

The Traveling Pulpit

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Sanctification

“Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace, be multiplied.” (I Peter 1:2)

Introduction

Like the blessing of “justification” (Rom. 5:16), sanctification is another privilege bestowed upon God’s “elect” as a result of their union with Him “in Christ” (II Cor. 5:17). Some people have incorrectly identified the doctrine of sanctification with terms, such as, baptism of the spirit, second blessing, or sinless perfection. Too often, the subject of sanctification is misunderstood as a second work of grace instead of a continuing work of grace.

God doesn’t expect His children to remain spiritual “babes” (I Cor. 3:3), but to feed upon the “word” (Heb. 5:13), and “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (II Pet. 3:18). This ongoing process of Christian development is called “sanctification.” It involves, not only being set apart for God at the time of salvation, but growing spiritually and learning how to live holy. Sanctification is the process by which, according to the will of God, we are made partakers of his holiness; it is a progressive work; it is begun in regeneration; it is carried on in the hearts of believers by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit; it is the work of God’s free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man, after the image of God, and enabled more and more to die unto sin and live unto righteousness.

The Meaning of Sanctification

The words sanctification and sanctify simply mean to consecrate, set apart, or to make holy. They can be used to speak of people, places, or things in both the Old and New Testaments. Most generally, these words are used to describe one’s personal character and are interchangeably used along with the words “holy” (Lev. 12:7) and

“holiness” (Heb. 12:14). Christian “holiness” includes both inward character and outward conduct and cannot be separated from the theme of sanctification (Rom. 12:1-2). Sanctification is the process by which holiness is accomplished in the life of a believer. Holiness is not determined by the way one grooms his hair, or by the way one dresses, but by submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. No sinful person can make himself holy, no more than he can “justify” (Titus 3:7) himself in the sight of God. Therefore, the sanctified are those who have been made holy by the grace of God.

Sanctified people are those who have been regenerated by the “power” (Acts 1:8) of the “Holy Spirit” (Jh. 3:8) and have been “justified” by “faith” (Rom. 4:16). It’s impossible for a depraved sinner to purify his heart and life by means of self-effort. Therefore, the new birth is prerequisite to the work of sanctification. Without a new nature, man would never desire to live holy. Sanctification involves the cooperation of a believer with God in yielding to His divine authority. Receiving and relying upon the promises of God’s word are essential elements in the continuous process of sanctification. Justification occurs instantaneously at the moment of conversion, but sanctification is a gradual occurrence over time.

The Nature of Sanctification

Scripture shows us that some of the best known servants of God had sinful tendencies that they had to overcome. For some examples I can point out men like “David” (II Sam. 11:4), “Peter” (Jh. 18:25), and “Paul” (Acts 15:37-40). In spite of their human weaknesses of the flesh, these redeemed men were still saints. They were saints, not because of their own goodness, but because God had begun his work of sanctification within them that would continue until their deaths. “Saints” (Rom. 16:15) are not people who have reached sinless perfection, but believers who are merely on the road to perfection. A saint is one who has been “saved” (Rom. 10:9) by the grace of God thus being “sanctified in Christ Jesus” (I Cor. 1:2). Christians don’t live holy lives in order to become saints, but because they are saints, they must learn to live holy. No believer will realize full sanctification until he dies and enters into the presence of the Lord. Only in heaven will perfect purity and holiness become a reality. God’s present work of sanctifying us is for the purpose of conforming us “to the image of his Son” (Rom. 8:29). When we get to heaven, “we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is” (I Jh. 3:3). Until then, “it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do his good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).

The partial sanctification of this life is progressive, but in heaven it will be complete. In this life, the process of sanctification is like the ascent to the top of a mountain. The believer is always going forward, but not always upward. Sometimes the pathway descends as he struggles with temptations and trials. Sometimes distractions might even prolong his ascent to the summit. But, eventually, he reaches a point where he can look back at his journey and see how far the Lord has brought him. There are times when this earthly pilgrimage becomes wearisome and the traveler despairs. But, by God’s grace he continues to press onward until the journey is complete. Once the end is attained, the believer will discover that the journey was worth the taking and that the traveling was not done alone (II Tim. 4:6-8). As Christians, we are born into the

family of God as “babes” (I Pet. 2:2) who must learn to digest the “word” of God in order to “grow thereby.” In this growing process, we’ll learn how to “put off” the “old man” and “put on the new man” (Eph. 4:22-25). Spiritual maturity is a part of the process of sanctification that impresses upon us to forsake the lust of the flesh and live godly (I Thess. 4:3-7).

