May the Holy Spirit sanctify you in Christ Jesus

Sanctification is simply the process of becoming like Jesus. This is a goal of a Christian. We know that Jesus is perfect and that He is perfectly pleasing to God. We want to be pleasing to God; so, we want to be more like Jesus. Our big problem is that we can’t do this ourselves; our sin nature is too strong. But once we accept Jesus, the Holy Spirit brings us through the sanctification process.

Our sanctification is likened in the Bible to gold being purified. Gold is purified in fire. The gold is melted in the heat; but the impurities are removed and the gold is not harmed. The person purifying the gold carefully watches over the process to make sure it is done right. What this comparison lets us know is that our purification, our sanctification, can be a painful process. Because of our sinful nature, this is what is necessary to make us like our Saviour.

As a Christian, we can be sure that even though the hard times we go through in life may cause us to melt, we will not be harmed. The Holy Spirit carefully watches over the process to make sure nothing goes wrong. This calls for our trust; this calls for us prayerfully going through life in order to cooperate with the Holy Spirit in this process of being sanctified. As followers of Jesus, our citizenship is in His kingdom. We want to be prepared for it when it comes.

*For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself.*

 Philippians 3:20-21

In Christ’s love

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Esther 9:1-19

The day finally came. Haman’s edict, to destroy, to kill, and to annihilate the Jews, had been written and sent out in the first month of the year. In the third month of the year, the edict written by Esther and Mordecai giving the Jews permission to defend themselves against their enemies, was written and sent out. Both edicts were to take effect on the same day in the twelfth month of the year. The enemies of the Jews had been given one day to commit genocide and take all their possessions. The Jews now had that same day to defend themselves and their families.

Right in the first verse, we are told the outcome of this day: The tables were turned; the Jews gained mastery over their enemies. Think of the tension that had been building for almost an entire year. For the first two and a half months, the Jews were in a hopeless situation. Free reign had been given to everyone in the Persian Empire to kill them; man, woman, and child. If they had fought back under the first edict, Haman would have simply sent the Persian army after them. Then, in the third month, the new edict would have given them hope; it would have been a light to them; a blessing from God. The remainder of the year would have been spent in organizing their armies and preparing for battle.

Again, we can see the hand of God working in the background; His providence. First, was the long time until the day of the actual conflict. Remember how Haman had determined that day. He had consulted his own mediums and gods and had practiced divination by casting the lot. The lot had given a date almost a year in the future. We read something about the lot in Proverbs 16:33. “*The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.*” God does intervene in the affairs of His people. The reading of the lot gave plenty of time for the new edict to be made and for the people to prepare.

Additionally, during this time, God brought about a fear of the Jews upon the people in the empire. God had done this before. Even before the Hebrew people entered the Promised Land, the Canaanites already feared them. This didn’t stop them from fighting against the Jews, but it put them on edge and made them less effective soldiers. There were many whose hatred of the Jewish people drove them to still want to kill them and take their belongings, but they were now at a disadvantage. When the day came to fight, that dread overtook them and they could not stand against the Jews.

During this time, Mordecai had become very active in the kingdom; he was doing his job. Because of this, all the government officials became scared of Mordecai. They ended up helping the Jews when the day of battle arrived. All of this was from Yahweh; He gave the time needed for all these things to take place. Notice how God intervened where He needed to, but then, the people had to do their part. So often God works through others; be they angels or people. He doesn’t need us, but that is how He chooses to do things. In this case, He used His chosen people to bring judgement and punishment on those who sought their harm.

The Jews struck their enemies with the sword. More than once, the word hated is used. The enemies of the Jews hated them. The numbers given in the account show us that there were a lot of people who hated the Jews. 75,000 who hated them were killed in the Persian empire, along with another 800 in the citadel of Susa itself. Was there really that much hatred for the Jews? Some who have studied the book of Esther have concluded that these numbers are exaggerations. Those who come to this conclusion don’t understand what is going on. The numbers may be rounded, but they are not exaggerated; they are accurate.

We must never forget that the hatred for Israel is spiritually driven and driven by satan himself. He wants God’s people exterminated. He wanted them exterminated at this time because he knew that the Messiah would come from the Jews. He knew the Messiah would be the end of him. Even now, he wants to destroy God’s people out of pure hatred for God.

We are aware of the history of the Hebrew people and how there have been several attempts to get rid of them. Consider now how much they are hated. All the nations that surround them now want nothing more than the destruction of Israel. Those nations include Persia, which is modern day Iran. Consider the United Nations and how many times they try to enact resolutions against Israel. The unwarranted hatred of Israel, of God’s people, is alive and well. The numbers in Esther are real; satanic hatred for the Jews is real; there is no other nation of people who have endured so much.

How necessary it is for we Christians to pray for them. To pray for Israel is pleasing to God and it is in His will. Pray for the conversion of individuals so they accept Jesus as their true Messiah. Pray for the nation itself; part of it clings to orthodox Judaism, most of it has become secular. Either way, they are lost. God promises to bless those who bless Israel. Let us be found blessing them.

Haman’s edict was to kill men, women, and children, and then to plunder their goods. You can bet that’s exactly what would have happened. The edict that allowed the Jews to defend themselves gave them the right to do the same to their enemies. The text tells us about men who were killed, but does not mention women and children. It seems Israel focused on fighting the men. Additionally, we are told three times that the Jews did not take any plunder. The people of Israel showed restraint; this was self-defense, not conquering.

