the point of exhaustion, I agonize...as I noted earlier...and then God works in me mightily."

Perhaps the best text, look at Philippians chapter 2 verse 12. "So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, you must obey. You obeyed when I was there, now keep on obeying. Work out your salvation with fear and trembling." He doesn't mean get yourself saved, they're already beloved

brethren. He is saying the salvation that is already in you needs to be worked out. You need to make the effort. And then he turns right around in verse 13 and says, "For it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for His own good pleasure." It's you, it's God, it's God, it's you...where do you draw the line? You don't, you can't. All we can say is, as someone said, it doesn't take much for a person to be a Christian but it does take all of him. It's all of you, but when it's all said and done, the only one who can sanctify you is God. That's the mystery...that's the mystery.

The nature of sanctification, separation from sin to holiness. The source is God. And He Himself is at work in you to bring it about. Thirdly, the extent. This is very important. The extent. To what extent does God desire us to be sanctified? God prays that you would be sanctified entirely. See it there? Entirely. That's a very rare word, only here in the New Testament. It comes from two Greek words, holosfrom which we get holistic. You hear that word holistic, holo, that means total or complete. Then the second half of the word, holoteles, teleswhich means the end. So what it's saying is whole to the end, all the way through. In fact the best idiomatic translation is through and through...through and through. "The whole of each of you," says A.T. Robertson," and every part of each of you." Through and through.

He's praying that sanctification will occur through and through you. This is the extent of sanctification. And then he adds down in the verse, verse 23, the word "complete." Later on he says, "May our spirit, soul and body be preserved complete." This is another word, holokleroswhich means intact, undamaged, complete, total. So the two words, entire and complete, simply means the extent of sanctification is the whole, through and through, undamaged, complete sanctification. No part of your life is to be left unholy, none of it. You have no blemish. Remember how in Ephesians 5 Christ wants to present the church unblemished? Remember how Paul in 2 Corinthians 11 wants to present a chaste virgin to Christ? We are told to live a holy life through and through. No part of any Christian's life should be lacking in consecration to holiness. There's no tolerance on God's part for some corner of your life that you're holding on to. The prayer is that sanctification may extend to every part of your being, leaving no area unaffected. Paul said, "I haven't attained that," Philippians 3:13, "but I press toward it," didn't he? I press toward the mark for the prize. What is the mark? The mark is perfection. The goal is perfection. The prize is Christ's likeness. I move toward that every area of my life.

The nature, sanctification from sin to holiness. The source, God. The extent, through and through. Four, the components of sanctification. This goes deeper in to point three, the components. Look what he says in verse 23, "May your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete." This takes the specific thought of entirely and complete and makes it a little more specific. He is saying both the material part, which is your body, and the immaterial part, which is your spirit or soul, are to be included.

Now it was very important for him to use the word "body," and I think that probably that's what his emphasis is in the verse. If he had had an underlying opportunity from the Holy Spirit, he probably would have underlined the word "body." Cause in the Greek culture to which he was writing and to which he lived, the body was held in low esteem. Philosophical dualism had come up with the viewpoint that the inner man, the immaterial part of man is good and the body is bad, the flesh is bad. It's inconsequential, it's meaningless. You can't change it, there it is. It's the prison from which the soul is to be liberated. It means nothing. Don't worry about it. Don't give any thought to it. And you had philosophy like that, it was rampant. And so it would be very easy for people to say, "I have lofty thoughts and lofty ideals, and I let my body do whatever it wants." It would be a convenient pact to immorality philosophically.

By the way, it has even been tried in Christianity. I remember one pastor who said, "Since the body is the flesh and the flesh is unredeemed until glorification, don't worry about what your flesh does. Therefore you eliminate all guilt for sin and all church discipline because if it's only the flesh, how can you punish the unredeemed flesh when it isn't redeemed?" And so he had swallowed the whole line of philosophical dualism. That's not an uncommon viewpoint in people, not philosophically but morally, who want to have lofty thoughts about God but live any way they like. And that was certainly the culture of Paul's time. If you could get people to believe that the body was inconsequential, then you could let it do whatever it wanted, and you can indulge all your passion.

So what Paul says here is...Look, this sanctification through and through is to extend to every single part of you, including your body. That reminds us again of Romans 12, doesn't it? "Present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable unto God." They're to be sanctified too, the body just like the rest. What?...Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6..."What? Don't you know your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit which you have of God and you're not your own, you're bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your spirit and your body," says the Authorized.

