

A Complete Small Group Study Resource
Source: Dr. C Norman Sellers · SellersBibleInstitute.com

1 Thessalonians

1 Thessalonians 5:23–28

'Til We Meet Again

Here, There, or in the Air

① The Text Read the passage NKJV	② Devotional Heart preparation Read days before	③ Commentary Teacher preparation Sermon · Outline merged	④ Self-Study Guide Group meeting Greek · Study Questions
Foundation for everything else	Personal prep before the meeting	Leader / Teacher preparation	Used during the group meeting
Everyone	All group members	Teacher / Leader	Small group together

⑤ Application — closes the study, drawing from all sections above and FGR.docx

① BIBLICAL TEXT — 1 Thessalonians 5:23–28 (NKJV)

1 Thessalonians 5:23–28 (NKJV)

23 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.

24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.

25 Brethren, pray for us.

26 Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss.

27 I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren.

28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

② DEVOTIONAL

Read this before the group meets — approximately 1 minute · Drawn from the sermon outline · 150–200 words

"He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it." — 1 Thessalonians 5:24

Paul's prayer to close this letter is also a promise. He asks God to sanctify us completely — and then immediately tells us why we can count on it: the One who called us is faithful, and He will do it. The gap between who we are and who God has called us to be is real. But it is not a gap He has left for us to close on our own.

There is a reason Paul points to God's faithfulness right after asking for our complete sanctification. He knows we cannot get there ourselves. But God works on our willer and our doer — He makes us want what He wants and do what He calls us to do. Our part is simply to stop resisting and make ourselves available.

The letter that began with grace ends with grace. Everything in between — instruction, correction, comfort, prophecy — happened inside the envelope of God's undeserved favor. Go into this week the same way: not straining to earn what has already been given, but living from it.

For Reflection:

1. Where do you feel the gap most between who God has called you to be and how you are actually living — and how does verse 24 speak into that gap?
2. The outline connects seeing Jesus in Scripture (2 Cor. 3:18) with being transformed into His likeness. How much of your time in the Word this week has been beholding rather than just completing a task?
3. Grace opens and closes this letter. Where in your daily life do you most need to receive — rather than earn — what God has already given?

Go this week not straining toward God's approval — resting in the faithfulness of the One who has already called you.

③ COMMENTARY — Sermon Outline with Notes

Teacher preparation resource · Full text organized under outline headings

Paul's farewell to the Thessalonians is not merely a closing — it is a benediction, a commission, and a promise: the God who called you is faithful, and He will finish what He started in you.

Introduction

We are at the end of the epistle. After these six verses, we say goodbye to Paul. At a recent dinner with friends from Miami Christian College, the farewell had its own flavor — one of them said: 'We'll see you later.' Then someone said: 'Here.' And they all chimed in: '— or there — or in the air.' Once you have joined the body of Christ through faith in Jesus, you can always say to another believer: I will see you. Here, there, or in the air.

I. A Parting Mediation — 5:23

"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."

Paul closes as a mediator — bringing God's blessing down to the Thessalonians and through them to us. The prayer is for complete sanctification. Sanctify means to set apart for God. And it has three aspects — all three found in 1 John 3:2–3.

A. Our Past — Positional Sanctification — 1 John 3:2a

"Beloved, now we are children of God."

At salvation, we are set apart completely. Permanently. That is our standing before God. We are His children — and if we are children of a holy God, we are holy in His sight. A former pastor used to say it with a grin: 'I'm Saint John the Baptist.' Not to exalt himself — but to claim what the Word says is actually true. We are all saints. That is our position.

B. Our Promised Sanctification — 1 John 3:2b

"We know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

This is our position becoming our state. When we see Him face to face — fully and completely — we will be like Him. Not that we will become God, but we will be like Him in holiness and freedom from sin. The sanctification will be complete. In the meantime, that process should be going on right now.

C. Our Present Sanctification — 1 John 3:3

"And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure."

This is what Paul is emphasizing in verse 23. The King James renders the key word as 'wholly' — w-h-o-l-l-y — and it appears only here in the entire New Testament. It is made up of two Greek words: complete and end. He is going to sanctify you completely to the end. The word whole refers to three dimensions of the person:

Spirit — the part that communicates with God; our vertical relationship with Him. Only human beings have a spirit that communes with the living God.

Soul — the horizontal dimension; our relationships with other people. How we communicate, love, serve, and carry one another.

Body — the instrument by which we do all of it. Every part is to be sanctified to God and used by God.

John Walvoord: 'Our physical bodies, our spiritual or intellectual life, and our psychological or natural life are all part of this sanctification process.'

