

Sanctification

*“This is the will of
God, even your
sanctification.”
—I Thessalonians
4:3*

THESE WORDS ARE addressed to the church, the saints of God. Sanctification is God’s will for his people, his desire, his design—their

full setting apart from the world to himself and his service—complete devotion to him. The Lord requires a sanctified class for a special position, and for a very exceptional and important work. When, by divine grace, the “high calling” of God is revealed to us, including its marvelous visions of the heavenly glory, and the work to be accomplished when the glorified church is with her Lord, we see that we can no longer have the spirit of the world.

We cannot live any longer for worldly hopes, aims, and ambitions, and we must sacrifice these. We must be separated from them, as the Levites in the wilderness were separated. (Deut. 18:1,2) We are not only to be separated from the things of earth, but separated unto God, having a constantly growing desire for fellowship with him and for the beauty of his holiness.

The words sanctification and consecration, although sometimes used almost interchangeably, have a certain difference of meaning. The word

consecrate has the thought of surrender and full dedication, a definite step which has been taken. It is the yielding up of the will to God. Whoever has not thus definitely surrendered himself to the Lord has never made a real consecration. Surely there is no step more necessary to be seen clearly by God's professed people than this one, and none more necessary to be made plain to others. The word sanctification not only contains the thought of this definite and complete consecration, but also takes in the subsequent entire process of transformation of character and preparation for the heavenly kingdom. (Rom. 12:2) It progresses on in the Christian life until the character is developed and ripened.

TWO PARTS TO SANCTIFICATION

There are two aspects to sanctification. God said to the people of Israel, "Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: ... I am the Lord which sanctify you." (Lev. 20:7,8) The setting of themselves apart was one feature of sanctification, and God's sanctifying them was another part.

Concerning the heavenly call of the Gospel Age, no one comes to the Father but by the Son, and no one comes to the Son except the Father shall previously have drawn him. (John 14:6; 6:44) In this order, first comes the drawing of the Father through his Word of Truth, through personal study of the Scriptures.

Our willingness to respond and receive God's invitation is merely the first step in response to his drawing. As we come to the point of entering the Christian way, we learn that it is narrow and difficult. (Matt. 7:13,14) Because of this, many turn

away before reaching this point. God, however, is now seeking a sanctified class to be the “bride” of Christ. (Rev. 21:2) These do not become discouraged and offended because of the narrowness of the way.

Formerly, we may have thought that acceptance of Jesus met all the requirements for one to be considered a follower of the Heavenly Father. The Scriptures, however, teach that we are to go on to make a full consecration to God. In that sense, we sanctify ourselves, and if our consecration is acceptable to him, God then receives us and sets us apart for himself. He gives us the indication of this acceptance by the begetting of his Holy Spirit. We soon begin to realize that God is working in us to develop a new mind, a new disposition, a new heart.

This acceptance by the Father is only the beginning of the deep, sanctifying work, and it is his will that this work should continue and progress. This sanctifying work is to affect every aspect of our lives—our minds, hands, feet, eyes, ears, and tongues—that we may be fully used by the Lord. It is the will that is given up at first, but we soon realize that this also includes the words, actions, and service of our mortal being.

However, our fleshly being has natural tendencies of its own. The giving up of the will means that we will seek to bring every thought, word, and deed into subjection to the will of God. It is one thing for the will to be made holy, and another thing to bring the mind and the body into line with this holiness of the will. Often, the proper will is present with us, but “how to perform” is the problem. (Rom. 7:18) Not only are our wills to maintain this sanctified state, but we are to broaden our appreciation

of God's design for us, and thus have more and more of the Master's spirit of loving sacrifice and service.

This deeper setting apart is by God, inasmuch as it is done by his arrangement. The disciples of old had left all to follow Jesus and were set apart in the sense that they wanted to know and do the will of the Father. Our Lord, however, desired that the work of divine instruction would continue on in them, as it is written, "They shall be all taught of God." (John 6:45) Jesus prayed that his disciples should come under divine providential instruction, which he indicated would come through the Holy Scriptures.

