

# May the Lord Sanctify You

## 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

*Strong & Ready! (Books of 1 & 2 Thessalonians)*

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[livinghopechurch.net](http://livinghopechurch.net)

**Introduction:** Open your Bible to 1 Thessalonians 5. I want to bring a teaching to you tonight entitled: “May the Lord Sanctify You!”<sup>1</sup>

Wouldn't it be wonderful if the Lord brought us to perfection the moment we are saved? But this is not the case. Listen to the words of Charles Haddon Spurgeon from the Metropolitan Tabernacle in London.

“The saints are sinners still. Our best tears need to be wept over, the strongest faith is mixed with unbelief, our most flaming love is cold compared with what Jesus deserves, and our intensest zeal still lacks the full fervor which the bleeding wounds and pierced heart of the crucified might claim at our hands. Our best things need a sin offering, or they would condemn us.”

**- Charles Haddon Spurgeon**

### Reading of Holy Scripture

**1 Thess. 5:23-24**, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”

Jesus demands nothing less than for His followers to be “all in” in their relationship with Him. As we have seen, the second half of Paul's letter is directed at the Thessalonians' commitment to Christ. Paul seems to be saying, “If you are all in for Jesus, then your life will reflect your commitment.” Paul has been revealing to them how their faith is to be fleshed out in the course of their lives. He

<sup>1</sup>Some of the outline and many thoughts for this study come from Howell, Mark (2015-01-13). *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians* (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) B&H Publishing Group.

has covered a lot of territory and addressed some major themes in the space of only two chapters.

## Outline

A Strategy for Glorifying God with your Communication

- The **process** of sanctification.
- The **promise** of sanctification
- Your **part** in others' in sanctification

### I. There is a **process** –a *journey*– in sanctification, vs.23.

1 Thess. 5:23-24, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup>He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”

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## The Process Begins with God

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### The God of Peace & Sanctification

Charles Wannamaker insightfully observes that by using the word peace, Paul is referring to God not merely as One who brings order into our confusion, but as “the source of all well-being for the people of God.”<sup>2</sup>

The word “peace” here refers to restoration and reconciliation. The Old Testament word Paul was thinking of is Shalom. It is a complete restoration to wholeness. According to the Hebrew lexicon, it means “completeness, soundness, prosperity, peace, safety, well-being.” The idea is total wholeness in mind, body, and spirit.

### What is Sanctification?

So it is appropriate that the God of Wholeness and Shalom would bring us sanctification. To sanctify (hagiazō) means, “to set apart,” “to separate” from sin to holiness.<sup>3</sup> In the broader theological sense, is to be made whole in Christ. To be separated and chosen to be conformed to Christ’s likeness (Romans 8:28-30).

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<sup>2</sup> Wannamaker, Epistles, 205.

<sup>3</sup> MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (2002). 1 & 2 Thessalonians (p. 202). Chicago: Moody Press.

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## The Process of Sanctification vs the Act of Justification

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There is a difference between **justification** and **sanctification**. Justification is an **act** of God. Sanctification is a **process**. The following table specifies several differences between justification and sanctification:

<b>Justification</b>	<b>Sanctification</b>
Our <b>positional righteousness</b> in Christ	Our <b>practical righteousness</b> through in the Spirit
Immediate	Progressive throughout this life
Legal standing	Internal condition
Once for all time	Continuous throughout life
Entirely God’s work	We cooperate
Perfect in this life	Not perfect in this life
The same in all Christians	Greater in some than in others

### A Couple Thoughts

So, according to what Paul says to the Thessalonians, God is in the business not only of justifying us, but indeed, sanctifying us. **1 Thess. 5:23-24**, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”

A couple ideas arise from these verses.

1. First, our sanctification is a God-sized endeavor. Indeed, God has to do something for us in this life to be sanctified, and live holy, fruitful lives for God. That’s a relief isn’t it?
2. Second, there is a deep struggle in sanctification. The struggle is so great that without God’s help we don’t have any chance whatsoever at sanctification.

