

Elect and Sanctified

“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.”
—I Peter 1:2

WHEN JAMES STOOD UP before the council of brethren at Jerusalem to sum up the findings of that group of consecrated followers of Jesus relative to the position of Gentiles in the Gospel church, he included in his remarks the statement, “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.” (Acts 15:18) This indicates that every feature of the Heavenly Father’s plan has been working out according to a divinely fixed purpose, and that those who would be coworkers with God in his plan must of necessity conform to its requirements. In our opening text the Apostle Peter, addressing the church made up of both Jews and Gentiles, describes its members as being “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father.”

How does God’s foreknowledge operate with respect to those striving to follow in the footsteps of Christ? Has he arbitrarily chosen them in advance

as individuals, and apart from any qualifications which they may possess? The Scriptures do not so indicate. Jesus, the Head of the church class, was indeed chosen as an individual to fill the position which he occupies in God's plan. (Matt. 12:18) Even with him, however, God's election was not so arbitrary that the Master would have gained the position to which he had been selected, had he failed to qualify under testing and trial. The Apostle Paul was chosen from his "mother's womb." (Gal. 1:15) In his case, just as with Jesus, the Heavenly Father exercised his ability to know in advance that Paul would possess certain qualifications which would be needed in order to fill the place in the divine arrangement for which he was chosen. Yet, Paul was tested greatly to ensure that he would remain obedient to the Father's will and purpose.

Thus we see that even with the two outstanding personalities—the Head of the church, and the great Apostle to the Gentiles—although God chose them in advance, it was not irrespective of their qualifications, nor of the requirement of obedience. There is no record in the Scriptures that others of the church have been selected in advance as individuals even in this limited sense. God has the ability to do this if he wished, and without in any way interfering with the individual's free choice in the matter, for he can foreknow what a person will do without the necessity of controlling his actions.

CONFORMED TO HIS IMAGE

What, then, does Peter mean by the "foreknowledge of God," through which the followers of the

Master are made of the “elect?” Paul answers that question, saying, “Whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.” (Rom. 8:29) To phrase this another way, it means that if we wish to be among those who are elected in harmony with the conditions of God’s foreknowledge we will need to become copies of God’s dear Son, for it has been divinely predestined that only such can be counted in as among the “many brethren” of the firstborn class. How many of the individuals in this class God may have chosen in advance because he knew that, when given the opportunity, they would meet his predestinated conditions is quite unimportant. The truly important consideration is that we become conformed to the image of his Son. Paul, who was chosen as an individual, understood this and wrote of the necessity to keep his fallen nature under control and “bring it into subjection,” lest, after having preached to others, he himself might be a “castaway” [Greek: unapproved, rejected].—I Cor. 9:27

THROUGH SANCTIFICATION

Sanctification is both a setting apart to God and to his service as well as a process of being made holy. The first step therein is the consecration of ourselves to do the Father’s will—an unreserved dedication of all our time, strength, and means to the holy purpose of God. It is the giving up of our own will and accepting God’s will as the supreme authority of our lives. The act of consecration, when we answer the call, “give me thine heart,” is but the beginning of sanctification, the expression of our

desire to be set apart and to be made holy in the divine service.—Prov. 23:26

From the time this first important step toward sanctification is taken, God begins to work in us, and if our consecration was genuine, we begin to co-labor with God. Paul speaks of it as working out our salvation, even as God works in us to do of his good pleasure. (Phil. 2:12,13) In our text Peter speaks of God's part as "sanctification of the Spirit," meaning that the Heavenly Father works in us to further advance the process of our sanctification through the influence of his Holy Spirit. One of the definitions Jesus gave of the power of God which works in us as Christians was the "Spirit of truth." (John 16:13) This Spirit is the power or influence of God's mind, his thoughts over our lives, and his thoughts reach us through the written Word.

Jesus prayed to his Heavenly Father on behalf of his followers, saying, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth." (John 17:17) The entire Word of God is a work of the Holy Spirit. Hence, the sanctifying effect of God's Word in our lives comes about by means of the influence of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, it is the power of the Word itself which also works in us and by which we are sanctified. Jesus said, "For their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth." (John 17:19) The fact that Jesus had never been a sinner points out to us that sanctification does not mean a turning from sin to righteousness. Rather, it means a setting apart to God and to the doing of his will, and the demonstration of a holy character under severe trial and testing, after one has already dedicated his life to serving righteousness.

In the Master's whole life we have a wonderful example of what our own sanctification must be. Jesus said, "For their sakes," I sanctify myself. Jesus was sanctified through the Spirit, or by the Word of truth, even as we are. His sanctification began at the time of his consecration, even as ours does. It was then that Jesus expressed his desire to do all that was written of him in the "volume of the book." (Heb. 10:7-9) It was in carrying out this consecration that his sanctification was accomplished. It was in the "volume of the book" that Jesus found the complete expression of God's will for him, which was that he should lay down his life in sacrifice for his church and for the whole world. Thus his sanctification was for the sake of his church, because it led him to sacrifice his life for them.

