

The Gospel According to Paul: Romans

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Sanctification in the Letters of Paul

The term “sanctification” is taken from the Hebrew word *qadosh* which means, “making holy.” There are two different meanings associated with this Hebrew word, the noun *qodesh* (holy), and the verb *qadosh* (to make holy, sanctify, hallow, dedicated as holy, or designate as holy). The oldest meaning of this Semitic word is that of “designating something as special, exceptional, beyond or above the ordinary, or extraordinary.” The second meaning is the resultant meaning of “separating or setting apart,” or “dedicating something.” These two ideas are combined in Scripture so that the idea of *qadosh* is that of designating something as special and setting it apart from ordinary usage.

The oldest occurrence of this term *qadosh* is found in the Hebrew Scriptures. In Gen 2:3 we read, “And God blessed the seventh day and **made it holy**, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.” God marked the Sabbath day as holy – he designated it as special, and set it apart to be observed as special. In Exod 20: 8-11, the Sabbath Day is designated as special and it is set apart from the other days of the week to be observed in a special way.

Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

So, God “designated this day as a special day”, and he “ set the day apart” to be observed as a day which had been blessed and made holy (*qadosh*). Throughout the OT we find God designating things as holy: At the burning bush God told Moses that the ground on which he stood was holy because he was in the presence of God (Ex 15:11). The temple in Jerusalem was called holy because God told Israel he would make his presence there (1 K 8:10-11). Israel, as a people, was called holy because God had chosen them, had made his name to dwell in their midst, and had made them a people of his own possession (Num 19:4; Deut 7:6). And he told them that they were to be holy as he was holy (Lev 19:2).

What is this “holiness” all about? The idea of holiness is rooted in God himself. He is a being who is holy and he is a being who is good. He is called “The Holy One of Israel” (Isa 1:4; 5:19, 24; 19:17, 20; 40:25; 41:14, 16, 20; 43:3, 14-15; Psalms 71:22; 78:41; 89:18). In fact, the very presence of God in this world was most usually identified with the presence of his Holiness, his Holy Spirit (Psalms 33:6; Ezek 37:1-10).

God as a Holy Being makes that which comes into contact with him holy; i.e., special or beyond the ordinary, and set apart from that which is ordinary. And this is the background behind Paul’s concept of sanctification, or being made holy. That which is holy is special, above or beyond the ordinary, extraordinary or exceptional in terms of that which is ordinary. And that which is holy has, because it is special or extraordinary, has been set apart from that which is ordinary.

These meanings associated with the Hebrew words *qadosh* and *qodesh* are merged with the Greek words *hagios* and *hagiazō* in the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, called the Septuagint (LXX), and later in the New Testament. *Hagios* means “that which is separate from common use” but with the additional idea of “that which is pure or undefiled, free from defilement contamination.” So, the resultant meaning of holiness, as used by Paul, is that of something designated as special or beyond the ordinary, with the idea of something separated or set apart from that which is ordinary, with the additional Greek meaning of that which is set apart, not only because it is extraordinary, but because it is pure or free of contamination. This is the New Testament concept of holiness or sanctification.

This is seen in the writings of Paul more than all the other New

Testament writings put together. In Paul's thinking, God is the Holy One of Israel, who has entered into human history to redeem the human race. His work of deliverance is called "redemption," which has been effected by the creation of a new existence for those who are condemned by making it possible for them to die to their old existence "in Adam" (an existence characterized by enslavement to the power of sin) and enter into a new existence "in Christ" (an existence characterized by the holiness of God). By means of this work of redemption, those who, through belief that this transformation from one existence to another can happen, are declared "justified" (i.e., declared not guilty) from his sin "in Adam," and are "sanctified" by God's Spirit (i.e., they are declared holy or holy ones).

This means they are declared special or beyond that which is ordinary, and they are set apart as special because they are made holy by their association with or relationship with God – who has willed that they be holy as he is holy. This state of holiness is "declared" by God at conversion to existence in Christ, and it is a state of moral purity one strives to maintain and enhance while remaining to exist as a being of the flesh while here on earth.

The flesh (the means by which Satan and his powers access the will of man) is constantly in tension or conflict with the spirit of man (whose will is to be one with God). Man was created in the image of God, after his likeness. God is holy and wills that man be holy as his Creator is holy. Man's existence here in this world is to journey through this world (as a vale of soul making) to fit himself for eternity by restoring himself to his original state of being – a being created in the image of God.

The Theme of Sanctification Is Found Throughout the Letters of Paul

This is what Paul's doctrine of sanctification is all about, and this can be seen throughout his New Testament letters.