Can We See Jesus Now?

Yes. Where? On the pages of Scripture.

2 Cor. 3:18 "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."

The more we see Him in the Word, the more we are changed to look like Him. How much time are we spending in the Word?

II. A Parting Declaration — 5:24

"He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it."

Paul just asked God to sanctify us completely. The answer to the obvious concern comes immediately: He who calls you is faithful. He will do it. We cannot sanctify ourselves. But we can — and must — make ourselves available to God so that He can, by His Holy Spirit, separate us to Himself.

Phil. 2:12–13 "...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure."

God works through your willer and your doer. He makes your willer will and your doer do. The call is simply: make yourself available. Stop resisting. We will not be totally sanctified in this life — but we should be moving toward that goal every day.

III. A Parting Application — 5:25

"Brethren, pray for us."

Three words. The shortest request Paul ever makes — and one of the most important. Missionaries and church leaders face real difficulties. Many local church leaders in small churches are not paid — they work full-time jobs and pour themselves into the church on top of that. The missionary reminders in the bulletin every week are not decoration. Pray for them all — daily, hourly, moment by moment.

IV. A Parting Reception — 5:26

"Greet all the brethren with a holy kiss."

At Miami Christian College, the student handbook said: 'No kissing.' One of the students used to walk around saying: 'Greet one another with a holy no-no.' The key word is not kiss — it is holy. Whatever the greeting, it must be warm, genuine, and free of anything inappropriate. The point: someone comes through the door and gets greeted. Nobody leaves without being recognized — regulars and visitors alike.

V. A Parting Exhortation — 5:27

"I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren."

Paul puts the leaders under oath — a serious word. This letter is not for the elders alone. It is for everyone. There was only one copy — so it was read aloud. Eventually copies were made by hand, then by Gutenberg's press in 1440, and now the Word is available everywhere. The principle holds: make sure the Word reaches everyone.

VI. A Parting Benediction — 5:28

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen."

We have come full circle. The letter opened with grace (1:1) and closes with grace. Everything Paul has called us to in these five chapters happens inside the envelope of God's undeserved favor. God did not need to create us. He was not a lonely God. When a third of the angels sinned, they were cast out with no provision for salvation — they saw God's power and justice but never His grace. When man fell, this time God sacrificed His own Son. History is His story. Grace begins, sustains, and completes the Christian life.

Conclusion

So long, Paul. We will see him again — here, if the Lord tarries and we keep reading the Word. There, with the Lord after we go. Or in the air, when we are all caught up together.

Here, there, or in the air. So long, Paul. Lord, thank You.

④ SELF-STUDY GUIDE — Greek Word Study & Study Questions

For use during the group meeting · Focused on the commentary text

Greek Word Study

Source: [Blue Letter Bible](#) · Definitions: [Strong's](#) and [Thayer's](#) · Syntactical comment: [A.T. Robertson, Word Pictures in the New Testament](#)

Grammar key — Nouns/Adj: Case (Nom. Gen. Dat. Acc.) · Number (Sg. Pl.) · Gender (Masc. Fem. Neut.) Verbs: Mood (Ind. Imp. Subj. Opt. Ptc. Inf.) · Tense (Pres. Aor. Perf. Fut.) · Voice (Act. Mid. Pass.) · Person/Number

Verse	Greek Word (Lexical Form) English Translation	Strong's # Transliteration Grammatical Form	Definition (Strong's / Thayer's) · Robertson's Word Pictures · Significance in Context
v.23	ἀγιάσαι to sanctify	Strong's #37 Translit: hagianai Verb: Aor. Act. Opt. · 3rd Sg.	Strong's: "to make holy, to set apart to God, to sanctify" Thayer's: "to render or acknowledge venerable; to separate from things profane and dedicate to God" Robertson: "The aorist optative expresses the wish as a whole — Paul prays for complete sanctification viewed at once, not as a process. The optative mood marks this as a prayer, placing it entirely in God's hands." Significance: The aorist views sanctification in its completed totality. The optative mood distinguishes prayer from prediction.
v.23	ὀλοτελεῖς wholly, completely to the end	Strong's #3651 Translit: holoteleis Adj: Acc. · Pl. · Masc.	Strong's: "complete, wholly" Thayer's: "brought to completion in every part, perfect in every respect" Robertson: "Found only here in the NT — a compound of holos (whole) + telos (end/completion). Means 'completely to the end' — wholeness and finality packed into one word." Significance: Hapax legomenon — Paul's uniquely forceful expression for the totality of sanctification. Not partial, not temporary — complete and final.
v.23	πνεῦμα spirit	Strong's #4151 Translit: pneuma Noun: Nom. · Sg. · Neut.	Strong's: "spirit; the rational and immortal soul; the God-consciousness" Thayer's: "the vital principle; the rational spirit, the power by which a human feels, thinks, decides" Robertson: "The spirit is the highest element in Paul's tripartite division — the God-consciousness that the Holy Spirit directly indwells." Significance: The vertical dimension — the person in communion with God. Only human beings have this.
v.23	ψυχή soul	Strong's #5590 Translit: psychē Noun: Nom. · Sg. · Fem.	Strong's: "soul; the seat of feelings, desires, affections" Thayer's: "the seat of feelings, desires, affections; the inner life as it relates to the outer world and to other persons"

