

Peace of the Spirit

¹² We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you,

¹³ and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

¹⁴ And we urge you, brothers, admonish the idle, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all.

¹⁵ See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

¹⁶ Rejoice always,

¹⁷ pray without ceasing,

¹⁸ give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

¹⁹ Do not quench the Spirit.

²⁰ Do not despise prophecies,

²¹ but test everything; hold fast what is good.

²² Abstain from every form of evil.

²³ Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

²⁴ He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.

²⁵ Brothers, pray for us.

²⁶ Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.

²⁷ I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers.

²⁸ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

1 Thessalonians 5:12:28

An Unexpected Biblical Connection

As I was writing last week's sermon, the missionary who invited us to Ireland last October to do a conference wrote me with a question. "Do you know of any good books or articles that talk about Satan's abilities and his influence in the world post-resurrection?" I thought about it and couldn't really suggest the perfect book. I don't think it has been written yet. The reason why is because I don't know of any books on the subject that tackle this question with the divine council worldview in mind. And if you don't understand that, it seems to me your theology of how Satan works in the world today is going to be incomplete, to say the least. Sadly, most writing about Satan don't know it.

He explained the reason for his question. "A friend of mine suffers from spinal-bifida and he has been in a lot of pain lately and he was trying to think through suffering and Satan's role in our suffering post-resurrection." In a remarkable act of providence, I happened to be working on **1 Thesalonians 5:19-22**. In what couldn't have been five minutes earlier, I came across a footnote by Greg Beale who was talking about prophecy (a main theme of these verses) and Paul's overall context here.

He notes that verses are eerily similar to Job 2:3 (cf. 1:1, 1:8, and 28:28, see chart below). This includes the phrase “abstains from all forms of evil” (1Th 5:22) and includes words for “holding fast” (21) and being “blameless” (23). This hardly seems like a coincidence, especially when you consider that the context of both is judging the work of God in human affairs.¹

1 Thessalonians 5:21b-22 and Job				
1Th 5:21-23	Job 1:1	Job 1:8	Job 2:3	Job 28:28
"To the good hold fast." "Abstain from every form of evil." "... be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."	"and that man was true, blameless ... abstaining from everything evil."	"a man blameless, true ... abstaining from everything evil?"	"a man harmless, true, blameless ... abstaining from all evil?" "and he yet holds fast to innocence"	"and to abstain from evil is understanding."

¹ Here's the note: “5:22 The phrase *avoid every kind of evil* may echo Job 1:1, 8 and 2:3 (see also 28:28), where a strikingly similar Greek expression occurs. Also, like this text, all three Job texts closely link “blameless” (*amemptōs*) with “avoiding all evil.” In addition, Job 2:3 joins the phrase “keep away from all evil” with “but he still holds to good” (*akakia*), which is reminiscent of 1 Thessalonians 5:21b–22. In both cases, “holding” to good refers to **rightly evaluating the work of God in human affairs**. The broad context of Job concerns rightly evaluating God’s work in contrast to false evaluations by Job’s wife and friends. This background suggests that Paul’s injunctions in 5:21–22, while including the preceding issue of true divine prophecy, may include reference to rightly perceiving one’s relation to God in human affairs in general.” G. K. Beale, *1–2 Thessalonians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

Think about the story of Job for a moment. Satan and the other sons of God come before the throne in heaven to present themselves in the divine council. In other words, they are carrying out their regular judicial duties over the earth. The sons of God are those heavenly beings who preside over the nations (**Dt 32:8**), while the *satan* is the prosecuting attorney, or as one scholar calls him, the cop-on-the-beat who sometimes has to go before the court.²

God decides to question Satan about Job. **Stop right here**. A lot of people think this is the other way around, showing rather ironically that they are **not evaluating the story correctly** and have become like Job's counselors. God says, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one like him on the earth, a man who is blameless, truthful, and godly, keeping away from everything evil?" (**Job 1:8 LXX**). Of course, at this point a discussion ensues. Satan blames God for protecting him and suggests that if he removes his providential hand of blessing that Job will curse God. Game on. Satan goes out and, at the express permission of God, destroys everything precious to Job—his house, his animals, his family, leaving only Job and his wife untouched.

² **Lowell K. Handy**, "The Authorization of Divine Power and the Guilt of God in the Book of Job: Useful Ugaritic Parallels," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 60 (1993): 107-118.

The crucial thing in all of this is Job's response. "The Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, 'Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the Name of the LORD.'" In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong" (Job 1:20-22). Job acknowledges the source is God, he does not seem to understand Satan's involvement, but he does not accuse God of wrongdoing.

