

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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God's help for Christians today: Sanctification is possible

*I'm set apart to God above;
To Him I now belong!
Through Jesu's body sacrificed
He's now my strength and song.
Made holy through the precious blood
Christ shed at Calvary.
For His pleasure and purposes
I am now fit to be.*

*The Father and the Spirit too
Have sanctified my soul.
'Tis by the Trinity complete
I am, through grace, made whole.
One day, I shall God's presence know
When Jesus takes me home.
His glory will encircle me!
I'll bow before His throne!*

*I have a legacy above!
A hope that is secure!
The unity I have with Christ
Has strength for evermore.
The God who justifies from sin
And puts His Power within
Has made me spotless - without blame
That I might dwell with Him.*

GE Stevens

The previous verses show that we, as Christians, are sanctified once and for all in the absolute sense by the work of the Trinity - God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. This sanctification was planned and implemented by the God who chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world (see Ephesians 1:7).

In this little study, we shall:

- define "sanctification" and see a few of its purposes;
- examine the aspect of sanctification that is absolute (or perfect); and then
- explore the kind of sanctification that is both practical and progressive.

Introduction

By way of introduction, practical sanctification is that for which we, as Christians, are responsible. It is our response to the command of the Lord in 1 Peter 1:16: "...Be ye holy; for I am holy." This requires a manner of life which is compatible with that of Christ and to the pleasure of God the Father. It is a sanctification that is possible because we have the word of God to guide us, the indwelling Spirit to empower us and a new nature within us. The latter delights to do the will of God; but is so often overwhelmed by our old sinful nature. Therefore, for the purposes of this talk, we'll call the sanctification completed by God "Perfect Sanctification" and that sanctification which is the Christian's responsibility, "Practical Sanctification". Throughout, we shall see that sanctification and holiness are synonymous. If one of God's attributes is holiness, then our new, divine natures, which are also holy, ought to be allowed to dominate our lives.

Definition of Sanctification

So, let's define the word "Sanctification" and look at some reasons for it. Sanctification is the setting apart of a believer from sin and to God for His pleasure, possession, presence and purposes. As we have indicated, the Apostle Peter instructs us to be separate from sin by commanding us live in holiness. To be holy is to be pure in the physical sense; without blame in the moral sense; and set apart to God in the ceremonial sense. A holy life is a sanctified life!

In Revelation 1:6, the Apostle John tells us we are separated to God through Christ. We read: "...Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." In God's plan we have been made kings and priests or, as translated by some, "a kingdom of priests".

We emphasise that Christians are separated to God not only to serve Him but for His pleasure, possession, presence and purposes. Enoch, in the Old Testament, is an example of one whose life gave God delight (Hebrews 11:5). The writer of the letter to the Hebrews also states in Hebrews 13:16: "*But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.*" Hence, we immediately can see two ways in which we can please God practically.

In 1 Corinthians 6:20 the Apostle Paul shows that God possesses us: "*For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.*" We are not our own. We actually belong to God!

In 2 Timothy 2:21 the same Apostle shows that we are included in the fulfilment of God's purposes: "*If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.*" Here, our fitness to serve God is dependent upon separating ourselves from persistent men who teach wrong doctrine and lead believers astray. Those who **do** live lives that are set apart to Him, He is pleased to use in His service. This again is practical sanctification.

Lastly, we are sanctified so that we may enter His presence. 1 Thessalonians 3:13 tells us that "*the Lord [the Spirit] is continually working in us to the end He may stablish our hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.*"

Perfect Sanctification

Now that the word "sanctification" has been defined, and some of the reasons for it outlined, we will examine the perfect sanctification that depends entirely upon the work of God and makes us fit for heaven. In this small section, we will quote some verses that speak of sanctification through Christ before examining some verses showing we are sanctified by the Father and by the Spirit.

This perfect sanctification is rooted in the work of Christ on the cross. In the letter to the Hebrews we read: "*By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified*" (Hebrews 10:10-14). God has sanctified us through the offering of Christ's body. Hence, He views us as being holy in His sight. The verses go further and tell us that we have been perfected for ever by God through that same sacrifice of Christ.

Hebrews 2:11 states: "*For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren. Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.*" Here, the Lord Jesus is the Person who has the power to sanctify those who believe in Him.

In 1 Corinthians 6:11 it is the power of the name of Christ and of the Spirit that sanctifies: "*And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.*"

In Acts 26:18 we find that it was faith that brought about the sanctification of Christians. The Apostle Paul was sent to the Gentiles in order "*to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in the Lord Jesus.*"

When we turn to Jude 1:1 we can see that we are sanctified by the Father. It reads: "*Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called...*" All Christians are made holy by the perfect actions of God.

The fact that we are sanctified by the Holy Spirit is confirmed by Romans 15:16 where the apostle Paul says: "*That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.*" The indwelling Spirit is the One who has sanctified the Gentile believers and made them acceptable to God just like a holy offering.

It is through the will of God and the work of Christ by which we are sanctified perfectly. The offering of the body of Jesus upon the cross is the ground upon which we receive this blessing and that, once for all. Christians, whether Jews or Gentiles previously, have been set apart through that body offered up once for all.

