**WORDS OF SALVATION (#6)**

***Sanctification (End of Construction)***

I’ve got a great idea for my gravestone. As an epitaph I think I might like to have written the words I have seen many times in my life from road construction sites. Let me explain. How many times have we been on long drives and come to the orange cones and familiar obstacles that make up the obvious signs of coming traffic delays known as road construction? “Caution. For the next 25 miles slow down to 35 mph. Stay in single lane. Take detour. Delays ahead.” You know the drill. You get irritated, then frustrated, then out-right angry. But then after 25 miles you feel traffic finally picking up and you come to this final sign:

“End of Construction. Thank you for your patience.”

Wouldn’t that be a great headstone that represents my life as a Christian?

The word sanctification comes from the Greek word *HAGIASMOS* and can be translated as holiness or consecration. The root word is *HAGIOS*, which means holy, pure. The work of the “*Holy*” Spirit is to make us holy people set apart for God’s holy use. “*God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit*…” (2 Thess. 2:13).

So many, including myself, want to know the answer to this question: “what is my purpose in life?” What does God will for me? Here’s your answer: “*For this is the will of God, your* ***sanctification****: … that each of you should know how to possess his own vessel in* ***sanctification*** *and honor, … For God did not call us to uncleanness, but in holiness*.” (I Thess. 4:3-8)

Paul expanded on this thought even more clearly by saying,

“*But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor,* ***sanctified*** *and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work*.” (2 Tim. 2:20-21)

Exodus 26:33 tells us the Old Testament temple had a Holy Place and a Holy of Holies (Most Holy Place). Inside it were holy vessels that had been sanctified for God’s holy presence. That visual takes on special meaning when in the New Testament I learn I am to be a “*saint*” (*HAGIOS*) that becomes God’s “*sanctuary*” (*HAGION*) in which He dwells. My body is the *temple* of the Holy Spirit who is in me (I Cor. 6:19). Thus, I become God’s “holy place.” I have been sanctified to become “*useful for the Master*.”

In our baptism “*our old man was crucified with Him*” (Rom. 6:4-6). At that moment we were “*washed…* ***sanctified****… justified*” (I Cor. 6:11). We “*put off the old man*” and “*put on the new man which was created according to God in true righteousness and holiness*.” (Eph. 4:22-4). At baptism we figuratively married Jesus Christ, who then took His new bride that He “*might* ***sanctify*** *and cleanse her* *with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be* ***holy*** *and without blemish*” (Eph. 5:25-26).

Isn’t that a fantastic picture? I love it! At my baptism I was set apart as holy, cleansed, glorious, without spot, wrinkle or blemish before God’s eyes. No wonder I was called a new man, for I felt like an MVP. I thought, “can it get any better than this?” I have discovered the answer to that over the past 56 years. I was married to Christ at my baptism on April 26, 1964. I was married to Benita on June 17, 1977.

At my baptism, as at my wedding, something brand new began. A new life started together, first with my Lord, and then with my wife. Just as our marriage has grown and blossomed through many years of joys and struggles, so has my relationship with Christ. Through it all is a sanctifying process that is leading to a grand finale.

My marriage to Benita is intended to end with both of us as “*heirs together of the grace of life*” (I Pet. 3:7). My marriage to the Lord is intended to end when He “*will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able to subdue all things to Himself*” (Phil. 3:21). That “*working*” is God’s sanctification. From one who once cried, “*O wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?*” – He took me and began changing me so that one day “*we know that when He is revealed we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is; and everyone who has this hope in Him purifies (HAGNIZO) himself, just as He is pure (HAGNOS)”* (I Jn. 3:2-3).

Just as my life with Benita has changed me, and much for the better, so my life with Christ has changed me… dramatically, and for the better. Oh, it might seem imperceptible to the naked eye, but slowly, daily, Christ, through the Holy Spirit, is working on me in His own time and in His own way. But just as it’s true in my marriage that I have to daily work on my relationship with Benita, so in my marriage to Christ I have to *work* with Him. Or, as I like to think of it, I have to *walk* with Him.

I love to look at my life as a walk with God. One reason is that I love walking. My FitBit tells me that in 2020 I walked the equivalent of here (Minneapolis) to San Francisco, then south to Los Angeles, through San Diego, then on to the Mexican border at Baja, California. That’s over 2,200 miles. Spiritually I pray I walked even further than that. Just as my physical body felt good averaging 6 miles per day, my soul felt even better as I set a goal of “*walking worthy of the calling*” (Eph. 4:1), “*walking in the light*” (I Jn. 1:7), “*walking by faith*” (2 Cor. 5:7), “*walking in love*” (Rom. 14:15), “*walking in the Spirit*” (Gal. 5:16), “*walking in truth*” (2 Jn. 4), and “*walking in newness of life*” (Rom. 6:4).

Yes, it’s true, I became a “*saint*” (one sanctified, made holy) at a specific moment in time (baptism), but it’s also true that for the rest of my life I am going through a *sanctifying* process that eventually conforms me, and transforms me, into the very image of my Lord. I pray I look far more like Jesus today than I did 56 years ago. My outward man might be perishing, but my inward man is being renewed day by day (2 Cor. 4:16).

That’s sanctification.

End of Construction. Thank you for your patience. – Rick