			Robertson: "Distinguished from pneuma as the seat of personality and emotions — the person as oriented toward the world and toward others." Significance: The horizontal dimension — the person in relation to others. Root of 'psychology.'
v.23	σῶμα body	Strong's #4983 Translit: sōma Noun: Nom. · Sg. · Neut.	Strong's: "body; the instrument through which the soul and spirit act in the material world" Thayer's: "the body; the instrument through which the whole person acts, serves, speaks, and worships" Robertson: "Paul includes the body specifically — sanctification is not purely interior. The body is the instrument through which the whole person acts and worships." Significance: All three — spirit, soul, body — belong to God. No dimension is excluded from sanctification.
v.24	πιστός faithful, trustworthy	Strong's #4103 Translit: pistos Adj: Nom. · Sg. · Masc.	Strong's: "faithful, trustworthy, reliable; one who keeps his promises" Thayer's: "one who shows himself faithful in the execution of commands; one who keeps his promises" Robertson: "Predicate adjective without a stated verb (understood 'is') — a characteristic declaration. The brevity underscores certainty: no qualification, no condition." Significance: The ground of our sanctification is God's character, not our effort. Covenant dependability — what He promises, He performs.
v.24	καλῶν the one calling	Strong's #2564 Translit: kalōn Verb: Pres. Act. Ptc. · Nom. · Sg. · Masc.	Strong's: "to call; of the divine call to partake of the blessings of redemption" Thayer's: "to call; of God's calling of men to salvation and eternal life" Robertson: "The present participle — 'the one who is continuously calling.' God's call is not a past event only; He continues to call. The one continuously calling is also continuously faithful." Significance: The present tense is crucial — God's calling is ongoing, not merely a past summons at salvation.
v.26	φιλήματι with a kiss	Strong's #5370 Translit: philēmati Noun: Dat. · Sg. · Neut.	Strong's: "a kiss — the customary greeting in the Near East" Thayer's: "a kiss; in the early church, the kiss of fraternal affection given at meetings for worship" Robertson: "Dative of means — 'with a kiss.' Universal in the early church as a mark of brotherhood. The modifier ἁγίῳ (holy) distinguished it from all other kinds of greeting." Significance: The specific form is culturally adaptable; the warmth and holiness are not.
v.27	ἐνορκίζω I solemnly charge	Strong's #1726 Translit: enorkizō Verb: Pres. Act. Ind. · 1st Sg.	Strong's: "to adjure, to charge under oath; stronger than the simple 'I urge'" Thayer's: "to put under oath, to charge solemnly" Robertson: "Found only here in the NT. 'A strong

			word' — Paul is placing the leaders under solemn oath before the Lord. The gravity is intentional." Significance: Paul's most solemn directive in the letter — the Word of God must reach everyone, not be gatekept.
v.28	χάρις grace	Strong's #5485 Translit: charis Noun: Nom. · Sg. · Fem.	Strong's: "grace; good will, loving-kindness, favor; that which affords joy and delight" Thayer's: "the merciful kindness by which God, exerting His holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith" Robertson: "The same word that opened the letter (1:1). Paul's characteristic farewell — grace frames the entire epistle." Significance: χάρις is the first and last theological word of the letter — the envelope around everything. Every blessing described is a gift of grace.

Study Questions

Questions are drawn from the commentary (③) and the Greek word study above. Read the commentary before your group meeting.

Part 1 — From the Commentary: What Did We Learn?

Review the key points from the commentary. Complete the table in your own words.

Commentary Point / Outline Section	In Your Own Words — What the Commentary Taught
I. Parting Mediation — three aspects of sanctification (v.23)	
The whole person: spirit, soul, and body (v.23)	
Seeing Jesus in Scripture / 2 Cor. 3:18	
II. Parting Declaration — God's faithfulness / Phil. 2:12–13 (v.24)	
VI. Parting Benediction — grace wraps the whole epistle (v.28)	

Part 2 — Study Questions

Leader's Reference: Answer boxes are drawn from the commentary and Greek word study.

