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The Second Coming of Christ:
"Body, Soul, and Spirit Sanctification"
1 Thessalonians 5
Pastor Gary Hamrick

The Bible tells us that we are each "triune beings" possessing a body, soul, and spirit, and we should keep these three parts of us blameless at the coming of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 5:23). When Jesus comes again for His bride, He wants to find us walking in holiness, ready for His return. What is the difference between the body, soul, and spirit? What happens to those elements when we die or when Christ returns? That is the subject of this study out of 1 Thessalonians 5.

1. **1 Thessalonians 5:1–28** – *"[1] But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. [2] For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. [3] For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.*

   [4] But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. [5] You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. [6] Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. [7] For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. [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. [9] For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, [10] who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him. [11] Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing.

   [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.

   [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.

[25] Brethren, pray for us. [26] Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss. [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."

2. Context
    a. Brethren
        i. The word *"brethren"* implies Paul wrote this letter to Christians (verse 1).
    b. Outline of 1 Thessalonians
        i. Chapter 1
            1. We are delivered from God's wrath.
        ii. Chapter 2
            1. We have reasons to rejoice about Christ's second coming.
        iii. Chapter 3
            1. Love others while waiting for His return.
        iv. Chapter 4
            1. Be ready for the rapture.
        v. Chapter 5
            1. Experience spirit, soul, and body transformation in Christ.

3. Man's nature and purpose
    a. The image and likeness of God
        i. **Genesis 1:26a** – *"God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.'"*
            1. God created us in His *"image,"* which is why we share the same essential nature.
            2. This *"likeness,"* **dᵊmûṯ** in the Hebrew, refers to one's character, qualities, and capacity for relationship.
            3. When God breathed life into man, He gave us the capacity to have a relationship with Him.
        ii. Like our Creator, we have a triune nature, made up of a body, soul, and spirit.
            1. As Chuck Smith said, man is the inferior trinity.
            2. This is called man's tripartite nature.
    b. Man's triune nature
        i. The body
            1. The body is the vessel that allows us to interact with the material world through the five senses.
            2. The body has physiological needs it must meet to survive, such as air, food, water, shelter, and sleep.

ii. The soul
    1. The Greek word for soul is **psuché**, and we use it to mean the seat of emotion, reason, thought, will, and intellect.
    2. The soul is self-consciousness.
    3. Just as the body has physical needs, the soul has emotional needs: to love and to be loved, and to have a purpose.
    4. Psychology as a field specializes in developing a better understanding of a person's soul.
iii. The spirit is the essential nature that gives life to our being.
    1. God's essential nature is spirit, and He created us to share this trait with Him.
    2. A spirit is to a body what a hand is to a glove. Without the spirit, the body is lifeless.
    3. The spirit is our deeper self, the part with a God-consciousness and with the ability to commune with Him.
        a. Unless a person comes to Christ, his spirit is dormant (dead).
        b. Nonbelievers have no God-consciousness.
        c. Anyone can gain this awareness of and communion with God if they trust in Jesus.
        d. **Colossians 2:13** – *"You, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He [God] has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses."*
        e. **DISCUSS**: When did you first come to an awareness of God? How has your communion with God changed throughout the years?

c. Capacity or reality
    i. It is one thing to have a capacity to have a relationship with God and another to commune with God through:
        1. Worship
        2. Bible Study
        3. Prayer
        4. **DISCUSS**: Are you communing with God using these three prescribed methods? How has incorporating them into your life changed you and your relationship with the Lord?
    ii. The nearness of Jesus' return should incentivize us to walk in holiness. (**1 Thessalonians 5:23**).
        1. Holiness is the practice of whole-body sanctification.
        2. This process deals with not only the sins done in the body, but in the soul and spirit.

3. We must be mindful not only of what we do with our body but also what we feed our soul and spirit because God wants us to be *"blameless"* at His coming (verse 23).
4. Blamelessness does not imply perfection but a life without accusation that honors God in body, soul, and spirit.
5. **DISCUSS**: What have you been feeding your mind and your spirit? How has that affected your walk with the Lord?

4. Overcoming sin
    a. The flesh constantly desires to dominate.
    b. God calls us to exercise our spirit so that it is stronger than our body.
        i. **Galatians 5:16–17** – *"[16] I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. [17] For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish."*
            1. **DISCUSS**: How have you experienced the way walking in the Spirit excludes the things of the flesh from your life and vice versa? In which path are you walking now?
        ii. **1 Timothy 4:8** – *"Physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come."* (1984 NIV)
            1. Exercising your body benefits you in this life, but exercising your spirit benefits you in this life and the one to come.
            2. **DISCUSS**: How much victory over sin would you experience if you invested half the time that you spend on grooming and satisfying the body on feeding and strengthening the spirit? What spiritual habit can you add to your routine to help you grow in the Lord?
    c. Prayer is a powerful tool of spiritual warfare.
        i. On the day that Jesus would be crucified, He took His disciples to the Mount of Olives and went a little way from them to pray three times.
        ii. Jesus was so troubled that the capillaries on His forehead broke as He prayed. This is called hematidrosis.
        iii. **Matthew 26:40–41** – *"[40] He came to the disciples and found them sleeping, and said to Peter, 'What! Could you not watch with Me one hour? [41] Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak.'"*
            1. The disciples' physical need for sleep overcame their spiritual need to be strengthened in prayer before the time came for them to be tested.

