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“SANCTIFIED THROUGH AND THROUGH”
First Thessalonians 5:16-24

“Be holy because I, the LORD your G-d, am holy” (Leviticus 19:2). This commandment fell on me like a mountain. ‘Yes, you are holy! You are the LORD G-d! But I am human. How can I be holy?’”

Then I glimpsed a loophole by which I might escape: **“Be holy”** is Hebrew, I am Christian. **“Be holy”** is of Moses, I am of Christ. **“Be holy”** belongs to a world of animal sacrifice, religious diets and Sabbath ordinances, and that is not my world.

I could breathe freely again. I was off the hook!

But my relief was short-lived. I began seeing the holiness command all over the New Testament:

{Mt 5:29-30; TNIV/NLT} **“If your right eye causes you to lust, gouge it out and throw it away... And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away”;**

{II Co 7:1} **“Let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for G-d.”**

{I P 1:15-16} And so forth. Peter goes so far as to quote Leviticus verbatim: **“Just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’.”**

“Be holy because I, the LORD your G-d, am holy.” And so I resolved to **“be holy.”**

It was a disaster. Years of legalistic striving changed me into a seething mass of pride, self-loathing, fear, and resentment.

{Is 64:6} I was painfully aware that my **“righteous acts [were] like filthy rags.”** My soul shriveled in despair and I burned with rage.

At a pivotal moment I cast myself on G-d’s mercy and kindness. He saved me from myself and healed the alienation that had divided me from Him.

Still, I was left with some questions:

? What does it mean to **“be holy”**?

? {Eph 2:8-9} What place does holiness have in the lives of believers who are **“saved” “by grace” “through faith – and...not by works”**?

? How can we truly **“be holy”**?

▣ Please turn with me to First Thessalonians 5:16-24. What appears to be a hodge-podge of random instructions is actually a single teaching held together by a one, unifying concept: holiness or, to be more precise, sanctification.

■ Verse 23 is our anchoring verse, the lens through which we are reading the rest of the passage: **“May G-d himself, the G-d 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.”**

📖 **“May G-d...sanctify you.”** Sanctification is the condition of *being holy*, and it is also the *event or process by which we are made holy*. To sanctify a

person is **“to make [them] holy.”** The New Living Translation nails this verse: **“May G-d...make you holy.”**

? But just substituting different words does not answer the question, what does it mean to **“be holy”**?

📖 In biblical faith, **“to be holy”** is to *fulfill the sacred purpose for which G-d has set us apart.*

★ This purpose is sacred because...

It has its origin in the Living G-d. He has envisioned and defined our purpose.

It is not natural. We cannot discover it on our own, by natural processes. It is revealed by G-d.

It is untainted by sin. G-d's intent for us is pure, and as we pursue it we are purified.

So to be sanctified is to be transformed, empowered, and equipped to fulfill our sacred purpose.

? But what is that sacred purpose?

The details vary by individual. YHWH guides *some* into holy matrimony, *others* into holy singleness; *some* to vocations in the world, *others* to professional church work; *some* to spend their energy on ministries of compassion, others to pursue justice. And so on.

★ But underneath all that, this sacred purpose is the same for every Christian. **“For those G-d foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters”** (Romans 8:29).

📖 This is why we can also define sanctification as *the process of becoming like Jesus.* Do you want to know holy thought? Attend to Messiah's thinking. Do you want to know holy words? Listen to Messiah speak. Do you want

to know holy conduct? Watch Messiah act. Do you want to know holy relationship? Observe Messiah's interactions.

? What place does holiness have in the lives of those who are **“saved” “by grace” “through faith”**? It is the beating heart of discipleship! It is the sign and substance of our salvation!

{Col 1:21-22; Ro 11:16} For we **“were alienated from G-d”** but **“he has reconciled [us] by Christ's physical body through death to present [us] holy... without blemish.”** Sanctification is not an honorary status; it is who we are! **“If the root is holy, so are the branches.”**

Thus says the LORD: **“Be holy because I... am holy.”** **“Be holy”** because the Son, to whose image you **“are predestined to be conformed,”** is holy.