In another way also Jesus' sanctification was for our sakes and serves as an example. This is very important because making our calling and election sure depends upon our being "conformed" to his image. (Rom. 8:29) We are guided by the same Word of truth that revealed the Heavenly Father's will to Jesus, hence sanctification means the same to us as it did to him. One of the very critical elements of sanctification that we see exemplified in Jesus is his obedience to the Heavenly Father, and his "delight" in so doing. As prophesied by the psalmist, Jesus' heartfelt desire was, "I delight to do thy will, O my God."—Ps. 40:8

OBEDIENCE

In our opening text the apostle speaks of the principle of obedience, indicating that it is closely connected to the basic principle of sanctification.

“Through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience,” Peter states. This suggests that as our sanctification is accomplished it will be manifested in our obedience to the divine will. It was because of Jesus’ unqualified obedience to his Heavenly Father that he could say, “I and my Father are one.” That is, I have the same purpose as my Father; I have no will but to do his will.—John 5:30; 6:38; 10:30

It was this fullness of sanctification which the Master sought in his followers. To this end he prayed: “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 17:21) It is by obedience to the divine will, to which complete sanctification leads, that we become one with the Heavenly Father as Jesus was at one with him. It is only by meeting the exacting predetermined requirement that each member of this class be conformed to the image of the Son, that we may hope to be among the elect of God.

EVIDENCES OF SANCTIFICATION

The only perfect example of a sanctified life which we have to guide us is that of Jesus. Even the great Apostle Paul admonished us to follow him only to the extent that he followed the Master. (I Cor. 11:1) Inasmuch as the will of God expressed through his Word is the same for us as it was for Jesus, and we are to be conformed to his image, it is highly important that we look unto him and be guided by the perfect example of his wholly sanctified life.

Jesus possessed a perfectly balanced character of holiness. He was patient, longsuffering, gentle and kind. At the same time, he was resolute and firm in

his stand for truth and righteousness. These are all godlike characteristics and abound in every sanctified life. In themselves, however, they are not necessarily evidences of sanctification, for sanctification is much more than righteous elements of character. When God created our first parents, he implanted in them his image, and despite six thousand years of a downward trend away from holiness, some of the original godlikeness is still to be found. Noble-minded men and women are to be found in all walks of life. This does not mean that they are sanctified, nor that they are filled with the Spirit of God as it emanates from his Word. It demonstrates simply that traces of his image remain in them despite man's fallen nature.

However, in the life of the consecrated Christian these noble qualities are augmented by the infilling of God's Spirit. Hence, they should become dominant, and more manifest. In the case of Jesus there was not a single trace of imperfection or sin to mar the beauty of his character. He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners." (Heb. 7:26) Because of this he was able to say to his disciples, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." That is, the righteous qualities of the Heavenly Father's character were fully displayed in the life of his beloved Son.—John 14:9

In addition to his righteous and holy character, however, Jesus' sanctification set him apart to carry out the divine will for his life in conjunction with his Father's plan of salvation for the lost race. This phase of his sanctification required much more than living a righteous life. God's will for Jesus was that, first of all, he was to die as man's Redeemer.

However, in the laying down of his life he was to be a servant, a co-worker with God with respect to various details of his plan. He was to lay the foundation for the Gospel church by the selection and training of the apostles. He was to bear witness to the Truth amidst the crooked and perverse generation of his day. Furthermore, it was by his preaching of unpopular truth and exposing popular error that he incurred the enmity of the religious rulers of his day, an enmity which finally resulted in his death.

Our sanctification calls for the same kind of service. We, too, like the Master, are called upon to lay down our lives in sacrifice. In fact, God's will for us in this respect is identical to what it was for the Master, so much so that Paul speaks of our being "planted together in the likeness of his death." (Rom. 6:5) In laying down our lives in sacrifice, we are to serve the brethren. Jesus served his immediate brethren, the disciples of his day, and we serve one another, building one another up in our most holy faith.—Rom. 12:1; Gal. 5:13; Jude 1:20

We too are commissioned to bear witness to the truth by the power and influence of the Holy Spirit, hence activity in the work of witnessing is a necessary part of a sanctified life. (Matt. 24:14; John 15:27; Acts 1:8) This is not a matter which our Heavenly Father has left as an optional choice, nor is it relatively unimportant. If our consecration to do God's will was genuine, then every expression of his will should be considered as a mandate which leaves us no alternative but to obey. If we are truly emptied of self, and the influence of God's Holy Spirit is unobstructed in our lives, then we will delight in every phase of the divine will, even as Jesus did.

FORETOLD SUFFERINGS

Peter's reference in our text to "sanctification of the Spirit" is in a sense a statement of the theme of his epistle. In the 11th verse of the opening chapter, he speaks of the "Spirit of Christ" which through the prophets "testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." Time and again throughout the epistle Peter makes it clear that the church participates in those foretold sufferings, as well as in the promised glory. He writes, for example, "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; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."—I Pet. 4:12,13

In this manner we see emphasized that "sanctification of the Spirit" means the same for us as it did for Jesus. For him it meant first suffering and death, and then the glory which followed. In our text these two objectives of sanctification are alluded to in the expression, "Unto obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." First we are sanctified "unto obedience," and our obedience leads to suffering, trials, and eventually death.

