

THE TEACHING
LEGACY
 OF DEREK PRINCE

Partakers of His Holiness

How God Makes Us Holy

Holiness is a unique attribute of God. God has many other attributes—such as love, wisdom and power—which we can understand to some extent by reference to people or things in the natural realm that display these attributes. But holiness has no parallel in the natural; it is unique. John Wesley defined holiness as “perfect love.” However, I prefer to define holiness as a combination of God’s righteousness and God’s love. Love invites you to come; righteousness says that you are unfit to come. There is this built-in tension in holiness.

A Characteristic of God’s People

God’s Word tells us that holiness is to be a characteristic of the people of God. Consider Hebrews 12:9–10:

Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He [God] for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

God’s desire is that we may partake of His holiness.

Verse 14 of Hebrews 12 adds, “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.” First, we are to pursue holiness—we are to make it an objective. Second, in order to achieve holiness, we must pursue peace with all people. We are to attempt to live peaceably, not allowing quarrelling or disagreement that is within our power to avoid. The writer of Hebrews here also issues a very solemn warning. He

says we will not see the Lord unless we become partakers of His holiness.

A second Scripture that expresses God’s desire for holiness in His people is 1 Thessalonians 4:3: “*For this is the will of God, your sanctification.*” What, precisely, is sanctification?

To some extent the English language obscures the true meaning of this word. Any verb ending in *-ify* means “to cause to become” that which comes before it. For example, *purify* means “to make pure,” *clarify* means “to make clear,” *rectify* means “to make right.” By analogy, then, *sanctify* means “to make sanct.” By derivation, *sanct* is the same as *saint*; and *saint*, in turn, is the same as *holy*. All three words—*sanctify*, *saint*, *holy*—are derived from one basic Greek word *hagios*, meaning *holy*. Very simply, therefore, sanctification is “the process of making holy.”

Thus, we can accurately translate 1 Thessalonians 4:3, “*For this is the will of God, that you be made holy.*” Verse 4 continues, “*That each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification [a condition of holiness] and*



honor.” Appropriately, this verse contains a phrase that has become familiar in modern English: “know how.” It takes scriptural know-how to achieve a condition of holiness.

A person’s vessel is his body—the earthen vessel of the human spirit. Many Christians speak as if the body were something evil—something to be ashamed of. The body is not evil, it is good. It is one of the supreme achievements of God’s creative genius. Speaking of his own body, King David said, “*I am fearfully and wonderfully made*” (Psalm 139:14). David viewed the marvels of his body with awe and wonder.

Why should believers know how to keep their bodies in a condition of holiness? We may answer this by combining two Scriptures: “*The Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands*” (Acts 7:48); and “*Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you?*” (1 Corinthians 6:19). God has ordained one temple on earth to dwell in. It is not a temple made with hands, but the body of the sanctified believer. Therefore, each one of us needs to know how to keep his body in a condition fit for God to dwell in.

The Agents of Sanctification

How does Scripture picture the process of sanctification, and what part do we play in it? As I understand it, there are five agents of sanctification.

The Holy Spirit

Without the Holy Spirit—or the Spirit of Holiness as He is called in Hebrew—there is no hope of our becoming holy.

But we are bound to give thanks

to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth.

(2 Thessalonians 2:13)

In sanctification, as in every redemptive process, the initiative is with God. It begins with God’s choice of us, made in eternity. Thereafter, the sequence of events in time is as follows.

- The Holy Spirit begins to influence us
- He draws us aside from the broad way that leads to destruction (Matt. 7:13)
- He brings us face to face with the truth (in the last resort Jesus Himself is the Truth)
- He imparts to us faith to believe the truth
- Through believing the truth we enter into salvation

In Ephesians 2:8 Paul tells us that we are “*saved through faith,*” and then reminds us that this faith does not come of ourselves, but is imparted to us as a *gift* by God.

In this sense, we could define *sanctify* as “set apart to God.” In many cases the process of sanctification begins long before we personally come to know God. The apostle Paul said he was separated from his mother’s womb (Galatians 1:15); and God told Jeremiah that He had sanctified him in his mother’s womb (Jeremiah 1:5). God begins to set us apart to Himself long before we have any knowledge of it.