What is Job doing? He is looking at his circumstances and making a spiritual evaluation of what has happened. And, it is right. To put it in the language of Paul, he is "testing everything," he is "holding fast to the good" (1Th 5:21). He is abstaining from evil (22). He does this *in his evaluation of his circumstances*.

It is into this that the court of heaven opens for business on another day. Satan and the sons of God come again, and God again confronts Satan with Job. Again it tells us that Job is blameless and godly and that he abstains from all evil. But now it adds that besides "abstaining from all evil" and being "blameless," it includes that he still "holds fast" to the "good" (Job 2:3 LXX, Beale's translation). Holding fast to the good was not said before because Job's life was a piece of

cake. But now, he has been tested. In the testing, he holds fast to what is good. Curiously, the phrase in Paul is, “Test everything; hold fast what is good” (1Th 5:21).

Returning to the End

Today we will look at 1 Thessalonians 5:19-28. Recall that this is part of a larger section (beginning in vs. 12). This will end our study of this first book to the Thessalonians. As we go through it, we will continue to remember our main theme in this larger section is about “peace.” Recall how the passage begins with “peace.” “Be at peace among yourselves” (13). And it ends with “peace.” “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely...” (23). All of the commands at the end of this letter are given to benefit the church and the Christians so that they might be at peace together and in their own hearts with God.

This list of commands, which begins in vs. 12, is made up of five sections that break down into outward behavior and inward thought life:

1. the church’s responsibility to its spiritual leaders (vv 12-13)
2. the church’s responsibility to its needy members (vv 14a-c)
3. the church’s responsibility to all men (vv 14d-15)

4. the church's spiritual privileges (vv 16-18)
 5. the church's spiritual responsibilities (gifts) (vv 19-22)
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1. Christian behavior (12-15)
 2. Christian inner life (16-22)

The last of the five sections (vv. 19-22) is where we begin today. It contains four verses that should be read as relating to one another, as we can see from the parallel in Job. These four verses take us to the benediction and the end of the letter.

Do Not Quench the Spirit

Vs. 19 says, “**Do not quench** (*sbunnumi*) **the Spirit.**” The image is one of putting out a fire, which is fitting because throughout the Scripture, from the burning bush to the pillar of fire to the fire raining down from heaven to the tongues of fire, this is an image of the Spirit. “Quench” is different from “**do not grieve** (*lupeo*) **the Spirit**” (**Eph 4:30**).³ Grieve means “**to make sorrowful**” whereas “quench” means to “**put out.**” What can be said about both words is that **they apply only to persons** rather than things. In other

³ This in turn may come from **Isa 63:10** where the Greek word is *paroxynō*, but the idea is overlapping.

words, the Spirit here is not a force, not an “it.” It is the Holy Spirit of God, the Third Person of the Trinity.

Because of what comes next, **vs. 20**'s, “**Do not despise prophecies,**” some suggest Paul has in mind the manifestation of the so-called charismatic gifts. In other words, you want to read these two verses in light of each other. While this is undoubtedly true in principle, and **we will talk about that in a moment**, it could be that this verse also contains a more general warning.

This week a pastor asked me a question about what we should tell our children and how we should regard them prior to their coming to faith in Christ. I've had this same discussion with many of you. One thought that occurs to me is this verse. *Do not quench the Spirit.* What do I mean?

Jesus tells us that we are to have **faith like a child**. It seems to me that sometimes we think they are to have the faith of seminary graduates (God help us all). Thus, when they talk about Jesus positively or want to pray to him or whatever, we squash the idea until we can really be *sure* that they are Christians.

But is it not the Spirit's job to bring people to talk well of Jesus, to talk much of Jesus, to pray to Jesus, and to believe and trust in Jesus? Perhaps we sometimes minimize this

simply because some people “fake it.” If you have children, I would ask you to consider this question. Do your children do these things or do they do the opposite? Again, sometimes parents, for whatever reasons can be prone to not believing their children when these things are on display in them, that this is somehow the work of the flesh rather than the Spirit, of an unconverted heart rather than a regenerated one.

I’m not saying these activities necessarily mean the child is saved. But could it be that we may quench the Spirit’s work in their little hearts by not believing that what they are talking about is real because they aren’t old enough to know better and because they haven’t come up to us and directly said, “I am declared righteous before the court of heaven by faith alone in Jesus. Can I be baptized?” The very tiniest of children are capable of knowing implicitly that we are their parents. Can’t the Spirit work to teach them from the earliest of ages, especially when they grow up in Church, that he is God? Is there some reason you can think of that makes you believe he doesn’t want to do this for your children? It’s at least something to think about.

