

Sanctified by the Spirit
I Peter 1:2

Once again I invite you to take your Bible and open to I Peter 1 where we will continue to look at verse 2. Peter is writing to a group of Christians in Asia Minor or what we now know as modern day Turkey who were and would continue to experience persecution for their faith. Peter wanting to encourage them writes to remind them of how very special they are to God because they were chosen by Him and through the letter reminds them that this is just a temporary residence. This world was not their final home. Verse 2 describes that special relationship by noting how each believer has come into this wonderful relationship with God. First, they were “chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father”. Second, they were chosen “through the sanctifying work of the Spirit” and third, they were chosen “for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling of His blood.”

Each person of the Trinity – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit – has a unique role in the salvation of an individual.

John Phillips writes in his commentary on I Peter that the Father THOUGHT it, the Spirit WROUGHT it, and the Son BOUGHT it.

The Father in His love pardons the sinner, but because of His holiness He must also punish the sinner.

The Spirit opens our eyes to our lost condition and to see God’s love in the sacrifice of His Son.

The Son paid the debt of our sin by His own sacrifice on the cross, dying the death we deserve in order to give us the life we don’t deserve.

They could not act separate from one another in securing for you and me the salvation offered grace through faith. Last week we dealt with the work of God through election and what that means and I must apologize because as I talked with Robyn after the message, she said I talked way too fast. In hind

sight I should have taken three messages to deal with that topic at length.

Today’s topic is just as important. Let’s look again at that next phrase in verse 2. “through the sanctifying work of the Spirit.”

My aim is to talk about the work of the Holy Spirit at salvation and then talk about the work of the Holy Spirit after salvation. While there are many things the Holy Spirit does – indwelling, infilling, sealing, comforting, teaching, etc. – today I am focusing on His work in sanctifying us.

I. THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AT SALVATION

Now I want to be clear that in the context of the passage Peter is talking about the role of the Holy Spirit at the time of salvation. In theology there are two terms that are often used. One refers to His work in the believer at salvation and the other is used in His work in the believer after salvation. We’ll touch on both those terms today.

The first term is called *positional sanctification*. But before we take a look at what that means, we need to understand this word sanctification.

It is the Greek word *hagiasmos* – (αγιασμοω) and comes from the root word *hagias* – (αγιασ). It literally means to be separated or set apart and in a spiritual sense it is to be separated or set apart to God. Depending on the context it can either be translated sanctify, saint, or sanctification as it is used here or it can be translated holy or holiness.

Unger’s Bible Dictionary defines holiness as “a general term to indicate sanctity, or separation from all that is sinful, or impure, or morally imperfect; moral wholeness.”

Its use in the Old Testament is primarily used to speak of the nature of God that He is a God who is

sinless, perfect, holy. The antithesis of this word is profane, blasphemous, wicked.

God is holy in every way because His very nature is holy. He is entirely pure in all His character both in His actions and in His attitudes. Everything He does is motivated by His holiness.

A.W. Tozer adds that God is not holier than He was or than He ever will be. His holiness is unchanging and it is absolute. So when we think of holiness as it is related to God we mean that He is completely separated from sin. He is sinless or absolutely perfect. He has never had an impure thought or committed an impure act and He never will. He is unchanging in His moral character.

But the word is also used to speak of things or people that are considered holy.

It's used of the ground Moses stood on before the burning bush or the items that were incorporated into the worship of God in the Tabernacle and then later the Temple. Israel is described as a holy nation, set apart by God for God. Sacrifices made to the Lord were considered holy because they were set apart specifically for Him.

But we have taken a beautiful word and turned it into something common. When we think of God as holy there is to be reverence and awe because of who He is, awe that should lead us to respond like Isaiah and fall down in worship or to respond by saying because of our sinfulness we are unworthy to be in His presence. Or to be like Peter who tells the Lord to leave because he recognizes he is sinful and the Lord is holy. But we have dumbed it down and removed the awe factor by associating it with words like holy cow or holy mackerel. While the Hindus may consider a cow to be holy and we use the term as an expression of surprise or disbelief there isn't anything holy about it. And the last time I checked, I don't remember that fish were holy, but we have come to use the term rather glibly. And if you are a fan of the old TV Batman series from the '60's Robin's catch phrase always referred to something

as holy.

John Piper says we have ruined one of the highest and most valuable words in the Bible. We have profaned the very word itself by a lackadaisical, haphazard, even flippant use.

We need to recapture the word and use it in the context for which it is meant. We need to reclaim the word and once again make it descriptive of who we are as the people of God and of who God is - holy.