First Peter 1:2 presents a similar picture of the process:

To the...elect [chosen] according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit,

for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ.

God’s choice, made in eternity, is based on His foreknowledge—it is never arbitrary, never random. Sanctification is the process by which the Holy Spirit draws us aside to a place of confrontation with the claims of Christ. The Holy Spirit gives us grace to obey the Gospel and, when we obey, the blood of Jesus is sprinkled upon us.

In both of these above passages—2 Thessalonians and 1 Peter—the initiative in the process of sanctification is with God, not man, and the first agent in the process is the Holy Spirit.

The Word

In Ephesians 5:25–26, we find the second agent of sanctification: “*Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her, that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word.*”

In the Old Testament, after the blood was shed, every sacrifice had to be washed in pure water. In the New Testament 1 John 5:6 says that Jesus came “*by water and blood.*” The blood is the redeeming blood of Christ shed on the cross, and the water is the pure water of the Word. Christ redeems us by His blood; then He sanctifies and cleanses us by the washing of water by the Word.

Jesus prayed to the Father for His disciples: “*Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth*” (John 17:17). One of the main ways in which the Word of God sanctifies us is that it changes our way of thinking. Sanctification proceeds from the inside, outward; not from the outside, inward. The religious way to sanctification is to lengthen the dress, cut the hair, and wipe off the lipstick. But Paul says, “*Be transformed*

by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Romans 12:2) and, “Be renewed in the spirit of your mind” (Ephesians 4:23). It is the Holy Spirit that renews our mind. He does it through the truth, which is the Word of God.

We often use the term “brainwash” in a bad sense. However, that word would be appropriate to describe the way in which the Holy Spirit renews our minds, washing them clean with the pure water of God’s Word.

Faith

This is Paul’s great commission from the Lord Jesus Christ as he is being sent to the Gentiles: “To open their eyes, in order to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me” (Acts 26:18). An indispensable element in being sanctified is our faith. God’s Spirit and God’s Word never vary, but it is our faith that enables us to receive what God offers through these agents. The process of sanctification will only be as effective as our faith allows it to be.

Furthermore, there is a direct connection between the Word of God and our faith, because “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17). The more we give heed to God’s Word, the more our faith expands, enabling us to appropriate the total provision God has made for our holiness.

The Blood of Jesus

Hebrews 13:12 says: “Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.” Jesus shed His blood for many

purposes. One was to redeem us. Another was to sanctify or set us apart to God and make us holy.

It is possible to live in a place where sin and Satan cannot touch us because we are protected and sanctified by the blood of Jesus. “If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). The tense used in this Scripture is the continuous present tense: If we continually walk in the light, we continually have fellowship, and the blood of Jesus continually keeps us clean. We are kept pure and undefiled, for we live in a different element. We do not live in the contamination and vileness of this evil world. We are separated unto God, sanctified, set apart by the blood of Jesus.

This leads us to another important Scripture: “We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him” (1 John 5:18).

This is challenging—almost frightening. Does John mean that a person who has been born again never sins thereafter? Other passages of Scripture, together with our own experience, make this interpretation unlikely. The key to understanding this verse, I believe, is to see that John is not here talking about an individual person, but about a nature. It is not Brother David or Sister Mary who cannot sin; but it is the new nature that each believer receives through rebirth that cannot sin.

First Peter 1:23 tells us that this new nature is “born...not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.” In all forms of life there is one principle

that never changes. The nature of the seed determines the nature of the life that comes from the seed. An apple seed produces an apple, not an orange. The incorruptible seed of God’s Word produces a nature that is, like the seed, incorruptible. This nature is the “new man.” He is incorruptible. He does not sin. This is not true of any individual believer, viewed as a total personality, but it is true of the “new man” in every believer.

This agrees with 1 John 3:9: “Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.” John’s language here is even stronger. He says not merely that such a person does not sin, but that he cannot sin. Why not? Because the incorruptible seed of God’s Word, abiding in him, has produced a nature like the seed—incorruptible. The new man cannot be corrupted by sin.

