

Truth for Today

The Bible Explained

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Things which accompany salvation: Safety and Sanctification

I start this talk on Safety and Sanctification by subtitling it, "From sinner to saint", because some listeners may not realise that the topics of safety and sanctification are vital parts of the Christian Gospel message. And I want to plant a question in your mind from the very start of my talk, "Does the speaker really mean I can actually become a saint?"

All of us will be familiar with the idea of safety. However, some may not have come across the teaching of sanctification. An English dictionary definition of sanctification would be "to make something, or someone, holy - to purify from sin." The scriptural definition is somewhat the same, but is more positive because its emphasis is on "separating something, or someone, apart to be used by God for His service and for His own pleasure".

So let's get straight into our subjects, Safety and Sanctification, by looking at the Old Testament account of the exodus of the children of Israel from Egypt, the event which kick-started their nation's distinct identity. Exodus 12 describes the Passover night, when the children of Israel sheltered in their houses under the blood of the lamb, which was applied to the two doorposts and the lintel of each house (see Exodus 12:1-28). Their houses became places of safety and protected them from the judgments which the LORD executed that night upon all in the land of Egypt. He'd told Moses to warn Pharaoh: "*Thus says the LORD, 'Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, 'Let my son go that he may serve me.' If you refuse to let him go, behold, I will kill your firstborn son'*" (Exodus 4:22-23, English Standard Version).

Each year thereafter, the children of Israel were required to celebrate their nation's deliverance with the Passover Feast. But they were also required to carry out the ritual of sanctifying all the firstborn both of man and of beast unto the LORD for He claimed: "*[the firstborn] is mine*" (Exodus 13:1-2, 12 with Numbers 8:17-18). The Passover Feast reminded the children of Israel that God had saved them; and the firstborn rituals reminded them that, as His firstborn son of all nations, Israel had become a nation set apart for Him. He'd repeatedly told Pharaoh through Moses, "*Let my people go, that they may serve me*" (Exodus 7:16). Their sanctification was the primary reason for their salvation. At the Red Sea, they were completely separated from Egypt and totally delivered from Pharaoh's claims over them (see Exodus 14:1-31). He achieved both by His great power. He then protected them with His Presence in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night (see Exodus 13:21-22) during their long and arduous wilderness journey. However, although His Presence never left them, the wilderness was not their ultimate place of safety. The Promised Land of Canaan was what God had in mind for them, that is, over the river Jordan as well as through and beyond the Red Sea!

For Israel, complete national security was briefly experienced during King Solomon's reign when the Temple was built: "*Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon*" (1 Kings 4:25). But everlasting safety for Israel in the Promised Land will only come to pass when Messiah reigns during the Millennium. God has promised: "*I will make for them a covenant on that day with the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the creeping things of the ground. And I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land, and I will make you lie down in safety*" (Hosea 2:18, see also Jeremiah 32:37). Then God will show the whole world why He has set Israel apart for Himself: "*I will accept you with your sweet savour, when I bring you out from the people, and gather you out of the countries wherein ye have been scattered; and I will be sanctified in you before the heathen*" (Ezekiel 20:41, King James (Authorised) Version).

It's well-known that the salvation God provided for Israel, in delivering the nation from Egypt, illustrates the spiritual salvation which Christians receive through believing the Gospel. This means that they're saved from all of the terrible consequences of their sins. God no longer views them as being "*in Adam*" but "*in Christ*", or, "*in Christ Jesus*" (see 1 Corinthians 15:22) - that present place of safety and security "*in the heavenly places*" (see Ephesians 1:3). The Lord Jesus emphasised that His own are eternally safe in John 10:27-29 (English Standard Version): "*My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.*"

In Hebrews 5:9 (King James (Authorised) Version), Christ is described as being "*the Author of eternal salvation*". That means His salvation provides for all our needs: our sinful past, our present life in this world in which sin reigns as its

king; and our future in heaven.

“Have you believed this message?” In 1 Corinthians 1:18, Paul states: *“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God”* (1 Corinthians 1:18, King James (Authorised) Version). If you don’t, or won’t, believe the Gospel, which *“is the power of God unto salvation”* (Romans 1:16), then you’re not only in an unsafe place exposed to all the spiritual perils that sin throws at you in this life, you’re also in danger of being eternally lost. You’ll die in your sins and face the judgment throne of God, where there’s no place of safety. Then, you’ll be banished to Hell, the place of eternal separation from God.

