

“And The God Of Peace Himself ...”

“... sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thess. 5:23).

The apostle is concluding this, his first epistle to these brethren and likely the first of thirteen acknowledged letters from his pen. Ere he writes the last word, he breathes a blessing upon these brethren. His wish for them is that ...

The God of peace Himself will sanctify these brethren. He wishes for them a complete dedication of themselves to the service of their God. This desire for complete dedication of brethren as expressed by Paul when he wrote the Corinthians: “Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilements of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness (sanctification, jm) in the fear of the Lord” (2 Cor. 7:1). James utters the same wish: “Cleanse your hands, ye sinners, and purify your hearts, ye doubleminded” (Jam. 4:8). We must sanctify ourselves to God’s service, just as He sanctifies us wholly to Him.

Paul also prayed that the “soul and spirit and body” of these Thessalonians would be preserved entire (complete), without blame, at Jesus’ second coming. Often one hears the statement, “Man is a twofold being” and that is true. Solomon wrote, “Then shall the body return to the dust as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Eccl. 12:7). Elsewhere Paul wrote that “our outward man perishes, but our inward man is renewed day by day” (2 Cor. 4:16). Peter expressed the same thought but in a slightly different figure: “Knowing that the putting off of my tabernacle cometh swiftly, even as our Lord Jesus Christ signified unto me” (2 Pet. 1:14). Why then does Paul here refer to man as a threefold being: body, soul, spirit?

Paul’s reference to our body and soul is an allusion to the temporal part of man — obviously we recognize that truth by “body” but why is “soul” here also a reference to our temporal nature? Simply because “soul” sometimes is used to refer to those properties of man that give life to the body. When Moses records the creation of our world, then man, he wrote, “And Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life’ and man became a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). In 1 Peter 3:20 Peter tells us that eight souls were saved by water in the ark. Eight living beings. In Acts 7:14 Stephen relates that “threescore and fifteen souls” (Jacob’s descendants) sent down into Egypt. Stephen means threescore and fifteen living beings. Paul charged, “Let every soul be in subjection to the higher powers ...” (Rom. 13:1) and in the record of a shipwreck of which Paul was a part, there were 276 souls saved that were on that vessel (Acts 27:37). In all these citations, “soul” refers to a human being.

Yet, soul may also allude to the eternal part of man. David prophesied that the soul of Jesus would not be left in hell (Psa. 16:9-10) and Jesus asked, “What shall a man be profited if he should gain the whole world and lose his soul?” (Mt. 16:26). He also warned us to fear him who has power to destroy both soul and body in hell (Mt. 10:28).

Paul prayed that both spirit and soul would be preserved without blame at Jesus' second coming and we can understand the necessity of this, but why would he pray that our body also be preserved entire and without blame? It is evident, not only from the writings of others, but from Paul's own, that the physical body perishes at death, returning back to the dust. To my mind the apostle simply anticipates the transformation of the physical body into its resurrection one. Remember, all will be raised and given an incorruptible body, a body which can be cast into hell (Mt. 10:28). Paul prayed for the Thessalonians that their complete body-person: soul, spirit and incorruptible body, might be preserved without blame when Jesus comes again.

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