In 2 Cor. 5:17 Paul tells Christians at Corinth,

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! ¹⁸All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation (Old things have passed away; all things are new).

Salvation for the believer is being new life “in Christ, so in sanctification the same believer is freed from the sordidness and stain of sin, and the purity of God's image is restored to him. Sanctification is the change in man from the sordidness of sin to the purity of God's image,

*You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴and to put on the new self, **created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness** [Man is separated from the ordinary, made extraordinary in terms of his moral character], (Eph 4:22-24).*

In 2 Cor 7:1, Paul says,

*Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, **perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.***

A similar idea is in 1 Thess 5:23,

*May God himself, the God of peace, **sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ***

In Eph 1:3-4, he says,

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. ⁴**For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.***

In Col 1:21-22, we read,

*Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. ²²But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to **present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.***

In 2 Thess 2:13-14, Paul says,

*But we ought always to thank God for you, brothers loved by the Lord, because from the **beginning God chose you** (i.e., you who are “in Christ) **to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.** ¹⁴He called you to this through our gospel, that you might share in the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

And in Titus 3:4-7,

*But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, ⁵he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us **through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,** ⁶**whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior,** ⁷so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

Paul says in Rom 15:15-16,

*I have written you quite boldly on some points, as if to remind you of them again, because of the grace God gave me ¹⁶to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles with the priestly duty of proclaiming the gospel of God, so that the Gentiles might become an offering acceptable to God, **sanctified by the Holy Spirit.***

In Rom 6:19-23, he says,

*I put this in human terms because you are weak in the flesh. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery (service) to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, **so now offer them in slavery (service) to righteousness leading to holiness.** ²⁰When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. ²¹What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death! ²²But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in 1 Christ Jesus our Lord.*

In Eph 2:21-22, we read,

*In him the whole building is joined together and **rises to become a***

holy temple in the Lord. ²²*And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.*

In Rom 12:1-2, Paul writes,

*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.² 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.*

In Eph 5:3-5, he says,

*But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because **these are improper for God's holy people.***

And in Eph 5:26-27,

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her ²⁶**to make her holy**, having cleansed her by the washing with water through the word, ²⁷and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, **but holy and blameless.***

Then in Col 1:12-13,

*Therefore, as **God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved**, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

He opens his first letter to the Corinthians (1 Cor 1:2),

*To the church of God in Corinth, **to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy**, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ--their Lord and ours:*

To Timothy he says (2 Tim 1:8-10),

*So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, ⁹who has saved us and **called us to a holy life**--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, ¹⁰but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*

In 1 Thess 4:7, he writes,

*For God did not call us to be impure, but **to live a holy life**.⁸Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you his Holy Spirit.*

Conclusion

In Paul's thinking, God, the Holy One of Israel, has entered into human history to redeem the human race. Paul calls this work of deliverance, salvation, redemption, or reconciliation, which has been effected by the creation of a new existence for those who are condemned, making it possible for them to die to their old existence "in Adam" (an existence characterized by enslavement to the power of sin) and enter into a new existence "in Christ" (an existence characterized by the power of God's grace).

By means of this work of redemption, those who have experienced "regeneration" or "new creation" have been declared *hagios* (holy) and are called, *hoi hagioi*, "the saints" or "the holy ones." This means they are declared special, above or beyond that which is ordinary, and they are set apart as special or extraordinary because they are made holy by their association with or relationship with God, who has willed that they be holy as he is holy. This state of holiness is "declared" by God at conversion, as a new state of existence for those who are "in Christ." It is a state of moral purity one is given as a gift, but the one, now made holy through new creation, must assume the responsibility of keeping themselves holy while remaining to exist as beings of flesh.

The flesh (the means by which Satan and his powers access the will of man) is constantly in tension or conflict with the spirit of man (whose will is to be one with God in holiness). Man was created in the image of God, after his likeness. God is holy and wills that man be holy as his Creator is holy. Man's existence here in this world is to journey through this world as a vale of soul making to fit himself for eternity by restoring himself to his original state of being – existence as a being created in the image of God.

Fallen man, under the curse of death passed upon Adam, is estranged from his God. Paul is telling us that the divine reversal of the fall of man has begun. New creation has occurred. A second Adam has appeared and the final chapter of the history of man has been rewritten by the one who came into the world as, “the holy one” who was to be called “holy” (Luke 1:35), the one those of the demonic world recognized as, “the Holy One of God,” (Luke 4:3), and who was confessed by his apostles to be “the Holy One of God” (John 6:69). We are to be holy as God is holy, and the Holy One who has come into the world has shown us how to be holy, as beings created in the image of God, the one from whom all holiness derives.

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