

THE CALL TO HOLINESS – 1 Cor. 1:2

The Call of God #2

There were few times in the life of President Abraham Lincoln when he was more discouraged. As he rode that train back to Washington, D.C., he felt that he had embarrassed himself and let our nation down. As our country's leader and commander-in-chief, he had been called upon to dedicate a most sacred place. But he had struggled for words that would adequately convey the sacrifices that had been made. The speaker before him had been Edward Everett, one of the best-known orators of the time. He had eloquently delivered a 2 hour speech. President Lincoln followed with words that lasted just 1 minute and a half. Just 226 words. Only 90 seconds. Just about the length of time that I have now spoken. How could he have possibly consecrated a burial plot where 25% of the Union soldiers fighting and 33% of the Confederate soldiers fighting had given their lives in such a brief time? He had even taken some of the precious time of his short speech to confess his feelings of inadequacy. "The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here", he admitted. Never has a President so underestimated a speech made. For the Gettysburg Address remains to this day an oratorical masterpiece. The Encyclopedia Britannica recognizes it to be "one of the classic utterances of all time, a masterpiece of prose poetry." Even Edward Everett immediately saw the significance of this brief speech as he wrote to President Lincoln the following day, "I wish that I could flatter myself that I had come as near to the central idea of the occasion in 2 hours as you did in less than 2 minutes."

What made President Lincoln's Gettysburg Address such a model of oration that is memorized by students even to this day? It was his ability in a concise manner to pinpoint the necessity of recognizing the sacred nature of the sacrifices that had been offered and the need to set apart a plot of ground as a memorial to these who had been willing to give the ultimate sacrifice for their convictions. 43,000 soldiers died in the Battle of Gettysburg. This single battle turned the entire course of the Civil War. "We have come to dedicate a portion of this field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that our nation might live," the President said. "It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate- we cannot consecrate – we cannot hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract."

We all recognize the necessity of setting certain places apart as sacred when unusual or significant sacrifices have been made. The last time we were in New York City, we took a subway to the site where the Twin Towers once stood proudly. Just over a week ago, we again commemorated those terrorist attacks that took place there. Part of the commentaries given criticized the fact that today, 8 years after those treacherous attacks, there still has not been a suitable memorial raised because of the bickering and inner

fighting of various political groups. All Americans recognize the significance of this terrorist attack in the history of our nation. We all recognize that this event has made permanent changes in the life of our nation. We feel a need to honor those brave people who sacrificed their lives in their attempts to save their countrymen. So all of our country is looking, waiting for a proper memorial recognizing the sacred nature of this site.

This concept of setting aside something as holy or sacred is what is at the core of the Biblical doctrine of Sanctification. Both the New Testament Greek word and the Old Testament Hebrew word that are translated *sanctify* or *holy* come from the root that means *to separate or set something apart*. During the Old Testament times, things were most often sanctified or set apart in recognition that these were for God's special purposes. Mount Sinai where God met Moses in a very special way to give the law to him was sanctified, set apart so that the general population would not climb it or even touch it (Ex. 19). The tabernacle and its furniture were sanctified, set apart for worship of God alone (Ex. 29). The altar and animal offerings were sanctified, set apart for divine sacrifices (Ex. 40). The priests were also sanctified or set apart for God's service (Lev.8).

Now in these days following the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ upon the cross of Calvary, this concept of sanctification takes on a whole new significance. It is no longer things that are primarily sanctified, but now God's people are called to sanctification or called to holiness. As a result of the sacredness of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ, all of God's children who receive the cleansing that was paid for with His precious blood are set aside or sanctified as God's sacred memorials. Each individual believer becomes a temple of God Himself as the Holy Spirit comes to indwell each Christian. So the New Testament speaks of each follower of the Lord Jesus Christ as one who has been called to sanctification, called to holiness.

Last week we began a series on the various calls of God. If you were with us last time, you will recall that we focused on the call to salvation last week. When Jesus was criticized by the Pharisees for calling Matthew the tax collector to be a part of his apostolic band, the Lord responded by saying, "I did not come to this earth to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." God sent His one and only Son into this world to call sinners to repentance. As we confess our sins and turn from them in repentance accepting the cleansing provision of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary, we are delivered or saved from the penalty and power of sin in our lives. This is God's call to salvation. Now for those who accept God's call to salvation, there is also a call to sanctification or holiness. We want to look at this call this morning. There are many passages that we could look at in dealing with this subject for it is a common theme in the New Testament. I have chosen the 2nd verse of 1 Corinthians for a couple of reasons.

