
Words of Truth

I Thessalonians 5:23

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After the instruction to abstain from all appearance of evil, this was written: *“And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”* (I Thessalonians 5:23). You have to love that the beginning of this sentence is a reminder that God is our “God of peace” (Romans 15:33, Romans 16:20, Philippians 4:9, and Hebrews 13:20).

Think about why it is so important to be reminded that we serve the God of peace. What do we have in this world? When Jesus was talking to the twelve He said: *“These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world”* (John 16:33). So, we have to allow the spiritual peace that we have (Romans 8:6) to rule in our hearts (Colossians 3:15). God is our source of peace (I Corinthians 14:33). So, with that preface in mind (so to speak), we are going to study through the other statements in I Thessalonians 5:23.

We are going to start with the word “sanctify.” The translation of the Greek term “ἁγιάζω” in the King James Version is rather interesting (Strong’s # 37). It is translated “Hallowed” (Matthew 6:9 and Luke 11:2), “sanctifieth” (Matthew 23:17, Matthew 23:19, Hebrews 2:11, and Hebrews 9:13), “sanctified” (John 10:36, Acts 20:32, Acts 26:18, Romans 15:16, I Corinthians 1:2, I Corinthians 6:11, I Corinthians 7:14, I Timothy 4:5, II Timothy 2:21, Hebrews 2:11, Hebrews 10:10, Hebrews 10:14, Hebrews 10:29, and Jude 1:1), “sanctify” (John 17:17, John 17:19, Ephesians 5:26, Hebrews 13:12, and I Peter 3:15), and “holy” (Revelation 22:11). If you read all of the aforementioned references and some of the contexts of those references, you see a variety of meanings and applications. It is fitting therefore to think of this word as it is translated and defined in the sense of something set apart, made holy, etc. In the verse of our study in this article it is God setting apart these Christians “wholly” [completely (Strong’s # 3651)]. We have already seen, through a slightly different Greek word, the teaching of sanctification earlier in this epistle (I Thessalonians 4:3). God sets apart His people for Himself (Psalms 4:3). He then expects His people to maintain that holiness even as He is holy (I Peter 1:13-16).

The desire is that the Thessalonians, having been wholly sanctified by God, be preserved blameless in spirit, soul, and body. The Greek word translated “preserved” [τηρέω] is broad in meaning (Strong’s # 5083). The translation of that term varies being translated

“keep” (Matthew 19:17), “observe” (Matthew 23:3), “watched” (Matthew 27:36), “keepers” (Matthew 28:4), “reserved” (Acts 25:21), etc. It is not that God keeps someone under some form of bound sanctification. It is upon each Christian to remain in a relationship with God. Jude wrote: *“Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life”* (Jude 1:21). God plays a part in that too and we don’t want to miss that truth (Jude 1:24). The word translated “keep” in the previous quote is the same Greek term that is translated “preserved” in I Thessalonians 5:23. The idea in this part of this verse is well explained by the wording of Paul to the church in Corinth. Notice: *“Who shall also confirm [establish; Strong’s # 950] you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord”* (I Corinthians 1:8-9).

Jesus expects to find His people blameless when He returns. This is abundantly clear in another context about the end of the world. Notice: *“The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless”* (II Peter 3:9-14).

How can these things be applied? First, we will consider the spirit of man. Jesus told the disciples: *“Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak”* (Matthew 26:41). So, think about this term as it relates to the will of man. Next, the soul [ψυχή] (Strong’s # 5590) of man. The Hebrew writer wrote: *“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds”* (Hebrews 12:1-3). There the Greek word [ψυχή] (Strong’s # 5590) was translated “minds.” Finally, think about the body. Think about using your body in a godly manner (Philippians 1:20). Think about how these saints were taught to abstain from fornication in this letter (I Thessalonians 4:3-5). Fornication is a sin against one’s own body (I Corinthians 6:18). So, there we have the whole lesson of this verse. God will do His part. The Christian’s duty is to be blameless in will, mind, and body until Christ comes!