Do not Despise Prophecies

It seems from the context that this command is related to those gifts, especially prophecy. Some see this so clearly that they would paraphrase these verses as, “Don’t quench the Spirit,¹³ that is [or perhaps, ‘for example’], don’t treat prophecies with contempt.”⁴ The word *charisma* means “gift.” In the early church, God manifested his Spirit through gifts like tongues, prophecies, utterances of wisdom and knowledge, and miracles. As he only addresses prophecies here, we will only look at this gift.

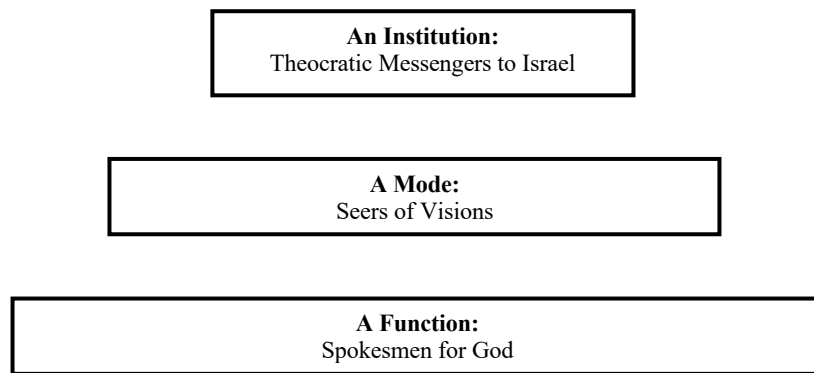
We will start with the idea of prophecy. Sam Waldron has a helpful chart explaining OT prophecy in three facets.⁵ **First**, it is a function. Prophets functioned as spokesmen (or women) for God. This is the most basic sense of the word. Anyone from Abel to Zechariah (A-Z) are prophets in this sense. **Second**, prophecy a mode. Prophets are sometimes called “seers,” and this describes the way they received their revelations, via dreams or visions. **Third**, prophecy was an

¹³ That is, “put out the fire.” The vivid and picturesque image of fire picks up the frequent association of the Holy Spirit and fire (e.g., Acts 2:3–4). The NIV (“do not put out the Spirit’s fire”) attempts to catch this imagery, but obscures the fact that “Spirit” is the direct object of the verb.

⁴ Michael Holmes, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 183.

⁵ See Samuel E. Waldron, *To Be Continued: Are the Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (Merrick, NY: Calvary Press, 2005), 53.

institution. Sometime after Israel was established, this institution developed, such that by the time of king Saul, it could be said that he was one of the prophets. The OT prophets were known for primarily three things: forthtelling (predicting the future), foretelling (bringing covenant lawsuits against God's people by telling them the truth about the covenant and how they have failed to uphold it), and singing.



In all cases, the biblical prophet was **infallible**. Waldron argues persuasively for me that this is true of the NT prophets as well.⁶ This is seen in many places, but the first one sets the standard for all the rest. Moses says, “**The prophet who presumes to speak a word in my name that I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other**

⁶ **Waldron**, 65-68. This is in contradistinction to people like Grudem and Piper. See also John MacArthur, “Prophecy Redefined: Deuteronomy 18:20-22,” *Grace to You*, <https://www.gty.org/library/Print/Blog/B140312>

gods, that same prophet shall die. And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?'--when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him" (Deut 18:20-22).

For whatever reasons, this topic has become a huge source of discussion and argument, especially in Reformed/Calvinistic circles. **There are some** who hold that all of these Charismatic gifts ceased with the death of the Apostles. Their purpose was to confirm the validity of the gospel and the authority of Jesus's Disciples, and once they died, having laid the foundations, there is no more need for them. Thus, when Paul says, "**As for prophecies, they will pass away**" (1Co 13:8), it refers to the end of that first generation.

Others (not in our circles) hold that, no, all of these gifts continue today and in fact everyone can have them, and some even teach that you basically aren't a Christian if you don't have at least tongues and sometimes prophecy is included. This view is mostly confined to the radical sects of Pentecostalism. Then there are all kinds of views that fall

somewhere in the middle. John Piper and Wayne Grudem and Sam Storms are examples of this, though they fall on different parts of the spectrum of those who believe in some sort of continuationism.