### Christianity Not Automatic

A couple times Jill and I and the girls (Katie and Kristen) would fly across the ocean to Spain. I expended no effort in actually flying. The pilots don’t have to very much either. After taking off, he sets the autopilot to the appropriate heading, altitude, and airspeed, and then we sat back and enjoyed the journey. Apart from takeoff and landing, the airplane virtually flew itself. Technology is an amazing thing! Unfortunately, what is true of airplanes is not true of Christianity. There is no autopilot in the Christian life. Following Christ is not as simple as saying your

prayers and reading a few Scriptures only to sit back and watch your faith fly itself. You don't soar past your problems, cruise through your relationships, and then glide effortlessly into spiritual maturity. Christianity requires hard work. In fact, Jesus made no secret of the level of commitment required to take this journey:

### **Count the Cost of Sanctification: Intense Discipleship**

**Luke 14: 26-33**, “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. 27 Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple. 28 For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? 29 Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, 30 saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish.’ 31 Or what king, going out to encounter another king in war, will not sit down first and deliberate whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? 32 And if not, while the other is yet a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. 33 So therefore, any one of you who does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciple.”

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## **God's Work in the Process of Sanctification**

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### **You are Not Alone**

So yes we have a major commitment, but it is not on our own. Let's go back to our verses in **1 Thess 5:23-24**, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”

God doesn't do it all. The clearest NT verse is found in Philipians. John Piper describes this as a paradox in Scripture because there is a battle:

1. **Philipians**. We work, but God works in us to work. Philipians 2:12-13, “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”
2. **Colossians**. We are dead to sin, but we have to continually put it to death. Colossians 3:3, “You have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” Then Colossians 3:5, “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you.”

3. **Romans.** Similarly, we are dead to sin, but we must reckon ourselves dead to sin. Romans 6:6, “We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.” Wow. What an event. And then Romans 6:11–12, “So you also must consider [or reckon] yourselves dead to sin.”
4. **1 John.** Then the Bible teaches us we don’t make a practice of sinning, but we still sin and battle against it. 1 John 3:9, “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning.” Then, 1 John 1:8, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” So, new birth creates a DNA, as it were, in this person — a divine-like DNA that cannot be content with ongoing sinning though, in this life, if we say we have no sin, we have a misunderstanding of how it is working.
5. **1 Peter.** You have been born, but you need to grow by taking in the Word and putting away sin. 1 Peter 1:23, “You have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God.” Then, the second half of the pair is 1 Peter 2:1–2, “So put away all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander. Like newborn infants, long for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up into salvation.”

### The Word “Keep”

God’s promise is to keep us blameless. The phrase “kept blameless” is quite powerful. The word keep is a military term that means to “guard” like a soldier or a warden. It means to keep an eye on, watch, and hence to guard and keep under a watchful eye.<sup>4</sup>

To keep also means “to cause to continue, to retain, to keep.”<sup>5</sup>

Dear child of God, God is your general, and He is guarding you. He is not only guarding you from committing sins with your body and flesh, but also your soul and spirit.

### Sins of the Flesh and the Spirit

**2 Corinthians 7:1**, “Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God.”

<sup>4</sup> Zodhiates, S. (2000). *The complete word study dictionary: New Testament* (electronic ed.). Chattanooga, TN: AMG Publishers.

<sup>5</sup> Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 152). New York: United Bible Societies.

The battle continues in both our spirit and our flesh until Jesus comes.

### **Material and Immaterial Part of You to be Sanctified**

Paul prays for an entire sanctification of body, soul, and spirit. Soul and spirit are paired together to describe the immaterial part of man.

So both the body (the material) and the soul and spirit (the immaterial) are part of God's plan to transform us.

***Sins of the flesh.*** John Gill says these are sins of external pollution. He lists some of these sins. He describes them as “sinful defilement by our actions committed in the body”, such as:

- All impure words (curse words, foolish talk, idle talk, gossip, blasphemies, sinful tones of voice, angry talk, etc.)
- Sexual sin in the body (fornication, lasciviousness, adultery)
- Drunkenness and partying

***Sins of the spirit.*** Gill says these are sins of **internal pollution**, defilement by the internal acts of the mind, such as:

- sinful thoughts
- being controlled by lusts, emotions, and passions of the flesh
- pride
- malice (hostility, hatred)
- envy, jealousy, or not wanting others to succeed
- covetousness, and the like

### **John Newton Quote**

John Newton: “My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior.” The Lord promises us that he will “save His people from their sin” (Mt 1:21).

