

MAJOR BIBLE DOCTRINES

Part 33: The Holy Spirit: sanctification

To sanctify means "to set apart from sin for holy purposes." Sanctification refers to the work of God in making sinners holy.¹ "Sanctification is God's making sinners holy in heart and conduct" (Children's Catechism).

Q. 75. *What is sanctification?* A. Sanctification is a work of God's grace, whereby they whom God has, before the foundation of the world, chosen to be holy, are in time, through the powerful operation of his Spirit applying the death and resurrection of Christ unto them, renewed in their whole man after the image of God; having the seeds of repentance unto life, and all other saving graces, put into their hearts, and those graces so stirred up, increased, and strengthened, as that they more and more die unto sin, and rise unto newness of life—Larger Catechism

Sanctification is an immediate work of the Spirit of God on the souls of believers, purifying and cleansing of their natures from the pollution and uncleanness of sin, renewing in them the image of God, and thereby enabling them, from a spiritual and habitual principle of grace, to yield obedience unto God, according unto the tenor and terms of the new covenant, by virtue of the life and death of Jesus Christ. Or more briefly—It is the universal renovation of our natures by the Holy Spirit into the image of God, through Jesus Christ—John Owen [*Works*, vol.3, 386]

I. Sanctification

A. Seven aspects of sanctification

1. *Its OT typology.* The OC sacrificial system typified both justification and sanctification, God's provision for the guilt and filth of sin. Throughout the OT, water was used to purify or cleanse what was unclean. "Thus you shall do to them to cleanse them: Sprinkle water of purification on them" (Num.8:7). This typified the "washing of regeneration" (Tit.3:5), the cleansing of sanctification (Eph.5:26). "In that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and for the inhabitants of Jerusalem, for sin (guilt) and for uncleanness (filth)" (Zech.13:1). The entire Levitical system could be reduced to blood and water. "The ceremonies consisted mostly of shedding the blood of animals that were offered, and of purifying with water. These ceremonies, now, are fulfilled in Christ. He came not only by water or not only by blood, but by both water and blood. Christ both sanctifies His people and justifies them" (Kersten).

(1) Heb.10:19-22

2. *Its initiation.* "It is a fact too frequently overlooked that in the NT the most characteristic terms that refer to sanctification are used, not of a process, but of a once-for-all definitive act" (Murray). This initial and definitive sanctification is radical, wholistic, and endowing. [1] It's radical. It's "the radical breach with the power and love of sin" (Murray). The old man is crucified and the new man resurrected. "Those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires" (Gal.5:24). "You have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is

¹ Men do not make themselves holy; their holiness, and their growth in grace, are not due to their own fidelity, or firmness of purpose, or watchfulness and diligence, although all these are required, but to the divine influence by which they are rendered thus faithful, watchful, and diligent, and which produces in them the fruits of righteousness. Without me, saith our Lord, ye can do nothing. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. The hand is not more dependent on the head for the continuance of its vitality, than is the believer on Christ for the continuance of spiritual life in the soul—Charles Hodge [*Systematic Theology*, vol.3, 218]

renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (Col.3:9-10). The first act in sanctification, is setting the sinner apart from this world. "God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal.6:14; Jn.17:16). [2] It's wholistic. Every faculty of the soul is renovated or restored to the image of God. "In the sanctification of believers, the Holy Ghost does work in them, in their whole souls, their minds, wills, and affections, a gracious, supernatural habit, principle, and disposition of living unto God; wherein the substance or essence, the life and being, of holiness does consist" (Owen). [3] It's endowing. The Spirit endows the soul with every grace necessary to live and act holy.² "In initial sanctification, the Spirit of Christ enters the heart with all His train of spiritual graces, and implants them there. He introduces spiritual life, impresses the soul with the image of God, creates new inclinations and motions, or, in other words, forms the new creature. This He does in an instant" (Colquhoun).

