

YOU WILL BE HOLY:
The Christian's Hope
in Final Sanctification

1 Thessalonians 5:23–24

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

I. **A Comprehensive Prayer**

Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.”

II. **A Compelling Promise**

—1 Thessalonians 5:23–24

I. A Comprehensive Prayer (5:23)

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- Paul begins the conclusion to his letter with a *prayer*, not unlike the prayer that ended the first half of the letter (3:11–13).
- This prayer repeats the two main areas of focus from 4:1 to 5:22—(1) *sanctification*; and (2) *Christ’s coming*.

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- Paul’s first word in the original language of the prayer is the pronoun **“Himself”**; it is pushed to the beginning for the sake of *emphasis*.
- The fact that Paul is *praying* for the sanctification of his readers should be enough to indicate that the ultimate agent of this sanctification is God.
- But Paul does not want to leave any ambiguity; it is *God alone* who can accomplish the work.

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- How Paul addresses God is not arbitrary: **“the God of peace.”**
- **“Peace”** describes much more than the absence of war or strife.
- Biblical **“peace”** describes true prosperity—the effect of the reception of grace (cf. John 14:27; Rom 5:1).
- Ultimate **“peace”** is the experience of complete sanctification.



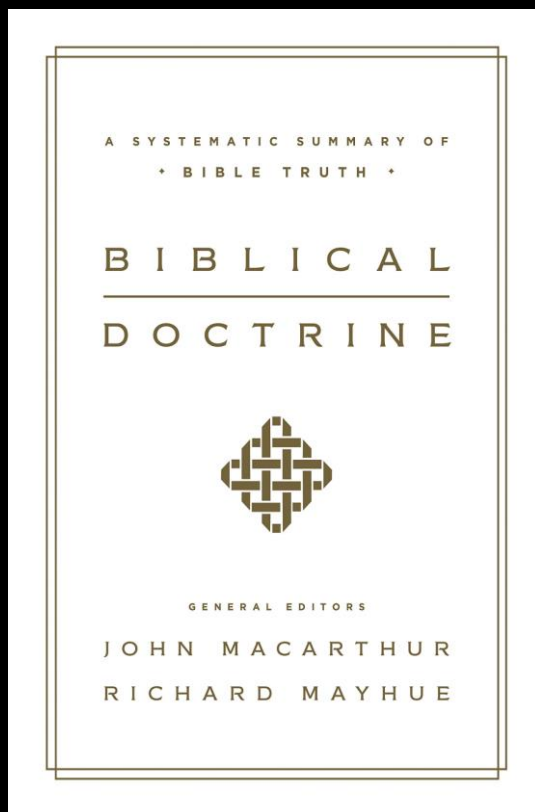
“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- At a basic level, *sanctification* involves: (1) *separation* from sin; and (2) *consecration* to God.
- Paul previously emphasized the utmost importance of this action:
 - **4:3a** – “For this is the will of God, your sanctification.”
 - **4:7** – “For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.”
- He petitions for it as a completed act (not an ongoing process), both by the term “**entirely**,” and by the tense of the imperative “**sanctify**.”

“Sanctification may be defined as that gracious and continuous operation of the Holy Spirit, by which He delivers the justified sinner from the pollution of sin, renews his whole nature in the image of God, and enables him to perform good works.”

—Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, 532

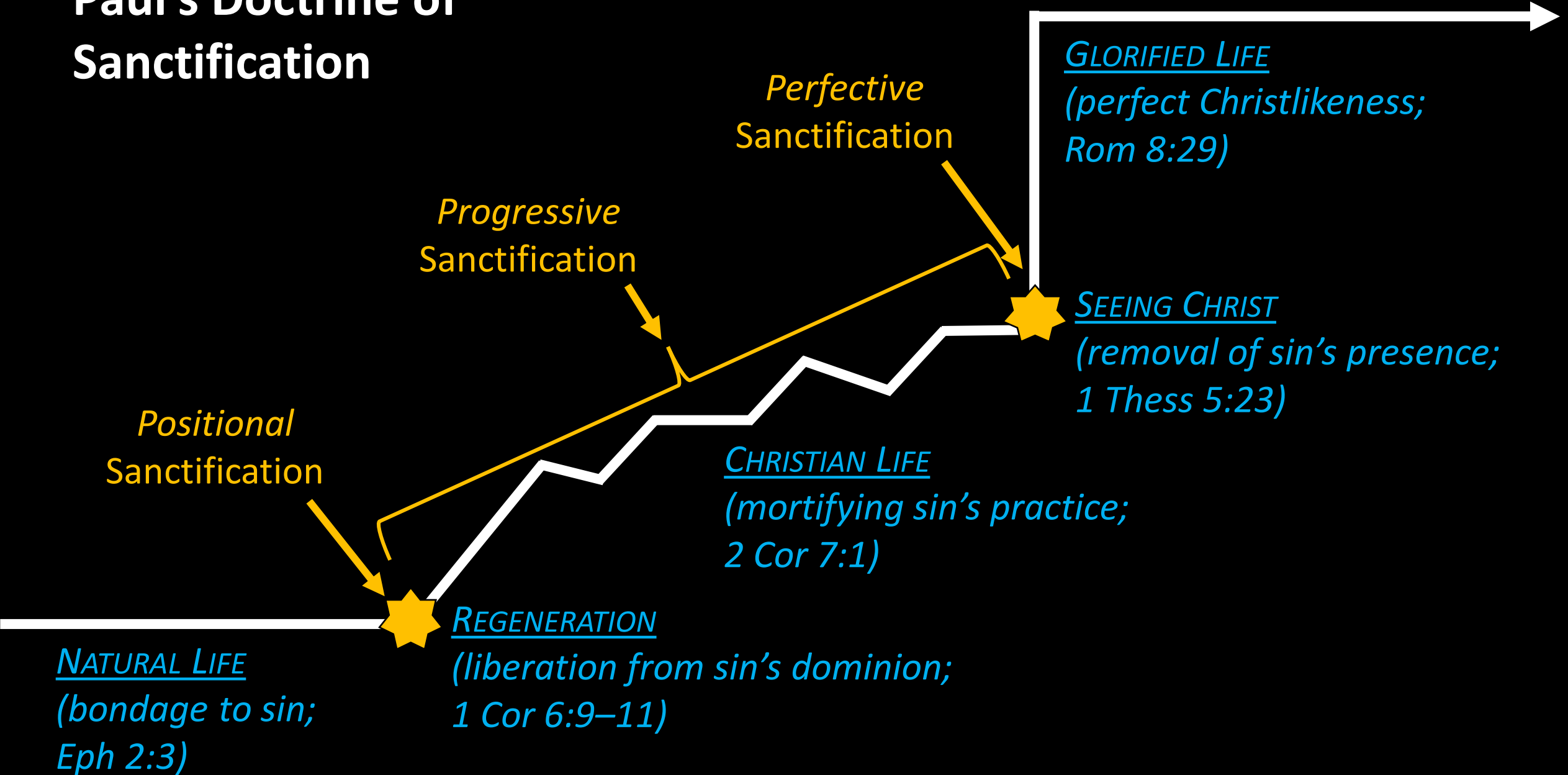




“In sanctification, God, working especially by the Holy Spirit, separates the believer unto himself (cf. 1 Cor 1:2) and makes him increasingly holy, progressively transforming him into the image of Christ (Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:18) by subduing the power of sin in his life and enabling him to bear the fruit of obedience in his life.”