So he talks about the body. That's part of it. This sanctification extends to every area of your body. And then to your soul and spirit. That's the immaterial part of you.

Now these two words have led to a significant debate about whether Paul is trying to identify two different parts of the immaterial essence of man. There are some who would say man is three parts...body, soul and spirit. There are some who say he's only two parts. He is the material part and the immaterial part. The people who say he is only two parts, the material and the immaterial part, are then faced with the issue of why does Paul refer to spirit and soul if they are the same thing? Well, being one of those who believes that there are only two parts, the material and the immaterial, I need to give you a reason to understand this.

Paul is not indicating two substances that can be separated. In fact, nowhere in Scripture are they separated. You cannot find a text of Scripture that separates them and shows you what the spirit is

and does and what the soul is and does. There are some who have suggested that the spirit is a sort of godward consciousness where as the soul is sort of an earthward consciousness, although that cannot be sustained in terms of the usage of pneumaand psuche, the two different words. You can't find anything in the Scripture that dissects and says this is soul and this is spirit as to function.

All people who say that man is both soul and spirit would agree that both soul and spirit go to heaven, so if they're intact eternally, how can they be two different things? We would agree that within the immaterial part of man there are a myriad of capacities to respond to God, to Satan, to the world, to all the stimuli around. But to somehow dissect that and call one this and one that and one the other and segment yourself into some kind of immaterial schizophrenia is impossible. You are a whole person, living in a physical form. And so I believe that spirit and soul are one and the same. Paul may be saying, it is possible that the Greek could be translated, "May your spirit, even soul and body," spirit then referring to the totality of the person, soul and body then dividing it into two parts. Or he could be simply saying, "May your spirit and soul," only in a literary stylistic sense to embrace both familiar common words. Or he may be using both to show the depth of the penetration that God wants to make in the sanctifying process.

But we do not believe that Paul was a trichotomist. We do not have any evidence that he believed in three-part human nature. In fact, we have evidence that he believed in only two. In Romans 8 verse 10, Paul says, "If Christ is in you, though a body is dead because of sin, yet the spirit is alive." There he defines one as body and spirit. In 1 Corinthians chapter 2 and verse 11 he says, "Who among men know the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him." So you have the spirit in the man. You have just the outer man and the spirit dwelling in him. In chapter 5 verse 3 he says, "On my part though absent in body, present in spirit," there are the two again, body and spirit. In verse 5 again, he talks about the destruction of the flesh and the spirit being saved, flesh and spirit. Chapter 7 verse 34, very interesting, he talks about, "Holy both in body and spirit." Second Corinthians 7:1, very important verse, "Let us cleanse ourselves," he says, verse 1, "let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness." So he sees those two. And there are many other passages of Scripture. Colossians 2:5; Galatians 6:18; 2 Timothy 4:22; etc.

Apart from this text, Paul never speaks of three. So we believe that spirit and soul are used interchangeably to speak of the immaterial part of man and he kind of doubles it up to embrace all the common words and to emphasize the depth of sanctification moving into the inner person.

now this is not an uncommon thing to do this, to use words that are somewhat synonymous. If you go back to Matthew 22:37 you will find there this statement, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, with all your strength," right? Now can you separate those? Do you know what your soul is, what your heart is, what your mind is and what your strength is and how they all offer different opportunities for action, thought? No. That's just grabbing all the terms to pull together the totality, to make the emphasis.

Now somebody will say, "Now wait a minute. What about Hebrews 4:12? Got a problem because it says in Hebrews 4:12, 'For the Word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit.' Whoops!" Now you have a sword dividing soul and spirit. How would you understand this? Is this saying there is a difference?

Not necessarily, not even in the Greek language, not even in English. He's simply saying this sword...it doesn't necessarily go down to separate the soul from the spirit, he doesn't say the dividing of soul from spirit. He's saying it goes down and it cuts open soul and it cuts open spirit. It doesn't mean that it separates them from each other. Further, look what the rest of the verse says, it says that it is able to pierce...and this is metaphorical...joints and marrow. Well joints are not parallel but different entities from marrow. Joints are made up of bones and bones have marrow. He's simply using a metaphorical expression to show the depth of the penetration of the Word of God.

Further he says, "Able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart." Can you separate thoughts from intentions? No. He's simply using two words in each case to express the depth and penetration of the Word. It goes into your thoughts and intentions. It cuts down into your joints and marrow. It goes down into your soul and spirit. Not necessarily distinguishing them from each other, the truth of the matter is they can't be distinguished from each other in any of those three couplets. So we do not think that Hebrews 4:12 makes any particular problem to see man as a two-part being.

