



Let's Get Ready to Rapture

First Thessalonians 5:23-28

"Hey! Do You Want to See Something Really Spiritual?"

Have you seen what you're going to look in 20 years?

There are some websites where you can upload a current photo and they process it to make you look decades older.

It's pretty scary!

The apostle Paul didn't have the technology we have, but he was nevertheless able, with 100% accuracy, to project what you would 'look' like at the coming of Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

You will be "sanctified completely" and "preserved blameless." Sounds great - and it is.

"Now," Paul said, as he began to wrap up his thoughts. We might say, "for now," this is what they needed to hear.

We need to trust that God the Holy Spirit knows exactly what we need to hear and then listen with humility for Him to speak to us through God's Word.

The descriptor Paul chooses for God is "peace." It reminds us that God, through the blood of the Cross on which Jesus died, has made peace with mankind. We are at peace with God the moment we repent and believe.

It's also a nice reminder of the fact God's work in our lives is ongoing. He made peace with us in order to have a relationship with us. Salvation is just the beginning of a lifetime of work.

The Bible calls that work "sanctification." Rather than give you a textbook definition, sanctification can be understood by the verse, "He that has begun a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6).

We can dissect it into stages that make sense to us. Usually we say there are three stages to our sanctification, but really, there are four.

There is a **pre-sanctification** stage when we are yet sinners. For example we read in First Corinthians 7:14 that a nonbelieving husband is "sanctified" by his wife. He's clearly not saved but her influence puts him in a place where the Gospel of grace can affect his heart to free his will to believe.

When a person believes and is born again, he is **positionally** sanctified by virtue of his union with Christ. This means that he is set apart to God from the world. Hebrews 10:10 says, "we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

Every day between being born-again and either our death or the rapture we experience **progressive** sanctification. This is the process by which we become more Christlike. This is the sanctification which Paul prays for the Thessalonians here.

There is a final, or **perfect**, sanctification. When a believer goes to be with the Lord, he will be like the Lord, completely and finally set apart from sin.

Sanctification is God's work in and upon us. It is "God... Himself" Who accomplishes the work. We cannot manufacture it on our own.

Nevertheless we must cooperate with God.

John MacArthur wrote, "I can't tell you what percentage of the responsibility falls on you, or exactly how your disciplined life cooperates with God's work in you... [but] each of us bears some responsibility for our own spiritual growth..."

Look at it this way. Thus far in First Thessalonians we have encountered many exhortations that we ought to obey. Paul is now reminding us that obeying them is part of God's progressive sanctification in our lives; and that, since God Himself sanctifies us, we are more than able to obey.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you **completely**...

Scholar D. Edmond Hiebert says of this word "completely," "it is a compound of *holos*, 'whole,' and *telos*, 'end.' Its basic [meaning] is 'wholly attaining the end, reaching the intended goal,' hence [it] has the force of no part being left unreached."

Not only will God complete the work He has begun, every part of us will be perfected.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 ... and may your whole spirit, soul, and body...

"Your whole spirit, soul, and body" are the parts that will be "completely" sanctified.

The immaterial part of us - the spirit and soul - will be completely sanctified, as will the material part - our bodies.

The commentaries launch into a long discussion about the differences between the soul and the spirit, and whether or not they are the same. I'd say there are three parts of the human person - spirit, soul and body - but that it can be difficult to separate the spirit and the soul. It's so difficult, in fact, that only God's Word can do it effectively.

Maybe this is the best way of understanding it:

- The spirit is the highest and most unique part of man that enables him to communicate with God.
- The soul is the part of man that makes him conscious of himself; it is the seat of his personality.
- The body, of course, is the physical part through which the inner person expresses himself.

When we are born into the world we are physically alive and soulishly active but spiritually dead. When we are born-again our spirit is alive and can dictate to the soul and body according to the leading of God's Holy Spirit that indwells us.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 ... may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless...

"Preserved" is from a word meaning *to guard* or *to keep an eye upon*. It describes God as keeping His eye on you, to guard you to the end.

It doesn't mean you can't disobey God; you can. It means He is always on hand to help you.

Commentators call this a prayer-wish of Paul's. His desire is that God's sanctifying work would continue unhindered by them so that, at any point along the way and right up til the end, they could be described as "blameless."

Notice they are not described as "perfect." We can never be perfect in this body of flesh. But we can be described as "blameless" in the sense we are cooperating with God, making spiritual progress, experiencing spiritual growth.

We might say that his prayer was for them to not backslide in any area of their lives but to press forward in cooperation with God.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 ... at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Every chapter in this letter highlights the "coming" of Jesus, and the "coming" Paul had in mind was His pretribulational, premillennial coming to resurrect the dead in Christ and to rapture the remaining, living believers.

When we are all in our glorified, resurrection bodies, then will our sanctification be completed. We will be perfect as He is perfect.

1 Thessalonians 5:24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

God the Father declared you holy and set you apart at the Cross; God the Holy Spirit preserves you in holiness day-by-day; God the Son will return to present you perfect in holiness in heaven.

Sanctification is the work of God. It depends on His faithfulness, not yours. He operates upon you by His indwelling Holy Spirit. You ought to cooperate with Him to make progress; but He is going to perfect you with or without your cooperation.

Once you are saved, you are predestined to be conformed into the image of Jesus. It's gonna happen. Go with it; enjoy it.

1 Thessalonians 5:25 Brethren, pray for us.

The veteran missionary pastor, who had already experience so much in his serving The Lord, asked these baby believers to pray for him.

I'd like to ask each of you to pray for me and my family everyday.

Beyond that, realize that your prayers are precious to God regardless your felt lack of maturity or knowledge.

1 Thessalonians 5:26 Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.

Before you get too excited... The reference is to men greeting men, and women greeting women, with "a holy kiss."

Later, when men and women started kissing each other, it gave the Church a bad reputation and early Church documents called for it to cease.

The idea is that you are preserving bonds of affection through grace; there is nothing keeping you from sincerely greeting one another – **but always in a culturally appropriate manner.**

That means hugs and handshakes here.

1 Thessalonians 5:27 I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.

Paul wanted the entire letter read aloud to the entire assembly. This letter, remember, might have been the very first letter Paul ever wrote to a church. If so, he wanted to establish that it was public, not private. It wasn't just for leaders, for them to interpret secretly and then give their own ideas. It was for everyone in the congregation.

We would also conclude that whatever else might be included as part of public worship, the reading of God's entire Word should be a priority.

1 Thessalonians 5:28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

"Grace" is so often defined as "God's unmerited favor," or "getting what you don't deserve," that we forget it is something very, for lack of a better word, *powerful*.

Grace is God's sufficient, sustaining strength in and for every circumstance of your life.

As far as I can tell, you can't store it up, but it is always there, ready to be put into action when you are faced with life.

What do I mean, "you can't store it up?" Let's say you hear about a believer who just found out they have terminal cancer. You go visit them, to encourage them. They end up encouraging you when you see the grace - God's strength - by which they are standing firm in His promises. You wonder if you have that same grace.

Well, you don't - because you don't need it yet! But it will be there for you when **you** need it.

Ephesians 4:7 reads, "Unto each one of us is grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ." It is measured out proportionately to your need.

But you can be sure it's always sufficient.

Paul was, simultaneously, certain that God would complete the work of sanctification He had begun, **and** he was concerned that the Thessalonians help and not hinder God's work in and upon them.

God Himself will do it; yet this is not a work that is without our assistance. Each Christian bears a direct and personal obligation to make a correct response to the call to sanctification. Peter pens it in this manner:

"But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; **that** ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvelous light," (1Peter 2:9).

