

SANCTIFICATION

Background

Sanctification has been called the highway to holiness. It is God's will for all mankind who are chosen for salvation through the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit and belief in the truth of God's Word. He desires that we are cleansed for fellowship with him through redemption by the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus. (See 1 Thessalonians 4:3; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2.)

Sanctification means the process of being made holy (or saintly). There are two aspects to this process – being separated from sin (and from the world's way of thinking and doing), and also being separated to God's way of living. The first reference to sanctification in the Old Testament concerns the Sabbath (the seventh day, *Shabbat*), which God blessed and sanctified. This day was to be set apart from other days for rest, and consecrated to God. (See Genesis 2:3; Deuteronomy 5:12; Nehemiah 13:22.)

There are many things and tasks that God required to be sanctified under the Mosaic covenant. Everything used for his service was to be made holy. This included: the tabernacle or temple (where he was present in a special way), the people, the priests; also a man's house or field, his first-born, his offerings to the Lord, and everything used to make atonement for sin (all the vessels of the tabernacle or temple). God (and his Name) was to be sanctified (held as holy) in the eyes of the people, through righteousness, through his bringing of his people back to their Land, through his judgment of the nations, and through the keeping of *Shabbat* as holy to him. (See Exodus 13:2; 19:10; 28:41; 29:27; 29:43; 30:26-29; 31:13-14; Leviticus 27:14,17; Isaiah 5:16; Ezekiel 20:41; 28:22; 36:23; Joel 1:14; 1 Corinthians 6:19.)

Many times in his Word, God said to his people, *sanctify yourselves*. Mostly this is in preparation for some future action: for judgment, for miracles, for making sacrifice to the Lord, or for touching holy things, and God castigates the people for insufficient or false sanctification. (See Joshua 3:5; 7:13, 1 Samuel 16:5; 1 Chronicles 15:12; 2 Chronicles 30:3; 35:6; Isaiah 66:17.)

The Process of Sanctification

There are two processes involved – cleansing and sanctifying. In Ephesians 5:25-27, Paul tells us that Jesus loved his church so that he might sanctify and cleanse it. To be sanctified, one must be made clean and pure. Jesus' redemption of the church cleanses and sanctifies, in order that he might present it without spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish. That has both personal and corporate aspects. (See Matthew 16:8.)

To his disciples, Jesus says: *You are already clean because of the Word I have spoken to you*. And for those who sin, John says that if we walk in the light and confess our sins, the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin and unrighteousness. Both 'water' and the blood of Jesus are required for sanctification. Man needs both redemption through the shed blood of Jesus, and inward washing by his Word. The Old Testament sacrifices for sin (with the combination of the shedding of blood upon the altar, and the washing in the laver) speak to us both of Jesus' shed blood on the cross and the continual inward washing that we need through the truth of his Word. (See John 15:3; 1 John 1:7, 9; 1 John 5:6; Hebrews 9:14, 13:12.)

In scripture we learn of a number of ways in which God's people have been sanctified. In the Mosaic covenant it was the offering of sacrifices on a physical altar. In the new (Messianic) covenant we think of: the Holy Spirit; the truth of the Word of God; Jesus himself, crucified once for us and risen from the dead; and our belief and faith in the Lord Jesus. (See Matthew 23:19; John 17:17; Acts 26:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; Hebrews 10:29; 1 Peter 1:2.)

Separation from sin is thus a vital stage in the process of sanctification, that we might be enabled by God to be in relationship with himself, the one who is perfectly holy. Romans 12:1-2 shows us the changes that are needed in this process. We present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God, as on an altar, holy and acceptable. We are not conformed to worldly values, but transformed by renewal of our minds (our way of thinking) by his Spirit, so that we can know God's will for us and embrace his inward washing by the truth of his Word. This leads to a new way of living, so that we can think and do as Jesus would have us think and do. Paul encourages us to be spiritually discerning; and have 'the mind of Christ' (1 Corinthians 2:16). True sanctification goes beyond 'Do not look, Do not touch, Do not taste, Do not do'. It requires that through faith, trust and obedience we are open to God's power ('Holy, Holy, Holy') – possible because of his promises. This power is made available to us through his Word and Spirit, and we lay hold of what he offers us, by faith in him – who is perfectly faithful – and in the finished work of Jesus upon the Cross. As disciples of Jesus we are helped by the Holy Spirit in the ongoing process of sanctification throughout our lives. Jesus prayed to his Father that we would be sanctified by his truth.

His Word and his name are 'truth'. (See Isaiah **6:3**; Colossians **2:20-22**; 2 Peter **1:3-4**; Hebrews **10:10, 14**; John **17:17**; Revelation **4:8**.)

Thus, with God's correction and help, we who are 'in Christ', having been set apart for him, are to be open to the work of the Holy Spirit, and we can be sanctified increasingly. We are to love him, and being holy in all our conduct is extremely important, because our God is holy. (See Deuteronomy **6:5**; Hebrews **12:10**; 1 Peter **1:15-16**.)