

# Truth for Today

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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## The Great Salvation: Sanctification

My message can be summed up in three statements:

1. God is holy
2. God makes holy those that are His
3. God expects and requires those who are His to be holy

In a word, I want to say something about sanctification, which is almost, though not perhaps exactly, the same as holiness. God is inherently, intrinsically holy. He is pure, He is clean. He is different to every other being. Having considered that, we shall look at what God has made all those who are believers on the Lord Jesus. We will look at Scriptures where God says that He has set such apart for Himself. Then, finally, we shall consider the third element, that those whom God has set apart positionally as to status before Himself, He requires to be sanctified, set apart, practically and morally from others in the world who are not His.

### 1. God is holy

First of all then, does Scripture support the statement that God is holy? In Psalm 22:1 and 3, in that terrible moment of abandonment the Lord Jesus cried "My God, My God ... Thou art holy". The prophet Isaiah in Isaiah 6:3 says, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts". Perhaps it is because of this statement, repeated in Revelation 4, that God is spoken of as a thrice holy God. God is a triune God, three distinct Persons, one God. When we come to the disciples prayer in the Gospels the Lord Jesus encouraged the disciples on earth, taking account of God in heaven, to seek that His Name might be "Hallowed," holy, sanctified. (Matthew 6:9). When we come to 1 Peter 1:15-16, Peter says, "He which hath called you is holy" and again "Be ye holy; for I am holy". Then in Revelation 15:4, "Thou ... art holy". In this matter of holiness or sanctification we must start with this basic premise, well founded in Scripture, that God Himself is set apart, different from all others.

Now, God has revealed Himself as a triune God - Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Accepting that God, as such, is holy, is it right to say that the Father, as such, the Son, as such, and the Spirit, as such, are intrinsically, inherently sanctified or holy? As to the Father, we need go no further than the prayer of the Son in John 17:11. Speaking to the Father, His Father, He said, "Holy Father". The Father is holy, the Father is sanctified, for the Lord Jesus expressly said, "Holy Father".

When we come to the Lord Jesus personally we find that His holiness is borne witness to by the three major writers of the New Testament epistles: John, Paul and Peter. John says of the Lord, "In Him is no sin" (1 John 3:5). That is one way of asserting His absolute holiness and personal sanctification. There was nothing in Him that sin could appeal to, or that the devil himself could use to bring about His downfall. Intrinsically, inherently, He is the Holy One. He revealed Himself in the address to Philadelphia as "He that is holy, He that is true" (Revelation 3:7). That was John considering the Lord Jesus in His intrinsic, personal worth. When we turn to Paul we read that God "hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin" (2 Corinthians 5:21). Not only was there no sin in Him, but He knew no sin. There was nothing that ever entered His holy mind that was of sinful character. He was perfectly holy, through and through. Peter gives us the last necessary touch. Not only inherently, not only in the thoughts that passed through His holy mind, but in action too, He was absolutely pure and holy. Peter says of Him, "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth" (1 Peter 2:22).

Now here we have to take account of something slightly different. There are things that are true of the Lord Jesus in Himself without reference to anyone or anything else. But then we come to statements of Scripture which tell us what He is relative to us, and positions or conditions into which He has voluntarily entered on our behalf. There are some Scriptures about the sanctification of the Son of God which we could not otherwise understand except in this way. Remember John 10:36, "(The Son) whom the Father hath sanctified, and sent into the world". The Father set the Son apart for the express purpose of coming into the world that we might have spiritual life through Him. It was not for any need of His own. It was on our behalf. It would ultimately lead Him into the work that He did at Calvary for our blessing. It was for that purpose that the Father sanctified the Son and sent Him into the world. When we get to the Son's prayer in John 17:19, He uses this term again in the same way: "I sanctify Myself". After His death and

resurrection He was going to set Himself apart from earth and go to heaven and take up a position there that He had never before had as man. He sanctified Himself in leaving the world and going back to the Father in heaven.

God, as such, then is sanctified, holy. The Father, as such, is sanctified, holy. The Son, as such, is sanctified, holy - on His own behalf and also that we might be blessed. The Spirit is characteristically so, for He is the Holy Spirit. In Scripture, almost always, unless there is a special reason, we learn concerning the Spirit that He is the Holy Spirit. In Romans 1:4 we learn that the Lord Jesus gave evidence of His deity and His holiness in raising dead persons, and that even that was according to the "Spirit of holiness."

## **2. God makes holy those that are His**

In the Old Testament we find that things, as well as persons, were set apart for the particular purpose of serving God. There is something special involved in each case. In Genesis 2:2-3 we are given the first reference in Scripture to the term 'sanctification' or 'holiness'. God rested on the seventh day and blessed it and sanctified it. God said, of the seven days, one is going to be special. It was set apart that God might rest in it with His creatures in the celebration and in the blessing of the work that had been done on the other six days. So the seventh day was hallowed. It was made holy to God. He Himself set it apart. Many other things in the Old Testament, such as the furniture and holy vessels in the tabernacle, the firstborn in each family in Israel, and the officers of the law, were sanctified to God, set apart, and committed to the service of God.

I want to speak now of the sanctification of Christian believers. God has set us apart for Himself. He has put us in a position which we were never in before, that we might serve Him. The Jude 1 tells us that we are sanctified by the Father. We learn in 1 Corinthians 1:2 that we are "sanctified in Christ Jesus". The people of Corinth were so sophisticated in the world's eyes, so clever, so cultured, but morally in the sight of God it was a dirty polluted city. It is to them that Paul says in 1 Corinthians 6:11, after giving a long list of what they used to be like, "but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the Name of the Lord Jesus". Again, in Hebrews 13:12 we read, "Wherefore Jesus... that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered without the gate." Sanctification then is a work done for us and not a work done by us; an important distinction. We are sanctified by the Son of God as a result of a work that He has done for us.