GOD'S WORD

Jesus, who knew and loved his Father's Word, prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17) This is the key to the procedure of the work of sanctification. The general tenor of our Lord's life throughout his earthly ministry was, "Lo, I come ... to do thy will, O God." (Heb. 10:7) It is a great honor and privilege to be able to read and understand the Holy Scriptures, even as Jesus did. Additionally, we now have the New Testament. This Holy Word is a "lamp" unto our feet and a "light" unto our "path."—Ps. 119:105

When we consecrate to God, we do not at first have a full knowledge of the divine will. We are helped onward by the power of the revealed Word, by the message of Truth, illuminated to our mind by the Holy Spirit. God is working in us "both to will and to do of his good pleasure." (Phil. 2:13) He gives us in his Word "exceeding great and precious

promises,” as well as divine counsel and admonition.—II Pet. 1:4; II Tim. 3:16,17

We are begotten again, “not from corruptible, but from incorruptible seed, through the living and enduring Word of God.” (I Pet. 1:23, *The Emphatic Diaglott*) The preciousness of this inspired Word is also described in Ephesians 5:25,26, “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.”

Our minds are opened to understand the Scriptures and the things that are needful for us as we read our Father’s Word and apply the lessons to ourselves. We thus grow in knowledge, grace and understanding, that we might be used at the present time in our Father’s service, and in the future also, beyond the veil, for the blessing of all the families of the earth.

God’s holy Truth is a wonderful sanctifying power, and it is very important that we should live “by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.” (Matt. 4:4) We are to seek and feed upon God’s Word in its purity, remembering that sectarian creeds and traditions are “teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.”—Matt. 15:9

There are around us today subtle, and severe, challenges to our “most holy faith.” (Jude 1:20) These tend to draw us away from the sacred condition of sanctification. These temptations are to be rejected, thus making sure the Word of God. “The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God,” is a vital part of the wonderful armor which our Father supplies, and we must “put on the whole armour of God,” that we may be able to stand against the “wiles of the devil.”—Eph. 6:10-18

We may, by divine grace, be blessed with a knowledge of the Truth of God's Word. Yet, in this blessed condition we must not encourage any feeling of ease, complacency, or self-satisfaction—merely drifting along in the Christian life. Our mind must be continually stirred up “by way of remembrance.”—II Pet. 3:1

The new mind, begotten by the Holy Spirit through the Word of Truth, is in a frail earthly tabernacle. Therefore, while we may know God's will, and the many exceeding great and precious promises, we must not be negligent to put ourselves and others “always in remembrance of these things.”—II Pet. 1:12

Under the guidance and blessing of Jesus, our Master and Head, the building up of the body of Christ is still a work of vital importance. Grains of wheat are still being gathered and are being prepared for the heavenly garner, through the proclamation and holy influence of the true Gospel as revealed in God's Word.—Matt. 3:12; 13:30

THROUGH CHRIST JESUS

As members of a fallen race, we were born in sin and “shapen in iniquity.” (Ps. 51:5) We were not sanctified in the beginning, but were “by nature the children of wrath, even as others.” (Eph. 2:3) Without the riches of divine grace we could not sanctify ourselves, but the offering of Jesus, the sacrifice of his untainted life for us, was the basis whereby we might become God's sanctified people.

Paul taught, “We have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.” (Heb. 10:10, *Diaglott*) No amount of consecration

could have made us the people of God unless, first of all, the foundation for this should be made in the sacrifice of Jesus. His ransom sacrifice opened the way. His merit cleansed us and made us acceptable to the Heavenly Father.—Eph. 1:6,7

As the merit of Christ's blood was necessary for our justification, so his acceptance of us as members of his body, and his continued aid, are indispensable to the making of our calling and election sure. Our Lord points out the necessity of our continuance under his care saying, "Abide in me, ... As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. ... Without me ye can do nothing. ... If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."—John 15:4-7

When we present ourselves in consecration, we are next accepted and "begotten" by the Holy Spirit, through the Word of Truth. (I Pet. 1:23; James 1:18) God's Spirit prepares and enables our heart and mind to more clearly understand and do his will, and thus guides us in the heavenly way. (I Cor. 2:9-14) Most importantly, God's Holy Spirit leads us, step-by-step, toward the fullness of the stature of Christ.—Eph. 4:13