This interpretation is confirmed by comparing three different passages in the writings of John. First John 3:9 says, “Whoever has been born of God does not sin.” John 3:6 says, “That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.” Finally, 1 John 5:4 says, “Whatever is born of God overcomes the world.” Putting these three Scriptures together, we have a *who*, a *that*, and a *what*. It is not an individual person that is spoken of, but the nature produced by rebirth in every believer. This new nature is incorruptible and undefeatable. It does not sin and it cannot sin.

Once I am born again, the course that my life takes depends upon which nature controls me—the new man or the old man. If I am defeated, it is because I am not meeting my problem with the new nature. The new nature

is undefeatable. An old lady who had conspicuous victory in her life was once asked how she overcame temptation. She replied, “When the devil knocks at the door, I just let Jesus answer.” This is the new man—Christ in me.

Satan can only touch the *old man*. God created man’s fleshly nature out of the dust, and when man sinned, God told the serpent that thenceforth he would feed on dust. The carnal nature is the legitimate prey of Satan, but he cannot touch the new nature. The new man cannot sin, cannot be corrupted, cannot be defeated, cannot be touched by Satan.

Let us turn back briefly to 1 John 5:18, “*We know that whoever is born of God does not sin; but he who has been born of God keeps himself, and the wicked one does not touch him.*” This places a responsibility upon each one of us who is born again. We are required to keep ourselves. How? Under the blood. And we do this by walking in the light, for 1 John 1:7 says, “*If we [continually] walk in the light...the blood of Jesus Christ [continually] cleanses us.*” Walking in the light, keeping ourselves under the blood, the new man lives in a realm where Satan cannot reach him. He is incorruptible, undefeatable, separated from all the power and contamination of evil by the blood of Christ.

The Altar

The fifth agent of sanctification is in one sense the practical key—the place of sanctification. In Matthew 23:16–17, Jesus rebukes the teaching of the scribes, “*Woe to you, blind guides, who say, ‘Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is obliged to perform it.’ Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that sanctifies the*

gold?’ Jesus is saying that the gold is not holy in itself; it is just metal. But when it is built into God’s temple it becomes holy. The temple makes it holy.

In verses 18 and 19 He continues, “*And, ‘Whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is on it, he is obliged to perform it.’ Fools and blind! For which is greater, the gift or the altar that sanctifies the gift?’* The gift does not sanctify the altar, but the altar sanctifies the gift that is placed upon it.

In the Old Testament, until the sacrifice was placed on the altar it was just the body of a beast. But when it was placed on the altar and bound to it, it became holy, set apart to God. This is just as true for the New Testament believer. Paul says, “*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service*” (Romans 12:1). I believe the only difference between the Old Testament sacrifice and the New Testament sacrifice is that our bodies remain alive when we place them on the altar. But in each case the principle of sanctification is the same. It is the altar that sanctifies the gift placed upon it.

Notice how closely this act of surrendering our bodies to God goes along with the inner process of sanctification in our mind. In verse 2 Paul goes on, “*And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*” The inward change in our thoughts and motives cannot be achieved until we have renounced all rights over our own bodies and placed them without reservation upon God’s altar, to be used as God desires.

Let us briefly review the part each of

these five agents plays in our sanctification. *The Holy Spirit* draws us apart and brings us to the place of believing and obeying the Gospel. *The Word of God*, like pure water, washes our minds, changing our thoughts and attitudes, bringing them into conformity with God’s standards. *Our faith*, which comes through hearing God’s Word, enables us to appropriate God’s full provision for us. As we then continue to walk in obedience, *the blood of Jesus* keeps us in a place of separation to God, where sin and Satan cannot defile or defeat us. Finally, *the altar of service* sanctifies the living sacrifice of our bodies, as we place them unreservedly at God’s disposal.

With our minds thus renewed, we perceive and appropriate God’s perfect will for us—that we be a holy people, sanctified, set apart to God—partakers of His holiness.

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