



Thoughts from First Thessalonians ...

God's Purpose

The tremendous plan of God has been to produce a truly spiritual people who can and will appreciate the glory of Christ. A key ingredient, as far as God is concerned, is that these truly spiritual people be spiritual by their choice. The integral part of the process, however, is that it takes a powerful act of God's creative powers to produce such a spiritual new creation. So the challenge has been for the All Wise and the Almighty to set in motion a system wherein both the individual's free choice out of love for God and God's infinite power both are actuated to produce this spiritual being which is desirous and capable of seeing the glory of Jesus. "Father," said the Lord Jesus in His prayer before He crossed the Kidron to the Garden of Gethsemane, "*I desire that they*

also, who You have given Me, be with Me where I am, in order that *they may behold My glory*, which You have given Me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world" (John 17:24).

- **First the natural** — The first Adam, in the words of Paul to the Corinthian brethren, was a natural man, "from the earth, earthy." The second Adam, a reference to Jesus as the progenitor of the spiritual race, was "heavenly." The idea is that "as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." The heavenly image thus must grow out of the earthy; the earthy man is the foundation out of which the seed for the heavenly man can sprout. "However," avers the apostle, "the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual" (1 Corinthians 15:45-49). The natural man is the incubator where the decision to become a spiritual man is made, thus preserving freedom of choice. The spiritual man is the result of God's performing an entirely new creative act in bringing this new creature into existence at his immersion into Christ. "For we are His workmanship," noted Paul, "created in Christ Jesus for good works" (Ephesians 2:10).

- **Understanding the inner man** — When a person becomes a "spiritual man" through His immersion in Jesus' name, the outer shell remains part of the material existence. This is part of God's plan so that Christians can, as the body of Christ on earth, continue to be the bridge by which the gospel can be transported to those who are still natural men but seeking God's face. "Our outer man is decaying," was the apostle's observation, "yet our inner man is being renewed day by day" (2 Corinthians 4:16). In the realm of the spirit and soul, the saint is a new creation; in the realm of the flesh — in the sense that "flesh" refers to the physical body — the outer man is subject to the vagaries of earthly existence. And, as the physical man dies, the spirit and soul are transported to Paradise, there to await their coming to earth when Christ returns and to be clothed with an immortal body. "We do not want to be unclothed," as Paul phrased it, "but to be clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life" (2 Corinthians 5:4).

- **The completion of the project** — God will bring the saints with Him when He makes His second coming. He will stop in the air, but the spirits/souls of His brethren will hit the ground and will receive their resurrection bodies, which is the completion of His process to produce a truly spiritual people.

"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely," is Paul's ultimate prayer, "and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass" (1 Thessalonians 5:23,24). With the glorified body, the saint can see Jesus' glory, and fulfill His earnest desire. "Beloved, now we are children of God," was the apostle John's reminder, "and it has not yet appeared what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because *we shall see Him just as He is*" (1 John 3:2).

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