1. The commentary identifies three aspects of sanctification from 1 John 3:2–3: positional (past), promised (future), and present (ongoing). How does understanding all three prevent two common errors — thinking we are already perfect, and thinking we must make ourselves perfect?

Answer: The commentary explains that positional sanctification (we are already saints before God in Christ) prevents the despair of feeling we must earn holiness from scratch. Promised sanctification (we will be fully like Him when we see Him) prevents perfectionism now — we are not expected to arrive in this life. Present sanctification (we are being transformed as we behold Christ in Scripture) is the ongoing process. The three together hold the Christian in a posture of confidence (settled standing), hope (assured destination), and active cooperation (daily yielding). Without all three, either pride or despair fills the gap.

2. The Greek word ὁλοτελεῖς (holoteleis, v.23) appears only here in the entire New Testament — a hapax legomenon. Robertson notes it combines holos (whole) and telos (end/completion), meaning 'completely to the end.' What does Paul's use of this uniquely strong word tell us about the scope of sanctification he has in mind?

Answer: The rarity of the word signals intentionality — Paul reaches for a uniquely forceful expression because partial sanctification is not his aim. The combination of wholeness and finality means he is praying for sanctification that touches every dimension of the person (whole) and carries through to the coming of the Lord (to the end). The aorist optative views the work as a totality: Paul prays for the entire completed work, not just the next step. The practical implication: we are not aiming at improvement in one area while leaving others untouched — the whole person (spirit, soul, body) belongs to God.

3. The commentary connects 2 Corinthians 3:18 to the present process of sanctification: 'beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed.' What makes this a process rather than an event — and what is our part in it?

Answer: The present passive participle 'being transformed' marks the transformation as ongoing and Spirit-driven — continuously happening to us. Our part, as the commentary explains, is simply to behold: to spend time in the Word where Jesus is seen. Robertson notes that 'beholding' can mean 'mirroring' — we reflect what we gaze at. The more we look at Christ in Scripture, the more the Spirit has to work with. Our part is not to generate transformation but to position ourselves where it happens: in the Word, with open eyes.

4. Verse 24 says 'He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.' The Greek participle καλῶν is present tense — 'the one continuously calling.' How does the ongoing present tense of calling connect to the certainty of God completing the work?

Answer: Robertson highlights the present participle καλῶν — God is not just the one who called in the past but the one continuously calling. This connects directly to πιστός (faithful): the one who keeps calling also keeps His commitment to complete what the calling began. Philippians 1:6 confirms: He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion. The ongoing calling is the ongoing guarantee. God's faithfulness does not

remove our responsibility (Phil. 2:12 says 'work out'); it underwrites it. Active yielding to a God who is actively working.

5. The letter begins with χάρις (grace, 1:1) and ends with χάρις (grace, 5:28). Robertson notes this is Paul's characteristic closing and that it frames the entire epistle. How does grace as the frame shape how we understand all the commands, corrections, and calls to sanctification in between?

Answer: Robertson's observation that χάρις appears at both 1:1 and 5:28 establishes grace as the theological envelope of the epistle. Thayer's definition: 'the merciful kindness by which God, exerting His holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith.' Every command in the letter — including the call to sanctification — is not law imposed from outside but grace working from inside. The corrections on sexual purity, the exhortations to honor leaders, the call to rejoice always — all are grace in action, not conditions for earning acceptance. Grace begins, sustains, and completes the Christian life.

Part 3 — Passage Summary

Complete the table together. Draw from the commentary for the middle column. Right column: one concrete application for this week.

Theme (Verse)	What the Commentary Taught	One Application for This Week
Parting Mediation — v.23		
Three aspects of sanctification		
Spirit, soul, body — the whole person		
Seeing Jesus / being transformed (2 Cor. 3:18)		
Parting Declaration — v.24		
Parting Application — pray for us (v.25)		
Parting Reception — holy greeting (v.26)		
Parting Exhortation — read the letter (v.27)		
Parting Benediction — grace (v.28)		

⑤ APPLICATION

Drawn from the commentary and post-commentary sections · FGR.docx references included where applicable

Application 1 — Make Yourself Available — God Will Do the Rest

Scripture Anchor: 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 "...may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless... He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it." FGR: Note on v.23: 'The prayer for complete sanctification rests on the character of God, not the capacity of the believer'

Source reference: Commentary ③ — Parting Mediation and Parting Declaration (vv.23–24); Greek word study ④: πιστός (faithful, Strong's #4103) and καλῶν (continuously calling, Strong's #2564, present active participle)

We cannot sanctify ourselves. That is not false modesty — it is what the text says. Paul prays for our complete sanctification and then immediately grounds its certainty in God's faithfulness. Robertson's note on καλῶν is significant: the present participle means God is not merely the one who called in the past — He is the one continuously calling. The one who keeps calling also keeps His commitment to complete the work. Our responsibility is simply to make ourselves available and stop resisting.

