



# The Scrolls

Helping **CENTRAL BIBLE CHURCH** Families Belong, Become and Go Beyond

V25 N22

May 28, 2023

## NOT HOME YET

“Finishing What He Started”

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

### THIS WEEK'S CORE COMPETENCY

#### Holy Spirit

I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts, and changes me as a child of God.

*“You, however, are not in the realm of the flesh but are in the realm of the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, they do not belong to Christ.”*

**Romans 8:9**



Who is the Sanctifier?

*Sanctification* is a theological term familiar to most Christians. Generally speaking, the noun refers to the process believers go through to be made holy, that is, to become like Jesus (Ro 8:29). When that process is viewed in terms of *holiness*, we call it sanctification. When it is viewed in terms of *development*, we call it spiritual formation. When we view it in terms of training, we call it *discipleship*. Generally speaking, the verb to *sanctify* refers to setting something aside for sacred purposes. One theologian describes sanctification as follows: “The gracious operation of the Holy Spirit, *involving our responsible participation*, by which he delivers us as justified sinners from the pollution of sin, renews our entire nature according to the image of God, and enables us to live lives that are pleasing to him” (Anthony A. Hoekema, “Sanctification,” in *Saved by Grace*, 192, italics added). Another distinguishes *sanctification* from *justification*. He writes: “Unlike justification, sanctification is not an act of God declaring us righteous; rather, it is a *continual process in the present* by which God is making us righteous. Justification is the act by which God gets us out of sin (legally). Sanctification is the process by which God gets sin out of us (actually)” (Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, *Sin, Salvation*, 237, italics added).

Sanctification is without doubt the work of God. Paul tells the Thessalonians, “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it” (5:23-24). But more specifically, it is the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the *primary agent* in our sanctification. He is the one who carries on a continuing war with our

sinful nature (Gal 5:17, 22-23) and provides the necessary power for overcoming temptation (1Co 10:13) and sin (Ro 8:12-14). But it is *also* the responsibility of his people. What we do really matters. Paul tells the Philippians, “Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed – not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence – continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (2:12-13). He works *continuously*; we must work *continually*.

The expression “let go and let God” is poor advice when it comes to living the Christian life, because it is at best a half-truth. One theologian calls it “a tragic distortion of the doctrine of sanctification” (Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 754). Another writes, “The initiative in the process [of sanctification] is always God’s, and we would in fact do nothing without his initiative. However, that initiative is not something we are waiting upon. The ball is, as it were, in our court . . . The issue now concerns what we will do. The idea that we can do nothing is an unfortunate confusion, and those who sponsor it never practice it, thank goodness” (Dallas Willard, *Renovation of the Heart*, 82).

The book of 1 Thessalonians presents both sides of the sanctification coin in bookend passages. In 4:3, Paul writes: “It is God’s will that you should be sanctified,” and in the same breath goes on to say, “that you should avoid sexual immorality.” But in 5:23, he writes: “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through . . . The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.”

# 1 EXAMINE GOD'S WORD

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## Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

## Read in other translations

23 Now may the God of peace himself make you completely holy and may your spirit and soul and body be kept entirely blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is trustworthy, and he will in fact do this. (NET)

23 May the God who gives us peace make you holy in every way and keep your whole being – spirit, soul, and body – free from every fault at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you will do it, because he is faithful. (NLT)

After reading the text, practice your Observation skills by noting the following:

- Circle “May” (2x) in v. 23.
- Underline “God of peace” in v. 23.
- Bracket “of peace” in v. 23.
- Circle “peace” in v. 23.
- Circle “sanctify” in v. 23.
- Bracket “spirit, soul, and body” in v. 23.
- Circle “blameless” in v. 23.
- Underline “one who calls you” in v. 24.
- Circle “faithful” in v. 24.
- Box “but” indicating *contrast* in v. 13.

What one word would you use to describe the **TONE** of this passage? (i.e., stern, joyful, cautious, etc.)

What word or idea stands out to you in this passage?

What one thing do you not understand in this passage?

