

How Holiness Works



Holiness by Derek Prince

In Part 2 of this Teaching Letter series on holiness, Derek Prince explains the Holy Spirit's role in bringing us to salvation. This excerpt—taken from the book, *Set Apart for God*—reminds us that God has chosen us to be holy—even before birth. When we recognize this truth, we begin to understand God's destiny for our lives.

Let's look at the operation of God (primarily by the Holy Spirit) in time. The Holy Spirit sanctifies. In this context, the word sanctify as an operation of the Holy Spirit means "to draw, to separate, and to reveal."

Let's return to 1 Peter 1:1-2, which is a key Scripture for all of this teaching on holiness:

"To the ... elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, for obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."

From the Beginning

Notice where the sanctifying operation of the Holy Spirit is placed in the context. First, we read, "To the ... elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father [God foreknew, God chose], in sanctification of the Spirit [the Holy Spirit]." It is through a sanctifying operation that the Holy Spirit brings us to the place of "obedience" to the gospel and, through obedience, to the "sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ." We have gone from the action of the Father in eternity to the sanctifying work of the Spirit in time—drawing, separating, and revealing.

Now, we return to 2 Thessalonians 2:13:

"But we are bound to give thanks to God always for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God from the beginning chose you for salvation [the end of God's choice is salvation] through sanctification by the Spirit."

Paul began his explanation in the above verse with a statement about God's choice. God's foreknowledge is part of the choice, although that is not specifically stated here. Once again, we see that the agent who brings us to salvation is the Holy Spirit, by His sanctifying operation. He

brings us to the place where we accept the truth of the gospel, obey it, and enter into salvation. An important factor to understand, therefore, is that the Holy Spirit's work begins before we believe the gospel and consciously receive salvation.

God's Work in the Lives of Paul and Jeremiah

It will be instructive for us to look at two remarkable statements about two great men of the Bible, Paul and Jeremiah. The first is in Galatians 1:15, where Paul said this about himself:

"But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb and called me through His grace"

Paul said he was "separated" from his mother's womb. From the very moment of Paul's birth, God began to set him aside for His special purposes. Yet, for some years, Paul was actually the chief persecutor of the church. During that time, Paul was not conscious of salvation, for he had not acknowledged Jesus Christ. Actually, he openly opposed the gospel. And yet, all that time, God the Holy Spirit was moving in his life to separate him and to bring him to the place where God's intended destiny could be fulfilled.

The prophet Jeremiah made a similar statement about himself in Jeremiah 1:4–5:

"Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying: 'Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.'"

Notice that Jeremiah's destiny was settled when he was still in his mother's womb. God told Jeremiah that before he was formed in the womb, He knew him. And before Jeremiah was born, God sanctified him—set him apart—for the purpose He had for his life: to be "a prophet to the nations." In regard to that purpose, God said, "I ordained you."

God's purposes for Jeremiah began to be worked out while he was still in his mother's womb. Yet, at the time when God spoke to him, Jeremiah essentially said, "Lord, don't call me. I can't be a prophet. I'm too young." (See verse 6.) Jeremiah was not conscious of the divine destiny that had begun to work in his life even before his birth. In fact, he was at first unwilling to accept that divine destiny.

We see in the lives of Paul and Jeremiah alike that the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit begins before we come to a conscious awareness of salvation, or to any kind of acceptance by our wills of God's purpose and program for our lives.

God's Intervention in Our Conscious Experience

Having recognized God's operation, first in eternity and then in time, we come now to the point in time when God actually intervenes in our conscious experience, so that our destiny brings us to hear the preaching of the cross. We see this intervention as we look briefly again at 2 Thessalonians 2. Paul wrote,

"God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which He called you by our gospel." (verses 13–14)

The moment of being called is when God's destiny is revealed to us through the preaching of His Word, when we are brought to the place where we must respond and make a personal commitment to the demand of God upon our lives.

We see the same truth in the book of Romans:

"For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He [Jesus] might be the firstborn among many brethren [which includes all believers]. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called." (Romans 8:29–30)

This passage describes God's divine intervention in time—in our personal, conscious experience. We physically hear the gospel being proclaimed, and, as the Word of God is preached, we spiritually hear the call of almighty God. This is the watershed of human experience.

The Watershed Moment

This is what the cross is. It is the watershed of every human life. It is the point of division, the point where our destinies are settled in experience. There is a critical moment of decision when we have to say yes or no to the call of God and to the claims of Jesus Christ.

Paul talked about this watershed moment in 1 Corinthians:

"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." (1 Corinthians 1:18)

Please understand that the cross does not change; the message does not change. Yet, it is our response that decides our destinies. If we accept it and submit to it, we are entering into salvation. If we refuse it and reject it, we are perishing.

Again, the division is at the cross, which is the watershed, the most vital moment of decision and destiny in human experience.

Paul expressed this watershed moment in a different way in Philippians 3:12:

"Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may

lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of ['apprehended' KJV] me."

I like that word "apprehended." It certainly applies to my personal experience. Apprehended suggests to me the great hand of almighty God, reaching down at a given point and a given moment and touching a human life. It is the moment of choice; the moment of destiny; the moment of calling when God's hand stretches down out of heaven, the moment when He apprehends a person for a purpose He planned from eternity but only gradually reveals to that person in time as he or she yields to His call. After such a moment, that life can never be the same again.

Never the same! On that note, let's close this letter with a prayer of thanksgiving:

Thank You, Lord, that You have apprehended me for Your purpose. Thank You for continuing the process in me—sanctifying me by the Holy Spirit and working Your holiness in me moment by moment. I am so grateful to You! Amen.

Teaching Letter

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