In my opinion, these gifts have ceased, because the reason they were given has passed away. The foundation has been laid. The Apostles established Jesus' church. God gave these incredible gifts for the purpose of confirming the validity of the Apostles and their message. But the question of prophecies is more difficult for me. Even **hard-core cessationists** admit that there are difficult examples of future predictions that came true within their own circles, they just don't want to classify those as prophecies in any kind of a biblical way.⁷ I myself have been the **personal recipient** of a couple of these, one that took place in a car just driving and talking to my uncle. There was nothing magical or mysterious about it. He just said that one of you (me or my brother) will be in ministry, even though neither of us had any plans for such.

So what is a "prophecy?" There are two basic kinds. The **first** is a **foretelling**, a telling of the future. In Paul's day,

⁷ E.g. The ARBCA position paper and the story of Hanserd Knollys who healed Benjamin Keach and predicted that he would live longer than Knollys, which he did in "A Position Paper Concerning the Continuance Of Revelatory Gifts in the Present Day," March 8, 2000, p. 6.

these kinds of prophecies were occurring regularly. No one denies that the office of prophet had passed away when he wrote 1 Thessalonians. Therefore, he is telling them, “Do not despise” these (1Th 5:20). To **despise** is to scorn or scoff. It is to ridicule the prophecy. Some take this too far to mean that no matter what anyone says you should be open to it. This is nonsense. And this nonsense is sometimes accompanied with patent rejection of and a temptation for others to abandon the biblical God for those which are false. Think of **Joseph Smith or Muhammad** as two prime examples. Those religions are filled with prophecies not found in Scripture, and those deities both masquerade as the true God.

The second kind of prophecy is **forthtelling**. It is interesting that the Puritans often defined prophecy as “**preaching**.” For example, William Perkins has a treatise called THE ART OF PROPHECYING: Or A TREATISE CONCERNING the sacred and only true manner and *method of Preaching*.” I think this is probably a legitimate use of the term, though I’m not sure it is what Paul had in mind or not. In this sense, I don’t know anyone that would argue that prophecy has passed away. And in the spirit of our verse, Paul would be exhorting the Christians not to despise the preaching of God’s word, which sadly, many do in our day

(including perhaps more than any, those who are supposed to be preaching it).

Testing, Holding Fast

The Apostle continues with another verse that is almost certainly related, for it starts with a connecting word, “**But.**” “**But test everything; hold fast what is good.**” The “everything” here is specifically **prophecies**. How do you test a prophecy? Regarding foretelling, the simple test is does what is spoken come true? This is exactly what we heard from Moses. How do we test a sermon? How do we test a cult like Mormonism or Islam? With God’s word. Is it consistent with Scripture? Does it lead you astray to follow after other gods? Is it full of error and blasphemous doctrine that, especially, mocks and destroys the unique Person and work of Jesus Christ?

It is interesting that in another part of Deuteronomy it says, “**If a prophet or a dreamer of dreams arises among you and gives you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or wonder that he tells you comes to pass, and if he says, ‘Let us go after other gods,’ which you have not known, ‘and let us serve them,’ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams. For the LORD your God is testing**

you, to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deut 13:1-3). God is testing them with false prophets. So, the command of Scripture is for you to test those prophecies.

Abstaining from Evil

Similarly, it is also quite possible that vs. 22, “Abstain from every form of evil,” is related to these verses. The Greek can be translated, “Avoid every evil kind.”⁸ Every evil kind of what? Well, first and foremost, evil prophecy (in any sense of that word). Don’t get caught up in them either as a follower or as a participant, especially since they are often accompanied with exciting manifestations that pass themselves off as godly (think Toronto Blessing or Pensacola Fire or Benny Hinn revivals) and are therefore very seductive!

Greg Beale, who is Reformed, argues that what was in mind here was a prophetic word that was “direct, flawless revelation from the Spirit” rather than merely faithful preaching of the word to a congregation, as some want to define the gift.⁹ His logic is reasonable, and yet I think he may have not thought enough about the point he himself

⁸ Beale, 174. See discussion below.

⁹ Beale, 173ff.

made about all of this language coming from Job (and to this end, I think his translation above, see n. 8, is too narrowly focused only on prophecy).

If there is indeed a connection between these verses and Job, then it seems to me that we have to extend this entire discussion beyond even sermons to something more general. I don't mean that this verse is talking about abstaining “**from any kind of sinful association with the outside world** (though Scripture speaks to that elsewhere).”¹⁰ Rather, it is talking about **the evaluation of our lives** and how God is leading them. People do this all the time, as they seek to want to know God's will for their life or to understand why such a such a thing has happened to them. This is a very practical matter.

