

#### IV. THE BIBLICAL TEACHING CONCERNING "SANCTIFICATION"

A misunderstanding of what the Bible teaches concerning sanctification has led to a number of errors which have vexed multitudes of believers and put them under a yoke which they cannot bear or given them a false sense of immunity to sin.

Most of us have heard someone say in regard to another, "If there was ever a saint of God she was one of them." This statement seems to infer that a person is a saint of God because of the works he or she has performed.

Most of us have also met individuals who claimed they haven't sinned for some particular period of time. They hold sanctification to be a state of holiness or "sinless perfection."

In order for us to get a proper understanding of what the Bible teaches concerning sanctification, we need to look at several words. First of all, the word "sanctify" means "to set apart." It doesn't mean to make one holy, or to be holy or to make progress in holiness. If this were true then Christ could not have sanctified Himself as He declared in John 17:18,19. Here our Lord referred to the fact that He was "set apart" by the Father to do a certain work.

"Sanctify" then means to "set apart" and with this explanation we find that God has set apart a number of things in Scripture: the firstborn of all Israel (Ex. 13:2), the Levites (Numbers 3:12), the priests (Ex. 29:44), the altar (Ex. 29:36), the Sabbath (Neh. 13:19,22), offerings (Ex. 29:27), and Israel as a nation (Ex. 19:5,6).

The word "holy" is another word used in connection with the doctrine of sanctification and it simply means "set apart from things which are unholy." In this sense we see that Christ was set apart from sinners (Heb. 7:25). But notice the fact that His being set apart did not make Him holy, but because He was holy this set Him apart.

Finally, the word "saint" is also used in connection with what the Bible teaches about sanctification. A "saint" means "one who has been set apart unto God." Every born-again child of God is already a saint. This included all those carnal Corinthian believers as well (I Cor. 1:2). Dwight Pentecost has pointed out how some have misunderstood this verse and what it really teaches:

You will notice your English text reads..."called to be saints..." and many have misunderstood this because they have concluded that we were called in order that eventually we might become saints. That is not what the Apostle is writing, for he is writing to all those who are in Christ Jesus. He says that they have been sanctified - that is, set apart unto God in Christ Jesus - and because they have been set apart they are called "saints" by God (115).

Now, let's examine what the Bible teaches about the believer's sanctification.

The Bible teaches...

### **I. THAT THOSE WHO BELIEVE ARE ALREADY SANCTIFIED OR "SET APART" POSITIONALLY IN CHRIST**

1. When we believed on the Lord we were set apart from other sinners in this world to belong to the Lord and to bring glory to Him (I Cor. 6:11; Heb. 10:10).
2. When we believed on the Lord we were given the perfect righteousness and holiness of Jesus Christ as far as our standing before God is concerned (I Cor. 1:30; II Cor. 5:21; Eph. 5:25-27; Rom. 4:13-25).
3. When we believed on the Lord we were given this position and possession and it is just as complete for the weakest and youngest believer as it is for the strongest and oldest believer. Nothing we do can alter or add to this imputed righteousness.

### **II. THAT THOSE WHO BELIEVE ARE BEING PROGRESSIVELY SET APART IN CHRIST**

This means...

1. We who believe are being set apart from certain practices in our lives to bring glory to God as we yield to and are led by the Holy Spirit (Jn. 17:17,19; I Thess. 4:3,4,7).
2. We who believe have a battle to fight with the flesh and as far as our practical holiness is concerned sometimes we will bring glory to God and other times we won't but never will we reach a state of "sinless Perfection" (Rom. 7:15-25; II Tim. 2:19-22; Col. 3:5-14).
3. We who believe can be living a sanctified life which is set apart from sinful things in this world and bringing glory to God which reflects spiritual maturity or we can be doing the very opposite.
4. We who believe have a responsibility and a very good reason to live a sanctified life (I Cor. 15:34; I Pet. 4:1-4). Testimony sake- so that we may be an effective witness for Christ is the basis for living a sanctified life.

### **III. THAT THOSE WHO BELIEVE ARE GOING TO HAVE AN ULTIMATE SANCTIFICATION OR SETTING APART IN THE FUTURE**

This means...

1. We who believe will receive a final setting apart either when we die (Heb. 12:23) or

when the Lord comes and then we will bring glory to God as perfect instruments of obedience to Him with there being no possibility to sin (I Jn. 3:2; Heb. 9:28; Jude 23; I Thess. 3:13).

2. We who believe will have a body like Christ which will not be subject to sin (Phil. 3:20-21).
3. We who believe will be wholly set apart in body, soul, and spirit unto God (I Thess. 5:23). When this occurs we will be to the praise of Christ's glory (Eph. 1:12).
4. In this light we can say as believers that we have been delivered from the penalty of sin; we are presently being delivered from the power of sin; in the future we are going to be delivered from the very presence of sin.

We should come to several conclusions as we examine what the Bible teaches concerning sanctification. Firstly sanctification is an act of God whereby He sets the believer apart from other sinners to be used for God's glory. It involves the work of the Holy Spirit and has to do with our standing and state before God.

Positional sanctification is a once-for-all action which takes place at the moment of salvation and gives the believer a holy and righteous "standing" before God and it is based upon the sacrificial death of Christ.

Practical sanctification is the process by which believers are being set aside daily by the Holy Spirit as they yield to His control. In this process they enjoy victory over sin (Rom. 6:11-13,22), are being conformed to the character of Christ (II Cor. 3:18) and are maturing spiritually in Him (II Pet. 3:18). How the believer responds determines his "state" before God and can be spiritual or carnal (I Cor. 1:2-9; 6:11; 3:1-4).

When the rapture occurs believers will experience their ultimate sanctification of being like Christ and being set apart from the sin nature, the world and the devil (I Jn. 3:2)