

BIBLICAL INSIGHTS #104: ARE YOU SANCTIFIED?

By John Temples

Even though “sanctification” is a Biblical word, many people have only a vague or confused idea of what it means. Here’s a fun thing to do: ask your preacher to explain sanctification, and what it means for me, a Christian, to be sanctified. Tell him a Pentecostal friend asked you if you are sanctified. He might break out into a cold sweat or suddenly remember an urgent appointment. That’s because the word “sanctification” instantly conjures up images of Pentecostal-type, Holy-Ghost-inspired hand-waving and/or emotional outbursts. To many people, sanctification is some mysterious and unknowable “better-felt-than-told” process by which a Christian becomes completely controlled by the Holy Spirit and exhibits such control, oddly enough, by acting totally out of control.

So what exactly is sanctification? That specific word occurs five times in the NKJV, possibly more often in other versions. The words *saint*, *sanctify*, *sanctification*, and *sanctuary* are all related, and occur as follows:

- *Saint or saints* (usually plural)--97 times in 95 verses. Greek *hagios*.
- *Sanctify*--74 times in its various forms. Greek *hagiazō*.
- *Sanctified*--37 times.
- *Sanctification*--five times, all in the New Testament. Greek *hagiasmos*.
- *Sanctuary*--158 times in 153 verses. Greek *hagion*.

So counting all the forms of the word, the subject of sanctification is mentioned over 370 times in the Bible. Obviously, this subject is important!

Another thing obvious is that all these words relate to the Greek word *hagios*. What kind of word is that? It is the basic Bible word meaning “holy”:

- A saint is a holy person.
- To sanctify is to make holy.
- Sanctification means the state or process of becoming holy.

- A sanctuary is a holy place or structure.

So if we define the word “holy,” we will understand the meaning of all these terms. One Greek authority defines *hagios* as signifying “separated (among the Greeks, dedicated to the gods), and hence in Scripture, in its moral and spiritual significance, separated from sin and therefore consecrated to God.” Another Greek authority, Thayer, says *hagios*, when applied to God, means “separated from evil, worthy of reverence or worship”; when applied to people or earthly things, “set apart for God, to be...exclusively His.”

So *hagios* means “separated, set apart, dedicated, or uncontaminated.” We could think of sanctification as *positional*: we are removed from one state of being and placed into another state. Sanctification is also *relational*. When we are sanctified, our relationship to God changes.

If we go back and plug this basic meaning into the words on our list, the meaning becomes clear:

- A saint is someone set apart or separated from the world, belonging to God and marked by holy conduct.
- To sanctify is to set something aside for a special purpose.
- A sanctuary is a special place set apart for the purpose of worshipping God and for no other purpose (such as the Holy Place in the tabernacle).
- Sanctification is the setting aside of persons or things for God’s service.

Here is an illustration that clearly shows the meaning: You open a savings account to save money to buy a car. You use that money for no other purpose. You make regular deposits. The money in that account is “sanctified”--it is set apart for a special purpose. Another illustration is fine china which many people have in their homes. This fine china is placed in a special china cabinet--set apart from other tableware--and is brought out and used only on special occasions (such as when the preacher comes to dinner). This by definition is “sanctified china.”

SO WHAT IS INVOLVED IN SANCTIFICATION, BIBLICALLY SPEAKING?

We want to look at that; but first, let's define who is a saint. Many of us hesitate to use this word to describe ourselves, again because the world sees a "saint" as someone who is unusually holy and sin free, who deserves or has been elected to "sainthood"--an honor reserved for only a select few individuals who have done some great service far above that of ordinary Christians. But remember, the Bible uses this word some 97 times, and in the vast majority of these passages, "saints" just means the people of God in general. Paul alone uses the word "saints" to refer to Christians some 40 times. He wrote to the entire church at Corinth and identified them as "those who are sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Corinthians 1:2).

So "saint" is a perfectly good word to describe Christians--any Christians, not just the super-faithful or spiritual "elite." Why then do so many church members say, "Well, I don't claim to be a saint"? Out of false modesty, they disclaim sainthood because they want to avoid giving people the impression that they are sinless or "holier than thou." You even hear this quite often, even from pulpits: "Well, we're all sinners." Folks, Paul did not say in his letters, "All the sinners salute you." He DID say "All the saints salute you" (2 Corinthians 13:13 and Philipians 4:22). He addressed the Ephesian letter to "the saints in Ephesus." Was he writing to just one or two super-Christians, or to the whole church? I believe we ought to think of ourselves more positively--we belong to God!