PROGRESSION, TESTING AND TRIAL

While sanctification includes our part of full consecration, and also God's part of acceptance, it has, additionally, an element of progression. We are to grow in sanctification daily. It is for us to manifest that continued consecrated condition of heart in which we will "hunger and thirst" after the sanctifying Word of God, feed upon it daily, and be thereby

enabled to grow “strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.” (Matt. 5:6; Eph. 6:10) In order for the depth of our sanctification be proven, we are tested by God. If we endure properly these experiences, we will know that our Father is dealing with us as sons, and this is very reassuring.—Heb. 12:5-11, *Diaglott*

Throughout our Christian life we are to seek as best we can to bring every thought, word, and deed “into captivity ... to the obedience of Christ.” (II Cor. 10:5) We are not to be conformed to this world, but “transformed” by the renewing of our mind, that we “may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (Rom. 12:2) It is explained in Titus 2:14 that the Lord Jesus “gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.” We are to willingly submit to this transforming work in whatever form it may take.

There are forces opposing our way in this privileged life of sanctification. We wrestle not merely “against flesh and blood, but against ... the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” (Eph. 6:12) “We are not ignorant of his [Satan’s] devices.” (II Cor. 2:11) On no account are we to become offended by tribulation or persecution which arises because of God’s Word. In addition, we need always to be on guard lest “the care of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word,” and we become unfruitful.—Matt. 13:21,22

Because of our faithful sanctification in Christ Jesus, our foes may at times be of our “own household.” (Matt. 10:36) Perhaps our “own familiar

friend,” in whom we have trusted, which did eat of our bread, “hath lifted up his heel” against us. (Ps. 41:9) We may experience that the workers of iniquity “whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows, even bitter words.” (Ps. 64:3) Under all such circumstances, let us say with Paul, “None of these things move me, ... that I might finish my course with joy.”—Acts 20:24

Notice these additional statements: “Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings.” (I Pet. 4:12,13) “Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness’ sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.”—Matt. 5:10-12

We must have intensity of aim and purpose as we press along the line toward the mark of the prize of the High Calling of God in Christ Jesus, for we are made partakers of Christ “if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end.” We need to “endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ.” (II Tim. 2:3) “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne.”—Rev. 3:21

THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

Jesus was “sanctified, and sent into the world” for the benefit of the whole human race. (John 10:36) His true followers, members of his body, are set apart for the same glorious purpose. Jesus prayed,

“As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”—John 17:18-21

Jesus declared, “I am the light of the world.” and to his disciples he said, “Ye are the light of the world.” (John 8:12; 9:5; Matt. 5:14) The footstep followers of Jesus clearly understand that the true Gospel of the kingdom is to be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations. (Matt. 24:14) They also fully appreciate that concerning these glad tidings which we are to uphold and reflect, as the Apostle Peter explains, are as a “light that shineth in a dark place,” the darkness of this present evil world.—II Pet. 1:19

Erroneous, unscriptural teachings and traditions, are still widespread, and much confusion results. People are inwardly perplexed and fearful. It is almost impossible for them to escape the “fear” that is “taught by the precept of men.” (Isa. 29:13) This spirit of error and fear, instead of accomplishing sanctification, hinders full devotion to God and the true worship of him, which, as Jesus said, is to be “in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:23) Misunderstanding the character of God, or of the fundamental features of his glorious plan of salvation, obstructs true sanctification.

The possession of an understanding of God’s Word of Truth brings with it great responsibility. Shall we prove faithful to it? Shall we show to the

Father our deep appreciation of his loving-kindness in granting us knowledge of his wonderful message of salvation, by cooperating with, and fully engaging in, the work of sanctification in ourselves? The Lord is seeking those who are valiant for him, for righteousness, and for the Truth's full work in their character. Only such will be found worthy of an abundant entrance into the heavenly kingdom.—II Pet. 1:10,11

How earnestly, and with what painstaking care, should we give heed to the word spoken unto us. Let us be faithful in proclaiming the true Gospel, telling forth the words which the Lord has put into our mouths, whether others hear or forbear, whether our faithfulness brings us favor or disfavor of those around us. Let us always speak the Truth in meekness and love. All of these efforts will bring us off "more than conquerors" in the completion of the work of our sanctification.—Rom. 8:37-39 ■