

Walking Toward The Light.

Text: 1 Thess 5:23-34

1) Thoroughly Sanctified

Suggested Hymns:

2) Trusting In The Faithfulness Of God

490, 337, 357, 294, 264

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, & 27-28, 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.* ²⁴ *He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it. ...* ²⁷ *I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.* ²⁸ *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Today is the last Sunday of the church year. It reminds us of the end of time and the coming of Christ. St. Paul speaks of times and seasons in the Epistle lesson we heard before, 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11.

It speaks especially of the coming of Christ. With this in mind, St. Paul admonishes the Christians, ⁶ *Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.* He then goes on to instruct them how they should walk so that they may not be overtaken by that Day, ⁴ *But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.*

They will be preserved on that Day if they will follow his admonition, ⁸ *But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the hope of salvation.* He also emphasises sanctification since godlessness destroys faith. But, on the other hand, they are to be kept watchful by exercising their faith in godliness. The result is that ⁵ *You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.*

He then lists various manifestations of Christian conduct as we read in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-22, ¹² *And we urge you, brethren, to recognize those who*

labor among you, and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. Be at peace among yourselves.

¹⁴ Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all. ¹⁵ See that no one renders evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good both for yourselves and for all.

¹⁶ Rejoice always, ¹⁷ pray without ceasing, ¹⁸ in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. ¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰ Do not despise prophecies. ²¹ Test all things; hold fast what is good. ²² Abstain from every form of evil.

Since, however, Christians cannot do this of themselves, he concludes with a closing prayer, greeting and benediction. He prays for God's power for this purpose, basing his prayer and their sanctification on peace with God, through faith in Christ. So today let us consider *Children of Light Walking toward the Light*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Children Of Light Walking Toward The Light Thoroughly Sanctified

Our text begins,²³ *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely.* Earlier in the letter St. Paul had reminded the Thessalonians that their pastors would encourage them to live according to God's will. He also urged the Thessalonians to help one another in sanctified living. Now he prays that "God Himself" would sanctify them.

The prayer that closes this letter asks God, from whom all blessings flow, to bless every effort to help them grow in holy living.

In the first part of the prayer St. Paul prays that God might sanctify them *completely*, "through and through." In Ephesians 4:13 the goal of Christian growth is described in words expressing the same thought, *till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.* We are to strive to attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

That is a level of sanctification we can never reach in this life. But “*Christ’s love compels us*”¹ to be satisfied with nothing less. St. Paul had given them many instructions in this letter about living God-pleasing lives. St. Paul prays that God, who established that glorious peace between all people and Himself, would continually help the Thessalonians to grow in sanctification toward that goal.

It is the God of peace who sanctifies. The God of peace, as we read in Romans 15:33, ³³ *Now the God of peace be with you all.*

The God who gives peace, is also the God of patience and comfort as we read in Romans 15:5 ⁵ *Now may the God of patience and comfort grant you to be like-minded toward one another, according to Christ Jesus,* ⁶ *that you may with one mind and one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

So the very God, God Himself, established peace and grants it to us. This peace is reconciliation with God through the atonement of Jesus Christ. God gives us this peace through faith in Christ. Thereby He also gives us peaceful hearts and sanctified lives. All peace and peaceful living must come from God Himself through faith in Christ.

The words *may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely* is the apostle’s parting wish to the Thessalonians. He wishes and entreats for them with God that they may live in sanctification, godliness, holiness, according to His holy will and in conformity with His own holiness.

Negatively this means a battle against sin, the conquest of sin, and the putting off of the old man, crucifying the flesh, and rejecting Satan, the world, and their temptations.

And positively it means conducting our whole life according to the holy will of God. “*Completely*” means our whole life. We are to walk as the children of light in everything we do.

Our text continues, *may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless.* In this second part of the prayer St. Paul prays that God would keep them in faith without falling backward in any way so that they would be blameless at the Lord’s coming on the Last Day.

Only the believer who by faith is clothed in Jesus' blood and righteousness will be found blameless when Christ comes to judge the living and the dead. By adding up the terms "*spirit, soul, and body*" and putting the adjective "*whole*" before these three, St. Paul emphasises how earnestly he prays that God will keep them faithful to the end.

We may remember how concerned St. Paul was that the persecution might lead them to abandon Christ. We know that one of the chief purposes of this letter was to encourage and strengthen them even more, now that he knew they were standing firm.

To *be preserved blameless* means that the whole Christian in all his parts is preserved by God and is blameless. Blameless means without fault, blame, spiritual blemish, or sin.

Just as the animals sacrificed in the Old Testament had to be without blemish, so the whole Christian, according to spirit, soul, and body, is to be preserved as a blameless offering to God. We read in Romans 12:1, ***I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.***

Sanctification is the work of the Holy Spirit. We read in *Luther's Small Catechism*, Q 156. *What is the special work of the Holy Spirit?* The Holy Spirit sanctifies me (makes me holy) by bringing me to faith in Christ, so that I might have the blessings of redemption and lead a godly life.

