

Fundamentals, Study 13: Sanctification (Rom 7:13-25)

by BS Poh

o It is important to be clear on the doctrine of sanctification as there are conflicting teachings on this subject.

1. We have learned that *effectual calling* is the work of God in saving sinners by the power of the Holy Spirit through the hearing or reading of His word.¹ We have learned also that the person who is effectually called will be regenerated, i.e. given spiritual life by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Once regenerated, the dominion (or reign) of sin over the person's life is destroyed. However, the person is not made perfect immediately. The continuing work of the Holy Spirit in the person, gradually making him holier, is known as *sanctification*.² Unlike *justification*, which is the once for all act of God declaring the person not guilty but righteous, sanctification is a process that will last the lifetime of the person on earth. (1. Rom 10:17; Gal 3:2; 2. Rom 6:14; 1 John 1:7-10.)

2. The Holy Spirit convicts the person of his sins, by the word of God. He will also give the person the desire, and the ability, to fight against those sins.³ Remaining corruptions will resist the work of the Holy Spirit in his life. Often, there is a severe struggle. Increasingly, the lusts of the body will be weakened and be put to death.⁴ This must not be confused with the efforts of an unconverted person to live a moral life, through sheer discipline and exertions of the will. Such efforts can improve the behaviour of the person to some extent, but they cannot change his nature. Sanctification is a supernatural work of God, the effects of which are far deeper and more thorough than can be achieved by mere human efforts. We see now that sanctification is totally the work of God, which at the same time involves the efforts of man.⁵ (3. Rom 8:13-14; Gal 5:17; 4. Rom 7:23; 6:14; 5. 2 Cor 3:18; 7:1; Phil 2:12-13.)

3. Sanctification affects the whole of the person, and not just some, or most, parts of him.⁶ A Christian cannot excuse himself for certain sins in his life - such as a bad temper, or gluttony - by saying that he is born that way. The Holy Spirit will continually supply strength to him to resist those sins. The believer, on his part, must attend to "the means of grace", i.e. the means which God provides for their spiritual growth. These include reading and hearing the word of God, getting baptised, taking part in the Lord's supper, praying individually and together with other believers, and being in fellowship with other Christians.⁷ The Christian grows in grace and holiness as he obeys the commands of Christ more and more, submitting to Him as Lord.⁸ (6. 1 Thess 5:23; 7. Col 1:10-11; 2 Tim 2:22; Heb 10:24-25; 8. 2 Pet 3:18; 2 Cor 7:1)

4. There are two errors which we must guard against. Firstly, there is *perfectionism* which teaches that it is possible for believers to be free from sin in this life. This error has the effects of lowering the standard of holiness set by the Bible, and limiting the idea of sin to conscious wrong-doings only.⁹ Secondly, there is the *higher life* or *victorious life* view of sanctification, which is a particular form of *perfectionism*. It teaches that by a definite act of faith and commitment to Christ, one can achieve instantaneous sanctification. It fails to take into consideration the clear teaching of Scripture that faith and commitment to Christ is not something passive, but involve habitual trust and

obedience, constant prayer and hard work.10 (9. Rom 3:25; 1 John 1:7-10; Heb 12:14; 10. Rom 8:13-14; Phil 2:12-13; Col 1:29.)

= Seek to live a holy life, by trusting and obeying Jesus Christ.

Review Questions

1. What happens to the dominion of sin when a person is regenerated?
2. What is *sanctification*?
3. State one difference between *justification* and *sanctification*.
4. State the three things the Holy Spirit does to the person who is being sanctified.
5. What is man's role in relation to God's role in sanctification?
6. Why can't a Christian excuse himself for certain sins in his life?
7. State the different means of grace used by God to help the believer in sanctification.
8. Name the two errors we must guard against with respect to sanctification.
9. What are the harmful effects of the first error?
10. What is the Bible's teaching on faith and commitment to Christ?

Assignment/Discussion

What are the similarities and differences between the views of sanctification as taught by John Wesley, the Keswick Convention, and Watchman Nee? At what points do they differ from the view taught in the 1689 Confession?

Memory Passage (Rom 8:12-14)

12 Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. 13 For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. 14 For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God.

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