First, I have chosen this verse because of its recipients. You see, whenever the subject of holiness is raised, many people click off their minds reasoning that this subject is for others but not them. They have an image of a saint being some holy person who lived centuries ago who is now cast in some sculpture in an old church somewhere. They know the internal struggle that they have with temptation and sin and they think that holiness is something that is beyond their reach. But the people who Paul greeted in this letter were not those who would become enshrined with sculptures after they died. These members of the church at Corinth were people who struggled every single day with temptation and sin. In fact, Paul wrote this book to address the many areas where they were failing. Paul speaks of their quarrellings and divisions, their immorality, their pride, their carnality, all kinds of sins in this book. This church at Corinth was not the model, perfect church. Yet the Apostle begins this letter by telling these people that they had been sanctified and called to be holy or called to be saints.

The 2nd reason why I have chosen this passage is because in one verse we find 2 aspects of the Biblical process of Sanctification mentioned. Sometimes we struggle with this concept of Sanctification in the Bible because we fail to understand the entirety of this process as laid out by God in His revelation. There are some Christians who emphasize one aspect to the neglect of the others and they either become puffed up in pride or discouraged in a defeatist attitude. The Bible clearly outlines 3 aspects to the process of Sanctification. When God calls us to be holy, there are 3 steps that will be taken before this process is completed. 2 of these are found in this one verse. We will conclude by just mentioning the 3rd step this morning. We need to see God's call to be holy as the process that it is in order to understand it and be encouraged by it.

Now with these thoughts in mind, listen as I READ Paul's greeting found in 1 Cor. 1:1-3:

1CO 1:1 Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes,

1CO 1:2 To the church of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be holy, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ--their Lord and ours:

1CO 1:3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

As I mentioned before, we are going to focus on the 2nd verse. And I want to begin by making 2 very brief observations.

First, the word translated *sanctified* and the word translated *holy* are the very same word in the Greek language. The only difference is the word *sanctified* is in the verb form and *holy* is in the noun form. But otherwise, they are the very same word. So to be sanctified is to be holy and vice-versa.

Second, lest we think that Paul's message here is only for these members of the church at Corinth, let's not overlook the last part of that 2nd verse. Paul makes it very clear that he is addressing not only the church of God in Corinth but also those everywhere who call on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Those who have

called on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ is another way of saying those who have received Jesus Christ into their lives as their Savior and Lord and have been saved. If you confess Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, Paul is writing this message to you and he is saying that you have been sanctified in Christ and have been called to be holy.

Now let's look together briefly at the 3 aspects of our call to be holy. And we will have to look at these briefly because we could easily spend an entire message on each one individually.

First there is a call to holiness that is positional. This is a complete holiness that is attained at the moment when a person is born again into the family of God. Paul refers to this positional holiness in the first part of verse 2 when he addresses "those sanctified in Christ Jesus" or we could say "those who have been made to be completely holy in Christ Jesus". The word that Paul uses here is in the form of a perfect passive participle. What this simply means is that there was some point in the past where these people had been made holy in God's sight. The perfect passive tense reflects an action that has been completed in the past. So the Apostle Paul addresses these members of the Corinthian church as those who have already been made to be holy by God Himself. This is positional holiness or positional sanctification. It occurs at the moment of salvation when the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ cleanses us from all of our sin so that we stand pure and holy in the sight of God.

Our Savior used the very common experience of a husband and wife having a baby as a picture of one becoming a member of God's family when He talked with a Pharisee named Nicodemus. John 3 records a scene where a religious leader named Nicodemus came to the place where Jesus was staying under the secretive cloak of darkness at night. Nicodemus as a member of the Sanhedrin was curious about Jesus' teachings, but he didn't want to be seen associating with Him for fear of what his colleagues might think of him. Nicodemus wanted to know the core of Jesus' teaching. He wanted to know how he could be sure that he was in a right relationship with God. Jesus, using the analogy of physical birth, told him,

"I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." (John 3:3)

Even though Nicodemus had a keen, sharp mind, he was confused by Christ's statement, so he asked, JN 3:4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"

Jesus went on to explain that He wasn't talking about physical birth, but was rather was speaking of a spiritual new birth.

JN 3:5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. ⁶ Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. ⁷ You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'

You see, when a child is born into an earthly family, that baby immediately is recognized as a member of that family. The child is given a family name. The child has received characteristics from both of the parents through genes that make for a similar appearance and similar mannerisms. So that child becomes a part of that earthly family.

So it is when a person is born again into God's family that person receives characteristics and attributes from God Himself. The Apostle Peter wrote that one born into God's family becomes a partaker of God's own divine nature. One of God's important attributes is His holiness. So a person who has been born again must become holy in order to actually become a member of God's family. God accomplishes this by imputing or crediting the very righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself to that newborn spiritual baby. Listen to these beautiful words recorded by the Apostle Paul in Romans 4:3-8:

³ What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

RO 4:4 Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. ⁶ David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

RO 4:7 "Blessed are they
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.

