

Are You Feeling The Breeze?

(This article is about sanctification.)

In general, when the New Testament writers used the word “sanctify” (hagiazō in Greek) they did not use it in the present tense. They generally used it to signify something that occurred in the past, like “God has sanctified you.” The author of the book of Hebrews decided to use it differently on two occasions and his purpose has significance that is worth noting. I believe his purpose in doing so has something to do with what John the Baptist said in Matthew 3:12.

“His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:12).

The writer of Hebrews wrote to people who were facing severe persecution to encourage them to endure.

“But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore, do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:

“For yet a little while, and He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.”

But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul” (Hebrews 10:32-39).

It is in the context of this severe persecution and trial of their faith that we find the author’s use of the word [\[1\]](#) *sanctify* in the present tense, the only two times in the entire New Testament (when applied to people):

“For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Heb 2:10, 11). (present tense)

“For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified” (Heb 10:14). (present tense)

Noting the author’s purposeful use of the present tense.

The New Testament writers were not sloppy in their use of the Greek language. So, since this is such an unusual occurrence (present tense of *sanctify* in regard to God’s people), we do well to ask ourselves why he did this.

The word *sanctify* is very much related to the words “holy” and “saint.” But at its very core, to sanctify means to set apart. Let me suggest that we rewrite our two verses to convey the idea of being set apart.

“For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being set apart are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Heb 2:10, 11).

“For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being set apart” (Heb 10:14).

Though he does not come right out and say it, it seems that by purposely using the present tense, he is conveying what God is doing on an ongoing basis in the lives of his readers. God is in control of all things. The persecution does not take Him by surprise. He is using it to separate the wheat from the chaff, like a winnowing fan.

“His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire” (Matthew 3:12).

When wheat was brought in from the fields, it was brought to the threshing floor. In that condition, it was not ready for use because chaff was mixed in with the wheat. So, using a winnowing fork, the harvester would toss the wheat up into the air. The weight of the wheat would cause it to come back down where it was tossed up. But the chaff, being much lighter, would be blown away from the wheat pile by a light breeze. This was the process of separating the wheat from the chaff.

Persecution and suffering are the tools that God uses to separate the wheat from the chaff. All of the ungodly are separated from the wheat and end up being burned in the fire. This also includes those who profess to be “Christians” but do not endure the persecution and sufferings. These also are chaff which ends up being burned in the fire.

What remains in the end is the pile of pure wheat that God gathers into His barn. He is in the process of setting His chosen ones apart and He uses persecution and sufferings as His winnowing fan to do so. These are those who are “the sanctified.” They are called “saints.” They are His “holy” people. This is why the author could say, *“Without holiness, no one will see the Lord.”* (See Hebrews 12:14.)

Let me make just one other observation from Hebrews 2:10-11 as a means to further substantiate my point.

“For it was fitting for Him, for whom are all things and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are all of one, for which reason He is not ashamed to call them brethren” (Heb 2:10, 11).

He said that both He who sanctifies and those who are being sanctified are **all of one**. Both are being made perfect through sufferings. (God is using trials and sufferings to separate the wheat from the chaff.) The people represented as chaff are not made perfect. The suffering and persecution drives them away. But those that are being made perfect through the sufferings take on the same characteristics as the captain of their salvation. For this reason, He is not ashamed to call them brethren. They appear to be from the same family.

Perhaps the author was thinking about the first Psalm as he was writing his letter to the Hebrews.

*Blessed is the man
Who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly,
Nor stands in the path of sinners,
Nor sits in the seat of the scornful;
2 But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in His law he meditates day and night.
3 He shall be like a tree
Planted by the rivers of water,
That brings forth its fruit in its season,*

*Whose leaf also shall not wither;
And whatever he does shall prosper.*

***⁴The ungodly are not so,
But are like the chaff which the wind drives away.
⁵Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment,
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous.***

***⁶For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,
But the way of the ungodly shall perish. (Psalm 1)***

[\[1\]](#) More specifically, in both these cases, the word appears in participle form (verbal adjective). But the author, by choosing the present tense, is obviously drawing attention to the present tense (on going) aspect otherwise, he would have used a different tense.