SPRINKLING OF THE BLOOD

It is interesting to note that according to our text, "sanctification of the Spirit" is said to be unto a "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ," but not by that sprinkling. True, our standing with the Heavenly Father is only by virtue of the blood of Jesus Christ. Indeed, as Paul says, we are "justified

by his blood.” (Rom. 5:9) However, the construction of Peter’s words in our text indicates that the reference is to a future “sprinkling of the blood,” and that it is for this work of sprinkling that we are now being sanctified or set apart to divine service.

In Hebrews 12:22-24, the apostle is enumerating the many glorious things to which we of the Gospel church are approaching, and among them he mentions, “To Jesus the mediator of the new testament [Greek: covenant], and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.” All the faithful members of the Christ class, those who suffer and die with him, are elsewhere described by Paul as having been given the “ministry of reconciliation,” and are being prepared and qualified during the present life for a future service of being “able ministers” of the New Covenant. (II Cor. 3:6; 5:18) They will share in the work given to Jesus as the mediator of the New Covenant—the “one mediator between God and men.”—I Tim. 2:5

Part of the ministry in preparation for the New Covenant is that of sacrifice and service. It is this phase of the ministry in which the truly sanctified followers of the Master participate at the present time, as they lay down their lives daily in the Lord’s service. However, there is a future ministry of glory that follows the work of sacrifice. That will be at the inauguration of “a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah,” and through them with the whole world of mankind. (Jer. 31:31; Heb. 8:8) This glorious work was prefigured by the mediating of Israel’s Law Covenant by Moses, and in connection with that work there was a sprinkling of blood.—Heb. 9:18-20, *English Standard Version*

Prior to the inauguration of the old Law Covenant by Moses, he did a work of sacrifice. As recorded in Exodus 24:4-8, oxen were slain, and part of their blood was sprinkled upon the altar of sacrifice, and the remainder was poured into basins. The Hebrew word translated “basins” has more the thought in the English of a cup or small bowl. It was from these vessels that the blood was sprinkled upon the people when the Law Covenant was enjoined upon them.

We have in this a beautiful picture of the manner in which the sanctified of the present age will participate in the future “sprinkling” of the blood of Jesus Christ. Part of the blood which Moses obtained from slaying the oxen was poured upon the altar. Here is illustrated how our sacrifice is made acceptable to God. We are only acceptable because Jesus poured out his perfect human life as a ransom sacrifice, satisfying the demands of God’s justice, and thus releasing us from Adamic condemnation. We are then “accepted in the beloved. In whom we have redemption through his blood.”—Eph. 1:6,7

The remainder of the same blood which Moses obtained was to be held for another purpose, which was that of sprinkling “both the book, and all the people” as a means of sealing the covenant. (Heb. 9:19) This blood was held in basins until Moses had finished reading the Law to the people. We think it is reasonable to conclude that these vessels pointed forward to the many members of Christ’s symbolic “body,” those who are now being sanctified “unto obedience and the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.” The vessels Moses used had no blood of their own. They had to be filled with the blood of the oxen which Moses slew. We likewise

have no blood—no life of our own. The life we now live is by “the faith of the Son of God.” (Gal. 2:20) We add nothing to the value of Jesus’ ransom sacrifice.

If our sanctification is complete, however, leading us to full harmony with God, and to oneness with him and with Jesus, we will become vessels by which the benefits of Christ’s blood, his life, can be made available to the people in the next age. Concerning this class, God said, “I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages.” (Isa. 49:8) This simply means that God will use his sanctified people of this age, Jesus and his church, as the instruments for establishing a “New Covenant” with Israel and all mankind during the coming age of God’s earthly kingdom.—Matt. 6:10

Thus, the apostle’s expression, “Unto ... the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ,” is his way of explaining the great objective of our sanctification. We are being set apart and made holy, not merely for the service of the Lord now, but more particularly for that glorious service of the future, that service of God through which his promises to bless all the families of the earth will be fulfilled. (Gen. 22:18) This will be the glorious climax of our ministry of the New Covenant, and what a blessed prospect it is!

When we see the wide scope of God’s purpose in and through the church, the word “elect” does not convey the same restricted meaning as it has to many in the past. It is not that God elects some and ignores others. Rather, the elect are chosen to be instruments of blessing for all. When we realize this, what an incentive it should be to strive to meet the foreordained

qualification of the elect—namely, to be conformed to the image of God’s dear Son.

There is but one way in which this can be done, and that is by being emptied of self and being filled with God’s Holy Spirit. This cannot be accomplished in a moment, but it is the work of a lifetime. However, if we are yielding to the influences of the Spirit, we should daily find ourselves rejoicing more and more in the will of God, even though his will at times may mean our loss of earthly blessings of one kind or another. We should find that as earthly blessings vanish our heavenly joys increase, and the joy which is set before us is furnishing inspiration to continue on faithfully in the way of sacrifice. We are assured that if we endure faithfully, even unto death, we will share Christ’s glory, and together with him have the privilege of imparting the blessings of life to all the willing and obedient of mankind. Surely the prospect is glorious! ■