2. The more your flesh seeks to dominate, the more you must feed the spirit.
3. **DISCUSS**: What is one way you can feed the spirit? What is one way you can starve the flesh?

5. An intertwined triad
    a. Because our body, soul, and spirit are intertwined, if one part of our nature sins, the other two parts suffer with it. The opposite is also true.
        i. **Proverbs 14:30** – *"A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones."* (1984 NIV)
            1. When the spirit is dominant, the whole person benefits.
    b. Because of the fall, our current bodies are cursed to return to the dust.
        i. **Genesis 3:19** – *"By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."* (1984 NIV)
            1. The human body is made up of 15 chemical elements, the three most prevalent being oxygen, carbon, and hydrogen.
            2. We share the same chemical composition as the dirt God used to create us.
            3. The root word for "human" is **humus**, meaning "ground or soil."
        ii. Jesus will give Believers glorified bodies when He returns.
            1. At Jesus' coming, Believers who died before the rapture will gain a glorified version of their bodies back from the dust.
            2. Then Believers who are alive during the rapture will get glorified bodies on their way up to heaven.
            3. **1 Thessalonians 4:17** – *"We who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."*
            4. **Philippians 3:20–21** – *"[20] Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, [21] who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself."*
            5. **DISCUSS**: How does knowing your citizenship is in heaven change the way you view this world and your place in it?
    c. A person's soul and spirit are so intertwined the words are often used interchangeably throughout Scripture.
        i. When we go to heaven, our spirit retains and expands on our soul's understanding.
        ii. **1 Corinthians 13:12b** – *"Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known."*

6. An eternal destination
    a. The good news
        i. **2 Corinthians 5:8** – *"We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord."*
        ii. Do not believe the Jehovah Witness doctrine of soul sleep, which states that Believers will not rise from the dead till Jesus' return. We enter the Lord's presence immediately upon death.
    b. The bad news
        i. Man's sin earns him hell upon death.
        ii. Hell is a terrible place.
            1. Hell is a place of eternal separation from the Lord.
            2. Hell is a place of *"outer darkness"* and *"weeping and gnashing of teeth"* (**Matthew 22:13**).
            3. Hell is a place of eternal punishment and suffering.
    c. The best news
        i. No one needs to go to hell.
        ii. Though we were all destined for hell, God sent Jesus to be our rescue plan, redeeming us with His blood.
            1. **Romans 10:13** – *"Whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved."*
            2. When people say they cannot believe in a God who would send good people to hell, they fundamentally misunderstand human nature and God's heart for us.
            3. Hell is wage, or payment, for our sins. It is what we earn for ourselves.
            4. Heaven is God's gift, freely given to any who trust in His Son.
            5. This is similar to how God sent an ark to rescue Noah and as many as would repent, but only Noah and his family chose to board the ark. The rest of the world rejected God's plan of salvation and faced the consequences of their choices.
            6. **DISCUSS**: How can you help your nonbelieving friends understand God's heart for them?

7. The suddenness of His coming
    a. Jesus will come at a time no one expects Him, like a thief in the night.
        i. **1 Thessalonians 5:2** – *"You yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night."*
        ii. **Matthew 24:43** – *"Know this, that if the master of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched and not allowed his house to be broken into."*

iii. **2 Peter 3:10** – *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up."*

iv. **Revelation 16:15** – *"Behold, I am coming as a thief. Blessed is he who watches, and keeps his garments, lest he walk naked and they see his shame."*

1. **DISCUSS**: Why is it significant that only the Father knows when Jesus is coming? How does the not-knowing affect your walk?

b. Jesus' coming will be surprising to nonbelievers, not Believers.

i. **1 Thessalonians 5:4–8** – *"[4] But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief. [5] You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness. [6] Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober. [7] For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. [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."*

1. The NIV translates *"overtake"* as *"surprise"* (verse 4).

ii. While we may not know the day of Jesus' coming, we can prepare for it by being soberminded, vigilant, and walking in the light.

iii. As Believers, we must share the good news with others so they may be ready for Jesus' return.

1. When we accept Jesus as our Savior, we allow Him who bore our sins to cover us and shelter us from the wrath of God.
2. If you are a nonbeliever, do not wait till death or the rapture to believe. It will be too late by then. Come to Jesus today.
3. **DISCUSS**: What does it mean to be *"soberminded"*? How are you exercising vigilance in light of Christ's coming?

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New King James (NKJV)