

Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:23

Throughout the Scriptures we are reminded that God is holy. He is high, exalted and set apart, distinct from everyone and everything else. All else is created, He alone is Creator.

God does not just justify those whom He loves, He also sanctifies them. He does not simply save, He also cleanses. The church is the body of those who are said to be sanctified.

There are two aspects of sanctification. One is an event which occurred at conversion and the other is a process which continues until death. We cannot deny either without doing serious injustice to Biblical revelation.

The Event of Sanctification

The Scriptures say that we were sanctified (past tense) and are sanctified (present tense). You can see this in the epistles of Paul in which he addresses those who are called “saints”¹ and “those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus”² and “saints”. This is also seen in such passages as 1 Corinthians 6:11 and Hebrews 10:10. These pictures show that one very important aspect of our sanctification is a past and present reality. Those who have been justified have also been sanctified. This is a precious truth.

The Process of Sanctification

While the Scriptures certainly teach the past and present aspects of sanctification, they also inform us of the ongoing and future progression into sanctification. This truth does not contradict the event of sanctification, but merely complements it. Those who are holy are being made holy. Though it is difficult to understand, it is impossible to deny.

After writing in Hebrews 10:10 that “we have been sanctified,” the author writes in 12:14 “pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.” The author was not content with merely saying “you are already sanctified so you can take it easy.” Rather, he presents the pursuit of holiness as a matter of life and death.

The Means of Sanctification

Sanctification, like all of God’s promises and gifts, flow through the work of Jesus upon the cross. Our holiness was purchased by His blood.

Furthermore, holiness comes through the gift of the indwelling Holy Spirit. Through Him, we are made to be what we are declared to be at conversion.

This picture of sanctification, both past and future, is appropriated by faith. As Paul has written in Galatians 3, we continue by that by which we began. This does not, however, mean that we are therefore free from the responsibility to work. Remember, Hebrews tells us to pursue. We must certainly work for sanctification. However, our work neither merits the gift of holiness, nor is it done apart from the Spirit. As Philippians 2 tells us, we are to work out our salvation, but only because God is working in us to make us willing and able to do so. As in all things, God gets the glory and is the sovereign and effective doer.

Sanctification is a complex subject, but it need not be complicated. We know that we have been sanctified and that we are being sanctified. We know that we are called to work for sanctification, but that ultimately even those very efforts are grounded in faith by the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit, according to the will of the Father.

Pertinent Scriptures

- *Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth.*
John 17:17
- *To the church of God which is at Corinth, to those who have been sanctified in Christ Jesus, saints by calling, with all who in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, their Lord and ours...*
1 Corinthians 1:2

¹ The word “saints” is a translation of the Greek word for holy, sacred, blameless or consecrated.

² See 1 Corinthians 1:2; Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2

- *Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God.*

1 Corinthians 6:11

- *Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1 Thessalonians 5:23

- *But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.*

2 Thessalonians 2:13

- *By this will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all...For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.*

Hebrews 10:10, 14

- *Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord.*

Hebrews 12:14

- *according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood: May grace and peace be yours in the fullest measure.*

1 Peter 1:2