Now let's specifically address *sanctification*--the word and the concept. We said earlier that that word occurs five times in the New Testament. Here are those passages with some notes appended:

- 1 Corinthians 1:30--"But of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." (The point here is that Christ is the source of and the motivation for our sanctification. We strive to be holy because He is holy.)
- 1 Thessalonians 4:3-5 (two occurrences)--"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor,

not in passion of lust, like the Gentiles who do not know God.” (Paul means that sanctification involves separating not just our minds, but also our bodies from immoral worldly activities. He is very plain here; the “vessel” in verse 4 is one’s body, and more specifically, the parts of the body used in sexual activities.)

- 2 Thessalonians 2:13–“But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.” (This verse emphasizes that sanctification is the means by which God prepares us for eternity. The Christian life is a series of struggles and challenges, but these should cause us to grow nearer and nearer to God as we mature in the faith. Also note that each member of the Godhead--the Lord (Christ), God the Father, and the Spirit--is mentioned in this verse, showing that the entire Godhead is concerned with and involved in our sanctification.)
- Lastly, 1 Peter 1:2, which describes us as “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”

Notice that two of these verses--2 Thessalonians 2:13 and 1 Peter 1:2--state that sanctification is a work of the Holy Spirit. But here’s the big question: exactly how does the Holy Spirit accomplish our sanctification? Unfortunately, many people think that sanctification by the Spirit is some extra-Biblical, miraculous, mysterious takeover of our minds bodies that we are powerless to resist. If we let Scripture explain Scripture, however, we will avoid the modern erroneous views of the subject. The question is, how does the Holy Spirit sanctify us? The answer comes clearly from John 17:17--“*Sanctify them through your truth; your word is truth.*” Although glorious, the process of sanctification does not involve some direct, mysterious, miraculous, hit-or-miss operation of the Holy Spirit. Just as the Spirit operates through the word to bring sinners to Christ, He operates also through the word to perfect us and get us ready for heaven.

Now, let’s look further at...

THE TWO-FOLD PROCESS OF SANCTIFICATION

Sanctification--the process of being more and more separated from the world and more and more holy to God--has two parts or aspects: *becoming* a Christian (our initial sanctification), and *growing* as a Christian (our ongoing sanctification). You could call these two parts *preparatory* sanctification and *progressive* sanctification.

There is a sanctification that is a one-time, once-for-all action. When we obey the gospel, God immediately sets us apart from the world and designates us as His own special people (1 Peter 2:9). That is what Paul was referring to in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11--"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, not homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But *you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified* in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God." Note that Paul connects our initial sanctification with our "washing"--our baptism.

When you obey the gospel, you are instantly sanctified or set apart and become God's property. You are taken out of the kingdom of Satan and set into the kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13). This one-time "setting apart" frees us from sin's PENALTY. There is also a sanctification that is progressive, ongoing, and continual. It frees us from sin's POWER. All the Scriptures that speak about growing in grace and knowledge, studying always to show ourselves approved to God, etc. refer to this ongoing sanctification. In Romans 12:2, Paul spoke of our being "transformed by the renewing of our minds." This is simply another description of sanctification, and is an ongoing process accomplished by Bible study, prayer, moral living, and regular worship and fellowship with other members of the church.

Remember the illustration of the bank account? When you become a Christian, God opens the account in your name--He makes the initial deposit. Then as we progress in our Christian life, we continually add to this account. So we might say

that sanctification is a joint, cooperative effort involving us and God.
“Sanctification” is really just a fancy term for “spiritual growth.”

Actually, sanctification is (or should be) a thrilling concept to us, one that we are eager to embrace. It involves the transformation of you and me into new persons, worthy of heaven. It involves working together with God and letting Him mold and make us more and more like Himself.

So you were sanctified when you obeyed the gospel; you were set apart and designated as “property of God.” Then, every day, as you study the Bible and live closer and closer to its teachings, you are being continually sanctified--set farther and farther apart from the world. So the question is, if you are a Christian, are you making deposits in your heavenly account every day? Are you a “saint”? Don’t be ashamed to say yes. --John Temples