The Bible commentator William Kelly wrote: "God rests in all its completeness and perfection..." He goes on to say that it is: "...a settled, permanent state" (see *Epistle to the Hebrews*, William Kelly).

Furthermore, contrasting the offering of Christ with Judaism, the inspired writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews stated that the previous sacrifices could never take away sins; but that the personal sacrifice of Christ **can** and, thereby, He has permanently perfected those sanctified (Hebrews 10:11-14).

In this sense we are seen without sin before God. We have been made righteous in His sight. Romans 4:25 tells us that "*Christ was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.*" We are justified - made righteous in the sight of God because of the sacrifice of Christ. He has utterly exhausted the punishment of God for our sins. There remains no punishment for us in relation to those sins. So, we may take Titus 2:14 to heart. It tells us that "*Christ gave himself for us, that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto Himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.*" This is Perfect Sanctification.

Practical Sanctification

We now come on to "Practical Sanctification" which is progressive in the sense that it brings a Christian to spiritual maturity and, also, it is continuous in the sense that it is ongoing. However, because sin still dwells in us while we are in these mortal bodies, there is a need for us to purify ourselves.

1 John 3:2-3 exhorts: "*Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.*" The word "*purifieth*" has the force of "cleansing" or "sanctifying" oneself in both our personal lives and in our service for God.

Hebrews 12:14 tells us to "*follow [or, better, 'to pursue'] peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.*" Practical sanctification takes effort!

The word "*peace*" in the last verse reminds us that it is the "*God of peace*" who sanctifies us practically as found in 1 Thessalonians 5:23 where we read: "*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.*" The word "*wholly*" shows that the work of sanctification is progressive.

The agent by which the Father sanctifies is the truth as listed in John 17:17 where we find the Lord Jesus praying for His disciples saying: "*Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth.*"

It is not only the Father who uses the word to lead believers to a mature spiritual life, it is also Christ Himself. In Ephesians 5:25-27 Paul states: "*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish.*"

This is a key verse because it not only shows how Christ is continuously sanctifying the church, but also the purposes for so doing, namely, that it should be glorious, holy and without blemish. As each one of us is part of that church, then these things apply to us.

Today, the main instrument of sanctification is the Holy Bible (Ephesians 5:26; John 17:17). If we do not submit to the authority and teaching of the Bible then how can the Lord actively be making us more holy? How can we progress in the Christian faith if we don't prayerfully study the inspired Word of God?

Sanctification is also the result of our union with Christ who said, *"He who abides in Me, and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit"* (John 15:5). In other words, without trusting and obeying the Lord Jesus then our lives will not generate the fruit of the Spirit which includes: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (see Galatians 5:22-23).

We have mentioned that Christians, being born again, have a divine nature. This new nature:

- *"Does not commit sin"* (1 John 2:29);
- *"Practices righteousness"* (1 John 3:7);
- *"Loves the brethren"* (1 John 3:14);
- *"Keeps the person"* (1 John 5:18); and
- *"Overcomes the world"* (1 John 5:4).

Furthermore, sanctification is the mark of God's election. 2 Thessalonians 2:13 says: *"But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth..."* This is supported by 1 Peter 1:2 where the Apostle states: *"Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied."*

Sanctification is a reality that can always be seen in a faithful believer - one who clearly practises righteousness. In Romans 6:19 the Apostle Paul wrote: *"I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness."*

Sanctification, like the prayer life associated with it, is a struggle. We have already said that it is something we must pursue and it takes effort. In 2 Corinthians 7:1 the Apostle says: *"Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."* One has said, "If there is any point on which God's holiest saints agree, it is this: that they **see** more, and **know** more, and **feel** more, and **do** more, and **repent** more, and **believe** more - as they get on in the spiritual life" (*Holiness*, JC Ryle). I would add to these, "**pray** more".

There is a war going on between the flesh and the Spirit in the believer. Galatians 5:17 states: *"For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would."* The fact that a Christian has this inner struggle at all shows that sanctification is active within him or her. The Bible teaches that the holy conduct or actions of a sanctified person is pleasing in the sight of God.

As we have already seen, one of the purposes of our sanctification is to prepare us for heaven. With this in mind, the apostle Paul, among others, had a great concern for the spiritual development of believers. The purpose for his warnings, preaching and teaching was to present every Christian mature in Christ Jesus (Colossians 1:28).

Are you a living example of a Christian who is developing towards spiritual maturity? If so, you will become more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. Others will see Him in you and be affected positively. We can see the power of this in 1 Peter 3:1 where we read: *"Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your **respectful and pure** conduct."*

As we began with some rhyming verses relating to perfect sanctification, we shall close this talk with several about practical sanctification.

*How shall I sanctify myself
As for the Lord I wait?
How can I live for God while here
And my old nature hate?*

*I'll find His will within His word
By reading it each day.
I'll yield my spirit to His mind
And follow in His way.*

*I'll bow before His throne in prayer
Where grace and mercy dwell.
I'll praise Him for His faithfulness
And worship Him as well.*

*I would be with the Spirit filled
And all His fruit display.
I'd serve my God in righteousness
And from sin turn away.*

*To Jesus I will look above;
For there's none pure as He!
I'll note the love and light He had
And try like Him to be.*

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