In Job, it was his evaluation that “**The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the Name of the LORD,**” yet his refusal to “**charge God with wrong**” that becomes the basis of his being said to be “**abstaining from everything evil**” and “**holding fast to good,**” the exact language used in our verses. In fact, the transitional verse that we will look at in a moment adds yet another component that Job was said to possess: **blamelessness**. “**Now many the**

¹⁰ Beale, 174.

God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless...” (1Th 5:23).

The Spirit of Peace and Benediction

Before leaving this section, let me ask one more question. This question finally returns to the overall theme of **peace** that we saw so much last week. We mustn't forget that this is still broadly in mind even here. **How does not quenching, not despising, testing everything, and holding fast to the good relate to our overall subject of peace?**

Paul concludes his long discussion on the spiritual gifts being exercised in the church with this very thought. “**For God is not a God of disorder but of peace**” (1Co 14:33). All things must be done peacefully. Not only should they be done peacefully, but they should **lead to peace** in the community. That is, the prophecies seem to have been there to help order the communities life together and relationships within it (Wanamaker, 190). Beale says,

To treat prophecies with contempt “dampens” the Spirit’s work and thus suppresses the peaceful effects of the Spirit. Diso-

bedience and chaos occur when God’s prophetic word is disregarded (as is clear from reading 2 Thess 3:6–15). On the other hand, discord results when false prophecies are allowed to spread throughout the church and “destroy the faith of some” (so 2 Tim 2:14–18). Therefore, Paul commands in 5:21–22 to *test everything* (i.e., all prophecies), to *hold on to the good* (that which derives from true prophecy) and to *avoid every kind of evil*.¹¹

What is one thing the Spirit does? He generates peace. “To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace” (Rom 8:6). There are many verses like this in the Scripture (cf. 1Ch 12:18; Acts 9:31; Rom 14:17; 15:13; Gal 5:22; Eph 4:3; 1Pe 1:2; etc.). To that end, Paul begins to close this first letter. He starts with a benediction. “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1Th 5:23). This has as its focus the goal of peace.

¹¹ Ibid. **A Final Thought.** Someone might have an objection to any kind of prophecy of any sort, being possible today under the argument that if it is a prophecy from God, then it ought to go in the Bible. Thus, this somehow undermines *sola scriptura*. There is nothing at stake here regarding *sola scriptura*, as there were plenty of prophecies in the OT and NT that were being spoken by anyone from prophetesses to people of the NT churches that never made it into the Bible. The speaking of a prophecy, even an infallible one, does not necessitate that it become canonical Scripture.

The Goal of Peace

We have spoken much about peace, almost as an end to itself these last couple of weeks. But the benediction makes it clear that even peace is **not the final goal**, though it is a necessary prerequisite to getting there. At its heart, peace means being reconciled to God by the death of his Son Jesus. In this way, the God of peace as it says here, becomes your peace. He gives you peace by his Spirit, so that you know that he is no longer angry at you, no longer your enemy, no longer to judge you on the basis of your sins, but rather on the basis of Christ's righteousness.

As important and beautiful as this personal experiential peace is, is itself still not the final ultimate goal of your life. Rather, this belongs to your status of being **kept blameless** (like Job) **at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ**. We've talked about the **Coming of Christ** as recently as the early parts of this very chapter (**1 Thess 5**). It is a major theme of this book and of the shorter letter to come. His coming is in justice, to judge the living and the dead. Who can stand? Only those who are blameless.

Certainty of the Goal

But **who are those that are blameless?** They are those who are “**sanctified completely.**” To be sanctified means to be set apart as holy. We’ve talked about **progressive sanctification** in this letter, that is God constantly washing you with his word, forgiving you of your sin, emboldening you with his Spirit to obey him. Indeed, that is part of what this last section of the letter has been about.

But here we are talking about **final sanctification**, total cleansing, the removal of all sin. We will talk about this in two ways. The first is what part of you this constitutes (spirit, soul, body). The second is how it happens.

Spirit, Soul, Body?

First, what part of you is sanctified. The obvious and correct answer is, “**All of me.**” It says, “**May your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless...**” But there is a question here of exactly what this means. One of you asked me when we first began this study about the language here of “spirit and soul and body.” The question was, is this a theological statement about the innate makeup of human beings? Specifically, the question is whether the spirit and soul

are the same thing or two different things. There are **three basic positions** on this question.

