

INTRODUCTION

This is the last message in the series from 1 Thessalonians. I hope you've enjoyed these messages as much as I've enjoyed sharing them.

Did you about the retired preacher who was searching for something in his wife's closet? He pulled out a drawer and saw five eggs and a stack of money that appeared to be over a thousand dollars. He called his wife and said, "Honey, what's with the eggs and the money?" She said, "Well, dear, back when you started preaching, I decided for every bad sermon you preached I'd put an egg in that drawer." The preacher smiled and said, "Only five eggs, that's pretty good! But what's with all the money?" She said, "Well, every time I got a dozen eggs in there, I sold them. That's why I have all that money!" Hopefully, I haven't laid too many eggs in this series!

As you've seen the title of this message, some of you already know what these eleven letters represent, others of you may be scratching your head trying to pronounce it or wondering if it's a misprint.

Sometime back in the 1980s I attended a Christian Conference and the leaders were all wearing buttons with those letters on them. It was a great conversation starter, because everyone they met said, "What do those letters stand for?"

If that button was designed to make you remember the theme, it worked, because all these years later I still recall that PBPWMGIFWMY stands for: Please Be Patient With Me. God Isn't Finished With Me Yet! If I had a vanity car tag, I think that's what I would put on it, although it would take a wide tag to fit all of those letters in!

Let's read the final words Paul to the believers in 1 Thessalonians 5:23-28:

"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. Brothers, pray for us. Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you."

Each of us is a work in progress. It reminds me of the little song I taught to children in one of the churches I served. "He's still working on me; To make me what I outta' be. It took Him just a week to make the moon and stars; The sun and the earth and Jupiter and Mars. How loving and patient He must be. 'Cause He's still workin' on me."

If you are a follower of Jesus Christ, you're being changed day by day. In this message, I want to answer three simple questions. First, who is changing me? Second, how is He changing me? And finally, when will He be finished?

I. WHO IS CHANGING ME? THE GOD OF PEACE

Paul identified the One who is changing us. He wrote, "May God himself, the God of peace." One of the first things we learn in English is every sentence has a subject and a verb. It may also have an object as well. In this verse, God is the subject, sanctify is the verb, and you is the object. In writing this sentence Paul used a unique Greek construction we don't really have in the English language. It triples the impact of the subject so that it literally says, "May God, May God Himself; May God Himself, the God of Peace sanctify you."

Paul could have identified God as the God of Power or the God of Grace or the God of Glory, but in this context He calls Him the God of Peace. Why? We live in such a chaotic restless world, that peace is a rare commodity. God's Will for your life is that He will bring you to a place where you experience real peace, the peace that passes all human understanding.

This is a good place to remind you about the three tenses of salvation. There are three big words that describing what God wants to do in your life. The words are justification, sanctification, and glorification. You have been saved; you are being saved; and you will be saved. In the past you experienced justification: God saved you from the penalty of sin. In the present you are experiencing sanctification: God is saving you from the power of sin. And in the future, you'll experience glorification: (you'll receive a glorified eternal body), you'll be saved from even the presence of sin.

Here's the truth. Only God can make you better. You can exercise to improve your body; and you can read and study to improve your mind, but only God can make you a better person.

People are searching for ways to improve their lives, but they will be frustrated by every attempt of self-improvement. As Augustine wrote sixteen centuries ago, "Lord, you have made us for Yourself; and our hearts are restless until they find rest in you."

Years ago the Model T Ford was the car driven by more Americans than any other. One afternoon there was a broken-down Model T sitting beside the road. The driver had the hood up trying to figure out the problem, but he couldn't find the reason the engine wouldn't start. Soon, another driver stopped by and looked under the hood. He immediately saw the problem and was able to fix it. The motor was purring like a kitten. When the driver asked him how he knew so much about the engine, the repairman wiped his hands and said, "I am the one who built it. My name is Henry Ford."