Sanctification, Paul's point, is simply this, is to penetrate into every part and open up every part so that nothing remains untouched. That's...that's its penetrate...that's the components, all the way down to the immaterial part, including the material as well.

Now, number five, the goal of sanctification. What is the goal? "To be preserved complete without blame...to be preserved complete without blame." Preserve means kept. Paul is saying, "God, keep them...he's really praying for their perseverance...keep them sanctified, keep them moving on the path of holiness until finally Jesus comes and they receive their ultimate sanctification." He desires the most thorough sanctification to be preserved by God. Without blame is used only here in the New Testament, but interestingly enough that very word is found on the tombs of Christians that have been dug up in archaeological digs in the city of Thessalonica. So when they wanted to identify a Christian as unique, they put blameless on his grave. I want them blameless, I want them spotless, without blemish, like Ephesians 5:26 and 27. Paul says, "Father, keep them blameless and spotless, preserve them." He's talking really about two things. He's praying for their perseverance, even though it is a promised thing, he yet prays for it. And he is also praying for their continual process of sanctification toward holiness. Father, bring it all the way to culmination, keep them completely sanctified, keep them blameless. That's the goal, that's the goal.

The nature of sanctification, separation from sin to holiness. The source, God. The extent, through and through. The components, the inner man and the outer man. The goal, complete sanctification so that we're blameless. Number six, the culmination, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's the culmination.

Sinners are going to be judged when the Lord comes, but while the sinners are being judged, Paul says I want these people to be without blame at the coming of the Lord Jesus. Having moved along the path of sanctification, still covered by their righteousness of Christ, in that great culminating event, for us the Rapture of the church, the coming of Jesus Christ, when He comes and finds us, may He find us faithful and may He fulfill the ultimate sanctification promised. Paul has in mind, I believe, the Rapture and he's saying keep sanctifying them, Lord, keep preserving them until Jesus comes. The Rapture, of course, he described in chapter 4.

And then finally, the security of sanctification, verse 24, "Faithful is He who calls you and He also will bring it to pass." How wonderful. You know what Paul is saying? He's saying a prayer and he says here I know it will get answered, I know it will. God has to sanctify you, He has to preserve you, He has to make you without blame at the coming of Jesus. Why? He promised, faithful is He who calls you. That's God. God is faithful. God is faithful.

I remember that phrase, don't you?, in 1 Corinthians 10. "God is faithful who will not allow you to be tempted above that you are...what?...able," therefore you will never lose your salvation. He'll be faithful to keep you from ever being tempted to the point that you could. Don't have any fear about the end, don't have any fear about the ultimate sanctification, don't have any fear about the ongoing continuing persevering sanctifying work of God, He promised it, He will do it...faithful is He who calls you. Again that's the efficacious call to salvation. When He called you, He'll do it. He does what He says. Scripture is loaded with testimony to the faithfulness of God.

So the Christian can be certain of his perseverance. His salvation is secure. God graciously calls. Then God supplies the grace to believe. Then God supplies the grace to persevere and be kept for the glory of the final sanctification.

"I'm confident of this," Paul said in Philippians 1:6, "that He that has begun a good work in you will...what?...perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." He started it, He'll complete it. Yes, He's faithful, He will also bring it to pass...He will bring it to completion. Here is pledged to us the power of God to guarantee our ultimate sanctification. We have that positional sanctification, we have that ultimate sanctification, both guaranteed. That process in the middle is the passion of Paul, that we continue on the path to experiential sanctification. And so we are in the process of sanctification, moving further away from sin and toward holiness.

We really need to understand that process because it is central to our Christian living. So I want to give you some principles just to sum up, that you can sort of nail down in your own thinking so you'll have a good understanding of the process of spiritual development, moving away from sin to holiness which characterizes the true believer.

First point, sanctification is two-fold...sanctification in its experiential dimension is two-fold. There is, first of all, a negative feature. In the process of being sanctified, being made holy, being set apart from sin, there is the negative feature. And that simply is the purging out of sin. Sin in Scripture is compared to leprosy. Sin in Scripture is compared to leaven which means it permeates with its wicked, evil influence. Sanctification purges out that leprosy and that leaven. Though it does not take away the existence of sin, it kills the love of it and kills the frequency of it.

