

## 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

### Prayer of Sanctification

1

### Introduction

Paul's benediction points to God who is the only source of power for obeying the exhortations given in this letter. **It is God who sanctifies** the obedient believer. **Sanctification** is inseparably linked to saving faith, because those whom God justifies, He also sanctifies (cf. Rom. 8:28–29). The apostle Paul began this epistle with testimony that the Thessalonians had truly responded in saving faith to his gospel preaching and been justified (1:2–5; 2:1, 12–13), and here at the conclusion, he prayed for their complete sanctification. His prayerful benediction for them in these verses reveals several essential elements of sanctification: its **nature**, **source**, and **extent**; its **human components**; its **goal and culmination**; and its **final security**.

2

## 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

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. <sup>24</sup> He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

3

### Sanctification's Nature, Source, and Extent

1 Thessalonians 5:23a

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely

**Sanctify** means, "to set apart," "to separate" **from sin to holiness**. Sanctification is the ongoing spiritual process by which God increasingly sets believers apart from sin and moves them toward holiness.

The concept of sanctification, setting things apart to God, is common theme in Scripture. God Himself sanctified the seventh day, set apart the firstborn of His people and their animals for His use (Ex. 13:1–2), set Israel apart as a holy nation (Ex. 19:5–6; cf. Ezek. 37:28), and much more.

4

## Sanctification's Nature, Source, and Extent

1 Thessalonians 5:23a

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely

Three basic elements define believers' sanctification.

First is **positional sanctification** which God effected at the time He saved each believer. God secured positional sanctification through the death of His Son (Heb. 10:10, 14). By that atoning work, God rescued all believers from the dominion of sin and spiritual darkness and placed them into the dominion of His righteousness. Believers also receive a new nature at salvation (2 Cor. 5:17; 2 Peter 1:4) and are sealed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9). God imputes Christ's righteousness to believers so that He sees us not as sinners, but as those sanctified, covered with the righteousness of Christ (cf. Rom. 3:21–25; 2 Cor. 5:21; 1 John 4:10). As a result, God declares the believer holy and calls them "holy ones" or "saints" (cf. Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1).

5

## Sanctification's Nature, Source, and Extent

1 Thessalonians 5:23a

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely

The second aspect of Sanctification is the future aspect or **ultimate sanctification** when God actually makes believers sinless in body and spirit forever (Phil. 3:20–21; Rom. 8:30; 1 Cor. 15:52–54; 1 John 3:2–3).

The third aspect defining biblical sanctification is **the present experiential aspect**. It is the process in which believers strive, by the Spirit's power, to be more and more conformed to the image of Christ. It is the pursuit of holiness (cf. Matt. 5:48; 1 Peter 1:14–16).

6

## Sanctification's Nature, Source, and Extent

1 Thessalonians 5:23a

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely

**God is the source of sanctification.** After giving the Thessalonians a series of commands and exhortations that called for them to put forth disciplined, devoted effort, Paul wanted them to recognize that ultimately it is God who enables believers to obey those admonitions and progress in sanctification. This is a mutual effort. The believer must die to self and yield in obedience to God. The Spirit's power gives victory and progressively transforms the believer into the image of Christ.

The title **God of peace** refers to God's saving work. It is the **peace** of salvation Jesus provides through the cross of Christ for all who repent and believe (Isa. 53:5; Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:14–15; Col. 1:20; cf. Luke 1:79; 2:14; John 14:27; Acts 10:36; Rom. 10:17).

7

## Sanctification's Nature, Source, and Extent

1 Thessalonians 5:23a

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely

To underscore that it is **God** who sanctifies, Paul used. God does not delegate the sanctifying process to an angel or an apostle. Rather He accomplishes it by His own actions as He works directly in believers' lives.

The term translated **completely** is used only here in the New Testament and is a compound of two Greek words, "whole and/or complete," and "end or finish." Paul asked that God would sanctify the Thessalonians "all the way through," and that sanctification would leave no part of their inner beings unaffected.

8

## Sanctification's Human Components

1 Thessalonians 5:23b

and may your whole spirit, soul, and body

The sanctifying work of God includes **spirit, soul, and body**. Paul is not here referring to glorification, because he desired that the elements of sanctification be true of the Thessalonians when Christ comes, not after.

The Greek culture taught that man's spirit is inherently good and his body inherently evil. This philosophy provided a convenient rationale for dismissing immoral physical behavior. **If sanctification is to be complete, it must extend to every part of the believer**, especially the body, which thinks, feels, and acts in response to the holiness of the inner person (1 Cor. 6:19–20; cf. Luke 11:36; Rom. 6:12–13; 8:13; 12:1; 1 Cor. 6:13, 15; 9:27; Col. 2:23; 3:5; James 3:2–3, 6).

9

## Sanctification's Goal and Culmination

1 Thessalonians 5:23c

**be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Paul prayed that the saints would **be preserved** ("kept"), that God would keep them in the path of holiness until they received their ultimate sanctification. His desire was that God would bring them to that point **blameless**. This is the same word archeologists have found on Christian tombs from ancient Thessalonica. When people wanted to identify a deceased friend or loved one as a Christian, they inscribed "blameless" on their grave

**At the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ**, God will make all believers sinless forever. This is the letter's fourth mention of His **coming** and, as with the other occurrences (2:19; 3:13; 4:15), it is again a reference to the Rapture of the church. Paul prayed that when the **Lord Jesus Christ** comes for believers, He will find them faithfully pursuing the goal of being as holy as their Lord and longing to receive the promised heavenly perfection.

10

## Sanctification's Final Security

1 Thessalonians 5:24

He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

God **who calls you is faithful** and **will do it**. Paul expressed to the Philippians this confidence in God's faithfulness to believers: "being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). That is a pledge to all believers that God has the power to guarantee their ultimate sanctification. The salvation God grants is secure.

11

## So What ...

We each need to take a moment to self-evaluate our walk with Jesus.

Is there unrepentant sin in your life? Remember it is not how far you can go and still be acceptable, but how much like Christ can you be. Jesus is coming back. What do you want your life to be like when you see Him? Your Eternal rewards hang in the balance.

Take time to study the Bible every day.

Memorize critical verses.

Practice living life in an attitude of prayer.

Get involved in studying the Bible with others.

Look for opportunities to put what you learn into practice.

Do all things so that Jesus is glorified.

1 John 2:6 - He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

12