

# Safety and Sanctification

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When God called Israel out of Egypt, the first thing He did was to ensure their safety from judgment by sheltering them beneath the blood of the slain lamb. Next, to sanctify the firstborn who had been sheltered. Exodus 12 gives us details of the one, and Exodus 13 starts with the other. "Sanctify unto Me all the firstborn."

This is the Old Testament type, and in the New Testament safety and sanctification are again connected. In John 17, for instance the Lord Jesus declared the *safety* of His own. As to the *pas*/, He said, "Those that Thou gavest Me I have kept." As to the *future*, He prayed, "Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given Me" (vv. 11 and 12). Immediately following this He prayed concerning their sanctification (vv. 17 and 19).

With these scriptures before us, we shall see that it is God's wish that the believer should be both safe and sanctified. Let us not, however, connect our safety with our growth in grace, neither let us so widely separate them as to make them a first and second blessing, with possibly years of experience rolling between. To understand the proper relation between safety and sanctification we need to know the scriptural meaning of the terms, and upon what each of them depends.

No one who reads these lines will have any difficulty as to what is meant by "safety." With "sanctification" it may be otherwise. Not many words in the Scriptures are more widely misunderstood.

To some sanctification means just *sanctimoniousness*. It really means nothing of the sort; nor does it even mean *becoming very holy*, save in a secondary sense. The primary meaning of sanctify is to *set apart* - to separate from base uses to the service and pleasure of God. For example: -

"Thou shalt anoint the altar . . . and sanctify the altar . . . thou shalt anoint the laver . . . and

sanctify it" (Ex. 40: 10, 11).

"I [Jesus] sanctify Myself" (John 17: 19).

"Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts" (1 Peter 3: 15).

In what sense can an object constructed of wood or metal be said to be sanctified? It cannot be made *holy* in the ordinary sense of that word. Inanimate objects have no qualities of mind or character. They can, however, be solemnly *set apart* for divine use. Moses did so set altar and laver apart, and they were thereby sanctified or made holy in the Scripture use of the term.

Again, how can we conceive of God Himself or the Lord Jesus as being *sanctified*, in whose presence the angels cover their faces crying, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of Hosts"? In this same sense alone the Lord Jesus has *set Himself apart* in heaven for our sakes, and we can *set God Himself apart* in our hearts, ever giving Him that place of supremacy and honour which is His by right.

So, too, when sanctification is connected with us believers, it has just this primary meaning. The above-quoted scripture, Exodus 13: 2, shows that sanctification is God claiming for Himself those whom He has sheltered by blood. We are thereby separated, or set apart, for the pleasure and service of God.

We must carefully note, however, that for us sanctification has two aspects. The first *positional* and *absolute* - an act of God with which we start our Christian career; the second *practical* and *progressive* - continuing and deepening through all our pathway upon earth.

Those scriptures, which speak of the believer as having been already sanctified, naturally fall under our first heading. For instance, Paul wrote to the Corinthians in his first epistle as unto "them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1 Cor. 1: 2). And again, "But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified. but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6: 11). These are striking sayings, for the Corinthian Christians were in many respects very blameworthy. They had not advanced far in the way of *practical* sanctification, yet the apostle does not hesitate to remind them that in the name of the Lord Jesus and by God's Spirit they *had been* sanctified as truly as they had been washed and justified. They had been set apart for God.

Again, in Hebrews 10 we read, "By one offering He hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified" (v. 14). Who are these sanctified ones? Are they believers of special attainments in holiness? *No*. They are all Christians without distinction or class - set apart for God in virtue of the one sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ.

But there are other scriptures where sanctification is presented as an object of attainment and desire. We read, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification" (1 Thess. 4: 3). "Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it" (Eph. 5: 25, 26). "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified and meet for the Master's use" (2 Tim. 2: 21).

In these scriptures, though sanctification still carries its root meaning of "setting apart," it is clearly viewed as something which is God's intention for His people; as something which Christ - not has done - but *is doing* for His church today; as some, thing which we are to individually seek, and which, instead of being already ours by God's gracious act, is to be ours *if* we respond to the divine instructions. In a word, it is sanctification of a practical and progressive sort.

Now let us inquire, upon what do these things depend? *Safely*, in Scripture, ever stands related to the infinite worth and value of the atoning work of Christ, and to His power to keep. Our attainments in practical holiness after conversion, important as they are in their place, have nothing to say to it. On that fateful night in Egypt no firstborn son would have been spared if the head of the household had tacked a paper to the lintel of the door, narrating his boy's excellencies of character or his progress in holy behaviour. The safety of every spared firstborn depended solely upon the sprinkled blood and on nothing else. So it is for us. Our safety, our forgiveness and justification hang entirely upon the precious blood of Christ. We are forgiven "through His name" (Acts 10: 43), we are justified "by His blood" (Rom. 5: 9).

But upon what does *sanctification* depend? In its positional aspect it is founded on the work of Christ. By His one offering we are sanctified. It also stands connected with the Holy Spirit. We are "elect . . . through sanctification of the Spirit" (1 Peter 1: 2). By the Spirit we are born again, and finally, in believing the truth, we are sealed by that same Spirit. In virtue of all this, we are set apart for God.

In its practical and progressive aspect sanctification depends upon the truth. "Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is truth" (John 17: 17). Hence the sanctifying of Ephesians 5: 26 is "by the Word." This being so, it is easy to see that diligence, and purpose of heart in departing from iniquity, are very necessary in this connection. If we "walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 6: 16) we do not fulfil the wishes of the flesh. Christ is before us as our Object, and we are brought under the influence of the truth of the Word, and thereby practically set apart for God in mind and affections. This practical sanctification goes on through all our pilgrim days.