—John MacArthur & Richard Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 632

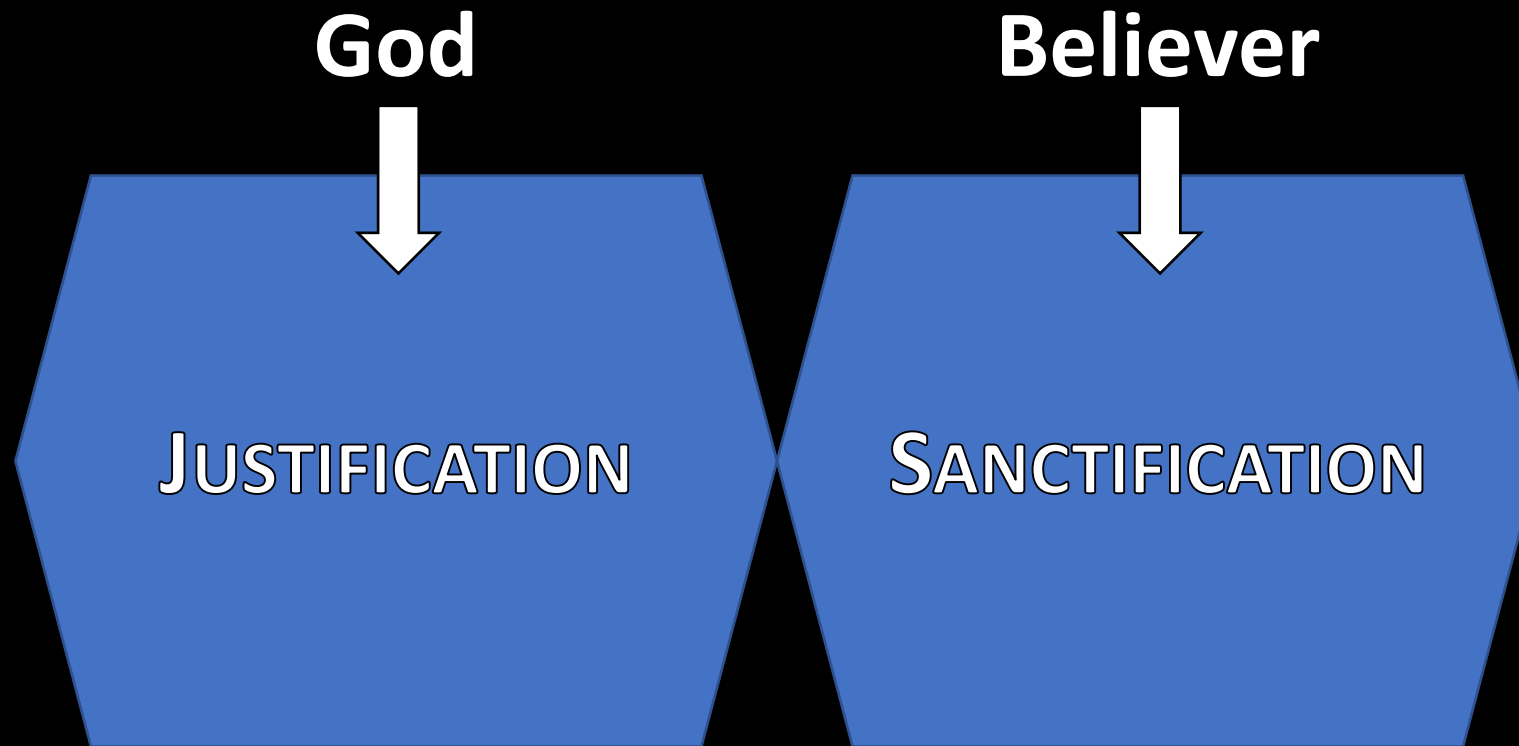
Paul's Doctrine of Sanctification



Error #1 Related to Sanctification



