

Sanctification I

by Lewis Sperry Chafer

The doctrine of sanctification is about being set apart unto a holy purpose, and it involves the means of sanctification, which include God's work and man's work.

Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 5:23

Topics: "Christian Sanctification", "Holy Living"

Description

Lewis Sperry Chafer delves into the doctrine of Sanctification, emphasizing the importance of interpreting it correctly by relating it to other Bible doctrines, avoiding the interpretation based solely on personal experiences, and considering all Scriptures related to the theme. The sermon explores the meanings of key words like 'sanctify,' 'holy,' and 'saint,' highlighting the significance of being set apart for a holy purpose. It also discusses the various means through which sanctification occurs, including God sanctifying individuals, believers sanctifying themselves, and one person sanctifying another.

Transcript

Though clearly stated in the Bible, no doctrine has suffered from misunderstanding and misstatement more than the doctrine of Sanctification. Because of this, the theme calls for special consideration.

Three laws of interpretation obtain which if carefully followed will preclude the errors usually connected with this doctrine.

First, The Doctrine of Sanctification must be Rightly Related to every other Bible Doctrine.

Disproportionate emphasis on any one doctrine, or the habit of seeing all truth in the light of one line of Bible teaching, leads to serious error. The doctrine of Sanctification, like all other doctrines of the Scriptures, represents and defines an exact field within the purpose of God, and since it aims at definite ends, it suffers as much from overstatement as from understatement.

Second, The Doctrine of Sanctification cannot be Interpreted by Experience.

Only one aspect of sanctification out of three deals with the problems of human experience in daily life. Therefore an analysis of some personal experience must not be substituted for the teaching of the Word of God. Even if sanctification were limited to the field of human experience, there would never be an experience that could be proven to be its perfect example, nor would any human statement of that experience exactly describe the full measure of the divine reality. It is the function of the Bible to interpret

experience, rather than the function of experience to interpret the Bible. Every experience which is wrought of God will be found to be according to the Scriptures.

Third, The Right Understanding of the Doctrine of Sanctification Depends upon the Consideration of all the Scriptures Bearing on this Theme.

The body of Scripture presenting this doctrine is much more extensive than appears to the one who reads only the English text; for the same root Hebrew and Greek words which are translated "sanctify," with their various forms, are also translated by two other English words, "holy" and "saint" with their various forms. Therefore if we would discover the full scope of this doctrine from the Scriptures, we must go beyond the passages in which the one English word "sanctify" is used, and include, as well, the passages wherein the words "holy" and "saint" are used. Lev 21:8 illustrates the similarity of meaning between the words "sanctify" and "holy" as used in the Bible. Speaking of the priest, God said: "Thou shalt sanctify him therefore; for he offereth the bread of thy God: he shall be holy unto thee: for I the Lord, which sanctify you, am holy." Here the root word used four times is twice translated "sanctify" and twice translated "holy."

I. THE MEANING OF THE WORDS

1. Sanctify, With Its Various Forms.

This word, which is used one hundred and six times in the Old Testament and thirty-one times in the New Testament, means to "set apart," or the state of being set apart. It indicates classification in matters of position and relationship. The basis of the classification is usually that the sanctified person or thing has been set apart, or separated from others in position and relationship before God from that which is unholy. This is the general meaning of the word.

2. Holy, With Its Various Forms.

This word, which is used about four hundred times in the Old Testament and about twelve times, of believers, in the New Testament, refers to the state of being set apart, or being separate, from that which is unholy. Christ was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners." Thus was He sanctified. So, also, there are certain things which the words holy and sanctify, in their Biblical use, do not imply:

(a) Sinless perfection is not necessarily implied, for we read of a "holy nation," "holy priests," "holy prophets," "holy apostles," "holy men," "holy women," "holy brethren," "holy mountain," and "holy temple." None of these were sinless before God. They were holy according to some particular standard or issue that constituted the basis of their separation from others. Even the Corinthian Christians who were "utterly at fault" were said to be sanctified. Many inanimate things were sanctified, and these could not even be related to the question of sin.

(b) The word does not necessarily imply finality. All these people just named were repeatedly called to higher degrees of holiness. They were set apart again and again. People, or things, became holy as they were set apart for some holy purpose. Thus they were sanctified.

