

A Different Take On: Holiness is a Process

There has been a teaching around since forever, that states that our holiness is based on how good we are or how well we behave. Theologically, that teaching is known as Progressive Sanctification. That idea means that our sanctification (i.e. being righteous or holy in Father's sight) is a product of our own effort, and that it is achieved over time as we purify ourselves. Under that teaching, therefore, holiness is works-based, which contradicts the inability the 'works' (personal effort) has to achieve anything in the Kingdom. Of course, that's putting aside 'good works' which demonstrate Father's heart to the world.

The idea of progressive sanctification probably comes from this verse:

1 Thessalonians 5:23 (NKJV) – *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Let's have a look at what the writer was trying to say, rather than accepting the version above as we read it in our personal Bibles.

'May' as a verb has within its use the sense of possibility, but not certainty. It also produces the idea "to express a present or future possibility" or "to express a wish".¹ Depending on who the reader of the sentence with the word in it understands 'may', they will interpret the sentence accordingly.

'May' in the above verse gives the idea of, "He may sanctify us." It's like saying, "Santa Clause may bring presents for you at Christmas if you're really, really good children." The action of Santa Clause depends on the action of the children. In regard to sanctification, the verse seems to say that Father may sanctify us.

This places our sanctification in the realm of our efforts at being holy, or, something else, like the amount of good works that we do. This takes it out of the finished work of the Cross and leaves it as a vague possibility. That possibility of not getting holy enough for Father to accept us, produces fear which 'feeds' religion and legalism, driving us further and further away from intimacy with him.

The REAL problem with the verse is this: The translators added the word 'may', and they did it twice. Here's a screen shot of the KJV with the Greek words next to them in blue, showing where the English words came from:

23. And [G1161](#) the very [G846](#) God [G2316](#) of peace [G1515](#) sanctify [G37](#) you [G5209](#) wholly [G3651](#); and [G2532](#) I pray God your [G5216](#) whole [G3648](#) spirit [G4151](#) and [G2532](#) soul [G5590](#) and [G2532](#) body [G4983](#) be preserved [G5083](#) blameless [G274](#) unto [G1722](#) the coming [G3952](#) of our [G2257](#) Lord [G2962](#) Jesus [G2424](#) Christ [G5547](#).

Notice that 'may' isn't there in the Greek, so it's not in this KJV translation. Notice also that 'I pray God' in italics has been added by the translators as it's not in the Greek either. The inclusion of 'may' and 'I pray God' are translator's ideas, not the writer of the text.

The full idea of what the writer is wanting to say is quite clear in the Jubilee translation:

1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 (Jubilee Bible 2000) – *And the very God of peace sanctify you completely, that your spirit, soul, and body be preserved whole without reprehension for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is he that has called you, who will also do it.*

Our righteousness (sanctity) is from "God" and it is complete, encasing our spirit, soul and body – that's our whole being. There's no "maybe" in the KJV and JUB translations which would indicate that there is a suggestion of it not eventuating. In fact, in context, the next verse (v:24) firmly states that he WILL do it. That is, he can be trusted that our sanctification will be total and that he does the sanctifying. That means it's all out of our hands – it's done.

1 – en.wiktionary.org/wiki/may#Verb

The other point with 1 Thessalonians 5:23 is that the Greek work translated as ‘sanctify’ is in the verb form that has no tense. It doesn’t specify whether it’s instantaneous, past, present, future, continuous, repeated, or accomplished. In other words, ‘sanctify’ in this verse has nothing in the word itself to indicate that it’s a continuing process.

In addition, “*be preserved*” (τέρεό – τηρέω) indicates that something has already been done and that it’s being guarded or watched over. That’s on this side of “*the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ*”. Perfection isn’t coming to us when we die, and, we don’t have to work for it because it’s already been given to us. And, it’s “God” who guards it, not us – we have no involvement.

John Crowder’s translation of 1 Thessalonians 5:23 makes the ‘good news’ very clear:

*“And himself, the God of Peace, is the one who sets all of you apart completely. Your whole spirit, soul, body, is preserved blameless until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will preserve you.”*²

Francois Du Toit expresses the ‘good news’ of the verse this way, in the MIRROR translation:

1 Thessalonians 5:23 (MIRROR) – *There, away from any effort of your own, discover how the God of perfect ^speace, who fused you skillfully into oneness – just like a master craftsman would dovetail a carpentry joint – has personally perfected and sanctified the entire harmony of your being without your help. He has restored the detailed default settings. You were re-booted to fully participate in the life of your design, in your spirit, soul and body in blameless innocence in the [†]immediate presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. (It is not in my “I-used-to-be-ness” or “I’m-trying-to-become-ness”, but in my “I-am-ness”. The word ^seirene, translated peace, refers to the dove-tail joint in carpentry. The word [†]parousia, suggests immediate presence; see my comment³ on 1 Thessalonians 2:19.)⁴*

All that I’ve covered in this article should definitively show that **there’s no process or activity that we have to go through to become perfect (holy) in Father’s eyes**. Jesus did it for us on the Cross when he reversed The Fall and took us back to where Adam was before The Fall, where he was blameless. Jesus’ action can’t be reversed. That means: It’s done – Fini, Finito.



IMPORTANT: The statement “Be holy, for I am holy”⁵ is Old Covenant because it was their conduct which made them holy. Under the New Covenant, the injunction is to live holy, just as we are holy (sanctified) because we represent holy Father to the world.

For more information around the topic, watch:

VIDEO: “Spirit, Soul, Body: Revisited” (John Crowder) [15:30-19:45]
www.youtube.com/watch?v=nx1e35Y1hvs

Laurence
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(www.CanberraForerunners.org)

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(Readers will need to look up for themselves any scriptures alluded to in this document)

2 – John Crowder (14-1-2017) “Spirit, Soul, Body: Revisited” www.youtube.com/watch?v=nx1e35Y1hvs [18:00-18:16]

3 – COMMENT: “The Greek word parousia, occurs 24 times in the NT, and 22 times it wrongly implies a 2nd coming or coming judgment. Only twice it is translated as presence. 2 Cor 10:10, Phil 2:12. Of all the English translations that I have checked, only the Young’s Literal has it correct. What a shame that this word has been so dramatically twisted over the years.”

4 – Scripture taken from THE MIRROR. Copyright © 2012. Used by permission of The Author. Mirror Bible: www.mirrorword.net

5 – 1 Peter 1:16 (Leviticus 20:7)