This is called sanctification in the wide sense as we read in 1 Corinthians 6:11, ***But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.***

Q162. *Besides faith, what else does the Holy Spirit create in you by the Gospel?* The Holy Spirit sanctifies me in the true faith, that is, by faith He works a renewal of my whole life - in spirit, will, attitude, and desires - so that I now strive to overcome sin and do good works

This is called sanctification in the narrow sense. We read in 2 Corinthians 5:17, ***Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.*** And in Romans 8:9, ***You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but***

by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

And in Galatians 5:22-23, ²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control.*

Every believer should pray with the Psalmist as we pray in Psalm 51:10, ¹⁰ *Create in me a clean heart, O God, And renew a right spirit within me.*

Our text continues with the words, *At the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* This is His coming in light and glory to judge the ungodly and wicked and to receive to Himself the children of light.

May you be preserved blameless unto that Day! May He preserve you so that no blame or blemish is found in you for which He must condemn you! Here we see the importance of the admonition of walking in light with the view toward Christ's coming in light.

2. Children Of Light Walking Toward The Light Trusting In The Faithfulness Of God

Our text says, ²⁴ *He who calls you is faithful.* We know that by our own efforts we cannot be sanctified completely, totally. We read in Philippians 3:12, ¹² *Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.* We deeply and repentantly deplore our insufficiency, imperfections, and sins.

The life of being Christ-like is a real battle as we read in Romans 7:22-24, ²² *For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. ²³ But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. ²⁴ O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? However, we should not despair but trust in God.*

Our text tells us that God is faithful. He has also called us. We read in 2 Timothy 1:9, ⁹ *who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began.* This call is sincere and effective.

God has also called us to holiness as we read in 1 Thessalonians 4:7, ⁷ *For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness.* It is not only God's will

that we should walk in holiness, but He Himself is faithful to perform this in us. Just as the call in Christ and to Christ works faith, so He also Himself sanctifies us through this call by granting us His Holy Spirit. So look to Him and trust in Him.

The last part of our text says, *who also will do it*. And St. Paul is sure the Lord will hear his prayers. After all, God is faithful. God often promises in His Word that He will send His Holy Spirit to strengthen His dear children in their faith and in their desire to live lives of thankfulness to Him. Because God is faithful, He never fails to do what He promises. That is why St. Paul could assure the Thessalonians, *“He will do it.”*

This confidence is also expressed in Philippians 1:6, *‘being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ*. He will keep us in the peace with Himself through faith in Christ; for He is faithful and has called us to faith in Christ for the purpose of keeping us in that faith and saving us.

Therefore God will also sanctify us and preserve us blameless, *at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*. He has created us in Christ Jesus for good works. We read in Ephesians 2:10, *¹⁰For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*.

He gives us His Holy Spirit to enable us to walk in holiness and to lead us into all good works. He graciously covers our failings and insufficiency with the perfect sufficiency of Christ, so that we shall be found blameless at Christ’s coming. Therefore always turn to God’s grace in Christ and firmly believe that this grace will also preserve you blameless.

So children of light walk towards the light. Are we perfectly sanctified? The text emphasises perfection, but it does not teach perfect sanctification in the sense that we commit no sins any more.

St. Paul prays for perfect sanctification for his Thessalonians and this should indeed be our goal, and we should strive for it, as we read in Philippians 3:12-14. *¹²Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me*.

¹³ Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴ I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.

We cannot do this of ourselves, but the God of peace can sanctify us wholly. So seek His peace in Christ eagerly and daily, and that peace will give us strength to grow daily in godliness.

Having that peace, we are indeed perfectly sanctified in Christ and shall walk as the children of light and towards the light, the day of His coming in glory to take us to live with Him in the perfect light of glory.

Finally St. Paul urges, that the Thessalonians should make sure this letter is read to every believer. With the words “***I charge you by the Lord***” he puts them under solemn oath to do what he directs.

This is no ordinary letter, but written by the inspiration of God. That is exactly the way the apostle Peter describes all of St. Paul’s letters, when he states in 2 Peter 3:15 ***also our beloved brother St. Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you.***

Since all of God’s Word is vital for believers’ growth in knowledge, faith, and sanctification, it must not be left to chance that somehow they might hear about this letter.

St. Paul’s benediction is a standard but beautiful one. Everything we are, and everything we will be in eternity, is a result of God’s grace. When the apostle speaks this blessing, he could ask for nothing more precious, ***“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”***

What better prayer could we pray than that which St. Paul prayed for the Thessalonians’ growth in sanctified living and for their being kept blameless until Christ’s coming on the Last Day? What more encouraging words could we hear than St. Paul’s reminder that God is faithful? Yes, God will keep all of His gracious promises to us. Amen

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ 2 Corinthians 5:14