

Finishing up 1 Thessalonians this morning. 1 Thessalonians was a letter written by a leader in the early church named Paul to a church in Thessalonica that he had been instrumental in starting around the year 49 AD. Paul and his fellow missionaries had been driven out of Thessalonica by a mob of angry Jews who found his message about Jesus being Lord to be blasphemous. And 2-3 years later, Paul has not been able to return to Thessalonica, so he sends Timothy, one of his fellow missionaries, who brings back a report about how the Thessalonians are doing and what issues they are facing. In response to Timothy's report, Paul sends this letter. Let's begin by reading the final section:

*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. <sup>24</sup> The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. <sup>25</sup> Brothers and sisters, pray for us. <sup>26</sup> Greet all God's people with a holy kiss. <sup>27</sup> I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers and sisters. <sup>28</sup> The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.*

Before I dive into this passage, let me give a big picture about what I have tried to do the past couple of months. I have tried to help you understand what this letter meant in its original context and what it means for us today. There are right and wrong ways to read the Bible. The right way is to read it in context. Specifically, to read it in four contexts:

- 1) The grammatical, literary, and historical context – this is why I give the history, say it's a letter, and read the whole letter. We don't pick passages out of the air like a fortune cookie. We pay attention to genre, and we seek to understand the historical context.
- 2) The context of the Biblical metanarrative – creation, fall, redemption, new creation. This is why we reference so many other passages. Every passage fits within a larger story
- 3) The context of Christian community – resources, church tradition, community of faith. This is why I cite commentaries and other books and encourage discussion. If I'm coming up with an interpretation that no one else in history has come up with, I should question my reading.
- 4) The context of a life of Spirit-led, obedient discipleship – we're not just reading for intellectual knowledge, or worse, to argue against it.

The Bible is God's Word delivered through human words. Its purpose is to call people to repentance and faith in Jesus and then to align their lives with God's purpose, living lives of faith, love, and holiness.

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### What does it mean to be sanctified?

When you are saved, you are perfect in His sight. You are positionally one with the Lord, His child. But in practice you are far from that. For the rest of your life, He will be working to sanctify you, to make you perfect, one with Him, His child. It's like marriage in that way – you are one when you say “I do,” but it takes a lifetime to actually achieve that kind of unity.

Paul prays that God would sanctify Him. He is faithful and He will do it. He will work to make you more like Jesus, to set you apart to be useful to Him, to find an intimacy with Him where your identity is in who He says you are, where your love and joy and peace are found in Him, not in anything or anyone in this world. Where your purpose is found in who He has created you to be and what He has gifted you to do. God loves you perfectly in Christ, but because He loves you, He will never let you stay the way you are. He will sanctify you to make you more like Jesus. And He will use anything, even suffering and disappointment and loss, to sanctify you.

But we have a role to play in our sanctification. Think of ***Philippians 2:12-13*** - *Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed-- not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence-- continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, <sup>13</sup> for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose.*

We have to put ourselves in a position to be sanctified. We have to set ourselves apart to be connected with him, to pray continually, expressing our faith in God's sovereign power to accomplish what we can not do on our own. Many of us know what it is like to be connected to our phones; we are to be connected to Jesus in an even greater way than that. Set ourselves apart through prayer, reading His Word, listening to His Word taught and responding in obedience. This is the bread your soul needs. His Word, through His Spirit, will sanctify you as you submit

yourselves to it. We are sanctified as we live in fellowship, serving others and allowing others to serve us, giving and sharing the gospel with others.