3. Saint.

This term, used of Israel about fifty times and of believers about sixty-two times, is applied only to human persons and relates only to their position in the reckoning of God. It is never associated with their own quality of daily life. They are saints because they are particularly classified and set apart in the plan and

purpose of God. Being sanctified they are saints. In three Epistles, according to the Authorized Version, believers are addressed as those who are "called to be saints." This is most misleading. The italicized words "to be" should be omitted. Christians are saints by their present calling from God. The passages do not anticipate a time when they will be saints. They are already sanctified, set apart, classified, "holy brethren," who therefore are saints. Sainthood is not subject to progression. Every born-again person is as much a saint the moment he is saved as he ever will be in time or eternity. The whole church which is His body is a called-out, separate people. They are the saints of this dispensation. According to certain usages of these words, they are all sanctified. They are all holy. Because they do not know their position in Christ, many Christians do not believe they are saints. The Spirit has chosen to give us the title of "saints" more than any other but one. We are called "brethren" one hundred and eighty-four times, "saints" sixty-two times, and "Christians" but three times.

II. THE MEANS TO SANCTIFICATION

First, Because of infinite holiness, God Himself -- Father, Son and Spirit -- is eternally sanctified. He is classified, set apart, and separate from sin. He is holy. He is sanctified (Lev 21:8; Joh 17:19; Holy Spirit).

Second, God -- Father, Son and Spirit -- are said to sanctify persons.

1. The Father sanctifies (1Th 5:23).
2. The Son sanctifies (Eph 5:26; Heb 2:11; Heb 9:12, Heb 9:14; Heb 13:12).
3. The Spirit sanctifies (Rom 15:16; 2Th 2:13).
4. God the Father sanctified the Son (Joh 10:36).
5. God sanctified the priests and the people of Israel (Exo 29:44; Exo 31:13).
6. Our sanctification is the will of God (1Th 4:3).
7. Our sanctification from God is: By our union with Christ (1Co 1:2; 1Co 1:30); by the Word of God (Joh 17:17; cf. 1Ti 4:5); by the blood of Christ (Heb 13:12-13); by the Body of Christ (Heb 10:10); by the Spirit (1Pe 1:2); by our own choice (Heb 12:14; 2Ti 2:21-22); by faith (Act 26:18).

Third, God sanctified days, places and things (Gen 2:3; Exo 29:43).

Fourth, Man may sanctify God. This he may do by setting God apart in his own thought as holy. "Hallowed be thy name." "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts" (1Pe 3:15).

Fifth, Man may sanctify himself. Many times did God call upon Israel to sanctify themselves. He says to us, "Be ye holy, for I am holy." Also, "If a man therefore purge himself from these [vessels of dishonour and by departing from iniquity] he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the Master's use" (2Ti 2:21). Self-sanctification can only be realized by the divinely provided means. Christians are asked to present their bodies a living sacrifice, holy, and acceptable unto God (Rom 12:1). They are to "Come out from among them," and be separate (2Co 6:17). Having these promises, they are to cleanse themselves "from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness [sanctification] in the fear of God" (2Co 7:1). "This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh" (Gal 5:16).

Sixth, Man may sanctify persons and things. "For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband, else were your children unclean; but now are they holy" (sanctified, 1Co 7:14). "And the priests shall sanctify the people." "So they sanctified the house of the Lord."

Seventh, One thing may sanctify another thing. "For whether is greater, the gold, or the temple that sanctifieth the gold?" "For whether is greater, the gift, or the altar that sanctifieth the gift?" (Mat 23:17, Mat 23:19).

From this very limited consideration of the Scriptures on the subject of Sanctification and Holiness, it is evident that the root meaning of the word is to set apart unto a holy purpose. The thing set apart is sometimes cleansed and sometimes it is not. Sometimes it can itself partake of the character of holiness and sometimes, as in the case of an inanimate thing, it cannot. Yet a thing which of itself can be neither holy nor unholy, is just as much sanctified when set apart unto God as is the person whose moral character is subject to transformation. It is also evident that where these moral qualities exist, cleansing and purification are sometimes required in sanctification; but not always (1Co 7:14).

QUESTIONS

1. What laws of interpretation must necessarily be followed in order to arrive at the right understanding of the doctrine of sanctification?
2. Wherein does human experience fail as a guide?
3. What three words are vitally a part of this doctrine?
4. What is the meaning of the word sanctify?
5. Are the words sanctify and holy used only of sinless conditions?
6. Is sanctification ever repeated?
7. Who are the saints so called in the Epistles?
8. a. When do they become saints?
b. On what ground are they called saints?
9. What persons are said to sanctify?
10. Name the means used in sanctifying the believers.
11. By what means may a person sanctify himself?
12. In what particulars is it possible for one person to sanctify another?
13. Is sanctification limited to those objects which are capable of partaking of holiness?
14. Does the sanctifying of a person always imply a change in character?

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