

Major Bible Themes

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1871-1952

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ISBN: 0-310-22390-3

CHAPTER XXXII

SANCTIFICATION II

Beyond the brief study in the preceding chapter of words and means related to the doctrine of Sanctification, consideration should be given to the deeper aspects of the truth as stated in the New Testament.

Though the exact meaning of the words sanctify, holy, and saint is unchanged, there is a far deeper reality indicated by their use in the New Testament than is indicated by their use in the Old Testament. The Old Testament is a "shadow of good things to come." This chapter is primarily concerned with the New Testament revelation, which may be considered in three divisions:

I. POSITIONAL SANCTIFICATION

This is a sanctification, holiness, and sainthood which is accomplished by the operation of God through the body and shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. We, who are saved, have been redeemed and cleansed in His precious blood, forgiven all trespasses, made righteous through our new headship in Him, justified, and purified. We are the sons of God. All of this indicates a

distinct classification and separation, deep and eternal, through the saving grace of Christ. It is based on facts of position which are true of every Christian. Hence every believer is now said to be positionally sanctified, holy, and is therefore a saint before God. This position bears no relationship to the believer's daily life more than that it should inspire him to holy living. The Christian's position in Christ is, however, according to the Scriptures, the greatest incentive to holiness of life.

The great doctrinal Epistles observe this order. They first state the marvels of saving grace, and then conclude with an appeal for a life corresponding to the divinely wrought position. (Note Rom. 12:1; Eph. 4:1; Col. 3:1.) We are not now accepted in ourselves: we are accepted in the Beloved. We are not now righteous in ourselves: He has been made unto us righteousness. We are not now redeemed in ourselves: He has been made unto us redemption. We are not now positionally sanctified by our daily walk: He has been made unto us sanctification. Positional sanctification is as perfect as He is perfect. As much as He is set apart, we, who are in Him, are set apart. Positional sanctification is as complete for the weakest saint as it is for the strongest. It depends only on his union and position in Christ. All believers are classified as "the saints." So, also, they are classified as "the sanctified" (note Acts 20:32; 1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11; Heb. 10:10, 14; Jude 1:1). The proof that imperfect believers are nevertheless positionally sanctified and are therefore saints, is found in the First Epistle to the Corinthians. Corinthian Christians were unholy in life (1 Cor. 5:1, 2; 6:1-8), but they are twice said to have been sanctified (1 Cor. 1:2; 6:11).

By their position, then, Christians are rightly called "holy brethren" and "saints." They have been "sanctified by the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10), and are "new men" who are "created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24). Positional sanctification and positional holiness are "true" sanctification and holiness. In his position in Christ, the Christian stands righteous and accepted before God forever. Compared to this, no other aspect of this truth can have an equal recognition. But let no person conclude that he is holy, or sanctified, in life because he is now said to be holy, or sanctified, in position. While all believers are sanctified positionally, there is never a reference in any of these Scriptures to their daily lives. The daily-life aspect of sanctification and holiness will be found in another and entirely different body of truth which may be termed,

II. EXPERIMENTAL SANCTIFICATION

As positional sanctification is absolutely disassociated from the daily life, so experimental sanctification is absolutely disassociated from the position in Christ. Experimental sanctification may depend (1) on some degree of yieldedness to God, (2) on some degree of separation from sin, or (3) on some degree of Christian growth to which the believer has already attained.

1. Experimental Sanctification the Result of Yieldedness to God.

Whole self-dedication to God is our reasonable service: "That ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). By so doing the Christian is classified and set apart unto God by his own choice. This is self-determined separation unto God and is an important aspect of experimental sanctification. "And being servants unto God, ye have fruit unto holiness" (sanctification, Rom. 6:22).

Sanctification cannot be experienced as a matter of feeling or emotion any more than justification or forgiveness. A person may be at peace and be full of joy because he believes he is set apart unto God. So also, by yielding unto God, a new infilling of the Spirit may be made possible which will result in a blessedness in life hitherto unknown. This might be either sudden or gradual. In any case it is not the sanctification that is experienced: it is the blessing of the Spirit made possible through sanctification or a more complete separation unto God.