But then we come to sanctification by the Spirit. Romans 15:16 says "That the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost." Again, "Ye are sanctified ... by the Spirit of our God" (1 Corinthians 6:11). The work that has been done for us at Calvary was a work by the Son of God and it is made good in us by the Holy Spirit.

The agent that is used is the word of God. The Lord Jesus praying to His Holy Father that the disciples might be sanctified, prays, "Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth." (John 17:17). Elsewhere we read, "sanctify ...with the washing of water by the word" (Ephesians 5:26). Even the things that are provided for the sustenance of our bodies are set apart for our use, "sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (1 Timothy 4:5). This puts a great dignity on the ordinary mealtime. God has set the food apart for our use that we might be strengthened, set apart for His own service.

Let us now consider a few verses that direct us to a principal purpose of sanctification. Sanctification gives us an entirely new basis for living. God has set us apart to be entirely acceptable to Him according to His absolute standard. That is something He has done for us that we could never do for ourselves. But God has also set us apart for the purpose of being a holy people, that we might be available to Him to make Him known to those who do not know Him for themselves.

## **3. God expects and requires those who are His to be holy**

Now, if God has set us apart to be committed to His service, if the Lord Jesus has undertaken the work to make it possible, and if the power of the Holy Spirit is available within us that it might be so, we cannot escape the conclusion that we must live clean, pure lives. Here we come to our problem. We live in an unclean world. As we get nearer to the Lord's coming, it is even more true for our generation than it has ever been before. How can holy, sanctified lives be lived in such an unclean world? 2 Peter 1:19 tells us we live in a murky, squalid world. The last few verses of 2 Corinthians 6 and the opening verses of chapter 7 tell us, "touch not the unclean thing; let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God." It is not just the negative matter of avoiding blatant, outward sinning and filth, but the very positive matter of living lives devoted to the service of God in purity and holiness. Those young believers in Thessalonica were told, "this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication" (1 Thessalonians 4:3). 2 Timothy 2:15-22 are more words just right for the last days of the twentieth century. We must depart from iniquity. We read in verse 21: "if a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified (set apart for God) meet for the Master's use." Verse 22: "Flee also youthful lusts: but follow righteousness, faith, love, peace, with them that call upon the Lord out of a pure heart". What

we are inside governs the way that we act outside - "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). 1 Peter 1:15 says, "as He which has called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation" - which means, all manner of life. Is it required of us? Scripture says "yes". If God has set us apart for Himself our lives have to be different from what they were before. They certainly have to be different from those of unbelievers. The sanctified ones must act in a sanctified way. Is it possible? Can it be done? How can we do it? First of all, we need to accept the statement of Scripture. "Every man that hath this hope in Him (that is Christ) purifieth himself, even as He (Christ) is pure" (1 John 3:3). That is not an exhortation. It is a statement of fact. The degree of purity in my life is the practical witness of the measure to which my hope is centred in Christ in heaven.

Now, we need to be encouraged. The bearing of that verse in 1 Corinthians 6:11, "ye are sanctified... in the Name of the Lord Jesus", is that we have this on His authority. We also have the power, for the same verse says, "ye are sanctified... by the Spirit of our God." There is the authority of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit available to help us live clean, pure lives. As ever, the agent is the word of God.

This is an old principle which comes out easily in Scripture. "Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy word" (Psalm 119:9). "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" (Psalm 119:105). We have already considered the Son of God's words in John 17:17, "Sanctify them through Thy truth: Thy word is truth." We say to the little ones, we need to say it to each other, "read your Bible, pray every day." There is indeed a purifying effect from the reading of Holy Scripture. As far back as Ezekiel 44:23 we get the words "they (the priests) shall teach My people the difference between the holy and the profane, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean." What did the priests do? They presented the word of God to the people.

Now I would like to turn to 1 Peter 3:15. This is something of a climax in the teaching to us of practical sanctification: "sanctify the Lord God in your hearts." God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have set us apart for the service of God. In order that we might be set apart, the work of Christ on the cross was necessary, and the power of the indwelling Spirit. But there comes the point where in responsibility we have to show whether or not we value what God has done on our behalf. 1 Peter 3:15 uses the very words that give us the proper response. The word of God says, as it were, "It is now up to you. Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts. Set a special place apart in your hearts, the best place, the chief place, the first place. Give that to the Lord. Don't give it to anybody else: not to yourself, not to your husband or wife, not to your children, not to your work, not to your leisure. Have a place that is reserved for the Lord which is paramount to you in your existence".

1 Thessalonians 5:23 gives us the encouragement that we need to carry it out, "the very God of peace sanctify you". What comfort! What composure! to take account of all the sanctifying work of the blessed God for us and towards us and in us by the Spirit. This comfort and composure are produced by the God of peace. This is a prayer that the very God of peace would sanctify us in a practical way, "sanctify you wholly", through and through. He says, "I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body". This is a descriptive term of what is involved in the entire person, the intelligent thoughts, the sensitive feelings, even the actions of the body, "being preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ". It is a certainty that we are to be presented blameless in the sight of God because of the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit originating in the heart of God. But the apostle here says fitting words that we do well to pray for ourselves and each other at the end of any day, "the very God of peace 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. Amen."

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