**If we disconnect safety and sanctification, will not people think they may be saved and yet live as they like?**

We will not disconnect them; far from it. Scripture makes it abundantly plain that those whom

God shelters from judgment, He separates unto Himself. That one should be sheltered and yet left in the world under the power of sin, is simply unthinkable to the Christian mind. The unregenerate alone would entertain such an idea.

But though we do *not* disconnect we do distinguish, for Scripture does so. Some there are who hopelessly confuse these two things. In their great desire to keep us humble and walking in the way that is right, they would have us believe that the degree of our attainments in practical sanctification determines the degree of our safety.

Is this so? Is our sanctification of such a doubtful character that we must be kept in perilous uncertainty lest we should shatter it? Let an analogy answer. Is it necessary to terrify little children in order to make them behave themselves? Is this method - sometimes practised by ignorant nursery-maids - the *only* way to reach that desirable end, or even the *best* way? Why then should we suppose that God treats His children on such lines? The truth is that all right conduct flows from the knowledge that we *are* sheltered, and from the right understanding of *what* we are separated to.

### **Does good progress in practical sanctification improve the believer's title to a place in heaven?**

Not in the smallest degree, though without holiness no man shall see the Lord. Near the close of his strenuous life, marked by so high a degree of holy living and devoted service, the apostle Paul wrote: "to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Phil. 1: 23). To a dying robber, just converted, but without many hours of holy living to his credit, Jesus said, "Today shalt thou be with Me in paradise" (Luke 23: 43)

Which of these two had the better prospects of heaven - that heaven which is summed up in the words "with Christ," "with Me"? Paul? Nay, their prospects were good alike, and as sure and firm as the finished work of Christ and the sure Word of God could make them.

Fitness for heaven is not something the believer works up to - he starts with it. We give thanks to the Father "who *hath* made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light" (Col. 1: 12). HATH, mark you! It is not something He is doing, but something that *He has done*.

Good progress in practical sanctification does, however, improve our *fitness for earth!* We are thereby rendered much more able to take our proper place as witnesses and servants of Christ in this world.

**When does this progressive or practical sanctification take place? Do we receive it by an act of faith?**

It is impossible to name a certain day or hour and say, "Then I was sanctified in a practical sense." For then, how could it be progressive? Nor do we receive it by an *act* of faith. Faith, of course, there must be; faith in the fact that we are already set apart by God for Himself. And faith is not an *act* merely to which we attain by a kind of supreme effort. Faith truly *acts*, but it is itself an abiding and continuous thing. *I believed*. Yes, but *I do* believe. I believe today!

Taking Scripture as our guide we learn that the Truth sanctifies, and that God's Word is truth (John 17: 17). Further, that the Spirit of God sanctifies. He is the sanctifying power, inasmuch as He it is who guides us into all truth (John 16: 13). The truth presents CHRIST to us, it opens out to our souls His glory, and as by faith we behold Him we are changed into His image, from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3: 17, 18). That is progressive sanctification indeed!

**Can you tell us when a Christian is entitled to speak of himself as sanctified?**

Every true believer *is* sanctified. To each it can be said, "Of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" ( 1 Cor. 1: 30). So that if truly converted and "in Christ Jesus," you may speak of yourself as sanctified with as much confidence as you would speak of yourself as redeemed.

If, however, your question refers to practical sanctification, the answer is - *Never!* Those in whom the largest measure of sanctification is found, who - in other words - are most Christ-like, are the last people in the world to say so. CHRIST, and not attainments, fills the vision of their souls. The excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus their Lord (*see* Phil. 3: 8) is their pursuit as it was Paul's, and if they speak of themselves at all it is to say, "*Not as though I had already attained*, either were already perfect" (Phil. 3: 12).

**We read in Scripture about the believer being sanctified wholly. Would not such a believer be perfect and beyond the reach of temptation?**

People, who do not observe the setting of scriptural expressions, sometimes suppose that to be sanctified wholly is to have the old nature completely eradicated. A glance at the passage will, however, help us to seize the meaning of these words. It runs thus: -

"Abstain from all appearance of evil. And the very peace of God sanctify you wholly; and I pray

God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5: 22, 23).

The apostle Paul desired, in regard to each of his converts, that the whole man might be practically set apart for God. Each of the three parts that go to make up a man - spirit, soul, and body - was to be affected, and to such an extent that he not only kept separate from evil, but also from all appearance of it. Nothing less than this should be the object of our prayerful desire even now. But "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us" (1 John 1: 8). It goes without saying that if the old nature be not eradicated, no believer can consider himself perfect or beyond the reach of temptation.

**Why does the Bible lay such stress on this positional or absolute sanctification which all believers possess to begin with? Of what practical benefit is it to us?**

It is of the greatest possible importance. The law may, indeed, set before us an ideal to which we are to strive to attain. God's way in grace is to show us what we ARE in His own sovereign choice, that we may practically be consistent with it.

Two boys are born on the self-same day: one is the son of a king, set apart from his birth to high estate and office; the other is the son of a pauper. Why is it that continually the young prince has it impressed upon him that he is the son of a king? Is there any practical benefit in it? Indeed there is. The two boys may often walk the same streets, but their practical life and behaviour are as different as can be. The prince is practically separated from many low and vulgar ways, because by birth he was absolutely set apart to kingly estate.

So it must ever be with us. Never can we be too often reminded that by the redemption work of Christ, by the Spirit's work and indwelling, we *have been* set apart for God. Nothing will prove more truly conducive to holy living.