The vast majority are what is called **dualists** (from the Latin *duo* meaning “two”). Dualism sees humans as being made up of two distinct parts, a material part called a body or the flesh and an immaterial part called variously the soul or the spirit. Jesus teaches this way saying,

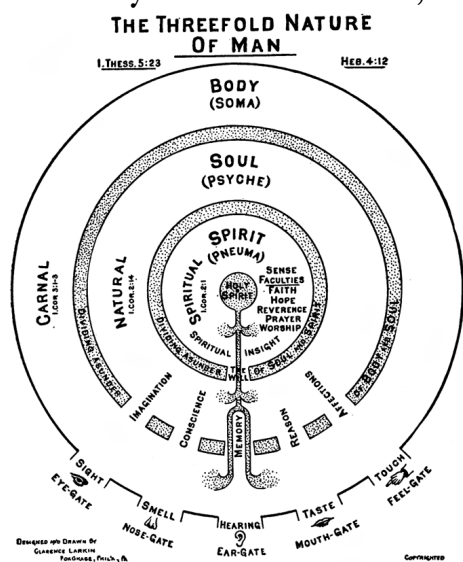
- “Rather fear him who can destroy both **soul** and body in hell.” (Matt 10:28)
- “The **spirit** indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.” (Matt 26:41)

A second view is called **trichotomy**, which sees humans divided into three parts. Berkhof says, “**the most familiar but also the crudest form of trichotomy is that which takes the body for the material part of man’s nature, the soul as the principle of animal life, and the spirit as the God-related rational and immortal element in man.**”¹² A surface reading of 1 Thess 5:23 seems to say this. “**May your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless...**” (each is divided by the word “and”). This has been perhaps the main teaching of

¹² **Louis Berkhof**, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 191ff.

Dispensationalism and Pentecostal theology and is probably the most popular view among Evangelicals today.¹³ It is also noteworthy that this view has its roots in Greek philosophy,¹⁴ that the Gnostics held strongly to it,¹⁵ and that it was essential to some Christian heresies.¹⁶ I don't mean to poison the well here, but it is an historical fact.

¹³ Cf. **C. I. Scofield** in the *Scofield Reference Bible* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1909), note 1 on 1 Thessalonians 5:23; **Watchman Nee**, *The Spiritual Man* (3 vols.; New York: Christian Fellowship, 1968); **Lewis Sperry Chafer**, *He That Is Spiritual* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1967). Chart by **Clarence Larkin**, *Rightly Dividing the Word* (Philadelphia: Fox Chase, 1921), 86.



¹⁴ See the short discussion in **Michael Horton**, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 374.

¹⁵ A good source for seeing the dangers of trichotomy in this respect is **Kim Riddlebarger**, “Trichotomy: A Beachhead for Gnostic Influences” in *Modern Reformation* 4.4 (1995): 22-26. <https://www.dougvandorn.com/gnosticism-july-august-1995.pdf>. Horton has this bibliography: **Hans Jonas**, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon, 1958); **Kurt Rudolph**, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983); **Dan Merkur**, *Gnosis: An Esoteric Tradition of Mystical Visions and Unions* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1993); **Edwin M. Yamauchi**, “The Descent of Ishtar, the Fall of Sophia, and the Jewish Roots of Gnosticism,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 29 (1978): 143–75; **Ugo Bianchi**, ed., *Selected Essays on Gnosticism, Dualism, and Mysticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1978).

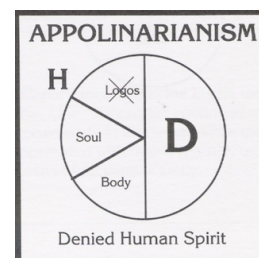
¹⁶ Specifically, Apollinarianism:

A third view is called **physicalism** or **monism**. As it sounds, this view teaches that man is essentially an extremely complex body. I've only seen this view argued in Christian circles by Greg Bahnsen.¹⁷ It is so radical, I won't deal with it here.

When thinking about this question, I think the mainstream teaching of the church is by far-and-away the best. This is the dualist view. It has understood that the Scripture speaks of the same thing in different ways. Horton identifies it as “**parallelism**” or a common (especially Hebraic) way of reinforcing a point with different terms, which he believes is true of this very passage.¹⁸ Robert Reymond explains this by looking at several parallel passages in the Gospels. Citing Deuteronomy 6:5,

Luke 10:27 reads that we should love God with all our **heart** (καρδία, *kardia*) and **soul** (ψυχή, *psychē*) and **strength** (ἰσχύς,

Apollinarianism is the view of Apollinaris of Laodicea (d. 390) that Jesus could not have had a human mind but rather had a human body and a lower soul (the seat of the emotions) but a divine mind. See **Gervase N. Charmley**, “The Great Heresies – 4: Apollinarianism,” (Feb 8, 2017), <https://banneroftruth.org/us/resources/articles/2017/apollinarianism/>. Picture in **Wayne H. House**, *Chart of Christian Theology and Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 55.