The Author of Sanctification

God alone can sanctify a sinner into something holy in His sight. The work of sanctification can be ascribed to all three Persons of the Godhead. Both the “Father” (Jh. 17:5-17) and the “Son” (Eph. 5:26) are involved in sanctification. However, it is the “Holy Spirit” to Whom the work of sanctification is especially assigned in the consecrating of a believer’s life (I Cor. 6:11, II Thess. 2:13, I Pet. 1:2). The “Holy Spirit” is the divine agent in regeneration Who indwells the believer at the very moment of conversion (I Cor. 6:19). It is the “Holy Spirit” Who empowers us for service (Acts 1:8), enlightens the mind (Jh. 14:26), and teaches us truth (Jh. 16:13). He equips us with strength to overcome the “flesh” and “mortify the deeds of the body” (Rom. 8:13).

As Christians yield themselves to the control of the indwelling “Holy Spirit,” they become not only recipients of His blessings, but submissive vessels through whom God will do His work on earth. The closer one grows to God, the further he will grow away from the world (Jam. 4:4). As our love (Rom. 5:4-9) for the Lord grows, so will our desire to “put off ... the old man” of sin (Eph. 4:22). By getting in the “word” of God, we can let the “word” of God get into us and by the power of the “Holy Spirit,” cleanse us from the defilements of the world (II Cor. 7:1). Until God changes man’s affections, he’ll never yearn to please God or live acceptability to Him. Only the “Holy Spirit” can motivate a sinner to live like a saint. Yielding to the control of the “Holy Spirit,” desiring a higher and richer spiritual life with God, hungering for God’s truth, cleansing from the filthiness of the flesh, are all indications of sanctification.

The Means of Sanctification

The exact means by which the Holy Spirit operates in sanctification is beyond the ability of man to understand. The work of sanctification is accomplished as the Spirit mysteriously moves us toward a closer relationship with God. This is done through spiritual growth and the application of God’s “word” (Jh. 17:17-19) in our lives. Dedicating ourselves to consecrated (holy) living and refraining from sin is evidence of sanctification. In various ways and through different circumstances, God can move to sanctify us unto Himself. He can allow life’s trials to strengthen us and to draw us into His will. Even the afflictions sent as “chastisements” can bring us nearer to God as He gets our attention, reminds us of His “word” and stirs us to “holiness” (Heb. 12:10).

Good “works” can no more produce sanctification than they can justification. However, good works no doubt are the result of sanctification, just as they are in justification (Jam. 2:21-26). Christians who are surrendered to God can become channels through which God will bless others. Apart from earnest prayer, a surrendered will, and dedication to the “word”, our sanctification will be stunted. The means of sanctification is always connected with God’s truth (Jh. 17:17-19, Eph. 5:26).

To take away the truth is to remove the sanctifying effect upon believers. Apart from the Holy Spirit and God's Word, sanctification could not be experienced.

Closing

Theologically speaking, we can say that the three tenses of salvation are justification, sanctification, and glorification. As believers, we have been saved from the penalty of sin, we are being saved from the power of sin, and we shall someday be saved from the very presence of sin. Sanctification commences in God's saving grace (Heb. 13:12), continues in spiritual growth (Heb. 5:14), and is consummated in eternal glory (Rom. 8:30). Justification means that God will never see a single sin that has been cleansed by the precious atoning blood of Christ. Sanctification means that God is in the process of ironing out our sinful wrinkles from this body of flesh. Glorification means that the final uprooting of sin from our old nature is yet to be eradicated after death, at which time we'll never sin again. God has promised that the good "work" which He has "begun" in us, He will finish (Phil. 1:6). In Justification, we are given a new relationship. In Sanctification, we are given a new character. In glorification, we are given a new body, which is the ultimate end of our sanctification.

A Ministry Update

The calling that God has placed upon my life is to teach God's Word to believers in order for them to learn how to live the sanctified Christian life. Living for Christ is an ever-learning spiritual journey that is only possibly by means of the indwelling Holy Spirit. May God give us a desire as never before, to learn and apply God's Word to our lives this upcoming New Year.

It's hard to believe that 2013 is upon us. Everyone says that time goes by so fast. That in itself is a reminder of how life is like a "vapor" (Jam. 4:14). It's here one moment, but gone the next. We don't know what the future holds, but our comfort and strength is found in the One Who Holds It! Every way we turn in this world, we find turmoil and confusion. Spiritually, our nation and churches throughout our land stand in need of a heaven sent revival. May God grant us the grace to be found faithful until Jesus comes again.

I've finished my booklet, "**Godly Servants - A Glimpse Into The Subject of Elders, Deacons, And Deaconesses.**" It's free for the asking. The Lord has blessed COGM with over six years of ministry. We have now entered our fifth year of radio. We'll continue doing what God has called us to do as long as He provides. This is a faith ministry supported by God's people. Thanks to each and every one that God has used in allowing me to fulfill His calling upon my life and this ministry.

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