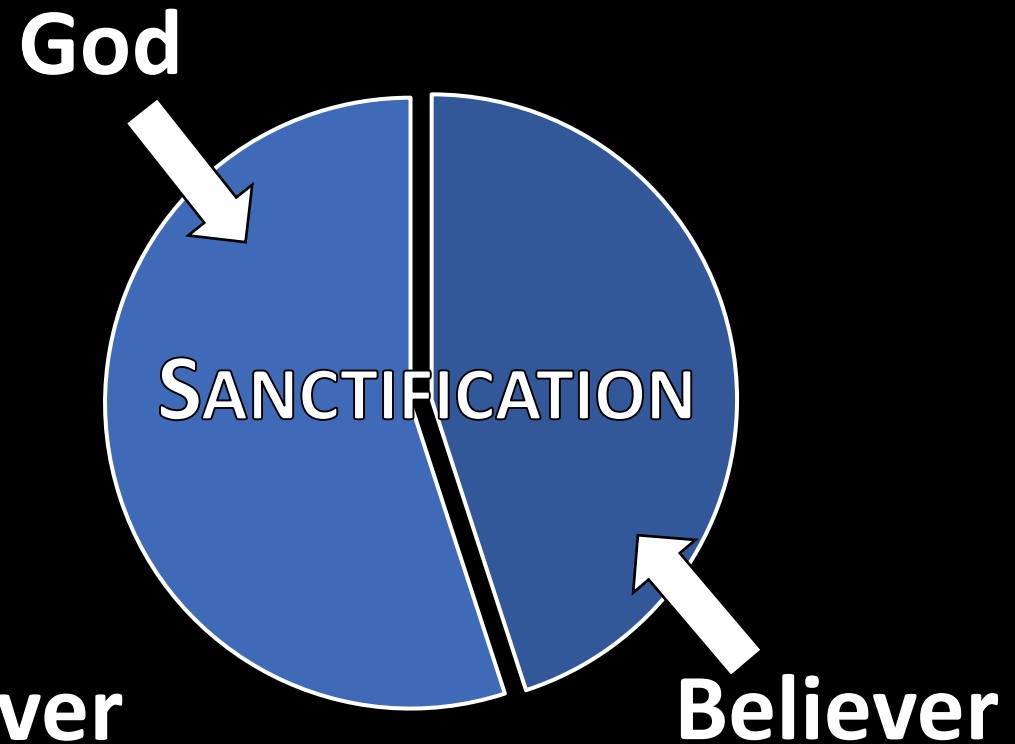
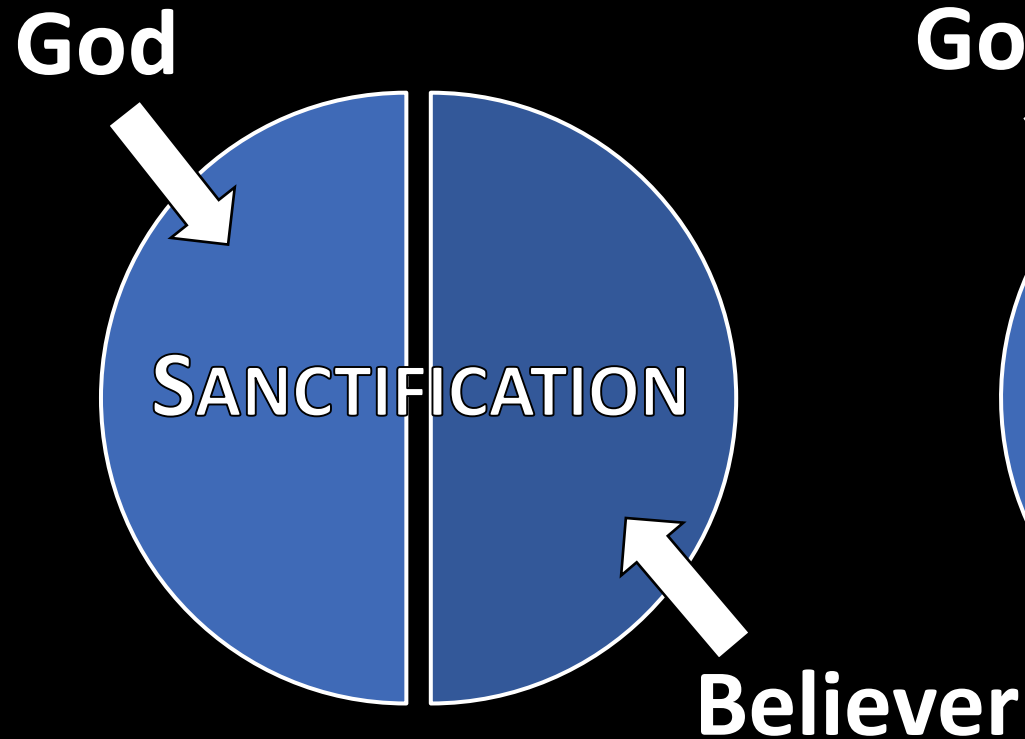
Division of Duties: God accomplishes justification; the believer is responsible for sanctification.