● Holiness is not optional. As Paul states in 4:3 and 7, **“It is G-d's will that *you* should be sanctified ... G-d did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.”**

A few observations about sanctification are needed.

✍ 1) Sanctification begins and ends in G-d.

■ Verse 23: **“May G-d himself...sanctify you through and through.”** And then verse 24: **“The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.”**

{Php 1:6} I can testify from firsthand experience that any kind of 'holiness' that originates in human will and depends on human effort is a superficial illusion

and an exhausting exercise in futility. The LORD YHWH “**began [this] good work in**” us, and *he* “**will carry it on to completion.**”

✈ 2) Sanctification is holistic.

■ Verse 23: “**May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless.**”

{Ro 12:1} During my years of legalistic striving, I could restrain my sinful physical impulses much of the time. But holiness entails the continuous offering of one’s entire body “**as a living sacrifice... to G-d.**”

{Col 3:8-9; Ro 1:29-30} During my years of legalistic striving, I could hold my tongue for a while. But holiness entails consistent freedom from deception, boasting, gossip, “**slander, and filthy language.**”

{II Co 10:5; Php 4:8} During my years of legalistic striving, I could control my mind for brief periods. But holiness involves “[taking] **captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ,**” filling our minds with that which is “**true...noble...right...pure,**” and “**lovely.**”

{Mk 12:30} Sanctification is not following a code of conduct while people are watching; it is loving “**the Lord...with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength,**” even when no one is there to see it.

✈ 3) Sanctification requires our participation.

Although it begins and ends in G-d, it is a collaborative process. Those who passively wait for holiness to fall on them are not made holy in this life.

{Php 2:13} “**It is G-d who works in [us] to will and to act.**” Yet we are responsible to “**work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling.**”

{Col 3:5; 12} It is G-d who chooses us to be “**holy and dearly loved.**” Yet we are the ones who “**Put to death ... whatever belongs to [our sinful] nature.**”

{II Co 5:17-18; Eph 4:24} It is G-d who accomplishes “**the new creation**” within those who are “**in Christ.**” Yet we are accountable to “**put on the new self.**”

? But what is participation? How can we cooperate with the LORD so that he can make us truly “**holy**”?

Paul has some solid advice for us. As we follow it, we will open ourselves up for deeper transformation.

■ In verses 16-18 Paul teaches: “**Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is G-d’s will for you in Christ Jesus.**”

The LORD is holy. His holiness is both the reason we are called to “**be holy,**” and *the means* by which we are sanctified.

There is only one way to access divine holiness, and that is in intimate fellowship. Sanctification is beyond me and you, but it is not beyond Christ in us.

How do we have intimate fellowship with the Father, Son, and H.S.? By deliberately drawing near in joy, prayer, and thanksgiving to immerse ourselves in his presence! These spiritual disciplines are essential to sanctification. It is by being with Holy God that we become holy.

■ But that is not all. Verses 19-22: “**Do not put out the Spirit’s fire. Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject whatever is harmful.**”

{Eph 2:22} The Holy Spirit does his greatest works in, among, and through the gathered body. In Christ Jesus we **“are being built together to become a [sacred] dwelling in which G-d lives by his Spirit.”**

{1 Co 12:7; 14:3} Paul mentions prophecy. Like the other gifts it **“is given”** by the Spirit. **“for the common good.”** All who prophesy rightly **“speak to people for their strengthening, encouragement and comfort,”** and that includes their sanctification.

These verses are about doing life together. We can rejoice, pray, and give thanks alone or in a group; but **“the Spirit’s fire”** and gifts are far more potent in community.

{Pr 27:17} **“Iron sharpens iron.”** I need you to help me grow more like Jesus. You need me to help you grow. Worshiping together, studying Scripture together, praying together, having fellowship together, and serving together are essential to our sanctification.

“May G-d himself, the G-d 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.”

First Thessalonians is the word of the Lord.