Now in our verse we see that the Holy Spirit sanctifies the believer and so let's come back to that idea of *positional sanctification*. That term basically means that at the moment of salvation the Holy Spirit makes the new believer holy and this happens instantaneously at the moment we believe. There is no waiting period, no progressive process, no additional steps required to get there. You are instantly transferred from the kingdom of darkness and Satan to the kingdom of light and God.

Some people believe that the process of salvation takes place over a period of time. They use Paul's letter to the Corinthians when he writes that some plant the seed of the gospel and others come along and water it. From our perspective it may appear that it takes time, even any number of steps, but from the perspective of God salvation occurs instantly the moment you believe and His Spirit makes you holy, separated to God. You are positionally now a part of God's family. He has adopted you into His family from that moment on and according to Romans 8 nothing will be able to separate you from Him.

I started learning how to play basketball in 6th grade. We had a few practices and then played a short game at half time of a varsity game. When I got to 7th grade I went out for the basketball team. I was given a uniform and positionally I was a member of the team. Granted at that age I think if

you tied your shoes and got your jersey on right you were part of the team. I must honestly say I wasn't very good. If I got into the game it was usually with less than a minute to go in the 4th quarter. Regardless of the fact that I wasn't very good, I was still on the team. I didn't have to improve my skills to be on the team, but improving my skills would get more playing time.

Some people teach and others believe that in order for you to get saved you have to clean things up first in your life then God will accept you. That couldn't be farther from the truth.

The thief who hung next to Christ had no opportunity to make amends for his crimes and yet Christ assured him he would be in heaven that day. Salvation came to the home of Zacchaeus not because he gave back what he had stolen in taxes, but because he believed first.

When you place faith in Christ you are declared holy by God through Christ's atoning sacrifice on the cross. II Corinthians 5:17 declares it so. "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation, old things have passed away, behold all things have become new."

In his commentary on I Peter Albert Barnes writes that we become the chosen of God by the work of the Spirit on our hearts making us holy. He renews us in the divine image. Even though we are chosen by the Father it is still necessary that our heart be renewed and made holy by the Spirit. He makes us holy by applying the righteousness of Christ to our lives so that we can stand before God.

Romans 15:15-16

Warren Wiersbe adds "As far as God the Father is concerned, I was saved when He chose me in Christ before the foundation of the world. As far as the Son is concerned, I was saved when He died for me on the cross. But as far as the Spirit is concerned, I was saved...when I heard the gospel and received Christ. Then it all came together, but it took all

three persons of the Godhead to bring me to salvation. If we separate the ministries, we will either deny divine sovereignty or human responsibility, and that would lead to heresy." Through the preaching of the gospel, the Spirit convicts me of my sin. Through the faith of the individual, the Spirit then converts the person freeing the person from bondage to sin and making him or her a new creation.

Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest states that "the Holy Spirit sets the sinner apart from his unbelief to the act of faith in the Lord Jesus."

In John 16:7-11 we read that the work of the Holy Spirit begins with conviction. He shows us that we have fallen short of God's standard of holiness and that we need a Savior.

In John 3:3-8 the work of the Holy Spirit is to regenerate. We see that used in Titus 3:5 where God saves us not based on anything we do or who we are or what we have, but by His grace through the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, who renews us.

The word regeneration is a compound word in the Greek – palingenesia - παλιγγενεσις
 palin – once more
 genasias – creation, birth

The root word is genesis. So putting the two words together the word literally means new genesis or new birth. Sometimes it is used when speaking of those who were raised back to life from the dead, a return to existence, like the raising of Lazarus. But in Titus 3:5 it means a renewal to a higher existence and embraces both the idea of new life (II Corinthians 5:17) and moral renewal. It's the idea Jesus used with Nicodemus when they discussed what it meant to be born again. Regeneration comes from the power of the Holy Spirit and makes us a new creation.

Now, you may say there are days when you don't feel very holy and you would be right. But bear this

in mind - God sees you as holy even on the days I may not feel or act very holy. When Paul writes to the Corinthians he refers to them in 1:2 as saints or the sanctified but later on he talks about some of their actions and attitudes that weren't very saintly. They were divisive, selfish, sinful, exploiting certain spiritual gifts. But they were still saints in God's mind. Did that mean they didn't need to change?

When you trust Christ through faith you are positionally sanctified by the work of the Holy Spirit. This is His work at salvation.

II. THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AFTER SALVATION

It's what in theology we call *progressive sanctification* and that is where we now turn our attention. If we are considered holy by God because of the work of the Holy Spirit at salvation why do I continue to do things that aren't very holy?

We are a work in progress. Philippians 1:6 "Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ."

The more we understand that we are holy positionally, the greater our desire to be holy in practice. Let me say it this way: what God began at salvation to transform you into His character, He will continue to do each day until either we die or Christ returns for us. In either case we will be in practice what we are in position.

In short: God isn't finished with us yet. Somebody say Amen.