Error #2 Related to Sanctification



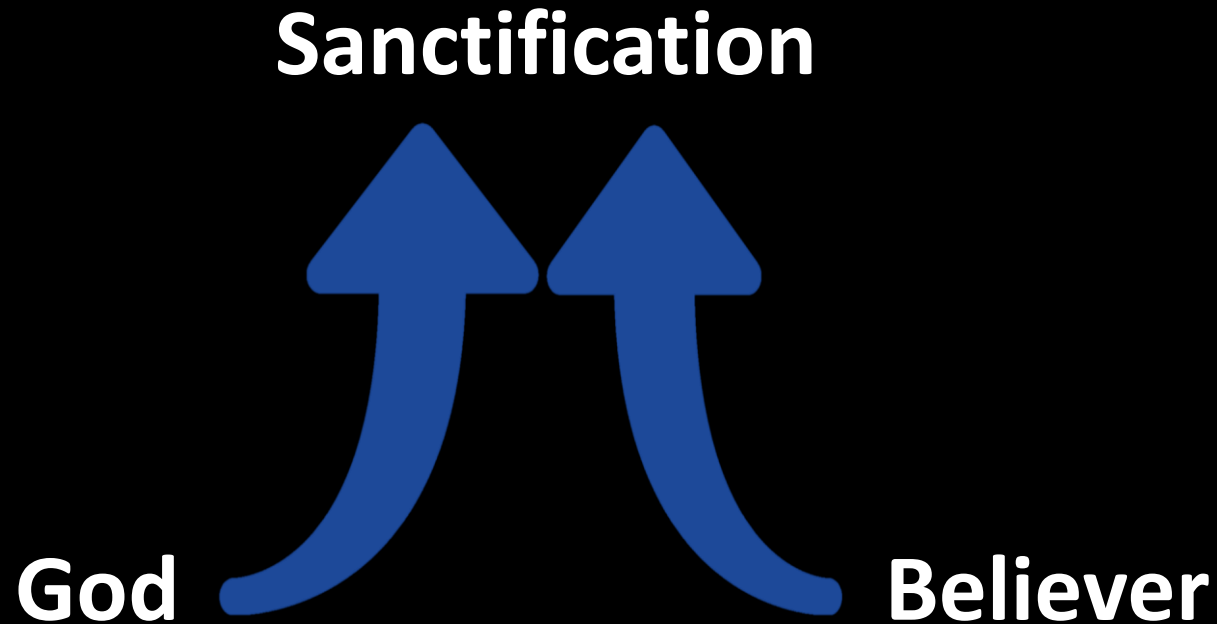
Shared Responsibility: God contributes His half, and the believer contributes his half.



Error #3 Related to Sanctification



Equal Ultimacy: God and the believer are equally ultimately responsible for sanctification.