### **St. Paul's Understanding of Justification and Sanctification**

So Paul has already spoken of the Thessalonians **justification**, now he is encouraging them in their **sanctification**.

John Piper puts sanctification in these terms. He says: “What God creates in the new birth is not a sinless Christian. What he creates is an embattled, not-yet perfect, Spirit-empowered, persevering, Christ-treasuring, sin-hating, new being — a new creation in Christ.”

## II. There is a **promise** of sanctification, vs.24

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### God Promises to Do What You Cannot

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**1 Thess 5:23**, “Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Our sanctification always proceeds from the inward work of the Holy Spirit (Eze. 36:25-27). We cannot do it ourselves.

We must be “led by the Spirit.” Romans 8:14, “For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God.”

We are called to be “filled with the Spirit” (Eph 5:19).

We are called to “keep in step with the Spirit” (Gal 5:25).

The point is, while we can work hard at reforming our behavior and altering our appearance, there is nothing we can do to transform our spirit, soul, and body. Fixing up our outside may make us feel better for the moment, but it can do little to give us lasting peace. However, what we are incapable of doing, God is able to do “completely.” Only God has the power both to transform us and to keep us “sound and blameless” until the coming of Christ.

As Leon Morris states,

“Paul is not thinking of a sanctification that may last a little time here on earth. . . . [He] looks for them to be preserved blameless not only through the changes and trials of this earthly life, but also on that dread day when they stand before the eternal judge.”<sup>6</sup>

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### The Promise is Based on God’s Faithfulness

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**1 Thess. 5:24**, “He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.”

So, salvation is not just **justification**, but it is also **sanctification** and **glorification**. Christ is “able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them” (**Heb. 7:25**).

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<sup>6</sup> Leon Morris, First and Second Thessalonians, 183.

Christ is always interceding, and his prayers cannot go unanswered. Every true born again Christian will be sanctified in some measure. It will not happen all in the same way or measure, but in some measure, sanctification and growth in Christ will take place in all Christians without fail.

### Spurgeon Quote

How vital it is that we realize that any Christianity that does not make us holy is not Christianity at all. Listen to Spurgeon who said: “If your religion does not make you holy, it will damn you as surely as you are now alive. It is simply painted pageantry to go to hell in.”

### A.A. Hodge Quote

To affirm that a Christian can live without being made holy, is to contradict and misunderstand what salvation is altogether. Archibald Alexander Hodge of Princeton Seminary illustrated the absurdity of this when he said:

Think of a sinner coming to Christ and saying, ‘I do not want to be holy; I do not want to be saved from sin; I would like to be saved in my sins; do not sanctify me now, but justify me now’... You can no more separate justification from sanctification than you can separate the circulation of the blood from the inhalation of the air. Breathing and circulation are two different things, but you cannot have one without the other; they go together and constitute one life.<sup>7</sup>

### Spurgeon Quote

Listen to the words of Charles Haddon Spurgeon. He said:

“If your life is unholy, then your heart is unchanged, and you are an unsaved person. The Savior will sanctify His people, renew them, give them a hatred of sin, and a love of holiness. The grace that does not make a man better than others is a worthless counterfeit. Christ saves His people, not *in* their sins, but *from* their sins. Without holiness, no man shall see the Lord.”<sup>8</sup>

## III. Consider your **part** in others’ sanctification, vs.25-28.

1 Thess 5:25-28, “Brothers, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. 27 I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”

<sup>7</sup> Archibald Alexander Hodge. *Popular Lectures on Theological Themes* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1887), 358.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Spurgeon. *Evening by Evening* (Whitaker House: New Kensington, PA, 1984), 41.



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## Praying for one another (5:25)

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**1 Thess 5:25**, “Brothers, pray for us.”

Although Paul did not name a specific request for which they should pray, the Thessalonians must have been aware of the challenges of his ongoing ministry (cf. Rom 15: 30-32; Eph 6: 19-20; Col 4: 3-4; 2 Thess 3: 1-2).

Paul’s greatest allies in his ongoing work were the untold number of Christians who were privately and corporately praying for him. Not everyone can go on missionary journeys like Paul, but through intercessory prayer everyone can partner with each other.<sup>9</sup>

Pray is a covering. Without it we will fail. One major mark of growth in Christ is a life that realizes the vitality of prayer.

No prayer, no power.

Little prayer, little power.