There is also a positive aspect to the matter of sanctification, and that is the spiritual refining of the soul. In the first, the negative, it is getting rid of something. In the second, the positive, it is bringing something in, the spiritual refinement of the soul. This the New Testament calls "the renewing of the mind." The purging part is the cleansing that Scripture talks about. Cleansing ourselves of sin. And so on the one hand we are purging out the sin, on the other we're renewing the mind. Paul used these terms to define it, "Putting on the Lord Jesus Christ." Sanctification is that two-fold process by which we're purging out sin in the power of God, and by which we are implanting spiritual refinement through the power of God.

There is a principle that detaches itself to that, which I must mention, and that is that it is the process of the Word of God in the hands of the Spirit of God that does both of those. It is the Word that cleanses, John 15 says, the Word acts like a pruning knife, to cut off the succor branches of our life. It is the pruning, purging Word. And it is the Word that refines and instructs and renews the mind in the positive as well. So the two-fold process of sanctification is accomplished by the Word, John 17:17, "Sanctify them by Thy truth, Thy Word is true."

There is a second principle that I would want you to remember and that is that sanctification lies chiefly in the heart. Sanctification lies chiefly in the heart, or the mind, or the inner person, the soul, the spirit. It is not learning to conduct yourselves in a certain fashion. It is not circumscribing your conduct to some code of ethics. It is not sort of training yourself from some pressure, some expectation, some desire to belong or be acceptable, to function in a certain way externally. Sanctification lies chiefly in the heart. It is the inner person. It is the adorning, as 1 Peter 3 says, of the hidden man of the heart. It is an inward grace, it is not an outward show. It ultimately shows up on the outside, but in and of itself it is an inward grace.

Thirdly, sanctification is a beautiful reality. I use the word "beautiful" because the Bible uses it. It is called in Psalm 110:3 "The beauty of holiness." Holiness, we might say, is the sparkling and beautiful jewel of the godhead because it says "God is all glorious in holiness," Exodus 15:11. If you were to

ask, "What is the glory of God? What is the beauty of God? What is the loveliness of God? What is the attractiveness of God?" We would answer, it is His holiness. It is bound up in His holiness, His goodness, His unmitigated virtue, His absolute and utter rightness, His total purity and absence of any sin, iniquity, error or wrong. That is His beauty. The psalmist was right when he wrote of the beauty of holiness.

Sanctification then is a beautiful thing. It is a thing that gives to man and woman beauty, glory, the majesty which God intended when He created them in His own image, but which was horribly disfigured in the Fall.

Fourthly, sanctification is an ongoing reality. Sanctification is an ongoing reality. John the Apostle wrote in 1 John 3:9 these words, "His seed," that is the seed of God, "His seed remains in him," that is the believer, "and he cannot sin." Oh my, what a great statement. What is John saying? He is saying when you came to salvation the seed was planted in you, the seed of righteousness, the divine seed of the life of God. It was planted in you and you cannot sin. It doesn't mean you will never commit an act of sin, it means you cannot continue to live in the same pattern of sinfulness, you will now live in a pattern of righteousness produced by the new seed that is in you. The progress may be slow and there are times when it may seem that sanctification has reached an eclipse, but it moves forward, it progresses because the seed, the divine seed of righteousness remains and you cannot have an uninterrupted pattern of sin. You can't as a believer, it is impossible. The seed remains that produces sanctification.

Fifthly, sanctification has degrees...it has degrees. It is relative. That's different than justification. Justification is absolute, it has no degrees. We can say of a person he is either saved or lost, right? He is either on the way to heaven, or the way to hell. He either possesses the life of God or he does not. He is either the temple of the Holy Spirit or he is not. He either belongs to the Kingdom of God or the kingdom of darkness. It is absolute, either one or the other. There are no degrees, it is not relative.

But when you come to sanctification it is relative. We cannot say of a Christian...he is either unsanctified or totally sanctified because we're all in process somewhere along that path. So a Christian is continually, as it were, adding to his spiritual stature.

Number six in terms of principle, sanctification can be counterfeited...sanctification can be counterfeited. It can appear to you and to me that someone is being sanctified when in fact that may not be true. It can be that people can on the outside appear to be doing all the right things and moving in the right direction, when in fact that's not the case in the heart.

Let me give you some of the counterfeits. One would be moral virtue. There are some people who for varying reasons are just. There are some people for varying reasons are fair-minded, some

people who do not live immorally. There are some people who do not live with scandal in their lives. There are some people who are loyal. There are some people who are civil. There are some people who are kind and some people who are generous. And some people who work very hard. And some people who sacrifice for others. And some people who are philanthropic. But under the leaves of human goodness can still be the worm of unbelief.