¹⁷ **Greg Bahnsen**, “The Mind/Body Problem In Biblical Perspective,” PS143, Covenant Media Foundation, 1972. At <http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/PA143.htm>.

¹⁸ Michael Horton, *The Christian Faith: A Systematic Theology for Pilgrims on the Way* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 375 and n. 5.

ischys) and **mind** (διάνοια, *dianoia*), Matthew 22:37 reads that we should love God with all our heart and soul and mind, omitting strength, while Mark reports in 12:30 that we should love God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength (reversing the order of the last two Lukan words), and in 12:33 that we should love God with all our heart and **understanding** (συνέσεως, *syneseōs*) and strength, using another word for “mind” and omitting “soul” altogether. In all, five different words are employed without even mentioning the **body**.¹⁹

He concludes, and I believe rightly so, “Surely, no one would insist, on the basis of these series of words connected by “and,” that each of these words refers to an immaterial, ontologically distinct entity, and that therefore Luke was a quintchotomist, Matthew was a quadchotomist, and Mark was a sexchotomist.”

I hope that makes the point of what I think Paul doing here. But if not, Hoekema explains my view on our passage.

When Paul prays for the Thessalonians that the spirit, soul, and body of each of them may be preserved or kept, he is

¹⁹ **Robert L. Reymond**, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: T. Nelson, 1998), 420.

obviously not trying to split man into three parts, any more than Jesus intended to split man into four parts when he said, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind” (Luke 10:27).²⁰

Someone may point to **Heb 4:12**, which is probably the other popular passage that seems to some to suggest that the soul is distinct from the spirit. “For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.” Here are some things to think about.

First, John Murray showed that the verb “dividing” (Heb 4:12) is never used elsewhere to separate two different things, but only to divide up various aspects of the same thing (Heb 2:4; **Luke 11:17-18**; **Matt 27:35**; **John 19:24**).²¹ **Second**, Horton points out, “Hebrews 4:12 does not say that the Word divides *between* soul and spirit but that it divides *even* soul and spirit.”²² Thus **Riddlebarger** concludes, “The point is not that the Word separates two distinct things—

²⁰ **Anthony A. Hoekema**, *Created in God's Image* (Grand Raids: Eerdmans, 1988), 23-33.

²¹ **John Murray**, “Trichotomy,” in *Collected Writings of John Murray*, Vol. 2 (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1977), 30-31 [23-33].

²² Horton, 375.

soul from spirit—but that ‘The Word of God judges the thoughts and attitude of the heart’ (Heb 4:12). The Word does not divide soul from spirit, as though these were two distinct entities, but the Word does divide soul and spirit in the sense of penetrating into our inner most parts.”²³

The point of this rabbit-trail must not be missed. Paul is saying that all of you, not just your inside but your outside will be sanctified. This is a cryptic way of speaking of the resurrection of our bodies on that Day. But it is also a way of talking about God purging every wicked recess of your inner self of sin. I don’t know how thinking about this can lead you to anything other than worship. I don’t understand how this can even happen, because I am too full of sin. But I believe it will, and this language causes me to want to shout, ‘Hallelujah, Praise the Lord.’ What a blessing this will be.

Certainty of the Goal

The second point is **how does this happen**. Frankly, the answer here causes me to equally want to shout the same thing. **Vs. 24** completes the thought. “**He who calls you is**

²³ Kim Riddlebarger, “Trichotomy: A Beachhead for Gnostic Influences” in *Modern Reformation* 4.4 (1995): 24 [22-26].

faithful; he will surely do it.” The letter ends with pure gospel. The good news is that this sanctification, this being kept blameless until the day of Christ is not something God puts into your hands. This is his gift, and he insures that those he gives it to will not lose it. He will perform it. He will do it.

It speaks here of being “called.” This has to be talking about the effectual call of the Holy Spirit, for he is speaking to those who have responded by faith to Christ. All the spiritual calls effectually are brought to completion. Jesus will lose none of those given to him by the Father. Knowing my own evil heart, I can’t tell you how good it is to know that God will never leave me or forsake me. He has given me his Spirit as a down deposit of the blessings to come. And therefore, he will do it.