Try to summarize the **THEME** of this passage in one word. If you were going to describe these verses, you might say, “This text is about \_\_\_\_\_.”



## DIG DEEPER

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Answer the questions to help you apply the passage and prepare for discussion

1. Paul's closing wish prayer addresses "the God of *peace*." What does that expression mean?
  2. The term "peace" connotes more than *tranquility* in verse 23 (cf. Ro 5:1; Eph 6:15; Col 1:20). How so?
  3. Paul desires God to "sanctify" his readers. Put what that means in your own words.
  4. What does "through and through" mean?
  5. In Paul's view, human beings have *three discrete parts*, two immaterial and one material – correct? Explain.
  6. If "blameless" (v. 23) means the same as "blameless and holy" (3:13; cf. "sanctify you through and through"), to what does it refer?
  7. Paul refers to "the coming of our Lord Jesus" (v. 23). Is that his coming to *rescue* or coming to *reign*? Explain (cf. 1:10; 4:13-18).
  8. *Who* exactly is faithful and *why* does it matter?
  9. *What* exactly will the faithful one do and *when* will he do it?
  10. **Discussion:** Talk about your answers to the 3 Living Questions.
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### Commentary On The Text

On 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24, one commentator writes: “Paul has come to the end of the first letter to the Thessalonian Christians. In the letter’s closing, the author includes a blessing expressed in the form of a prayer (v. 23) and assures the believers that God will faithfully carry out his work in their lives (v. 24). . . To mark the closing of their letters, Greek and Roman correspondents commonly penned a wish that the recipient would enjoy health, while Semitic authors would include a blessing of peace to signal that they had reached the end. The apostle concludes with a prayer blessing in which the ‘God of peace’ is invoked, elements that signal that the author has transitioned from the main body of the letter to the closing of the correspondence” (Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC, 266).

Verse 23 contains two complementary invocations or wish prayers introduced by “May” – the second one amounting to a restatement of the first, detailing what “sanctify you through and through” in the first one entails. Verse 24 contains Paul’s assurance that God will finish what he started. He will *for sure* sanctify them completely.

After emphasizing that God himself is the one who sanctifies, Paul further identifies the sanctifier as “the God of peace.” Many English translations rightly render the phrase “of peace” as “who gives peace.” And in this context, “peace” refers not to personal “peace of mind” or “a conflict free life,” but by *metonymy* to the peace that *salvation* brings. One commentator explains: “The phrase ‘God of peace’ (cf. Rom. 15:33, 16:20; Phil. 4:9; cf. also 2 Thess. 3:16) identifies God as the source of peace, which for Paul is not merely the absence of conflict but, more positively, a state of wholeness and well-being characterized by reconciled relationships (cf. Rom. 5:1-11); as such, it is *virtually a synonym for ‘salvation’*” (Michael W. Holmes, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 200, italics added). Throughout his letter, Paul has been concerned with sanctification (3:13; 4:3, 4, 7, 8). Now, as he closes, he prays that God will sanctify his readers *completely* – in other words, make them “blameless and holy” (3:13) or “unblameable in holiness” (F. F. Bruce, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 45, *1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 129).

Lest his meaning be lost on the readers, the apostle repeats himself, “May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,” clarifying that “through and through” refers to the *complete* sanctification of their *whole* be-

ing, so that they might reach “the full end or goal” for which they were saved and might appear “blameless,” or *faultless* as far as their sanctification is concerned, at the “coming of our Lord Jesus” to rescue them from wrath (1:10; 4:13-18). “The adjective ‘whole’ conveys the quality of being ‘complete’ or ‘entire’ similar to the word ‘entirely’ [cf. “through and through” NIV] of the previous clause” (Green, 268). And while some have concluded from verse 23 that human beings are made up to three discrete constituent parts – two immaterial, *spirit* and *soul*, and one material, *body* – the phrase “spirit, soul, and body” is more likely just a synonym for “you” in much the same way “heart” is a synonym for “you” in 3:13. And so, when God completes his work of sanctification, believers will appear faultless before their returning Lord.

