Roan Mountain Baptist Church

"Is Every Christian a Saint?"

By Russell McKinney
Mitchell County

Christianity offers a whole list of strange words that all end with the letters "t-i-o-n." We have: "justification," "regeneration," "glorification," "propitiation," "imputation," "predestination," and "transfiguration." One little boy, whose parents made him go to church every Sunday, got into trouble at his local school for turning in his math assignment late. The teacher asked him, "Son, do you know what procrastination means?" The boy replied, "No, but I'm sure the people at my church are for it."

Another word we can add to Christianity's list is "sanctification." And what does this word mean? Well, since "sanctify" means "to be set apart for service to God," "sanctification" can be defined as "the state of having been set apart for service to God."

The first time the Bible uses the idea of sanctification is in reference to the Sabbath day of the creation week (Genesis 2:3). That day was specially set apart for service to God. However, the Old Testament era featured all kinds of things that were classified as "sanctified." That list included: the people of the nation of Israel (Exodus 19:14), the Jewish Tabernacle (Exodus 29:43), the various items of service that were used by the priests at the Tabernacle (Leviticus 8:10), the Jewish temple (2 Chronicles 7:16), and the various items of service that were used by the priests at the temple (2 Chronicles 29:17-19).

I'm mentioning all of this because the word "saint" is simply a shortened version of the term "sanctified one." Therefore, to be a "saint" is to be a "sanctified one," one set apart for service to God. And so, consequently, the answer to the question, "Is every Christian a saint?" is a resounding, "YES."

As evidence of this, the apostle Paul addresses his letter to the Christians in Rome by saying, "*To all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints*" (Romans 1:7). Likewise, he addresses his letter to the Christians in Philippi by saying, "*To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons*" (Philippians 1:1). Also, he addresses his letter to the Christians of Ephesus by saying, "*To the saints in Ephesus, and faithful in Christ Jesus*" (Ephesians 1:1).

Now, obviously, a Christian being a saint doesn't mean that he will always behave in a saintly manner. In other words, saints are still sinners. They are saved sinners, but they are sinners, nonetheless. But what being a saint does mean is that the Christian lives his life in a constant state of having been set apart from the rest of the world for service to God. Some Christians do a good job of operating in that state, while other Christians do a poor job of it. Whatever the case may be, though, no Christian ever loses the status of being sanctified.

Actually, the Christian's sanctification has no less than three aspects to it. First, it has a past aspect. You see, in one sense, the Christian's sanctification is a done deal because it's something that got accomplished the moment the Christian believed in Jesus as Savior. At that moment of saving belief, the Christian was set apart from the rest of the world for service to God. The passages on this are 1 Corinthians 1:1-2, 1 Corinthians 6:11, and Hebrews 10:14. In these passages, Paul explains that Christians either "are" or "were" sanctified. We can rightly call this the Christian's positional sanctification.

Second, the Christian's sanctification has a present aspect to it. In 2 Timothy 2:21, Paul says, "*Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter (referring to the "vessels of dishonor" he mentions in the previous verse), he will be a vessel of honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work*" (N.K.J.V.). Notice Paul's use of the word "if" at the beginning of that verse. That word implies that, in another sense, the Christian's sanctification is not a done deal but is, instead, an ongoing process.

Paul gives us this same kind of thought in 1 Thessalonians 4:3-4 when he says, *"For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you should abstain from sexual immorality; that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor"* (N.K.J.V.). Here again, he is telling us that the Christian's sanctification is in one way contingent upon behavior. As Paul describes it, the Christian will be sanctified if that Christian abstains from sexual immorality and possesses his own vessel (body) in sanctification. This is the ongoing, present aspect of sanctification. We can rightly call this the Christian's practical sanctification.

Third, the Christian's sanctification has a future aspect to it. In Ephesians 5:27, Paul talks about a day when Jesus will present the church — which is made up of all the Christians who have ever lived — to Himself as a church that is glorious, holy, and without blemish. This will be the great wedding day between Jesus (the bridegroom) and the church (the bride). Paul talks about this same day in 1 Thessalonians 3:13, where he says that the hearts of Christians will be established blameless in holiness at the coming of Jesus. John speaks of this day as well when he says in 1 John 3:2 that when Jesus is revealed, we Christians will be like Him.

And what is this great day of the wedding between Jesus and the church? When is this time when Jesus will come and the hearts of Christians will be established in perfect holiness? What do we call this moment when Jesus will be revealed and we Christians will become like Him? The answer to each of these questions is one and the same: the Rapture (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, 1 Corinthians 15:35-58, and John 14:1-4). The Rapture is that moment in history when the body of every Christian who has ever lived — dead or alive — will be transformed into a glorified body that is suitable for spending eternity with Jesus. The Rapture, then, is the future moment when the Christian's sanctification will be eternally finished, completed, and realized. We can rightly call this the Christian's prophetic sanctification.

So, in conclusion, a summary of the Christian's process of sanctification would read as follows. First, the moment the Christian believed in Jesus as Savior, that Christian was saved from the PENALTY of sin by experiencing POSITIONAL sanctification. Second, at that same moment of saving belief, God the Holy Spirit came to indwell that Christian and the Holy Spirit's spiritual energizing and influence allow the Christian to be saved from the POWER of sin by experiencing PRACTICAL sanctification. And then, finally, at the moment of the Rapture, the Christian's body will be transformed into an eternal, glorified body that is free from the Adamic, sinful nature. This, then, is when the Christian will, at last, be saved from even the POSSIBILITY of sin by experiencing PROPHETIC sanctification.

Russell Mckinney lives in the English Woods area of Spruce Pine and serves as the pastor of Roan Mountain Baptist Church in Bakersville

---