

“You Are Sanctified!”

Becoming a Christian is the result of choosing to leave the world and being identified as God’s child. Christianity is a lifestyle of trying to “walk in the light” (1 John 1:6–9) and become “imitators of God” (Ephesians 5:1). Imitating God requires commitment. It is a process of maturing and growing in the way a baby grows into an adult (Ephesians 4:15; 2 Peter 3:18). As the new Christian matures, his mind, decisions, and actions are transformed into what God desires (see Romans 12:1, 2). Even though he does not instantly become mature, he begins living and thinking as a mature follower of God (1 Corinthians 14:20). Why is this immediate change required? Why must the new Christian immediately stop certain practices and start transforming his thoughts to agree with God’s will? The reason is simple: He has been “sanctified.”

The term “sanctify” is a prominent biblical concept. It is associated with an object, a place, or a person that has been set aside for use by the almighty God. Once an item was “sanctified” under the law of Moses, it could never be used for a common purpose. The two priests in Leviticus 10:1–3 failed to respect this “setting aside” and were destroyed. God emphasizes that His people must conduct themselves according to a new life of sanctification.

Now that you are a Christian, you have been “sanctified.” Does this sound frightening? Sanctification is illustrated by a practice in Israel. The Jews were required to give a tenth of everything they owned to God. It was the custom of the Jews to select a tenth of their sheep as an offering

to Him. This was accomplished by an interesting procedure. The lambs were separated from the dams (the mother sheep) and were then enclosed in a sheeppen with only one narrow exit. Just outside the narrow gate, the dams were kept. On signal, the gate would be opened, and the lambs would hurry to join their mothers. A man was positioned at the exit with a rod dipped in a mineral stain called “ocher.” As every tenth lamb passed by, he would dip the stick into the color and touch the lamb. He made certain that every tenth lamb was touched (see Leviticus 27:32). As each lamb was marked, the man would say, “Let this be holy.” The prophet Ezekiel used this ancient practice to teach sanctification: “I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant” (Ezekiel 20:37). The prophet’s words were clear: Those who are sanctified have entered into covenant with the Lord! (See Jeremiah 33:13.)

Being sanctified is not optional. As a Christian, you have been marked as God’s unique property. You have been redeemed by Christ’s blood, and you belong to God (Titus 2:14). Therefore, you must live the sanctified life. In the second half of Ephesians, Paul detailed this sanctified life. In chapters 4 through 6, Christians are specifically commanded to do certain things and to avoid other things. In the next three lessons from chapter 4, we will look at Paul’s instruction showing how a Christian makes choices, serves in the Lord’s church, and enjoys a new lifestyle. The present discussion describes the sanctification which is such a crucial part of the Christian life.

THE MEANING OF SANCTIFICATION

Although the term “sanctification” is not commonly used, it is explained and illustrated in the Bible. Basically, “sanctify” means to “set aside for a special use.” This is translated from the same term from which the word “holy” is derived. An object, person, or place that is holy possesses a special quality. We associate the term “holy” with God. When an object or place is holy, it is special. Such is the property of the almighty God. When a person becomes a Christian, he becomes God’s special possession (Titus 2:11–14). The Christian must understand that he now belongs to God.

Sanctification is illustrated by King Josiah in 2 Kings 23. This good king was willing to submit to the Word of God (v. 2). After hearing God’s truth, “the king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to carry out the words of this covenant that were written in this book . . .” (v. 3). King Josiah was determined to live a sanctified life by following God’s Word. He was eager to obey God’s commands. The king did not hesitate, try to modify what was required, or argue with the commands. He would keep God’s commands with “all his heart and all his soul.” What an encouraging example! Now that you are a Christian, this is exactly how you should view living the consecrated life. Give all your heart and soul to the task.

Paul illustrated the concept of sanctification in writing to the Christians in Corinth. He addressed this congregation as “those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling” (1 Corinthians 1:2). This reveals that one who becomes a Christian is a saint. Why are all Christians saints? When one becomes a Christian, he is bought by the blood of Christ and becomes the possession of God. He is “set aside,” or “sanctified,” for God’s own use. A saint is not a deceased person who lived an extraordinary spiritual life or accomplished some sensational action. The Corinthians were “saints by calling.” Their “calling” resulted when they heard the gospel preached, believed, confessed, repented, and were immersed. (See Romans 10:9–16.) Later, Paul wrote that these Christians had

been “washed,” “sanctified,” and “justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Corinthians 6:11). Salvation occurs when one is “justified” before God (Romans 5:1, 9; 8:30). The Corinthians were not “justified” until they had been “washed” (immersed, or baptized, for the forgiveness of their sins). At the point of immersion, they were placed in the kingdom of Christ (Colossians 1:13). At this same point, they were “set aside” for God’s own use. When your immersion took place, you were likewise washed, sanctified, and justified. The Scriptures teach that sanctification occurs at immersion.

Another illustration of sanctification is given in Ephesians 5:26. Jesus Christ has sanctified the church (His bride). Only those in the Lord’s church are sanctified to God because Christ only sanctified His church. Civic groups and religious organizations may do good deeds and have good reputations, *but* they are unable to sanctify. If one wants to be sanctified (saved), then he *must* be in the Lord’s church. The Greek term ἁγιάζω (*hagiazō*) refers to that which has been purified or made holy. When you became a Christian, you were immersed into the Lord’s body (His church; Colossians 1:18) and were at that moment sanctified because you were saved.

