



CHRISTIAN EDUCATION: LESSON 178

Sanctification – The English verb sanctify is derived from the Latin verb “sanctificare,” which is a compound word, derived from the noun “sanctus” meaning holy, and the verb “facere” meaning to make or do. Thus, to sanctify literally means to make holy. In the Old Testament the Hebrew noun for holy or holiness is “khodesh,” from which we get “ghodos” or “moghadas” in Arabic and Persian (e.g. ruh-olghodos, ketabe moghadas). The Hebrew verb for sanctify or hallow is “khadesh.” In the New Testament the Greek noun for holiness is “hagiasmos,” and the verb for sanctify or hallow is “hagiazo.”

Most people commonly think of the word holy in terms of moral qualities or characteristics, such as to be pure, good, righteous, or perfect. Thus sanctification is primarily thought of as moral renewal. Though this is a facet of holiness, it does not express the primary meaning of holy in the Bible.

Separation – The word holy fundamentally expresses the idea of separation or otherness. We see this first and foremost with respect to God. When the Bible speaks of God as being holy it primarily speaks of His “otherness” or “separateness” from everything else. He is divine and thus absolutely distinct from His creation. He is above and beyond all creation. He is exalted, lofty and majestic. This refers to God’s transcendence (Exodus 15:11; Isaiah 6:1-5; Luke 5:1-8). The first and natural reaction of sinful man before the holy and majestic God is fear and trembling (Psalm 89:6-7; Isaiah 8:13; Revelation 15:4).

Based on this, God sanctifies people and objects to Himself, in a special relation to Him. This means that they are separated or set aside from their ordinary purpose and use for special (extraordinary) purpose and use, and thus they are regarded as holy. In the book of Exodus we read of God sanctifying the garments of the priests, the tabernacle, the altar, Aaron and his sons, and all the furnishings and utensils in the tabernacle (Exodus 3:5; 28:2; 29:21; 40:9-10). Elsewhere we read of the Sabbath, the land of Canaan, the city of Jerusalem, the temple of God, the feasts of Israel, the Levites, the priests, and the prophets as being sanctified (khodesh) to the Lord. The angels of God are called the “holy ones” (Psalm 89:5, 7); even Old Testament believers are called “His saints” (Psalm 30:4; 34:9; Deuteronomy 7:6).

The inner composition and structure of these things were not changed into something else. The fabric of the garments, the soil of the ground, and the metal of the utensils were not changed into a heavenly material; nor were the people made inwardly holy. Rather, these people and objects were declared to be holy by God, and thus were set apart in a special relationship to Him, and for a sacred purpose.

In the New Testament the apostles and prophets are called holy (Ephesians 3:5), Jesus is referred to as the one whom the Father sanctified and sent (John 10:36), the New Jerusalem is called holy (Revelation 21:2, 10), and all believers are called saints (Acts 9:32; 26:10; Romans 15:25; 1 Corinthians 14:33; 2 Corinthians 1:1; 13:13; Ephesians 1:1; Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:2; Hebrews 13:24; 1 Peter 2:9).

Moral purity – The secondary meaning of holy is with respect to moral purity. Again, this first and foremost applies to God, His purity, righteousness, and impeccability (sinlessness). God’s nature is without any stain, spot or blemish, and all that He does is always pure and right. This refers to God’s absolute moral perfection, in character and in conduct (1 John 1:5; Habakkuk 1:13; Psalm 145:17).

With respect to man, sanctification is something which God progressively produces in us, cleansing us more and more from sin, enabling us to live righteous lives, and conforming us to the image of His Son. Those who have been set apart by God are now called to live holy lives before Him (Romans 6:19; 12:1; 1 Peter 1:14-16). Thus, when speaking of sanctification, the Bible speaks of being set apart in a special relationship to God, as well as the yielding of the inner qualities of holiness. Both are God’s will and purpose for His church (Romans 8:29; Ephesians 1:4; 5:25-27; Colossians 1:22; 1 Thessalonians 4:3).