RO 4:8 Blessed is the man
whose sin the Lord will never count against him."

Christian Smith of the University of North Carolina's sociology department has studied American Christianity in some depth. He has written some of his findings in the book entitled, *Soul Searching: the Religious and Spiritual lives of American Teenagers*. In this book, Smith presents his view that while spirituality has been revived in American young people today, the dominant viewpoint is what he calls *Moral Therapeutic Deism*. According to this "religion", God created and watches over the world but otherwise is only to be called upon to solve problems. All he requires of us is that we be nice and kind to one another. The central goal of life is to be happy and feel good about oneself. What is conspicuously absent is any view of sin or goal towards holiness.

Abraham and David and every other righteous person in the Bible had a concept of their own sinfulness and God's holiness. They saw that as we confess our sins and trust in God's mercy, God is then able

to give a gift to us – the gift of His own righteousness. Our transgressions are forgiven, our sins are covered. God credits us with His own righteousness so that we are perfectly holy in his sight. This is positional holiness. It takes place at the moment when we are saved. It removes the sin barrier and puts us into a right standing with God.

But now we must move to a second aspect of sanctification. There is also a call to holiness that is progressive. This is an aspect of holiness that is continuous throughout our lives here on this earth. This is a growth process. It is a progression whereby we become more and more like the character of God as we grow in our knowledge of God's word and as we learn how to apply it to our lives. This is a process where we both learn how to gain more consistent victory over the patterns of our sinful nature and how to develop the patterns of godliness following the example of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives. To use terms that the Apostle Paul so often used in his epistles, we learn both how to put off the old man of the flesh and how to put on the new man in Christ. Now this is a process that will never be fully perfected in this life for we will continue to have a sinful nature until this earthly body dies and we receive our glorified, resurrected bodies. That's the reason why I don't have the line going all the way up in the diagram. But this is a process that every Christian experiences. Paul refers to this when he wrote that these Corinthian Christians were "called to be or become holy". This is a present experience. This is a progressive process. Whereas they had been sanctified in Christ Jesus, they also were being called to become holy as they grew in their faith and relationship with the Lord.

When a baby is born into a family, even though that baby immediately possesses the position of being a member of that family, the baby doesn't just continue to be a baby. No, the baby begins to grow. Soon the baby is crawling. Then the baby is walking. After a while, the baby begins to mimic words spoken by the parents and the baby begins to talk. With each step, the baby takes on more and more characteristics of the parents. The baby begins to speak like the parents. The child begins to look more and more like the parents. There is a process of growth and development of character that takes place in the experience of every person.

So it is in the child of God. Throughout our lives, there is a process of growth and development of character as we become more and more like our Savior, Jesus Christ.

Throughout this present lifetime, it is our Heavenly Father's will for us to become more and more holy in our lifestyle. And God has given to us the Holy Spirit Himself as our mentor in this process. Jesus promised that the Spirit of truth would lead and guide us into all truth. Paul wrote that we could have confidence that the one who has begun this good work of salvation in us will complete it (Phil. 1:6).

There is the progressive development throughout this lifetime that occurs as we grow in our faith and become more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ. This is a struggle because our flesh continues to war against our spirit. All of us feel inadequate. We all feel that we haven't made the spiritual progress that we had

hoped to make. But if we are truly a child of God, we have made spiritual progress because we have been called to holiness. This is one of the ways that we know that we truly have been born again into God's family. And this process will continue throughout this earthly life.

We just have time to mention the 3rd and final aspect of our call to holiness. This aspect is not found in this passage but is found in many others. We might designate this aspect perfected sanctification – this is the time when our position and our progression meet either when the Lord Jesus Christ returns to us or when we die and go to be with Him. This is the time when our positional state will be our experience for all eternity. Paul speaks of this perfected holiness in 1 Thess. 3:12,13:

¹² May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else, just as ours does for you. ¹³ May he strengthen your hearts so that you will be blameless and holy in the presence of our God and Father when our Lord Jesus comes with all his holy ones.

The Apostle John said it this way:

1JN 3:1 How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. ³ Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.

There is coming a day when our faith we become sight. There is coming a day when we will all leave this earthly realm either by death or by the coming of the Lord. When that time comes, we will know experientially what we only know positionally now. When that time comes, our progressive holiness will meet our positional holiness in perfected holiness. And for most of us, it will be a big jump – but it will be a glorious event.

If you know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, you have received a call to holiness. There is a sense in which you already have been called to holiness in the past. There is a sense in which you are being called daily to holiness in the present. And there is a sense in which you will be called to holiness in the future.

Incredibly, God has chosen you and me to be His sacred monument commemorating the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.