There are two things to consider about the Jews not taking plunder. For the first, we go back to Genesis 14 and the account of Abram rescuing his nephew Lot. Lot was living in the city of Sodom when it was attacked by a group of other kings and their armies. All the residents, including Lot, were taken as prisoners of war. Abram gathered his people and went after the invading forces. Abram’s men defeated the attackers and rescued all the people and the goods that had been taken from the city.

The king of Sodom asked for his people but told Abram that he could keep all the goods. But Abram refused. He depended entirely on the LORD for all that he had and he didn’t want the king of Sodom to be able to say that he had made Abram rich. Abram wanted God to have all the glory.

In the same way, the Jews would be able to say that they were fighting in self-defense. They could not be accused of fighting to gain wealth. In all that had happened, God’s providence was obvious. By refusing to take plunder, the focus would be on what God had done and He would be glorified.

The other thing to consider in refusing to take plunder goes back to the original cause of this problem: King Saul. Remember who Haman is descended from. He is descended from Agag, a king of the Amalekites. Because of how the Amalekites had harassed the Israelites when they left Egypt, God declared that they would be removed from the face of the Earth. In 1 Samuel 15 is the account of the LORD giving Saul the command to attack the Amalekites, kill all the people, and take none of their goods. Saul was disobedient. He didn’t kill all the people and he helped himself to all the stuff that looked good. We looked at this earlier and considered the consequences brought on Esther and her people as a result of Saul’s disobedience.

In the account of Esther, the enemies of the Jews were not all Amalekites, but the man who started it, Haman, was. So, unlike Saul, they killed all their enemies and left the plunder. In all of this, regardless of how bloody and horrible things were, we are shown that the Jews acted necessarily in self-defense; and not for their own material gain.

The body count in the citadel of Susa was available that night. Five hundred men had been killed and the ten sons of Haman. Certainly, the sons of Haman had been indoctrinated by their father in a hatred for the Jews. Once Haman had met his dishonorable end, you can bet that they wanted to avenge their father’s honor. This hatred and vengeance simply cost them their lives. What they ended up with was a grief-stricken mother, who eight months after losing her husband, lost her ten sons. This is sin. This is what sin does. No matter how glamorous it looks when we contemplate it, we soon discover that it is hideous and ugly beyond imagination. All sin is like this; all sin causes grief; all sin is offensive to God.

Another way to consider the brutality of sin is to look to the Man who hung on a cross at Calvary. Already beaten and mocked, with most of His skin stripped off Him, He now hung in the hot Judean sun, struggling to breathe. This is what we deserve for the sins we have committed in our lives. Whether our lives have been short or long, whether we think our sins aren’t that big, whether we think we are pretty good overall. We have sinned against the infinitely holy God and we deserve what Jesus took on that cross; we even deserve more.

Sin is so serious that we can’t ever be in the presence of God. It would take an eternity of separation from God to pay the price our sin demands. Jesus took this also, suffering separation from His Father; a suffering too great for us to imagine. Jesus paid the price for sin so that we sinners could come into the presence of God for eternal happiness; but Jesus only paid the price for those who accept Him: accept Him as the only begotten Son of God; as the only Saviour; believing on Him in faith. Those who do not accept this merciful offer will pay the price for their sins themselves: eternally.

King Ahasuerus appeared to be amazed that there were so many people who hated the Jews. If there had been 500 killed in the city, he could only imagine how many had been killed in the rest of His kingdom. If this many people were against his queen and his right-hand man, perhaps something more needed to be done. He asked Esther what else she might want. Notice in his offer, he didn’t include half of his kingdom. Maybe he thought half his kingdom was now gone!

What Esther asked for seems blood-thirsty in our ears, but we must consider what was going on. An attempt had been made to eradicate the Jewish people. The fact that many tried to do just that showed how much hatred there was for them. The point had to be driven home that this was not to be done. Having another day in Susa to fight their enemies would lessen the number of people in the capital who might try something like this again. Hanging the ten sons of Haman on display would send a clear message to let the Jewish people alone.

When everything was over, spontaneous rejoicing broke out. Can you imagine what a relief it would have been for this to be done? A year of concern and even dread about one day; a day that could mean the end of you and your family and all your people. They had been delivered from a terrible threat; their God had proven faithful once again.

Our God is still faithful. In this life, because of sin, we are under tension and strain. But God holds all in His hands; and that includes we who are His children; we who have accepted Christ. We are safe here. We may be hurt; we may be killed; but we will never be destroyed. Our life is eternal in Christ Jesus and we can rest safe in His arms; we can fight in His strength; we can wait for Him to come and establish His kingdom on Earth.

Prayer

Lord God, how wonderful are Your promises in Jesus Christ. You desire good for us and not evil. Your strength is for our benefit and not our destruction. The life You give is eternal and in Your presence. You give us undeserved mercy and have made a way for us to come to You when there had been no way. You are almighty God who has sacrificed on behalf of Your creation. You are worthy of praise.

As citizens of Your glorious kingdom, we await the coming of our King. We desire His rule here on Earth, that justice and goodness and peace will abide. Make us ready, Holy Spirit, to live in this environment of holiness. Change us, mold us, into the shape of our Saviour, that we may be ready for our returning King. Keep us busy in the Lord’s work, that we are not found slacking in the day of our Master’s return.

So many, Lord, have not found their way to that narrow path, that leads to that narrow gate, which is Christ the Lord. Send out laborers into the fields to bring in a great harvest of souls, those who will fill Your barns with the wheat made righteous by Jesus Christ. Use us, Lord, as You see fit; that You may be glorified and Your people made ready for Your arrival.

We ask these things in Jesus’ name

Amen