However, I now move on to speak about the sanctification of believers. Do you remember our subtitle: “From sinner to saint”? Let me explain how the Gospel completely and comprehensively provides for this transformation. It’s only when we realise the complete havoc wrought by sin upon the human race that we can appreciate the fullness of God’s answer to it in the Gospel of His grace:

- Sin makes everyone guilty before God but the Gospel is about His forgiveness;
- Sin brought in universal condemnation for mankind but the Gospel provides justification whereby repentant sinners are pronounced righteous by the righteous God;
- Sin causes men to be in bondage to its mastery but the Gospel provides for their redemption. They can be set free because the ransom price has been paid in full by Christ’s blood;
- Sin resulted in man’s enmity with, and his alienation from, God but by the Gospel believers are reconciled to Him;
- Sin makes us rebellious people, who defy God but the Gospel states He can be merciful to us because Christ is our propitiation. That is, God’s wrath has been satiated by Christ’s sacrifice and, specifically, the shedding of His precious blood;
- Sin has rendered us spiritually dead to God but the Gospel gives us new life in Christ. We have been *“made alive together with Christ”* (see Ephesians 2:5 and Colossians 2:13);
- Sin has corrupted every person to the very core of his being because he’s inherited Adam’s fallen nature. But by believing the Gospel we’re born anew and get a new incorruptible nature; and, finally with respect to our subject, sanctification,
- Sin has polluted us and has made us profane or unholy. At its extreme, sin makes people godless and totally irreverent, dominated by the world of unregenerate mankind. But the Gospel provides the means of our sanctification so that we become holy people, that is, saints of God.

For the remainder of my talk I would like to explain how the Gospel message includes sanctification. In fact the Apostle Paul listed it in the Gospel commission, which he received from the Lord Jesus: *“to open [the Gentiles] eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me”* (Acts 26:17-18, English Standard Version). But before I do, here’s a reminder of the meanings of the word, sanctification. Sanctification is “to make something or someone holy - to purify from sin”, with the scriptural emphasis on “separating that something or someone apart for use in God’s service and for His own pleasure”.

Now let’s return to the history of the children of Israel to see how those people were made holy. We’ve seen that on the Passover night, the LORD claimed their firstborn sons as His own property by the blood of the Passover lamb (See Exodus 12:1-13). Then in the wilderness He instructed Moses: *“All the firstborn among the people of Israel are mine, both of man and of beast. On the day that I struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I [sanctified] them for myself, [but now] I have taken the Levites instead of all the firstborn [sons of] the people of Israel”* (Numbers 8:17-18). From the Levitical tribe, Moses separated the family of Aaron to be priests in the Tabernacle system of worship. In Exodus 29, Moses was instructed by the LORD to sanctify this family by offering a bull sin offering on their behalf; and also by applying blood from ram sacrifices to various parts of their bodies, from head to toes (see Exodus 29:1-37).

Their history illustrates the way in which Christian believers are sanctified. It is the book of Hebrews which compares and contrasts Israel’s national relationship with God to that of Christians. With respect to sanctification, Hebrews 10 teaches that: *“we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. ... For by a single offering he has perfected [forever them that are ...] sanctified”* (Hebrews 10:10 and Hebrews 10:14). Hebrews 13:12 states that: *“Jesus also suffered ... in order to sanctify the people through his own blood.”* Therefore, all Christian

believers are sanctified, that is, set apart for God, through Christ's sacrifice upon the Cross. And we must notice that this was required by God because His will was fulfilled when Jesus died for us in this way: His body offered as a sacrifice for our sins and His precious blood shed to cleanse away our sins.

Furthermore, Hebrews 2:11 (JN Darby translation) says: "*Both [the Lord Jesus Christ who] sanctifies and those sanctified are all of one; for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren.*" Let me paraphrase this startling truth: "the Lord Jesus sanctifies His people to make them a family of priests"! This takes us back to the illustration I used from Exodus 29, where Aaron and his sons were sanctified to minister to the LORD as priests in the Tabernacle system of worship. The amazing truth is that, in the Christian dispensation, every believer is a priest in God's spiritual house (see 1 Peter 2:5); and in "*the holy of holies*", that is, the very presence of God (see Hebrews 10:19). The Lord Jesus is our worship leader for, quoting Psalm 22:22, Hebrews 2:12 amplifies the meaning of Hebrews 2:11 (and of sanctification) by stating that He declares the Father's name to His brethren by singing the Father's praises in the midst of the church.

This is not an abstract doctrinal truth to be studied by theologians, but one to be practised in church by believers as Hebrews 10:19-25 (King James (Authorised) Version) exhorts us: "*Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, By a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. ... Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together [to worship], as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as [we] see the day approaching.*" So I conclude this rather lengthy point by saying that the sanctification of Christians primarily is their separation to God for purposes of worship.

But the New Testament teaches that believers are also sanctified in other ways:

1. In the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ;
2. By the Holy Spirit; and
3. By the call of God in the Gospel.