2. Experimental Sanctification the Result of Freedom from Sin.

The Bible takes full account of the sins of Christians. It does not teach that only sinless people are saved, or kept saved; on the contrary, there is faithful consideration of, and full provision made for, the sins of saints. These provisions are both preventive and curative.

(a) There are three divine provisions for the prevention of sin in the Christian: The Word of God with its clear instructions (Psa. 119:11), the present interceding, shepherding ministry of Christ in Heaven (Rom. 8:34; Heb. 7:25. Note, Luke 22:31; John 17:1-26), and the enabling power of the indwelling Spirit (Gal. 5:16; Rom. 8:4). However, should the Christian sin, there is

(b) the divinely provided cure, which is the present advocacy of Christ in Heaven by which He pleads His own sufficient sacrificial death. Thus, and only thus, imperfect believers are kept saved.

The divine prevention of sin is imperative in the case of every child of God, since so long as he is in this body he retains a fallen nature which is ever prone to sin (Rom. 7:21; 2 Cor. 4:7; 1 John 1:8). The Scriptures promise no eradication of this nature, but there is a moment-by-moment victory promised through the power of the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-23). This victory will be realized just so long as it is claimed by faith and the conditions for a Spirit-filled life are met.

The sin-nature itself is never said to have died. It was crucified, dead, and buried with Christ; but since this was accomplished two thousand years ago, the reference is to a divine judgment against the nature which was gained by Christ when He "died unto sin." There is no Bible teaching to the effect that some Christians have died to sin and some have not. The passages include all saved persons (Gal. 5:24; Col. 3:3). All believers have died unto sin in Christ's death; but not all believers have claimed the riches which were provided for them by that death. We are not asked to die experimentally, or to enact His death; we are asked to "reckon" ourselves to be dead indeed unto sin. This is the human responsibility (Rom. 6:1-14).

Every victory over sin is itself a separation unto God and is therefore a sanctification. Such victory should ever be increasing as the believer comes to know his own helplessness and the marvels of divine power.

3. Experimental Sanctification in Relation to Christian Growth.

Christians are immature in wisdom, knowledge, experience and grace. In all these things they are appointed to grow, and their growth should be manifest. They are to "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Beholding the glory of the Lord as in a glass, they are "changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

This transformation will have the effect of setting them more and more apart. They will, to that extent, be more sanctified.

A Christian may be "blameless," though it could not be truthfully said of him that he is "faultless." The child laboring to form his first letters in a copybook may be blameless in the work he does; but the work is not faultless. We may be walking in the full measure of our understanding today, yet we know that we are not now living in the added light and experience that will be ours tomorrow. There is perfection within imperfection. We who are so incomplete, so immature, so given to sin, may "abide in him."

III. ULTIMATE SANCTIFICATION

This aspect of sanctification which is related to our final perfection, will be ours in the glory. By His grace and transforming power He will have so changed us -- spirit, soul and body -- that we will be "like him," and "conformed to his image." He will then present us "faultless" before the presence of His glory. His bride will be free from every "spot and wrinkle." It therefore becomes us to "abstain from every appearance of evil. 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."

QUESTIONS

1. Is the exact meaning of the words sanctify, holy, and saint ever changed as used in the Scriptures?
2. In what sense are all believers said to be sanctified?
3. State on what ground they are thus sanctified and to what degree of perfection.
4. Is positional sanctification real and abiding?
5. What relation does it sustain to the believer's daily life?
6. What are the aspects of experimental sanctification?
7. How may one promote his own experimental sanctification?
8. a. What is promised as to the prevention of sin in a Christian?
b. What is promised as to the cure of sin in a Christian?
9. In what sense is a victory over sin a sanctification?
10. What is the relation between Christian growth and sanctification?

11. May an immature and inexperienced Christian be experimentally set apart unto God?
12. What difference is possible between being blameless and being faultless?
13. May experimental sanctification increase as we receive more light?
14. Describe ultimate sanctification.