When one becomes a Christian, he is sanctified for God’s use. He recognizes that he cannot live as those in the world. The attitude of repentance has led him to turn to God’s directions. In following God’s instructions, he lives a sanctified life because he has obeyed the gospel, has been immersed for the remission of sins, and has thereby been placed into the Lord’s church.

THE EXPRESSION OF IT

Sanctification is expressed by our living as “saints.” Unfortunately, the connotation of living as a saint prevents most people from understanding this biblical concept. The Scriptures teach that a saint is one dedicated to living a life of holiness because he has become a Christian. The practice of holy living is mandatory (1 Peter 1:13–16). The holy life is one that is dedicated to God. Through this lifestyle, the Christian seeks to bring God glory in every word or deed. Living a sanctified life means that a Christian is devoted to God and is trying to live as God directs.

The sanctified life is described in 1 John 1:6–9 as a life committed to “walk[ing] in the Light” of God’s revealed truth. When the saint sins, forgiveness is possible—if he confesses his sins! Everyone sins, but God forgives the Christian when he confesses and repents of sin. Forgiveness requires the penitent person to stop the practice of sinning. The important point for the Christian to understand is the phrase “practices sin” (1 John 3:8, 9). The Greek verb indicates that the Christian does not continue sinning as he did before coming to Christ. Before conversion, a person lives with a careless attitude regarding sin. After conversion, he realizes that this unconcern about sin must stop. While it is impossible to live without sinning (1 John 1:10), it is imperative that the Christian live with a different attitude toward sin. This dramatic contrast is illustrated in 1 John 3:1–10. The Christian’s life is devoted to being purified, while those in the world devote themselves to practicing sin.

The practical result of being sanctified is that everything changes! (See 2 Corinthians 5:17.) The Christian must make sure that he has set aside his inward thoughts and attitudes for God’s service. Those who fail to cleanse the inner thoughts fail to live as saints (see Matthew 23:26–28; Mark 7:21; Romans 2:1–5). The sanctified Christian is not hypocritical, but is one who sincerely seeks to glorify God in every part of his living. Christians are like the people of ancient Israel, who left bondage for freedom. When the Israelites fled from Egypt, they left nothing behind (Exodus 10:24, 26); they did not allow themselves the option of returning to the life in Egypt. When we leave the bondage of sin, we do not leave a part of ourselves in the world!

Now that you have become a Christian, you are sanctified. This does not mean you are perfect, but it does suggest that you are following God’s will to the best of your ability. It indicates that you are eager to change any part of your life which must be changed for you to become more like Christ. Colossians 3:10 portrays sanctification as a renovation. The Greek term used describes the renewal of a structure, with all of the old parts being removed and everything being replaced, or made “new.” As a Christian, you are in this remodeling process. Day by day, you continue to learn what God requires of you concerning various words, actions, or attitudes. You

are willing to do this because you know that you have been set aside for God’s personal use.

THE IMPORTANCE OF IT

Sanctification is crucial for the Christian. The Old Testament demonstrates that God’s anger burns against those who use what is holy in the wrong way (Leviticus 10:10; Ezekiel 22:26). Divine anger is seen in the New Testament as well. The Corinthian saints had allowed their sanctification to become polluted. They had permitted the world’s temptations to corrupt the purity of their devotion.¹

Living as God’s saint is not optional (1 Peter 1:13–16); those who fail to live the sanctified life will face eternal destruction (Philippians 3:17–19). Now that you are a Christian, God is your heavenly Father. You are to reflect the traits of God’s holy family. You do this by your commitment to sanctification.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Becoming a Christian is the greatest blessing in this world. The decision to follow Christ is based upon one’s understanding of the tragedy of sin and the loving grace of God. Being a Christian means accepting and wearing the “yoke” of Christ (Matthew 11:29) and living as a saint.

The Christians in the first century rejoiced in the salvation offered to them. As they accepted the invitation to be saved, they committed themselves to being sanctified. In Acts 5:29–42, we see how their commitment was practiced. Their dedication to following God’s commands was visible. In their lives, we see an understanding that sanctification is the lifestyle of a saint. They knew that a sanctified lifestyle would bring joy into the Christian’s heart and peace into the soul. Regardless of how difficult it was for them to practice their religious convictions, their sanctification filled them with courage and propelled them to serve enthusiastically. This is exactly what God expects of His saints today.

God expects Christians to live the sanctified life. God has called us to salvation in the new covenant of Jesus Christ. Jeremiah foretold the

¹Read 1 Corinthians 1:10–13; 3:1–3, 16–19; 4:6, 14; 5:1–13; 6:13–19; 8:11, 12; 10:10, 21; 11:17–20; 12:25.

coming of the new covenant, when God would once again number His people just as the lambs were counted as holy (Jeremiah 33:1–13).

The covenant of sanctification that God established with ancient Israel illustrates His offer to us today. Let us listen to God's invitation and enthusiastically respond by living sanctified lives since we have the almighty God of heaven as our Father! "If you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own posses-

sion among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exodus 19:5, 6). The coming of Christ fulfilled these prophetic words. Now it is said of Christians, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

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