

God's Other Faithfulness

1 Thessalonians 5:23–24

May God himself, the God of peace, make you holy through and through. May God himself, the God of peace, make you holy through and through. “You holy through and through” is more than just having our sins forgiven, more than God declaring that we are righteous by our faith. “Holy through and through” describes transformed daily lives.

Is it even possible for God to make us thoroughly holy in this life? Paul wrote this to the Thessalonians. Were they better Christians than we are? No they were not. Paul has been urging them to live holy lives. Earlier in the letter, he wrote, “*you are witnesses, and so is God, that we lived holy and blameless lives before you when we were in Thessalonica.*” “*Each of **you** should control your own body in a way that is holy and honourable.*” “*God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life.*” The Thessalonians need help with holy living.

But then Paul ends 1 Thessalonians with our opening line: *May God himself, the God of peace, make you holy through and through.* The second sentence says the same thing in different words: *May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.* May God make us completely holy. May our entire selves— spirit, soul, and body—be kept blameless until the Lord Jesus returns.

He ends the benediction with this: *The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.* God called us to himself; he called us to holy living. The God of peace is the God of *shalom*, the God of fullness and completeness. He will make us holy through and through. *The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.* When God called us to Christ, this was included. He will do it.

This is a benediction, an indirect prayer. In a benediction, the speaker speaks directly to the people, but really the speaker asks God to do something. It is indirect prayer. “May God make you holy through and through.” Some call a benediction is a prayer-wish, but there’s no wish.

God invented benedictions, indirect prayers, and he likes them. At the end of Numbers 6, Yahweh said to Moses, “Moses, tell Aaron and his sons to bless the Israelites like this: ‘May Yahweh bless you and keep you. May Yahweh shine his face on you, and be gracious to you. May Yahweh turn his face toward you, and give you peace.’” Then Yahweh told Moses, “This way they will put my name on the children of Israel, *and I will bless them.*” “When they say this, Moses, *I will bless Israel.*” Benedictions matter to God. “May God himself, the God of peace, make you holy through and through.”

Providence is celebrating its 100th birthday this weekend. Our school hymn is “Great is Thy Faithfulness,” and with good reason. God has been our faithful provider. I’m not sure there is a tactful way to put this: Providence has seen many financial crises. It has often looked bleak.

But for one hundred years, God has provided. By God's grace the school's doors stay open, and by God's grace our students are shaped and sent out, year after year. Including me. If God can be faithful like that for the last one hundred years, he can certainly be faithful for another hundred.

But there is another faithfulness of God, which we saw in Thessalonians. *May God himself make you holy through and through. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless until the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.*

That's not his faithfulness in providing so Providence can continue. This message is called, "God's Other Faithfulness," God's faithfulness in changing us, so that we actually become more like the Lord Jesus. The Thessalonian believers had seen good examples. Paul and Silas and Timothy had lived holy and blameless lives while in Thessalonica, and Paul knew that God himself would agree. The Thessalonians had watched this, and had received Paul's teaching.

Was good modeling and good teaching enough to lead the Thessalonian believers into holy living? No, it was not. *May **God** make you holy through and through. The one who calls you is faithful, and **he** will do it.* Good examples and hearing God's call are important, and aim us in the right direction, but only our faithful God can make it happen.

The Corinthian church was the most challenging of Paul's churches. 1 Corinthians reads like a catalogue of church problems. Here's a line from the beginning of that letter, 1 Corinthians 1:8: *God will strengthen you to the end, so you will be blameless until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.* How can Paul have that kind of confidence about *any* church, especially *that* church?

God will strengthen you to the end, so you will be blameless until the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's confidence rests on the next words: **God is faithful. God is faithful, who has called you into fellowship with his Son.** God's call to us includes him strengthening us to the End.

Our society believes we can fix ourselves. Remember the book, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*? We love books like that. That's the kind of answer we want. We want a book called *The Seven Habits of Holy and Blameless Believers*. We want to know those habits and go after them. We will do what it takes. We'll try harder! Oh, if only we could only try harder!

People, these things all have their place, but it is not going to work, because it is not up to us. *May God make you holy through and through. He is faithful, he will do it. God will strengthen you until the end, so you will be blameless until the coming of our Lord. God is faithful, who called you into fellowship with his Son.* That, people, is God's other faithfulness.

This kind of transformation will not happen without our participation. If we are not open and willing to seek it, it will not happen. We are hungry for this. But our hunger and our willingness and our good habits will not make it happen.

And that's okay, completely okay, because God is faithful. Blessed are the poor in spirit. That's us, the spiritual beggars, who cannot make it happen. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteous, for they will be filled. God will make us hungry, and that's where it begins.

Here is another side to this same faithfulness of God to transform us. 1 Corinthians 10:13. *God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear, but with the temptation, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.* [repeat]

I don't always like that verse, because sometimes I want to sin. Most of you are better than that. You do not give yourself permission to sin. I am not one of the better people.

On the other hand, how often do we sinners do the right thing, the God thing, precisely because God was faithful to us in this way? We don't keep track of those, but everyone who has followed the Lord over time has benefited immensely from this very faithfulness of God. It is a part of how he makes us holy through and through.

If we deny him, he will deny us. If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself. 2 Timothy 2. *If we are faithless, he remains faithful, for he cannot deny himself.* Even when we give up on this for a time, even when we are faithless, God has not quit.

Holiness will not happen without our participation. But it does not depend on our faithfulness. It depends on God's faithfulness. He faithfully makes us holy through and through. He faithfully strengthens us to the End, so we'll be blameless before our Lord. He faithfully makes temptation bearable. Every time we walk away from sin, God has kept this promise.

God has provided for Providence for one hundred years, and for that we give him praise and thanks. We go into the future with that confidence. But providing resources is not enough, is it. Many institutions last more than one hundred years, but they are not doing the Kingdom of God any good. We need more from God than provision to keep the doors open.

God's other faithfulness, to transform his people, has been real at Providence all along. It's always been at work around us and in us. Without *that* faithfulness, folks, what's the point?

So let's treasure it. Let's prize it. Let's thank God for it. He always works in us to will and to do what pleases him (Php 2:13). Let's value that. Let's nurture it. When there is financial trouble, we plead with God to renew his *providing* faithfulness to us, and he does. Let's also implore and urge God to renew his *transforming* faithfulness, making us holy through and through, strengthening us to be blameless. It is an immense grace. Let's treasure it. Amen.

PRAYER: O God, keep us from falling. O God, bring us into your presence without fault and with great joy. For all eternity we will give praise and glory to you and your Son Jesus. We thank you for your faithfulness, even when we have been faithless. Amen.

BENEDICTION: May God himself, the God of peace, make you holy through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. Amen. Go in God's peace to love and serve the Lord.