Personal Reflection: Where are you currently resisting God's sanctifying work — holding back an area of your life from His access? What would making yourself available in that specific area actually look like this week?

Practical Step: Identify the one area where you sense God has been working and you have been pulling back. Name it to yourself. This week, take one concrete step of yielding — and tell one trusted person what you are doing and why.

Application 2 — Whole-Person Holiness — Spirit, Soul, and Body

Scripture Anchor: 1 Thessalonians 5:23 "...may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless..."

Source reference: Self-Study Guide ④ — Greek word study: ὁλοτελεῖς (Strong's #3651) and πνεῦμα / ψυχὴ / σῶμα — Robertson notes holoteleis means 'completely to the end,' combining holos (whole) and telos (completion)

The word ὁλοτελεῖς appears only here in the entire New Testament — Paul reaches for a uniquely forceful expression because partial sanctification is not what he has in mind. And the word whole reaches across all three dimensions of the person: spirit (vertical — communion with God), soul (horizontal — relationships with others), and body (the instrument through which both operate in the world). There is no dimension of the person that falls outside the scope of sanctification. All of it belongs to God.

Personal Reflection: Of the three — spirit, soul, body — which dimension of your life is currently least surrendered to God's sanctifying work? What would it look like to specifically open that dimension to Him this week?

Practical Step: Choose one practical, physical discipline (a habit of the body, a pattern of speech, a relational tendency) that you know is out of step with holiness. Address it specifically this week — not by willpower alone but by asking God to work on your willer and your doer in that area.

Application 3 — Behold Him — and Be Changed

Scripture Anchor: 1 Thessalonians 5:28 + 2 Corinthians 3:18 "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." / "...beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory."

Source reference: Devotional ② — seeing Jesus in Scripture as the mechanism of present sanctification; Commentary ③ — Parting Benediction and the 2 Cor. 3:18 cross-reference

The means of present sanctification is not a program — it is a person. The more we see Jesus on the pages of Scripture, the more the Spirit transforms us into His image. Second Corinthians 3:18 describes believers as mirrors — we reflect what we gaze at. Grace, which opens and closes this letter, is the atmosphere in which we behold Him and the power by which we are changed. A Christian who is not spending time in the Word is spending less time looking at the One who transforms them.

Personal Reflection: When you read the Bible, are you gathering information — or beholding? Do you finish a passage having met Christ, or simply having completed a reading? What would it take to shift your posture this week?

Practical Step: Read 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24 slowly — once in the morning and once before bed — for five days. Before each reading ask: Lord, what do I see of You here? Write down what you notice. Bring it to the group.

Application 4 — Live from Grace — Not toward It

Scripture Anchor: 1 Thessalonians 5:28 "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." FGR: FGR note on 5:28: 'Grace — the characteristic Pauline closing. The same grace that saved is the grace that sustains and will ultimately glorify. The believer lives from grace, not toward it.'

Source reference: FGR.docx — note on 5:28; Commentary ③ — Parting Benediction; Greek word study ④: χάρις (Strong's #5485) — Thayer's: 'the merciful kindness by which God turns souls to Christ, keeps, strengthens, and increases them in Christian faith'

The letter opened with grace and closes with grace. Everything Paul has called us to in these five chapters happens inside the envelope of grace. Thayer's definition of χάρις is worth sitting with: 'the merciful kindness by which God, exerting His holy influence upon souls, turns them to Christ, keeps, strengthens, increases them in Christian faith.' Grace is not only what brought us in — it is what keeps us, strengthens us, and grows us. The commands of this letter are grace in action, not conditions for earning acceptance.

Corporate Reflection: As a group closing this series, where has God's grace been most evident in your life together over these months? Where has a truth from 1 Thessalonians changed how you live, speak, or relate to one another?

Practical Step: As a group, write one sentence together — your testimony from this series. What has God done among you through 1 Thessalonians? Post it somewhere visible. Then plan your next study. The church that stays in the Word stays in grace.

End of Study · 1 Thessalonians 5:23–28

End of Series · 1 Thessalonians