

June

27

BEING SANCTIFIED

*God is faithful to sanctify Christians
through and through.*

THE WORD

1 THESSALO-
NIANS 5:12-24

Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. ¹³Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. ¹⁴And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

¹⁶Rejoice always, ¹⁷pray continually, ¹⁸give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus.

¹⁹Do not quench the Spirit. ²⁰Do not treat prophecies with contempt ²¹but test them all; hold on to what is good, ²²reject every kind of evil.

KEY VERSE

²³May 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. ²⁴The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.

ENGAGE THE WORD

CHRISTIAN LIFE IN COMMUNITY

1 Thessalonians 5:12-15

This section and the next are specific instructions on how Christians are to behave, especially in the light of sanctification and the return of Christ. Paul's first concern is how the church treats its leaders. We are "to know" our leaders. This Greek word translated "know" is a special word that conveys the ideas of a

close personal relationship and of giving deserved recognition or respect to someone. We are to love and respect those who instruct, warn, admonish, and lead us.

In addition to giving our leaders personal encouragement and respect we are “to consider them most highly in love because of their work”[†] (5:12-13). This means that we are to recognize their work publicly and honor them the best way we know as a community.

Paul then turns to interpersonal relationships within the church. We are to be at peace with each other. If we have a problem with a fellow Christian, Jesus provides a method for dealing with those problems in Matthew 18:15-17. First, we go to the person and try to solve the issue, face to face. If that doesn’t work, then we take a trusted friend along to help mediate. And if that doesn’t work, we treat them as we would any pre-Christian.

More than keeping the peace, we are to actively care for each other. Paul tells his audience to warn the idle (those who are rebelliously living off the community), console the fainthearted (those in despair), hold on to the weak (staying close to those who have addictions or having that weekly lunch with someone who is going through a long crisis) and being patient with everyone. We are to watch out for any indication that fellow Christians are retaliating by hurting those who have hurt them. Christians “do good” to each other and to everyone.

PERSONAL DISCIPLINE

1 Thessalonians 5:16-22

First of all, as believers, we are to rejoice always. This comes from the hope of salvation. Secondly, we are to pray unceasingly. This means to approach every part of our day asking God to help us understand what is going on and to use us to make a difference. Finally, we are to give thanks in all things. This means we are to approach life with a thankful spirit.

Did You Know?

Those of us in the Western World understand the person to be composed of mind and body or mind, spirit, and body. We learned this from the Greeks who were the creators of Western culture. In the Semitic world (world of the first-century Jews), the person was a complete whole. In other words, the body can't do something different from the beliefs of the person. We hear this in James, "I will show you my faith, by my works" (James 2:18b). What I truly believe can be seen in what I do. Although the meaning is slightly different, we also have the proverb "Actions speak louder than words!" We believe that actions speak more to a person's beliefs than what he or she might say they believe.

We are not to suppress the work of the Holy Spirit by saying *no* to the prompting of the Spirit. We are to be open to the Lord's message to us, whether it is from Scripture or from fellow Christians. (Always think critically about what you are hearing spiritually from others. Does it make sense? Does it ring true from personal experience? Does it agree with the interpretations of the church? Does it agree with the rest of Scripture?)

We are to hold on to everything good and keep away from any form of evil. Some have translated this last section as "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (KJV). But this is not the meaning in the Greek. This translation created situations where sensitive Christians worried so much about not appearing to do anything wrong, they missed ministry opportunities.

ENTIRE SANCTIFICATION

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24

Paul closes this section with a prayer for their sanctification. These instructions are not something that we can do on our own, but only through the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul uses a rare form of the verb "to sanctify," which indicated to his Greek readers that this was his ultimate wish for them. So that no one would doubt that God could do this, he follows up with verse 24 which describes the one who is calling us to sanctification as faithful and will certainly do it.

Sanctification is often talked about in terms of being "spirit-filled" or "cleansed." As we close our study of 1 Thessalonians, what can we learn about sanctification from Paul's letter? First of all, sanctification transforms our inner being and our most intimate relationships (1 Thessalonians 4:3-8). It gives us the strength to "control our own body in a way that is holy and honorable" (4:4). It also helps us to treat our spouses, siblings, and closest friends in a way that wants the best for them. In other words, a sanctified person does not use others for their pleasure or gain.

Think About It

In 1 Thessalonians 5:23 we read Paul's emphasis on how completely one is to be sanctified. First he uses the term "through and through" (NIV) or "entirely" (NASB), and then goes on to talk about one's "whole spirit, soul and body" (NIV). Because Paul is talking to Greeks, he uses the "spirit, soul, and body" designation to emphasize that sanctification is not just something we pray for, but it is something that becomes a part of every inch of our person.

Secondly, sanctification transforms our relationships with others in the church community (1 Thessalonians 4:9-10a). We are "taught by God to love each other" (4:9b). So this is a deep love which wants the best for fellow believers and is willing to die for it! This is not too hard to grasp with fellow believers who think like we think and have the same cultural values. But this call to love "all of God's family" means that we need to learn to love fellow Christians who don't think like we do and who belong to a totally different culture. This takes spiritual discipline and intentionally reaching out across cultural and language barriers.

Thirdly, sanctification means that we are good citizens of our world. The concern here is that as sanctified people we contribute to our communities to make them a better place. We do our part to build up the community and when we do, we "win the respect of outsiders" and make Christianity an option for those who do not know Christ.

Paul began his instructions on sanctification in chapter 4 and ends his instructions in chapter 5 with a prayer that every part of the lives of the Thessalonian Christians would be transformed by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Understanding our need for sanctification and giving our lives to God completely often takes a moment. However, the process of God's work to transform every part of our lives—spirit, soul, and body—may take time as we begin to realize the extent to which we allow God to change our thinking, actions, and emotional responses.

REFLECT What are some important spiritual disciplines for Christians to grow towards Christlikeness?

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