If through the work of the Holy Spirit at salvation we recognize He convicts and converts the person so that God sees us as holy through the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, it is through

the work of the Holy Spirit after salvation that He challenges and changes us each day to become in practice what we are in position.

Let me go back to 7th grade basketball. As I told you when I became part of the team I wasn't very good. But over the course of the next year, I grew a bit and improved my skills to the point where I started on the 8th grade team and then started on the 9th grade team and then the JV team. My skills got better because I understood the game better and what was expected. I was progressing.

The work of the Holy Spirit to help me become more holy in practice is a choice I make. As I read God's Word He points things out that need to change because they don't fit the lifestyle of someone who is holy on the inside. If I want to lose weight, it's a choice to pick up that donut and eat it or pass it by. If I want to grow in my faith it is my choice whether to obey the Spirit teaching me.

One of the classics Charles Dickens wrote was *Oliver Twist*. While a fictional story, it addressed the plight of London's poor and orphans during the 19th century. It's a story about a boy who lived in poverty starting his life out in a workhouse. He was sold to an undertaker as an apprentice, but ran away to London. He had no money or place to stay until he ran into Artful Dodger who ran a gang of pickpockets led by an elderly criminal named Fagin.

Through a set of circumstances Oliver came to live with a Mr. Brownlow who treated him kindly and gave him a wonderful place in which to live. It's a drastic change from what he was used to. The old gang caught up with him and forced him to return to the old ways. To make a long story short Oliver ended up back with Mr. Brownlow and discovered that the woman who had been taking care of him was none other than his aunt. All's well that ends well.

I tell you that story to hopefully illustrate what has

happened at salvation when the Holy Spirit takes us from our old kingdom and makes us a resident of God's kingdom. Until we arrive at His kingdom we are faced with any number of temptations that lure us back to the old ways. But the power of the Holy Spirit helps us to resist those temptations and every day makes us more like God in character. And while I Peter 1:15-16 issues a command to be holy because God is holy, we have a choice to obey.

I John 3:2-3 tells us that when Christ appears we are going to be like Him, but until that time we are to pursue holiness and we do that through the work and help of the Holy Spirit.

And we are going to see next week that the goal to all this is obedience to Christ who died for us.

As we listen to the Spirit teaching and guiding us to make changes in our character each day we become more holy. When I played basketball in 12th grade I was nothing like the player I was in 7th grade. If I had said on the second day of practice in 7th grade that I wasn't any good so I might as well hang up my sneakers and turn in my jersey I would have never seen the potential of what I became in 12th grade. And that's what can happen each day we allow God's Spirit to change us. Now, I'm still a work in progress, but I can see a difference today that wasn't evident the day after I trusted Christ. Some people might say that it's no use, I'll never change. Don't let that discourage you. Keep in step with God's Spirit and over time you will see change. Don't give up. As I like to say from I John 3:2-3 *"I'm not what I was and neither am I yet what I'm going to be."*

Sometimes there is an instantaneous outward and very evident change, but sometimes there is not. I trusted Christ as my Savior at the age of 8. Now there are exceptions to this, but how much sin could an 8 year old who grew up cutting his teeth on the nursery cribs at church get into? I wasn't a drug pusher or murderer. I didn't swear or steal. Okay, there were times I disobeyed and got what I

deserved, but for the most part I tried to be good and follow the Bible as much as an 8 year old could understand. But the more I know, the more I know I need to change. The greater the understanding of God's holiness, the more I see I need to change.

But there are those who get saved a little later in life and they have gone out and sown their wild oats and painted the town red and developed quite a reputation and they get saved and there is a dramatic change. I met a guy who was part of a motorcycle gang and did stuff normally associated with motorcycle gangs. He had long hair and a temper, but he said he never drank or used drugs, part of that culture, because he always wanted to be in control. One day he heard the gospel and was convicted by the Holy Spirit and he was saved. Right away he left the motorcycle gang went out and got cleaned up – shaved and had his hair cut. He returned a couple years later to that town and met one of the policemen with whom he had previous run ins with and asked the officer if he knew him. The officer said he didn't and my friend took out his wallet and showed him an old picture of the way he used to look. He became a Deacon and Sunday school teacher in his church. It was a dramatic transformation. Your story may be similar.

Now I'm not suggesting that if you get saved you should go out and get a haircut and put on a suit. But for him, the radical inner change by the Holy Spirit, led to a radical outer change in lifestyle and character. He wanted people to see that Christ had made a difference in his life.

But let's recognize that this change in character is nothing we can do on our own. It is by the indwelling and empowering Holy Spirit who makes that change in character possible. Each day as we allow the Holy Spirit to work in us He helps us become more like Christ in our character and according to I John 3:3 it will be complete when we see Christ. We refer to it as glorification. When we stand in the presence of God we will become in

practice what we already are in position. When we are finally in God's presence we will never sin again and the Holy Spirit's work in us is complete.