Lotta prayer, lotta power!

### The Heavenly Air Force

When the Wright brothers invented the first fixed wing airplane on December 17, 1903, it changed the nature and future of warfare. No longer was hand to hand combat the only way to fight. Today, a company of soldiers only needs to communicate with the Air Force in order to win the victory. We have a heavenly “air force”! It is called prayer.

In modern warfare, there is always a soldier who watches the battle and gives the coordinates of the enemy to the fighter jets in the air. If taking out the enemy from the ground is not possible, then the fighter jets are called in.

After giving all the spiritual armor for the Christian, which is our security in Christ and in the Gospel, he says that we must call in the heavenly Air Force through prayer. Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul.

**Ephesians 6:18–24**, “praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints, 19 and also for me, that words may be given to me in opening my mouth boldly to proclaim the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains, that I may declare it boldly, as I ought to speak.”

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<sup>9</sup> Howell, Mark. Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Thessalonians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) (pp. 175-176). B&H Publishing Group. Kindle Edition.

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## Encouraging one another (5:26)

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**1 Thess 5:26**, “Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss.”

There is a tenderness, a family attitude among the Body of Christ. **Jn 13:35**, “By this shall all people know you are my disciples, by your love one for another.”

### The Church, a Growing, Living, Organism

The know, the church is a living, growing spiritual body (Eph 2: 19-22; 4: 11-16; 5: 23-33; 1 Cor 12: 12-27). Like our physical bodies, it comprises many parts, each with its own specific function. As has been made clear in this letter, each member of the body of Christ comes with his own set of hurts, habits, and hang-ups, including being fearful, discouraged, and irresponsible (5: 14). Considering the varying backgrounds, personalities, and preferences of those within the body of Christ, it is a miracle that the church is able to accomplish anything. Yet through the power of His Spirit, God not only equips His people to do His work, He also enables them to love one another while they do it. God expects His people to build close relationships that are marked by mutual love and accountability. God did not establish His church to be a place; He established His church to be a people— a people who love Him and love one another.<sup>10</sup>

We are God’s “forever family!”

### A Holy Kiss?

To those outside the church, Paul’s request to “greet all the brothers with a holy kiss” might seem a bit unusual (5: 26), but those who are a part of the body of Christ understand the profound love that Christians have for one another. The cold formality and palpable superficiality that you may experience in some churches do little to encourage the simple shake of a hand, let alone the giving of a holy kiss!<sup>11</sup>

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## Growing with one another (5:27-28)

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**1 Thess 5:27-28**, “I put you under oath before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”

That this command is written in the first person singular most likely indicates that Paul has personally penned these words. Up until this point, Paul likely

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<sup>10</sup> Howell, 1 Thess, 176.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

employed an amanuensis, or secretary, to record his words (cf. 2 Thess 3: 17; 1 Cor 16: 21; Gal 6: 11-18). With very strong language, he commands them to have the letter read to the church.

### **God's Word can help you Grow**

God's Word can grow you! To understand why Paul was so bold in his command is not difficult. Although Paul was the human author of the letter, its message was divinely inspired (2 Tim 3: 16; 2 Pet 1: 20-21).

**2 Peter 3:18**, "But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."

**Hebrews 4:12**, "For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart."

### **Conclusion**

Let's conclude by highlighting four takeaways from this passage.

1. God has taken a special interest in you. His construction project on you begins from the moment He saves you. And it's more than a renovation project that will last for only a few months— it's a transformation project that will last for a lifetime. He doesn't break for lunch, and He never takes a vacation. He won't break His contract, and He won't let you down. God uses only the finest materials, and He never takes shortcuts. He promises to bring to completion the work that He began in you.
2. The time to get serious about your personal holiness is now. Your sanctification is not in doubt, for God guarantees it. If God guarantees your sanctification, then why would you resist? To resist God's hand makes no sense. You will only find yourself fighting a battle that you cannot win. His sanctifying work can either be a blessing or a battle. If God is committed to complete the good work that He began in you, then perhaps it's time to partner with Him in the process.
3. Recognize that God is sanctifying others also. God is not only at work in our lives, He is also working in the lives of others. When we are tempted to lose our cool because of their lack of progress, we would do well to remember that we also are works in progress.
4. Nothing is accidental. God oversees the affairs of our lives even to the smallest of details.