

The Benefits of Salvation Series

Message: Definitive Sanctification, a Divine Act

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We usually think of sanctification as a process, and that is true. And yet the Scriptures often represent the believer as one who *has been* sanctified and as one who has been definitively constituted in some way holy. Look at Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Cor. 1:2; 1 Cor. 6.11; Eph. 5:26. We can note the perfect tense in the first three references above and the aorist tense in the last two references, as well as the numerous instances where Christians are called “saints” or “holy ones.” The believer is definitively constituted holy because of the declaring act of God.

So, just as God has declared those elect in Christ as justified, He also has declared them sanctified and has adopted them into the family of God. Because of Christ, true believers are defined as holy, blameless, and without reproach and then become what they have been declared to be in a progressive sanctification. It is a radical transformation.

Additional biblical evidence includes:

Romans 6:2, 6 – we died to sin...the old man was crucified with Him...

Romans 6:17-22 – “when you were slaves of sin...having been liberated from sin, we were enslaved to righteousness...when you were slaves of sin...but now, having been liberated from sin and having been enslaved to God...”

Romans 7:4-6 – “...you also were made to die to the law...for when we were in the flesh...but now we have been released from the law, having died to that by which we were bound...”

1 Peter 2:24 – “...that we, having died to sins, might live to righteousness.”

1 Peter 4:1, 2—“Therefore, since Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, because he who has suffered in the flesh [a reference to the believer who “suffered in the flesh” when Christ “suffered in the flesh”] is done with sin, with the result that no longer does he live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men but to the will of God.”

What it means. Through its language of death and of liberation from slavery, these passages depict a radical contrast between the believer’s pre-Christ existence and the life he lives as a Christian. It affirms that every Christian is definitively sanctified the moment he/she trusts in Christ (Acts 26:18—“those having been sanctified by faith which is in Me”). He died *to* sin, he has been liberated *from* sin. This reminds us of the exodus redemption in the OT by which the people of God were delivered from Egypt once and for all and completely. Accordingly, the Scriptures speak of every true

believer as a “saint” or “holy one” as in Ephesians 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col 1:2. In Greek this is ‘o ‘agios, (ha hagios) “holy one.”

This sustained contrast can only mean that for the Christian there exists a breach and a translation as really and decisively true in the sphere of moral and religious relationship as in the ordinary experience of death. Death puts an end to life as we knew it. So also this is a once-for-all definitive and irreversible breach with the realm in which sin reigns in and unto death. There is a decisive and definitive breach with the power and service of sin in the case of everyone who has come under the control of the provisions of grace. (cf John Murray, “Definitive Sanctification,” *Collected Writings*, 2, 279-280)

The power of sin is broken and the ground of this is the fact that a spiritual union exists between Christ and me. Romans 6. The believer died and rose with Christ to newness of life. The ground in justification is imputed righteousness and union with Jesus Christ.

The ground of the Christian’s breach with sin. Just as the ground of the Christian’s justification is Christ’s imputed obedience, which saving benefit every believer receives the moment he/she becomes a partaker of Christ through faith, so also the ground of the Christian’s definitive sanctification is his/her real spiritual union with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6:1-14; 2 Cor. 5:14, 15), into which saving union every believer is *actually* brought the moment he/she becomes a partaker of Christ through faith.

So...not only is the true believer accounted by God as righteous *vis a vis** Law, he/she is also constituted holy by God *vis a vis** the power and mastery of sin. It is not simply positional holiness that definitive sanctification envisions for the true believer. It is a real existential breach with the reign and mastery of sin that it envisions for him/her, which breach is constituted by his/her actual spiritual union with Christ in His death and resurrection, and which is as decisive and definite as are Christ’s death and resurrection.

John Murray: “So intimate is the union between Christ and his people, that they were partakers with him in [his death and resurrection], and therefore died to sin, rose with Christ in the power of his resurrection, and have their fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life...the decisive and definitive breach with sin that occurs at the inception of Christian life is one necessitated by the fact that the death of Christ was decisive and definitive. It is just because we cannot allow for any reversal or repetition of Christ’s death on the tree that we cannot allow for any compromise on the doctrine that every believer has died to sin and no longer lives under its dominion. Sin no longer lords it over him. To equivocate here is to assail the definitiveness of Christ’s death. Likewise the decisive and definitive entrance upon newness of life in the case of every believer is required by the fact that the resurrection of Christ was decisive and definitive. As we cannot allow for any reversal or repetition of the resurrection, so we cannot allow for any compromise on the doctrine that every believer is a new man, that the old man has been crucified, that the body of sin has been destroyed, and that, as a new man in Christ Jesus, he serves God in the newness which is none other than that of the Holy Spirit of whom he has become the habitation and his body the temple.” (*Ibid.*, 2, 289, 293)

In justification relative to the Law, every obligation has been fully met in Christ. In definitive sanctification relative to sin, sin is broken by real spiritual union with Jesus

Christ. Just as we cannot reverse the cross or the resurrection, so also we cannot reverse the believer's breach with sin.

Summary. The doctrine of definitive sanctification does not mean that the Christian actually achieves, personally and existentially, sinless perfection the moment he/she trusts Christ. There is a progressive sanctification in the believer's life. Entire sanctification awaits the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thess. 5:23). The Christian who says he/she has no sin is deceiving himself and the truth is not in him/her (1 John 1:8). What is being advocated here is that every true believer, the moment he/she becomes a Christian, by virtue of his/her union with Christ is instantly constituted a "saint" and enters into a new relationship with respect to the former reign of sin in his/her life and with God Himself. In this new relationship he/she ceases to be a slave to sin and becomes a servant of Christ and of God. The Christian is to take this breach with sin, constituted by his/her union with Christ, as seriously as God does and stop "presenting the members of his body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness" and start "presenting himself to God as one alive from the dead, and his members as instruments [or servants] of righteousness to God" (Romans 6:13, 19).

We cannot go back to where we were before being born again, or born out of God. We must go forward in Christ. We're talking about a whole new beginning; a whole new life. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. Amen.

Constitute – to make up, form, compose; to be or to be considered as something; to create and charge with a task or function; to set the groundwork/to establish. Example - **To constitute** is to make up a whole from smaller parts, or "constituents." "What **constitutes** a family?" means "What makes up a family?" Parents, kids, pets, and other family members **constitute** most people's idea of a family.

<https://www.vocabulary.com/dictionary/constitute>

Vis a vis – face to face with; in relation to; as compared with

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