Moral virtue can exist apart from sanctification. Unbelievers, people who do not know God can be morally virtuous on the surface.

There's a second counterfeit, that's what we would call religious superstition...religious superstition. We heard a lot tonight about people who were formally Roman Catholics. There are some very devout Roman Catholics. There are some people in the Roman Catholic Church who would do everything they could within their power to make sure that all their life long they avoided any mortal sin out of religious superstition. There are many who would even want to be sure they avoided any venial sin. They would be very careful to bow down to the images of their own concern, they would light all the appropriate candles, they would say all the appropriate prayers with all the appropriate beads. They would go to the altar when necessary. They would make sure that they sprinkled holy water at the proper point and time. They would engage in certain rituals. They would be involved in religious activity and all of that is a superstitious kind of goodness that is built not on love for God, but on one simple concept, fear...fear. They want to earn righteousness with God and they're afraid not to.

There is a third counterfeit of true sanctification, we could call it profession...profession. A pretense of holiness, a parading of holiness, a superficial kind of religiosity, even a superficial kind of Christianity that is a delusion and it does delude even those who watch.

There is another kind of counterfeit, let's call it restraint...restraint. Some appear to be sanctified because of moral virtue, some appear to be sanctified because of religious superstition, some appear to be sanctified because of some profession they make, and some because their life is characterized by restraint. They reject sin because they're afraid of its consequences. They don't hate sin for what it is. They don't have a heart for righteousness and they don't have a particular desire to obey God, or Scripture. But they reject sin because of its consequences. And again the factor here is fear. They may not be religious. They may not go to church. They may not light the candles and go through all the religious ritual like the superstitious person, but they stay away from sin because they fear its consequences...sometimes physically and certainly sometimes spiritually.

And there's one other that contributes to a counterfeit sanctification, let's call it conscience...conscience. There are some people who have had their conscience trained rightly. There are some people, for example, raised in a Christian family where they were taught biblical principles of life. Those principles are imbedded into their conscience. You see, the conscience

comes in as kind of a blank slate and you train a conscience to react a certain way. And there are people who have had by their parents built-in convictions. They're not related to the love of God. They're not related to the love of Christ. They're not related to that at all. It's just that their conscience bothers them if they do something wrong, so they'd rather not do it. That's a counterfeit for sanctification.

Sanctification can be counterfeited and we have to be careful to discern when moral virtue, religious superstition, profession, restraint or conscience is making someone appear to be sanctified, when in fact that's not the case.

A seventh principle in talking about sanctification, sanctification is essential...it is essential. And there are a number of reasons why. I'll give them to you. First of all, God calls us to it...God calls us to it. First Thessalonians 4:3, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." It is essential because God demands it.

Secondly, it is essential because...listen to this carefully...it proves our salvation...it proves our salvation. It is essential to assurance. That's why Peter says, "If you add to your faith virtue, you will not forget that you've been purged from your old sins," right? If you add to your faith virtue, you're going to know you're saved when you see the sanctification in process. In 2 Thessalonians chapter 2 and verse 13 Paul says, "We should always give thanks to God, brethren, beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification." So when you see the sanctifying process, when you see that you love God and you hate sin and you desire to obey and you're moving along a path of decreasing love for sin and increasing love for righteousness, decreasing frequency of sin, increasing frequency of righteousness, that is evidence that you've been saved. It confirms, it proves your election. It proves you are in the New Covenant because in Ezekiel 36 it says, "When you are in the New Covenant, God will give you a new heart and He will take away your old stony heart and then He will plant His Spirit in you." And when you begin to feel the impulses of the new heart that longs for righteousness and feel the work of the Spirit of God moving you toward righteousness, you know you've been redeemed. It is essential because God calls us to it. It is essential because it verifies our salvation.

And then I should add as a footnote to that, it is essential because it is necessary for heaven. Do you remember what it says in Hebrews 12:14? "Without holiness no man will see the Lord." Unless you have been sanctified, are in the process experientially of being sanctified, you won't see the Lord. It guarantees heaven. So, sanctification is essential.

Number eight in our little list, sanctification protects us from polluting holy things...sanctification protects us from polluting holy things. Why is that important? Well, I was reading this in Titus 1:15 and it struck me, "To the pure, all things are pure. But to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled."