1. In the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ

After listing what kind of gross sinners some of the Corinthians believers were, Paul wrote, "*And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God*" (1 Corinthians 6:11, English Standard Version). Here Paul indicated that believers are regarded as sanctified people in virtue of the value of the Name of Christ to God. God looks upon us as sanctified because he sees us in the Person and worth of "*Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, 'Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord'*" (1 Corinthians 1:30-31). "*In Christ Jesus*" means in the risen and glorified Man, who completed the work for our salvation and sanctification in His death upon the Cross.

2. By the Holy Spirit

But, in 1 Corinthians 6:11 Paul concluded his statement by adding that we're also sanctified "*by the Spirit of God*" (see also Romans 15:16). When we believed the Gospel, the Spirit was active in bringing us into the position of sanctification. He's the Agent through whom God worked to achieve our sanctification for we're: "*elect... through sanctification of the Spirit*" (1 Peter 1:2, King James (Authorised) Version). In this respect, we were born again or anew by the Spirit and, upon believing the Gospel, we were sealed by Him.

3. By the call of God in the Gospel

This brings us to the final point of teaching about our sanctification - that we're sanctified by the calling of God. It very much fits into what Peter said in 1 Peter 1:2. God calls you and me to obey the Gospel by faith and become those who are "*sanctified in Christ Jesus.*" Now I can answer the question I posed at the beginning of my talk, "Does the speaker really mean I can actually become a saint?" The answer is a resounding, "Yes"! Paul addressed his letters to the Romans (Romans 1:7) and to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 1:2) in this way, "*to those... called to be saints ...*" More accurately they were "*called saints*", the word "called" describes what kind of saints they were. They were saints by virtue of the fact that God had called them to this position (of sanctification). But so are we and so is every person who believes the Gospel! To quote 1 Corinthians 1:2, English Standard Version: "*To the church of God that is in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints together with **all** those who in **every** place call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, both their Lord and ours.*" You can see now why I suggested the subtitle, "From sinner to saint". And the staggering fact is that the name "saints" is the most frequently used name for believers in the New Testament! But I reckon that you'll probably get some peculiar reactions from folk, including some of your fellow-believers, if you mention to them that you're a saint. I only recommend you try it if you're able to explain the truth of sanctification!

Practical points on Safety and Sanctification

But I must finish my talk with some practical points on our title, Safety and Sanctification.

1. If you're not sure of your salvation, you'll not be enjoying your position of sanctification

The first is a very simple issue: if you're not sure of your salvation, you'll not be enjoying your position of sanctification. Knowing that you're safe *"in Christ"* through His blood will lead you to become a worshipper of God, who gave Him up to the death of the Cross for you.

2. There're demands placed upon saints to demonstrate their sanctification

Second, there're demands placed upon saints to demonstrate their sanctification. For example, after writing in Hebrews 13:12 *"Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood"*, the writer exhorts us in Hebrews 13:15, *"Through [Jesus] then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name"*, which I have said is worship. My point here is that our understanding of the fact that we possess an eternal salvation, a ticket to heaven, must lead us to express our appreciation upward to God for His super abounding grace. But there's also the outward flow of grace from us to others: *"Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God"* (Hebrews 13:16). And other aspects of Christian fellowship follow on from our primary fellowship of worshipping God together in church: *"Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised ;) And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works"* (Hebrews 10:23-24, King James (Authorised) Version). In addition, Hebrews 10:25 stresses the importance of believers meeting together in church; of exhorting and encouraging each other to continue in the faith; and of looking forward to the Lord's return.

3. There is need for progressive sanctification

Finally, there is need for progressive sanctification. The vexed issue that all saints of God find with everyday living in this present world is the problem that sin within us wants to control us. There's a continual battle raging, that of the Spirit against our sinful nature, the flesh. At times this causes us to think that we're either not really saints or that we are total failures. What are we to do? First we need to understand that it is God's will that we should live up to our calling: *"For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that you abstain from sexual immorality: that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honour not in the passion of lust like [those people] who do not know God"* (1 Thessalonians 4:3-5, ESV). In this context, sanctification is the practice of holiness that corresponds to our positional sanctification of being *"in Christ Jesus."* Since we have such blessings, we must strive to *"cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and spirit, bringing holiness to completion in the fear of God"* (2 Corinthians 7:1). But how? To overcome sin in the flesh, we need to recognise that God only see us *"in Christ"*, and that in the death and resurrection of Christ we have been set free from sin in order to be servants to God. Reckoning ourselves dead to sin but alive to God, we must *"put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."* By doing so, we'll produce fruit unto holiness that ends in everlasting life (see Romans 6 with Ephesians 4:24).

So I finish with this prayer:

"Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

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