And God; God Himself; the God of Peace is the One who created you. And He is the only one who can fix you.

That leads to our next question:

II. HOW HE IS CHANGING ME? BY SANCTIFYING ME

We see the action verb in this verse when Paul wrote, "Sanctify you through and through." Don't be scared of the word "sanctification." In its simplest form, it means, "to improve." John Calvin called the process of sanctification as "the entire renovation of man." We understand what it means to take an old house and renovate it into something better.

There are reality television shows like Extreme Makeover: Home Edition, This Old House, or Trading Places. On these shows, the producers find a rundown old house, and they send in a team of experts who completely change it. They don't just improve a room or two, and leave the rest old and ugly; it is a complete renovation.

That's the idea Paul was conveying in this verse. God's process of changing us covers every area of our lives: body, soul, and spirit.

In the Book of Genesis God said, "Let us make man in our image." (Genesis 1:26) So you and I are made in the image of God. That doesn't mean we look like God, it means we are designed like God. Just as God is a tri-unity, so are we. God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. There's only one God, but He expresses Himself in those three ways. You are only a single individual, but you are a tri-unity: body, soul, and spirit. With your body, you relate to the material world beneath you. With your soul you relate to the social world around you. With your spirit, you relate to the spiritual world above you.

Sanctification is the process through which God is changing you for the better in all three areas. Let's look briefly at all three parts of your being.

A. When your body is right you're healthy

The word for body is *soma*. The Greek philosopher, Plato, taught that we only have a body and soul. And he taught that the body is evil, given to lusts and passions. The soul is trapped in this wicked body. So to those who followed his teaching, it really didn't matter what you did with your body.

It would seem many church members embraced Plato rather than the Bible when it comes to their body. The New Testament teaches that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. We are to offer our bodies as living sacrifices to God. John wrote, "I pray that in all respects you may prosper and be in good health, just as your soul prospers." (3 John 2 NASB)

When interviewed, a 98-year-old man was asked, "As you look back on your life, would you have done anything differently?" He said, "Well, if I had known I was going to live this long, I'd have taken better care of my body."

In my first church, I attended a birthday party of the first person I ever met who turned 90. Her name was Miss Edna and she made the best fried apple pies in the world. At her party I asked her what the best thing about being 90 was. She smiled and said, "No peer pressure." But today, more and more people are living into their 90s and beyond. So, it's important for us to take care of the God's Temple, our body.

B. When your soul is right you're happy

The Greek word for soul is *psuche*. We get our words "psychic" and "psychology" from this word. Your soul is your personality. It includes your mind, your emotions and your will. It is within your soul where human relationships are sealed. The Bible says, "The soul of Jonathan

was knit with the soul of David.” (1 Samuel 18:1) That’s what friendship is, when two souls are knit together. In the Bible, marriage is when the souls of a man and woman are knit together, and they also become one flesh.

It’s easy for your soul to be sucked into the vortex of the world. Romans 12:2 warns us not to be conformed to this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. As followers of Christ, we think differently from nonbelievers. We have a Biblical worldview. That means we interpret everything we see and hear through the Word of God.

C. When your spirit is right you’re holy

The fact that we have a spirit makes us unique from the rest of God’s creation. Plants are living creatures. They have bodies, but no soul, contrary to what some of the tree-huggers claim. Animals are living creatures, and they have a bodies and a soul, they have a personality. But contrary to what the PETA folks would say, animals don’t have a spirit. They don’t have any capacity to relate to God. Have you ever seen a dog fold his paws and give thanks before he eats his dog food? Have you ever seen cats coming to church for catechism classes?

So what is it that makes us different from a toad or a turnip? God breathed into us a spirit.

It is with our spirit that we relate to God who is Spirit. In the Bible you can always distinguish between the human spirit and the Holy Spirit because the Spirit of God always has a capital “S” and our spirit always has a lower case “s.” For instance, in Romans 8:16 the Bible says, “God’s Spirit testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children.”