You know what is characteristic of an unsanctified, unjustified person? They desecrate holy things, don't they? They mock God. They blaspheme God. They mock Christ. They blaspheme Christ. They laugh at spiritual things. They treat with ridicule in a demeaning way the Word of God. They may mock the people of God. It is just anything and everything that God has designed for His own glory, they will pollute. They will take marriage and they will pollute it. They will take love and they will pollute it. They will take friendship and they will pollute it. They will take blessings in the things that God gives us, and they will pollute it and use it in ways that are wrong. They pollute everything. Sanctification protects us from polluting holy things. A holy heart is an altar on which everything is sanctified...everything is made holy.

And what do we do? Just the opposite, we take the mundane things of life and we make them sacred. Don't we? The other day I was with my son and we were out playing golf and the whole time I was playing I found myself inside saying, "Thank You, Lord, for the beauty of Your creation. Thank You, Lord, for the love of a son. Thank You, Lord, for all that this day of refreshment means to me." And the simplest thing in life becomes the sacred thing. That's what happens when you're being sanctified.

Number nine, and the last point in my list, sanctification then is the priority for our lives. It is and must be, therefore, the priority for our lives. It is the will of God, 1 Thessalonians 4:3. Christ did die to produce it, that is why He died, to produce sanctification, Titus 2:14 "He gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a people."

God commanded it. Christ died to produce it. And on the negative end, it would be a shame of all shames and a dishonor to Christ to name His name and not be sanctified. "For if we say we abide in Him," 1 John 2:6, "then we ought to walk the way He walked."

Well, all of that to show you something more of the nature, the character of sanctification. It is two-fold, it involves the purging out of sin and the spiritual refining of the renewing of the mind. Both accomplished by the Word in the power of the Spirit. It lies chiefly in the heart and works its way out. It is a beautiful reality. It is an ongoing reality. It has degrees. It can be counterfeited. It is essential. It protects us from polluting holy things and sanctifies everything. It therefore becomes the priority of our life.

In conclusion, what about a little checkup...what about a little checkup to see how we're progressing in the path of sanctification? What are the signs that we're moving along? Let me give you a few...just briefly.

One, those who are being sanctified remember clearly a time when they weren't. Okay? Those who are being sanctified can look back and remember a time when they weren't.

Secondly, those who are being sanctified are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Those who are being sanctified therefore feel the moving and the working of the power of the Spirit of God within them.

Thirdly, those who are being sanctified have strong antipathy toward sin. Those who are being sanctified have strong antipathy toward sin, even the sin in their own lives, most significantly that sin. That made Paul cry in Romans 7, "O wretched man that I am..."

Fourthly, those who are sanctified seek to do spiritual duty with the heart out of love for God. Remember Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:14, "For the love of Christ...what?...constrains us." Those who are being sanctified seek to do spiritual duty with the heart out of love for God.

Fifthly, those who are progressing in sanctification show a disciplined life...they show a disciplined life. That's very basic. Peter said it. "If you add these things to your life, you're going to know you're being sanctified...oral excellence, virtue, love," all of those things. In 1 Peter...that, of course, is in 2 Peter 1...in 1 Peter 1:15 he says, "But like the holy One who called you, be holy yourselves also in all your behavior." To be holy means to be in control of your behavior. Those who are sanctified show a disciplined life.

Sixthly, those who are being sanctified have a strong desire to serve Christ...have a strong desire to serve Christ. Those who are being sanctified will present their bodies a living sacrifice. Those who are being sanctified will desire, as the Apostle Paul put it, to be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.

Number seven, those who are being sanctified love the Word of God. "The Word dwells in them richly." And they say with the psalmist, "O how I love Thy law."

And finally, those who are being sanctified associate with other people who are being sanctified. They choose the company of the holy. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:33, "Bad company corrupts good morals." People being sanctified don't want to corrupt good morals. They choose good company. They seek the fellowship. "Stimulate one another to love and good works," as Hebrews 10 says.

So, if you're one being sanctified, you'll remember a time when you weren't. You can see progress. You will have experienced the indwelling ministry of the Spirit, for there's no such thing as a Christian without the Holy Spirit. All who are Christ's possess Him, Romans 8:9 says. If you're being sanctified you'll have a growing antipathy toward sin. You will seek to do your spiritual duty from the heart out of love for God. You will show a disciplined life. You will desire to serve Christ. You will love the Word. And you will long for the fellowship of others being sanctified. You will be able to pray with the psalmist this prayer, Psalm 51:10, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

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