Now there are those who might say that if I'm going to be made perfect when I see Christ, why try now. Others conclude that it's just too hard; I keep failing, so what's the point of trying?

I think the simple answer is that we are commanded to become holy. We are commanded to put off characteristics of the old nature and put on those that are part of the new, Christ-like nature. We read about them in places like Colossians 3:1-17 where it describes traits that a Christian should practice and those a Christian should not. It's a good measuring rod to determine if progress is still needed in certain areas.

There is a clear distinction in character between what I was and what I should be. I look at my past and see how far I have come, but I look ahead at the character of Christ and see how much farther I have yet to go. But that shouldn't stymie my efforts. I shouldn't look like a deer in head lights as if I'm immobilized and don't know what to do or where to go so I just stand there in my tracks unable to move. Christ has given me His pattern to follow and He has given me His Spirit to help bring me to that place with the realization that when I see Him He will make me completely like Him in character.

When I was playing basketball in High school I knew no matter how much I practiced I didn't have the skills to become a pro, but that didn't stop me from going out and trying to do my very best. It's the same in the Christian life. Keep at it.

During my senior year running cross country, the coach would tell us to go out and run 4 miles. I chose to run home which was 6 miles. Now this never happened, but let's say I started out and since no one was watching, I decided to walk the rest of the way after only running a mile. It would take me

a long time to walk the other 5 miles. So the further I ran meant a shorter distance I had to walk.

One of my favorite characters in the Bible is from the Old Testament. His name is Enoch. The Bible says he lived to be 365 years old. Now that's quite old, but not compared to the rest of those in the time he lived. The average age was well over 900 years old compared to our lifespan. The Bible says he became the father of Methuselah who lived to be 969 years old. In comparison we might say that Enoch really lived short of his potential. But here's why I like Enoch. The Bible says in Genesis 5 that he walked with God and then one day he was no more because God took him. My Bible professor in college used to say that every day God and Enoch would go for a walk and each day they walked a little further than the previous day. Then one day they had walked so far that God told Enoch they might as well keep going to His home rather than return to Enoch's.

He serves as a great example of someone who grew each day in the character of God. But let's keep one very important point in mind, the operation of sanctification, can only be accomplished by a holy person and in this case the Holy Spirit. We can't do it in our own will power.

Paul makes it clear in Romans 6 that at salvation we died to sin and so are no longer its slaves so that we continue in it. Our desires change and if we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit we won't be led to follow the sinful desires or cravings of the old nature.

Positional sanctification happens immediately upon our faith in Christ.

Progressive or practical sanctification happens over the course of our life where we gradually and steadily grow or mature in character to be like that of Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit. II Corinthians 3:18 "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being

transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”

On the one hand we recognize that it is the Holy Spirit who does this remarkable transformation in us over time. We trust Him to make the changes. He does the work. We can call this passive sanctification. But on the other hand there is an active role we take in sanctification as well.

I Thessalonians 4:1-4

There is an expectation that we have a role in the practice of being sanctified. Actively we are to put to death the old nature and strive for holiness, flee immorality, and cleanse ourselves from what contaminates us.

If we emphasize only the work of the Holy Spirit we can become lazy and neglect any spiritual discipline like prayer or reading our Bible regularly. This leads to a lack of Christian maturity.

If we emphasize only our efforts in the process it can lead to legalism, pride and self-righteousness. The end result is that the Christian life becomes depressing and hard to live up to.

When we follow the lead of the Holy Spirit who empowers us to pursue personal holiness we grow in character that reflects God's holy nature. Thankfully God continues to work in us to complete what He started the day we trusted Christ as Savior.

How do we pursue personal holiness?

Through God's Word

John 17:17 “Sanctify them with Your truth, Your Word is truth.”

Psalms 119:9, 11

Colossians 3:16 “Let the word of Christ dwell richly in you.”

Through God's Spirit

Galatians 5:16 “So I say, live (walk) by the Spirit,

and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature.”

Galatians 5:25 “Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.”

Through remembering the price that was paid for you

I Corinthians 6:19-20 “Do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought with a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”

Through the armor of God

Ephesians 6:10-11 “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes.”

With the work of the Holy Spirit in us we become in practice what He has already made us in position.

“We were chosen by the foreknowledge of God the Father, through the sanctifying work of the Spirit, for obedience to Jesus Christ and sprinkling by His blood.”

God sees you as holy in position by the work of His Holy Spirit at the moment of salvation, will you let the Holy Spirit continue to help you become in practice what you are in position? His work didn't end when you were saved it continues until the day you see Christ.