Verse 24 contains assurance that a faithful God will not renege on his commitment to his own; he will finish what he started. One author writes encouraging words: “God is faithful to bring to completion the work He has begun in believers (Phil. 1:6). God does not save a person by grace and then leave him alone to work out his Christian growth by works (Gal. 3:3). As God calls and justifies by grace, he sanctifies by grace too” (Thomas L. Constable, “1 Thessalonians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: New Testament*, 710).

When God is finished with us, namely, when our sanctification is complete, we will be “conformed to the image of his Son” (Ro 8:29). We will not be identical, i.e., be clones, but we will all be mature, having individually attained “the whole measure of fulness of Christ” (Eph 4:13). We will have immortal bodies like Jesus’ resurrection body (Php 3:21) and be free from not only the penalty and power of sin but also from its very presence. One theologian remarks: “Now, by God’s grace we are *able not to sin* (1 Cor. 10:13), but *then* we will *no longer be able to sin*. This is not the loss of true freedom but the actualization of it” (Norman Geisler, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, *Sin, Salvation*, 242).

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## Word Studies/Notes

v. 23 **May, May** Cf. 3:13. The optative mood expresses a *wish* or *desire*. Because the apostle's desire, namely, that his readers be sanctified, is here directed toward God, it is called a "wish prayer" or "invocation/wish prayer" by some commentators (see F. F. Bruce, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 45, 1 and 2 *Thessalonians*, 129; cf. Ben Witherington III, 1 and 2 *Thessalonians*, 171). "Just as [3:13] summarized the main point of chapters 1-3, so its repetition in 5:23 is the main point not only of 5:12-24 but of chapters 4-5 and hence of the entire book" (G. K. Beale, 1-2 *Thessalonians*, IVP New Testament Commentary Series, 176).

v. 23 **God of peace** Cf. "God who gives us peace" (GNT, NLT). "He uses the descriptive genitive 'of peace' [*tēs eipēnēs*] to show that peace comes from God (see also Gal 5:22). His reference to God is underscored with the intensive pronoun 'himself' [*autos*]" (Gary S. Shogren, 1 and 2 *Thessalonians*, ZECNT, 226). "Paul addresses God as the giver 'of peace' (cf. 1 Cor 14:33), who has provided for a harmonious relationship between himself and man through Christ's death" (Robert L. Thomas, "1 Thessalonians," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 11:294).

v. 23 **peace** "Peace in this context is almost synonymous with Christian 'salvation' (1.1; Acts 10.36; Rom. 2.10; 5.1; 8.6; 14.17; Eph. 6.15)" (Gene L. Green, *The Letters to the Thessalonians*, PNTC, 267). "The sum total of gospel blessings can be expressed by [*eirēnē*] (cf. 1:1), the designation of [*ho theos tēs eirēnēs*] pointing to God as the source of them all" (Bruce, 129).

v. 23 **sanctify** I.e., "to make holy" (cf. NLT, NET), "to consecrate" (cf. "set you apart for himself," NLV). "The aorist tense indicates that the completion of sanctification is in view [Hb, WBC]" (Richard C. Blight, *An Exegetical Summary of 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 2nd ed., 170). "The verb 'sanctify' (*hagiazō*) is the verbal form of the noun translated as 'holiness' (*hagiasmos*) in 4:3). The expression 'sanctify you through and through' restates in different words the idea of 'blameless in holiness' from 3:13 (see discussion there). Like the noun 'holiness,' the verb 'sanctify' indicates a process rather than a state, whose goal is associated (as in 3:13) with 'the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ'" (Michael W. Holmes, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 and 2 Thessalonians*, 200). "This wish-prayer is in essence a repetition in different words of that in 3:11-13, the climax of which is the prayer that the Thessalonians' hearts may be established 'unblameable in holiness' at the Parousia . . . It is the completion of the process that is in view here, as in 3:13" (Bruce, 129).