When you are born again, God’s Spirit comes to take up resident in your heart. And it’s like the Holy Spirit shakes hands with your spirit to confirm that you really are a part of God’s family.

So God’s will for your life is that you are healthy, happy, and holy. But notice the order. Paul listed spirit first, then soul, then body. That means God works on us from the inside out. Here’s the last question.

III. WHEN WILL HE BE FINISHED? WHEN I MEET JESUS

Paul wrote, “May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” God will keep on working on us until one of two things happens—until Jesus returns or until we die. And in either case, that’s when we’ll meet Jesus.

Paul prayed that we would be kept blameless at the coming of Christ. There’s a big difference between being faultless and being blameless. Faultless means you haven’t done anything wrong. But when it comes to our sin, we have to say, “It’s all my fault.” But Paul used a legal term translated “blameless.” It means you are guilty, but you are pardoned for your crime.

When Preachers used to perform marriage ceremonies they would sometimes say, “If anyone can show just cause why they may not be lawfully joined together, let them speak now or forever hold their peace.” That’s actually from the old Episcopal Prayer Book. Through the years as I’ve

met with couples before their wedding they have sometimes asked me NOT to ask that question because they feared an ex-boyfriend or girlfriend might say something. I assure them that I never ask that question. The history of that line comes from a time when there weren't easy access to public marriage records. And the question was asked because someone might happen to know that the man or woman was already legally married to someone else. It wasn't an objection to the couple; it was for legal reasons.

That's what this word "blameless" means. When you stand before God if an angel says, "Can anyone in heaven or in earth, or below the earth give just cause why this person should not be allowed into heaven, let them speak now or forever hold their peace." There will be silence because there is NO CONDEMNATION for those who are in Christ. None of us are faultless, but we may stand before God blameless!

The great British Baptist Pastor F. B. Meyer wrote: "Our God has set Himself to the work of our sanctification. He looks upon us as His inheritance, and He will not rest until He has brought every acre of territory under cultivation. The work of sanctification is quiet and silent. When God comes with power into the human spirit there is often no hurricane, tempest, fire or earthquake, but the thrilling whisper of the still, small voice. We are not made faultless, but kept blameless—preserved from recurring self-reproach. I saw the other day a love-letter of a little boy to his father. It was anything but faultless, but the father did not consider it worthy of blame, since he carried it next to his heart."

Let me leave you with three practical take-away truths from this passage.

A. Don't be too hard on yourself and others; only Jesus is perfect

In High School I remember reading the words Jesus used in the middle of His Sermon on the Mount. He said, "Therefore be ye perfect as your father in heaven is perfect." (Matthew 5:48 NKJV) So I set out to try to be perfect. And I was perfect—I was a perfect failure at being perfect! It led to several years of frustration as I tried to work harder, do better, and read more to become perfect. It was a liberating day when I discovered that I the only way I could ever be perfect would be to stand in the perfection of Jesus.

Nobody is perfect except Jesus. A preacher was driving home this point. He said, "Has anyone in this congregation ever met a perfect man?" A man in the back raised his hand and the preacher asked, "Sir, you have met a perfect man?" The man sheepishly said, "Well, I haven't met him, I've just heard about him." The preacher said, "Who is this perfect man?" The man said, "My wife's first husband!" Well, he wasn't perfect either.

There are some Christian groups who teach instant sanctification. That is, they believe they can have an experience with God in this life which makes them totally sinless from that moment on. I don't want to argue with them because I love anyone who is trying to live a holy, pure life.

I recall attending a meeting where a woman stood up and testified that she had reached a state of sinless perfection and she hadn't committed a sin in over seven years. My first thought was, "Well, you just broke that record because you lied!"

The Apostle John was writing to Christians when he said, "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." (1 John 1:8) That's why he went on to write, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us of all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)

So lighten up. We should all carry a sign that says, "Please be patient with me. God isn't finished with me yet."