“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- In the original, the second half of Paul’s prayer (“and may . . .”) begins with the word “**complete**,” mirroring the final word of the first half of his prayer, “**entirely**.”
- “**Complete**” emphasizes *in every part*, whereas “**entirely**” emphasizes *in a collective whole*.
- Ultimately, *totality* serves as the *center* of his prayer; his prayer is for *total, entire, complete* sanctification.



“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- Paul’s language in v. 23 has caused no small amount of debate.
- At a minimum, we recognize that Paul refers to two categories of man’s composition: the *material* (“**body**”), and the *immaterial* (“**spirit**”/“**soul**”).
- But can the *immaterial* be further divided between “**spirit**” and “**soul**”?
- The text is highly debated, but at the level of the language, it appears that some distinction between “**spirit**” and “**soul**” is intended.

“Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

- To “**be preserved**” means “to maintain a state or condition”—the status of being “**complete**” and “**without blame.**”
- This *preservation* is seen in reference to a key event: “**at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.**”
- **3:13** – “so that He may establish your hearts without blame in holiness before our God and Father at the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints.

παρουσία

parousia / coming; advent; presence

II. A Compelling Promise (5:24)

“Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.”

- In a remarkably abrupt transition, Paul immediately reveals the answer to his intercessory prayer.
- The first word from his pen is “**Faithful**”—a term emphasized by its unusual placement at the beginning of the sentence.
- There are many things we do *not* know about God (cf. Romans 11:33), but what we *do* know about Him is that He is *faithful to His word*.

“God’s faithfulness is His reliability, His determination to fulfill all that He promises. His faithfulness is grounded in His absolute truth. God is perfectly sincere in all His undertakings and dependable in discharging all His engagements.”

—A. A. Hodge, *Outlines of Theology*, 161



“Faithful is **He who calls you**, and He also will bring it to pass.”

- This *faithful One* is defined as “**He who calls you**,” an echo of previous descriptions in the letter of God’s redemptive activity.
 - **2:11–12** – “just as you know how we *were* exhorting and encouraging and imploring each one of you . . . so that you would walk in a manner worthy of the God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.”
 - **4:7** – “For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.”
- Ultimately, the reference to God as One “**who calls**” emphasizes God’s *verbal, promise making nature*.

“Faithful is He who calls you, and **He also will bring it to pass.**”

- Paul connects the first assertion to a necessary and inevitable consequence.

- Literally, “He also will do.”

WORD



ACHIEVEMENT

- God chose the Thessalonians (1:4), He had called them to enter His kingdom (2:12), He had made known to them His will of sanctification (4:3), and He would make sure His word would not return void.
- Thus, *God is the ultimate agent of sanctification; He is the One who achieves it.*

“Mortification [of sin] from a self-strength, carried on by ways of self-invention, unto the end of a self-righteousness, is the soul and substance of all false religion in the world.”

“The use of means for the obtaining of peace is ours; the bestowing of it is God’s prerogative.”

“Mortification of any sin must be a supply of grace. Of ourselves we cannot do it.”



—John Owen, *Of the Mortification of Sin*, 47, 64, 133

“It is profoundly satisfying to the believer that in the last resort what matters is not his feeble hold on God, but God’s strong grip on him.”

—Leon Morris, *1 & 2 Thessalonians*, 184

“He Will Hold Me Fast”

[1] When I fear my faith will fail,
Christ will hold me fast;
When the tempter would prevail,
He will hold me fast.

I could never keep my hold
Through life's fearful path;
For my love is often cold;
He must hold me fast.

[2] Those He saves are His delight,
Christ will hold me fast;
Precious in His holy sight,
He will hold me fast.

He'll not let my soul be lost;
His promises will last;
Bought by Him at such a cost,
He will hold me fast.

[3] For my life He bled and died,
Christ will hold me fast;
Justice has been satisfied;
He will hold me fast.

Raised with Him to endless life,
He will hold me fast
'Till our faith is turned to sight,
When He comes at last!

He will hold me fast,
He will hold me fast;
For my Savior loves me so,
He will hold me fast.