v. 23 **spirit, soul, body** "This is the only place in the Pauline letters where the apostle uses these three terms to describe the totality of human nature. During that era, there was an ongoing debate concerning whether the human person consisted of two or three parts, a discussion that continues down to our day. We should not, however, simply conclude that Paul was falling out on the side of those who embraced the tripartite view. In 1 Corinthians 7.34 Paul summarizes the totality of human nature with the bipartite description 'body and spirit.' Jesus, on the other hand, spoke of humans as 'soul and body' (Matt. 10.28), while on another occasion he summarizes human nature as 'heart, soul, mind and strength' (Mark 12.30; cf. Deut. 6.4-5; Matt. 22.37; Luke 10.27). While these terms may describe different *aspects* of a human's nature, in the present context the apostle's appeal to God is simply that his sanctification may extend to the *entirety* of their being" (Green, 268-69; cf. Witherington, 172-73; contra. Thomas, 294-95, who argues for a trichotomous view).

v. 23 **blameless** See 3:13; cf. Jas 1:4. "Paul's desire for his readers was that every part of them, involving all their relationships, would remain without fault and that they would continue to mature and live free from legitimate grounds for accusation until Christ's return" (Thomas L. Constable, "Notes on 1 Thessalonians," 2023 ed., 82, [planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/1Thessalonians.pdf](http://planobiblechapel.org/tcon/notes/pdf/1Thessalonians.pdf)). Not just *until* but also *at* Christ's return when their sanctification is complete and they appear "without fault" before the Lord (see Leon Morris, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, NICNT, 182). "The prayer that the converts may be preserved without fault at the Parousia suggests that they must be perfected before they appear before Jesus, perfected in body by resurrection and perfected in spirit either at the resurrection or before" (Witherington, 174).

v. 24 **one who calls you** I.e., "God himself, the God of peace" (v. 23); cf. 1:4.

v. 24 **faithful** Cf. Php 1:6. "God, besides being a Caller, is a Doer . . . The God to whom Paul prays is not a God who is inactive or ineffective. Paul thinks of Him as One who will certainly bring to completion that which He has begun. 'Hath he said, and will he not do it?' (Num 23:19). Because He is the faithful One, and because He is the One who has called them, they may now that He will do perfectly all that is involved in their call" (Morris, 183).



## APPLY THE TEXT

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### CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE TEXT

God will finish the job of sanctifying you completely, so that you will be blameless at the coming of Jesus Christ.

### CENTRAL MESSAGE FOR YOUR LIFE

(Rewrite the Central Message above to personally apply to your own life)



## 3 LIVING QUESTIONS

The “Living Questions” are simple questions we may ask of any text in order to apply the Bible to our life. Answer the questions below as personally as you can.

1. What does this passage teach me about God?

2. What does this passage teach me about myself?

3. What does this passage lead me to do?



## FAMILY TALK

Being a college student and working tends to take up a lot of my time. I imagine being a parent, working, and caring for your spouse is even more time consuming. Often when my schedule gets too busy, I start relying on myself to get through the million daily tasks when I should be turning to the Lord and giving all my worries and daily tasks to him. This week alone I have fallen so far away from my normal habit of opening my Bible, praying and talking with the Lord. I've become so consumed by my busy schedule and checking off all the boxes that I forget to submit myself to the Lord. I fail to invite him into my space and ask him to provide and intercede for me. I know very well how busy life can become, especially in this end-of-year season we're in right now. We are told to sanctify ourselves and become blameless by the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to be "set apart" for God's holy plan. It is his will for our lives to be sanctified in him, but am I doing that? Take inventory of your life today. Are you consumed with getting the kids out of school or going to sporting events and dance recitals? I encourage you to start your day submitting yourself to the Lord. Make that daily commitment to pursue spiritual growth and sanctification. In doing this you can share with your kids the goodness of God. Don't let your busy life block you from what God has for your life and the opportunity to share the gospel with your kids.

**\*\*This week's Scrolls written by Delaney Elliott, Children's Ministry Associate**

### What Does The Bible Say?

Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24.