B. Let's love each other; we're all under construction

Construction zones can often be messy and dirty. That's why we need to show love and patience to one another. That's why Paul ended his letter with this command, "Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss." (1 Thessalonians 5:26) He adds this same admonition at the end of four of his letters.

It's funny how we've ignored this and substituted the holy kiss with the hearty handshake. You might have even heard someone explain it away by saying, "Well, that was the common custom in that culture to greet each other with kisses. And today in our culture, we just greet each other with handshakes."

However, that's a copout because kissing was NOT a part of the Hellenistic Greek culture. They were influenced by stoicism, which avoided the sharing of affections or feelings. The truth is, in Rome and in Greece, they seldom even would touch a stranger or a newcomer. You've seen enough of those Romans movies where two soldiers grab forearms. The custom of handshaking is an ancient custom that a man would put out his hand to show that he's not holding a dagger. And the other person would take his hand to show that he wasn't holding a dagger either. It was basically a gesture that said, "I'm not going to slit your throat."

Hugging and kissing was reserved for family members only. So the truth Paul is communicating here is that the church is like a family. It's okay for us to show love and affection to each other.

So, if you aren't already doing it, you should greet one another with a holy hug and a holy kiss. The emphasis is on holy. There are all kinds of kisses. There is a kiiiiiss. And there is a kiiiiisssssssss. And there is a kiss. In the church, we practice the holy kiss.

I visited with Karen DeLeon this week as she is spending her last days here before her promotion to heaven. As I left her, I planted a kiss on her cheek and said, "If I don't see you again here, I'll see you in heaven." She kissed my cheek and said, "You can count on it."

C. God will finish what He starts

Paul said God is faithful, and He will do it. He is the author and finisher of our faith. What He commences, He will complete. He wrote this great promise to the believers in Philippi, "Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Philippians 1:6)

We're all in the process of being changed. None of us are there yet. That's why we should be patient with each other. But when God looks at you and me, He sees not what we are now, but what we will be when He's finished with us. That's the power of an artist. They can look at an empty canvas and see a picture. An architect can look at a piece of property and see a building.

The great Michelangelo was asked once how he could take a block of marble and create an angel. He scoffed and said, "I just cut away everything that doesn't look like an angel."

That's what God is doing in us. He is cutting away everything that doesn't look like Jesus. And it's a lifetime process.

So what's our part? We must cooperate with God. We must make ourselves available to Him. If you have a tumor, you can't remove it yourself, but you can make yourself available to a surgeon and allow him to remove it. You would never say, "I'm sick and I want you to fix me, but don't touch my body." No, you'd give him or her full access. If your car isn't running right you wouldn't take it to a mechanic and say, "Here, fix my car, but don't touch the engine." You'd give him full access.

That's why we must fully surrender our lives to God. Here, God, I give you access to every part of my life. Change me. Make me like Jesus.

A great prayer for us to pray would be that verse from the old hymn, *Have Thine Own Way*. "Have thine own way, Lord/Have thine own way/Thou are the Potter/I am the clay/Mold me and make me after thy will/While I am waiting yielded and still." That's a prayer God will always answer!

So when we look at each other, we imagine a big sign around our neck that says, "Please Be Patient With Me. God Isn't Finished With Me Yet!"

OUTLINE

I. WHO IS CHANGING ME? THE GOD OF PEACE

"may God himself, the God of peace"

II. HOW HE IS CHANGING ME? BY SANCTIFYING ME

"sanctify you through and through"

- A. When your body is right you're healthy
- B. When your soul is right you're happy
- C. When your spirit is right you're holy

III. WHEN WILL HE BE FINISHED? WHEN I MEET JESUS

"May your whole spirit, soul, and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Take-Away Truths:

- A. Don't be too hard on yourself and others; only Jesus is perfect
- B. Let's love each other; we're all under construction
- C. God will finish what He starts

"Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." *Philippians 1:6*

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes