

Peter's Epistles # 8

Results of our Election

(also available on-line at www.ICHTHYS.com)
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Revised Translation of 1st Peter 1:1-2:

Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who, though outcasts dispersed throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, were yet selected in the foreknowledge of God the Father, by means of the Holy Spirit's consecration, for the obedience in and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ. Grace and peace be multiplied unto you!

Review: We have seen that as Christians, we are "elect" or specially selected by God to be His children. Because Jesus Christ was willing to go to the cross and die for all mankind, the Father has given all people the opportunity to be so selected. We all have life and free will, so we all have the chance to express to God a willingness to know about Him. The basis for our selection (or *election*) is our decision to believe in Jesus Christ. In verse two, Peter outlines the different roles played by each member of the Trinity in this process of selecting us to be part of God's family and God's plan.

1. The Father has *planned* our entrance into His family as Christians, even before the beginning of the universe. We have studied this concept as the doctrine of *foreknowledge* (Greek *prognosis*, "a knowing ahead of time") in previous lessons (Pet.#2 & 5). God is omniscient. That means that He knows all that ever was, is, or will be knowable. He knows both the real (the things that did, are, and will happen) and the potential (the things that might have been, had different decisions been made or different actions taken). He "foreknew" us before He made the world (Rom.8:29). This means that God the Father knew that we would come to believe in His Son, Jesus Christ, long before we were even born, and structured His plan and our lives to give us the opportunity to do so. When we do actually come to believe in Jesus Christ, we are "officially" entered into God's family, but the Father had known about this and had planned it all along. Peter reflects this truth when he says that we are "selected in the foreknowledge of God the Father".

2. The Son *paid for* our selection, thus carrying out the central work of the Father's plan. He did this by redeeming us, that is, buying us out of slavery to sin through the precious price of His death for us on the cross. Because of His work on the cross for us, we are freed from any impediments that would prevent our entrance into the family of God (we will have occasion to study the doctrine *redemption* in detail at a later date).

3. The Holy Spirit is the agent who *empowers* the Father's plan in time. In that plan, God has "elected" all followers of His Son from before the foundation of the world (Rom.8:28-30; cf. Gal.1:15). When we believe in Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit enters us into the family of God, and we enter fully into this "election" of God for which we have been set apart from birth, sealing the initial process of "sanctification" or consecration whereby, as partakers of Christ, we are now all not only under the Spirit's protection, but all possess the Spirit's indwelling presence.

If the theological terminology employed here sounds a bit difficult, the concept itself surely is not. God the Father *knew* that we would believe in Christ, and so made all the arrangements necessary for us to do so. *When* we do believe in Christ, our status changes completely, for it is at the point of placing our lives in Christ's hands that we are *selected* to truly be sons of God.

Because of the failure of our original parents (Adam and Eve), all mankind is born into a state of alienation from God, for all are born sinful (Rom.7:7-25). The proof of this disagreeable status is twofold:

1. the propensity we all possess to *commit sin* (Rom.3:23; 1Kng.8:46).
2. the indisputable fact that we all eventually face *physical death*, the original penalty for sin (Gen.2:16-17).

However when we believe in Jesus Christ, the One who in our place paid the penalty for all sin, our status is completely changed, and we are "rescued out of the kingdom of darkness, and transferred into the kingdom of His beloved Son" (Col.1:13). This change in status (becoming a Christian) has many aspects, and is described in various ways in scripture:

- **Justification:** From a legal point of view, for example, we are said to be *justified* by our faith in Christ (Rom.3). This means that while we had previously been guilty as sinners before God, by faith in Jesus Christ, our sin and guilt are washed away.
- **Adoption:** Another way of explaining our new status as Christians is that we are now "sons" of God. Paul describes this process as an "adoption" by the Father of all those who believe in Christ: we are no longer slaves to the law of God which points out our sins so clearly, but beloved sons in Christ Jesus our Lord (Gal.3:21-4:7).
- **Sanctification:** Peter chooses to emphasize a different aspect of our "change of status": that of "consecration" or, as it is more commonly known, *sanctification*.

The Doctrine of Sanctification: One of the things that happens when we believe in Jesus Christ is that God, through the agency of the Holy Spirit, marks us off as being at the same time both different *from* the rest of the world, and special *to* Himself. The English word "sanctification" is based on two Latin words: *sanctus* (consecrated, holy, sacred) and *facio* (to make). Behind this

Latin-derived word is the Greek root *hag*. The Greek adjective *hagios* means "devoted to the gods, sacred, holy" (you may have heard of the famous basilica, the Hagia Sophia, now the "Blue Mosque"). The *hag* root is in turn related to the Greek verb *hazomai*, which means "to fear, to dread, to revere". In short, things described as *hag* in Greek were normally under some sort of religious ban, curse, or protection. *Hag*-things were thus under *divine protection*. Furthermore, *hag*-things were *different* from normal, secular things. They were set apart and separate from mundane things. Both of these ideas are present in the biblical description of we Christians as "sanctified". By being "hag", sanctified or consecrated, the Father has, in effect, through His Holy Spirit, put His mark upon us as being *different from* and as being *separate from* the rest of the world. Sanctification/consecration (i.e. being "hag" to God) thus indicates both divine protection of the believer, and a positive change in status for the believer. We are no longer secular people. We are now holy people. And God expects us to act the part:

Be holy, because I am holy. 1st Peter 1:16 (see also Lev.11:44, 45; 19:2; 20:7)

Sanctification (or consecration) is one aspect of our new status as Christians. This doctrine says, in effect, that we *are, in fact, now* "holy" as far as God is concerned. I have avoided using the word "holy" up till now, because the word carries certain unfortunate connotations today. When Peter writes here in verse 2 that we have been elected by means of the Holy Spirit's consecration (sanctification), he is saying that God *first had to separate us from the rest of the world before He could select us into His family*.

The Holy Spirit accomplished our transfer into the family of God by making us "holy", it is true, but Biblical "holiness" is not what many people assume it to be. There are several points about *true holiness* which should be kept in mind:

a. **Sanctification is God's Work:** The initial "holiness" (sanctification/consecration) imparted to the believer by God the Father, through the agency of the Holy Spirit (our verse, 1Pet.1:2) is entirely God's work! We do believe in Christ, but there is no effort or merit involved in this action. The "holiness" we receive as a result is administered by the Holy Spirit and involves no behavior on our part whatsoever, whether good or ill. As Christians, we are "holy" to God, that is, He considers us to be uniquely His own, separate from the rest of the secular world. It is not a function of our behavior! If we were not Christians, but lived "good lives", we would not for that reason be "holy" in God's sight. On the other hand, if, as Christians, our behavior should be imperfect, we are yet "holy" in God's sight (though we would do well to remember the principle of God's discipline upon His wayward sons: Heb.12:1-13)

b. **Sanctification is a Process:** As there are three different phases in the plan of God (phase one: salvation; phase two: time; phase three: eternity), so there are three corresponding phases to *sanctification*. So far, we have been discussing "phase one *sanctification*". On becoming Christians, we become "holy to God" (phase one *sanctification*). After we die, we will be "holy" or "saints" forever in the presence of God (Rev.20:9). In time, however, things are a bit more difficult. Here, in this world, behavior *is* an issue. For while it is true that we become

holy "positionally" (i.e. purely as a result of our new status as believers in Christ) entirely through the agency of God, we do not instantly lose all of our bad habits the moment we become Christians. As believers, we continue to live in the same physical bodies (with sin indwelling them: Rom.7:20), and the world continues to tempt us to sin (1Jn.2:15-17). Phase two *sanctification* is a *process* whereby our behavior should parallel our spiritual growth, falling into line with our new status in Christ as we progress. In other words, at salvation we are soldiers of Christ, but it takes some time before we start acting like seasoned veterans. In writing to the Corinthians (1Cor.1:2), Paul (in almost the same breath) describes them as "sanctified in Jesus Christ" (their positional or phase one *sanctification*) and "called to be sanctified persons" (the objective given to them by God of behaving in a manner appropriate to their status). Only by continuing to grow spiritually can we hope to be successful in carrying out God's mandate to be holy in every sense.

c. **Sanctification is Internal:** Perhaps the most important point to remember is that true Biblical holiness (or *sanctification*) only genuinely occurs from the inside out. You cannot, you will not effect any meaningful progress merely by attempting to change your behavior outright apart from the Word of God and spiritual growth. In praying to the Father for the believers He would soon leave behind in the world, our Lord Jesus Christ asked that He "sanctify (or make us Holy) with Truth (Jn.17:17). The only way to achieve any true progress toward holiness is through spiritual growth, which is based upon accepting, believing and applying the truth of Scripture. We shall have much more to say about spiritual growth in future lessons, but we should note once again at this point the basic mechanics: you receive biblical truth from the Bible and orthodox Bible teaching; you believe it; you begin to apply it to your life. As you continue this process on a regular and consistent basis, you will grow spiritually, and your behavior will change. When you are objectively and privately convicted by the Holy Spirit and by Scripture that you are doing something that you should not, or are not doing something that you should, the more spiritually mature you have become, the more genuine and effective (not to mention long-lasting) will be the changes you make. Such changes are best based on the true and legitimate teachings of scripture, and far more valuable from a spiritual standpoint than behavior modifications originating purely from social pressure, or the idiosyncratic standards of some other person or group.

Avoiding Whitewash: Our Lord called the Pharisees "white-washed sepulchers" because the "holiness" they exhibited was only a surface holiness. They showed up to be baptized. They went to temple and diligently participated in all of the religious observances. They gave money and prayed convincingly in public. They felt themselves to be aloof from sin. But Jesus was not impressed. Not only were the Pharisees failing to exhibit true holiness, they had, in fact, no true faith in God at all. On the outside, to the casual observer, they were white and clean. But on the inside, they were full of all sorts of pollution. God is concerned with our insides. He wants our hearts to be pure. If they are, and if we are diligent to keep them pure by confessing our sins to Him and continuing to take in His holy Word, we will grow spiritually within, and this true, internal change cannot help but be made manifest in our lives as well.