1. Who sanctifies you?
2. What parts of you are to be kept blameless?
3. How is God described in these verses?

### What Do You Think?

How does God help you to be kept blameless?

### What Do You Do?

This week as a family put together a puzzle. Talk about how each piece gets put together to complete the picture just like sanctification. We work on our own lives piece by piece to resemble Jesus.

## CORE COMPETENCY: Holy Spirit

I believe the Holy Spirit helps me become more like God.

## MEMORY VERSE: 1 Thessalonians 5:11

*"Therefore, encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."*

## KidPIX COUPON

Earn 1 KidPIX Token by completing the CENTRAL Kids Bible Study on this page and another token by memorizing and reciting the memory verse for this week.

Questions: [kids@wearecentral.org](mailto:kids@wearecentral.org)

- ☐ I completed my Bible Study
- ☐ I memorized this week's verse
- ☐ I brought my Bible to church
- ☐ I brought a friend



CHILD'S NAME

GRADE

PARENT SIGNATURE

# OUR CORE COMPETENCIES

## CENTRAL BELIEFS

**Authority of the Bible** (2 Timothy 3:16-17)  
*I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.*

**Church** (Ephesians 4:15-16)  
*I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.*

**Eternity** (John 14:1-4)  
*I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.*

**The Holy Spirit** (Romans 8:9)  
*I believe the Holy Spirit convicts, calls, converts and changes me as a child of God.*

**Humanity** (John 3:16)  
*I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.*

**Identity in Christ** (John 1:12)  
*I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.*

**Jesus Christ** (Hebrews 1:1-4)  
*I believe Jesus Christ is the Son of God who became man, died for sinners and rose from the dead.*

**Life Purpose** (Acts 20:24)  
*I believe I am a steward of God's resources and have been redeemed to participate in His Kingdom purposes for His glory.*

**Personal God** (Psalm 121:1-2)  
*I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.*

**Salvation by Grace** (Ephesians 2:8-9)  
*I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.*



## CENTRAL VIRTUES

**Love** (1 John 4:10-12)  
*I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.*

**Joy** (John 15:11)  
*I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.*

**Peace** (Philippians 4:6-7)  
*I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself and others.*

**Patience** (Proverbs 14:29)  
*I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.*

**Kindness/Goodness** (1 Thessalonians 5:15)  
*I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others*

**Faithfulness** (Proverbs 3:3-4)  
*I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.*

**Gentleness** (Philippians 4:5)  
*I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.*

**Self-Control** (Titus 2:11-13)  
*I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.*

**Grace** (Colossians 3:13)  
*I demonstrate forgiveness, mercy and generosity to others, even when they have offended me.*

**Hope** (1 Peter 1:3-5)  
*I have a growing anticipation of God's promises and my secure eternity with Him.*

**Humility** (Philippians 2:3-4)  
*I choose to esteem others above myself.*



## CENTRAL PRACTICES

**Bible Study** (Hebrews 4:12)  
*I study the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.*

**Biblical Community** (Acts 2:44-47)  
*I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.*

**Compassion** (Psalm 82:3-4)  
*I seek to serve the last, the least and the lost in my community.*

**Disciple-Making** (2 Timothy 2:2)  
*I multiply godly beliefs, virtues and practices in others to encourage their spiritual growth in Christ.*

**Evangelism** (Acts 1:8)  
*I share Jesus with others through personal proclamation and demonstration of the gospel.*

**Generosity** (2 Corinthians 9:6-11)  
*I gladly give my resources to fulfill God's purposes.*

**Prayer** (Psalm 66:16-20)  
*I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.*

**Single-Mindedness** (Matthew 6:33)  
*I focus on God and His priorities for my life.*

**Spiritual Gifts** (Romans 12:4-6)  
*I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.*

**Worship** (Psalm 95:1-7)  
*I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.*

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**Stephanie Thomas** (B.B.A University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella and Simon. Stephanie has attended Central Bible Church for more than 20 years, has been on staff since 2014, and now serves as Children's Minister.

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