It is important that you understand that this sanctifying work that happens totally at the end is nothing but the making complete of the work that has already begun in you. In fact, we can say it another way. The final sanctification is the “not-yet” part of present justification. Today, if you hear his voice, you are justified by faith. That is, you are declared righteous because of Christ. Tomorrow, you will be made righteous in all respects. Thus, justification is the first and necessary aspect of this. Final sanctification is its mirror. It is

the objective reality bought about by the legal reality. That deserves much praise indeed.

Conclusion of the Letter

In many ways, this is the theological highlight of the letter. But we have **four short verses to go**. It ends with three of these which contain the word “**brothers**” (*adelphos*, from which we get the word “Philadelphia” or “*brotherly love*”). We saw how the long list of commands that we finished this morning began as those addressed to brothers. Family. God’s sons. Christ’s adopted siblings.

The first is a command to pray. “**Pray for us**” (25). This is in line with the command to “**pray without ceasing**” (17). If the latter is a general attitude of prayer, this one is a formal call to **specific prayer**. Not only is life to be a way of prayer, but specific prayers are to be offered. The Apostle wants prayer. Why would he covet such prayers? For one, he had tremendous responsibilities and a calling to spread the Gospel to the outer reaches of the known world. For another, they have been under great persecution. For yet another, they greatly desire to return to Thessalonica to see them. Prayers directed specifically at these kinds of things are what he is asking for.

Paul, Timothy, and Silas are now dead. So, does the command stop with them? No. This is a general call to [pray for your church leaders, missionaries](#), all those who labor in the gospel, who seek the welfare of the churches. It is also a call to pray for the churches and all the leaders of Christ's church *everywhere*. These burdens are not relieved until Christ returns. And prayer is a major means God uses to help his bride and his shepherds and his future-elect when they are in need.

Next, they are to “[Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss](#)” (26). My understanding is that the Russian Churches do this, and if you went there, you probably wouldn't like it. Because it's a kiss on the lips. Is this a forever command or contextual? He doesn't actually say where you have to kiss. Nevertheless, this raises a thorny issue, and maybe a [handshake](#) or a [pat on the back](#) or a hug signifies enough.

With that said, let me suggest that there seems to be an association between [kissing and peace](#). This is what made Judas' betrayal so wicked. He pretended peace; he brought war. One scholar proposes that Paul repeatedly encourages Christians to kiss ([Rom 16:16](#); [1Co 16:20](#); [2Co 13:12](#), and here) to underscore that former antagonistic barriers of gender, race (Jew and Gentile) and social rank (slave and free)

have been broken down by Christ's work and to express a new unity in Christ.²⁴ Another says, “Moreover, since kissing in the Greco-Roman world was a sign of close familial relationship or, at times, reconciliation between antagonists, it indicated for Paul that all diverse people-groups in Christ are part of a newly constituted spiritual family at peace with one another. Of course, this fits right in with the notion of peace woven throughout 5:12–24.”²⁵ My Scandinavian and northern European culture is not like the Greek and Italian cultures of the world. Probably kissing each other as they were doing would convey the wrong things to many people today. And that is the difficulty of the command.

Finally, he commands those who have received this letter not to hide it. “... Have this letter read to all the brothers” (27). I do not believe he is speaking about merely reading a portion each week, but to read it all, in one sitting, like any letter should be. All I can say is, “Amen.” That is why we began this series doing this very thing. Reading the whole letter has an effect that no sermon can have, because

²⁴ William Klassen, “The Sacred Kiss in the New Testament,” *New Testament Studies* 39 (1993):133-35 [122–35].

²⁵ G. K. Beale, *1–2 Thessalonians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 177.

the letter is God's word, meant to be heard, able to be understood. Though we Reformed take preaching very seriously, I think we (not to mention the rest of Christ's church) could stand to take this particular verse much more seriously.

In fact, it is so serious to Paul that he places them under **an oath** before the Lord to do it. Oaths are serious business. There is a teaching out there that says, because of something Jesus says in the Sermon on the Mount, that OT laws about oaths have ceased. Nonsense. This radical anabaptist (Mennonite? Amish?) teaching fails to understand the continuity of the Scripture. Why, even Jesus himself was put under oath. Rather than saying, "You don't understand Caiaphas, I've abolished all oath-taking for Christians," the only time he really answers at his trial is when he is put under oath. And for it, he is put to death. Let us therefore read these books of God together as we are commanded.

The letter ends the way it began. It began, "**Grace and peace to you**" (28). With peace being the main theme of this latter half of chapter 5, all that is left to complete the book is to send for a blessing of grace. Grace from the Lord Jesus

Christ. And why not? That is the overall purpose of the letter. To that end, I pray his grace and peace be with all of you as well.

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