

Set Apart For God

“Follow peace with all men and holiness [sanctification], without which no one shall see the Lord” (Hebrews 12:14).

“The God of peace Himself sanctify you completely and your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, who also will do it” (I Thessalonians 5:23, 24).

The term “sanctification” has been a problem to the believers for some time. In fact, whole movements have been built around its implications. To many believers, the word has something of a mystical implication, which suggests that there is some special touch from God subsequent to salvation that brings one into a special state of perfection not achieved by “mere salvation.” In this concept, to be saved and to be sanctified are two different things. The text that we are looking at seems on the surface to bear this out. We must examine it more closely.

Sanctification, without which no one shall see the Lord... Much of the confusion can be cleared with a closer examination of the word “sanctification.” The Greek word is *hagiazō*—“to set apart.” The Hebrew equivalent is (*qadash*), which in turn comes from the semitic root—*qad* which meant “to cut,” and thus “to separate.” It was used everywhere in the Old Testament in connection with the setting apart of the temple vessels as well as the rites and ceremonies. Thus, the vessels of the temple were “sanctified” or “set apart” for God’s use. In the narrative of Daniel, Belshazzar mocked the God of Israel by drinking wine from one of the sanctified temple vessels. It was then that the infamous gold letters appeared on the wall and Belshazzar was cut off that very night.

The Greek word *hagiazō* is the equivalent of this and is used to designate those, who by means of salvation, have become members of the body of Christ and “sanctified” or “set apart” for God.

The word *hagios* is the root of *hagiazō* and in the plural, is translated by the word “saints.” So everywhere Paul addresses the Church as “the saints,” even though there were a great many problems among them which made them seem anything but holy or “saintly.” The Corinthian Church, for instance, was having major difficulties for which Paul had to give them sharp rebuke. And yet, in the first part of chapter 1, he calls them “saints” and commends them for many evidences of their faith in Christ. Unfortunately, the term “saint” has been distorted in some quarters of Christendom and applied only to those who are, “very holy.” Such a meaning has become part of modern parlance even in the secular world and used for very pious individuals.

The problem is serious when it begins to distort the true meaning of our position in Christ. According to our text in Hebrews, without “sanctification” one cannot be saved. This creates problems for those who believe that sanctification is an additional experience after salvation, or a very special touch from God. It also would suggest that one cannot see Christ without

perfection. This of course is quite contrary to the mainstream of the New Testament.

Paul's words to the Thessalonians clarify the issue considerably, if we translate it there properly. In the King James version, the translation seems to suggest that Paul is praying that this sanctification might happen to the Thessalonian believers. But the Greek text, as above, puts a different light on it. In a sense he is merely committing them to Christ, for His preserving of them, "body, soul and spirit." It is much like his words to Timothy—*"I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep what I have committed unto him against that day"* (II Timothy 1:12). That Christians are imperfect and that their salvation is based solely on the righteousness of Christ, is clearly taught in the Scripture and universally accepted. The introducing, then, of some idea that there must be a special touch of holiness in addition to this, is most confusing.

The truth is that we are set apart for God at the moment of salvation and rescued from the power of Satan. We are, so to speak, lifted from the kingdom of Satan and carried across the chasm to the Kingdom of God. There, we are preserved "body, soul and spirit" until the coming of the Lord. The word translated "wholly" means "unto total completion." Only the Spirit of Christ is capable of this.

Faithful is He who calls you, who also will do it. This passage breathes with the power of the Holy Spirit, who touches our lives, imbues us with the nature of God and sets us apart to share in His eternal glory.

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