

"THE GOAL OF SANCTIFICATION"

1 Thessalonians 5:23

Theme: We are to seek the grace of God as we strive to live righteously.

Introduction ...

I. THE ENABLER OF OUR SANCTIFICATION - *"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you ..."*

A. The Power of Sanctification - *"... Now may ... God ... Himself sanctify you ..."*

1. As we review the previous 7 verses, we see the "Exhortations to Godliness" in the various imperatives for which every believer is responsible.
2. However, these are unnatural duties - unaccomplishable by the arm of the flesh - that is, believers need help to fulfill these responsibilities.
3. Hence the Holy Spirit directs us to our dependency on God - the only source of power for obeying all these exhortations.
4. The statement that Paul makes here is something called an "optative" - a mood that conveys a realizable prayer-wish understanding that if a saint is going to know progress in sanctification, God will have to be the enabler.
5. It is God's power - *"God ... Himself"* is the One who sanctifies us -

1 Corinthians 6:11 - *"Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God."*

Hebrews 2:11 - *"For both He who sanctifies and those who are sanctified are all from one Father; for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren,"*

1 Peter 1:2 - *"according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure."*

6. These references demonstrate that the power behind sanctification rests in God - who enables us to become more obedience and conformed to the Lord

Philippians 2:12-13 - *"So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure."*

B. The Point of Sanctification - *“... the God of peace Himself sanctify you ...”*

1. Paul emphasizes that the point of sanctification is to enjoy *“peace”* with God - that is, to be conformed to a condition of eligibility for fellowship with Him.
2. Hence, Paul identifies God as *“the God of peace”* who will *“sanctify you”* - [ἁγιάζω] - “to set aside” to make something “suitable for ritual purposes” - to consecrate.
3. So, it is compatibility with God that is the point - where we are truly “at peace” with Him:

- a) **Positionally** - this happens at the moment of redemption - our sins are cleansed and we stand before God blameless and holy.

1 Corinthians 1:2 - *“To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus ...”*

- b) **Practically** - this is happening as we are progressively transformed into the likeness of Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:18 - *“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.”*

- c) **Perfectly** - this happens at the moment we see Christ and are glorified -

1 John 3:2 - *“Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we will be. We know that when He appears, we will be like Him, because we will see Him just as He is.”*

II. THE EXTENT OF OUR SANCTIFICATION - *“... entirely, and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete ...”*

A. The Inclusivity of Sanctification

1. Pauls’ prayer is that God would *“sanctify you entirely”* [ὀλοτελής] - a compound word from *holos*, “whole, entire,” and *telos*, “end.”
2. It essentially means that the sanctification would be whole, attaining to the end” or wholly complete.
3. His emphasis is that there would be no area of life that is left without the power of God’s work to sanctify it.
4. Paul then makes reference to the entirety of a person’s identity - “... and

may your spirit and soul and body ...”

- a) The argument here is whether there is a 3-part division called trichotomy, or a 2-part division called dichotomy.

(1) Trichotomy refers to seeing a distinction between the spirit, soul, and body;

(a) **“spirit”** [τὸ πνεῦμα] - a reference to “life principle imparted to man by God who is Spirit, enabling him to know and communicate with God.”¹

(b) **“soul”** [ἡ ψυχὴ] - a reference to the self-conscious life of man, the seat of personality and interaction with other men.

(c) **“body”** [τὸ σῶμα] - a reference to the physical body, often the tool of the flesh to indulge in the sin principle.

(2) Dichotomy refers to seeing a simple distinction between the immaterial (**“spirit and soul”**) and the material (**“body”**).

B. The Integrity of Sanctification

1. The degree of sanctification extends to the entirety of the person, but the integrity of sanctification is seen in the phrase: **“be preserved complete”**
2. This is persevering work of God whereby He **“preserves”** [τηρέω] - to “keep watch over, or to guard” with reference to causing a condition of holiness to continue.
3. **“Complete”** [ὀλόκληρος] - refers to the ability to meet all expectations with integrity, undamaged, or intact.
4. Essentially, he is saying that his prayer is that we would be kept on the path to holiness without deviation, walking worthy of our calling -

Colossians 1:10 - **“so that you will walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, to please Him in all respects, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God”**

III. THE END OF OUR SANCTIFICATION - **“... without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

A. The Priority of Sanctification

¹ Hiebert, p. 252.

1. The ultimate destination of sanctification is the perfect conformity to the Lord Jesus Christ which means that we will be *“without blame.”*
2. This refers to a behavioral innocence - [ἀμέμπτως] - conducting oneself blamelessly.
3. It has in mind that there are no matters that can be grabbed onto for the purposes of accusation of evil -

Ephesians 5:26-27 - *“so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless.”*

B. The Perfection in Sanctification

1. We live in light of the accomplishments of God in our lives today - realizing that holy living is what marks the believer.
2. However, we also have a goal - the ability to see Christ and realize conformity to Him who is blameless - *“... at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”*
3. This is the fourth mention of the Rapture of the Church in this epistle (1:10; 2:19; 3:13; 4:15) and here.
4. This is when everything that is lacking will be filled up, but we are to press toward that Christlikeness now with the sanctification that will ultimately be achieved when we see Christ.

Hebrews 12:14 - *“Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.”*

We are to intentionally avoid evil.