(1) Rom.6:1-14³; 1Cor.1:1-3; 1Cor.6:9-11; 2Thess.2:13-14; 1Pet.1:13-19

3. *Its pattern.* Sanctification is patterned after the character of God, the image of Christ, and the moral law. [1] The character of God. Sanctification is the restoration of God's image in man. "The pattern to which believers are sanctified, is the holiness of the divine nature. Man was created in the image of God, and the design of sanctification is to restore him to his original state" (Dick). As sons, we reflect the moral image of our Father. "Be holy, for I am holy" (1Pet.1:16). [2] The image of Christ. Sanctification entails the elect, as Christ's spiritual brethren and children, being conformed into His moral image. "My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you" (Gal.4:19), that is, the image of Christ formed in them through sanctification. "It is to the holiness of God as manifested in Christ that believers are conformed by the agency of the Spirit; and hence Christ may also be considered as the pattern after which believers are sanctified. I speak of him, not as the second Person of the Trinity...but as incarnate or clothed with our nature, and in it exhibiting all the graces and virtues which constitute our assimilation to God. We see in him what human nature was, when it was formed by the hand of the Creator, and he looked upon it with approval, and what it must become that it may be pleasing in his eyes, and may be admitted into his glorious presence" (Dick). [3] The moral law of God. Sanctification begins with God writing His law upon the heart (Jer.31:33), and it continues with the Spirit enabling us to fulfill its righteous demands (Rom.8:4). "Our experimental sanctification consists in *our hearts being conformed to the Divine law*...As all sin is a transgression of the law (1Jn.3:4), so all holiness must be a fulfilling of the law" (Pink).⁴ Because the law is "holy, just and good" (Rom.7:12), it shows us wherein true holiness and

² Many of the older writers distinguish between *habitual* and *actual* holiness. These are the counterparts to *original* and *actual* sin. Habitual holiness refers to the renewed soul endowed with every grace, actual holiness refers to the outworking of that holiness in word and deed. "Make the tree good (habitual holiness), and its fruit will be good (actual holiness)" (Matt.12:33).

³ The decisive and definitive breach with sin that occurs at the inception of Christian life is one necessitated by the fact that the death of Christ was decisive and definitive. It is just because we cannot allow for any reversal or repetition of Christ's death on the tree that we cannot allow for any compromise on the doctrine that every believer has died to sin and no longer lives under its dominion. Sin no longer lords it over him. To equivocate here is to assail the definitiveness of Christ's death. Likewise the decisive and definitive entrance upon newness of life in the case of every believer is required by the fact that the resurrection of Christ was decisive and definitive. As we cannot allow for any reversal or repetition of the resurrection, so we cannot allow for any compromise on the doctrine that every believer is a new man, that the old man has been crucified, that the body of sin has been destroyed, and that, as a new man in Christ Jesus, he serves God in the newness which is none other than that of the Holy Spirit of whom he has become the habitation and his body the temple—John Murray [*Works*, vol.2, 293]

⁴ The unchanging moral Law of God, which requires us to love Him with all our hearts and our neighbours as ourselves, is the believer's rule of life, the standard of holiness to which his character and conduct must be conformed, the line and plummet by which his internal desires and thoughts as well as outward deeds are measured—A.W. Pink [*The Doctrine of Sanctification*, 179]

righteousness consists. "The law is spoken of as holy, just, and good. These are attributes which express what God is; and to characterize the law as holy, just, and good is but to claim in the most explicit way possible that the law is of God and bears the imprint of his character as holy, just, and good. Thus every lack of conformity to the law of God is lack of conformity to God's likeness, and all conformity to the law is but conformity to that pattern which is the primary and ultimate pattern of sanctification" (Murray).

(1) Ezek.36:26-27; Matt.5:43-48; Rom.8:29-30; Rom.12:1-2⁵; 2Cor.3:18; Eph.5:1-2

4. *Its source.* In every aspect, sanctification is dependant on a personal and saving attachment to Christ. Christians are "sanctified in Christ Jesus" (1Cor.1:2), that is, in saving and vital union with Christ. "Our *union to Christ* is the grand hinge on which everything turns" (Pink). [1] Initial sanctification. "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him" (Rom.6:8). "By our union with Christ we receive a new and holy nature, whereby we are prepared for holy living, which holy living is determined and regulated by our practical and experimental fellowship with Him" (Pink). [2] Progressive sanctification. All grace necessary for our sanctification, is found in Christ. "And of His fulness we have all received, and grace for grace" (Jn.1:16). [3] Completed or perfected sanctification. This is glorification, and it's also the result of our union with Christ. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus" (1Thess.4:14).

(1) Jn.15:5; 1Cor.1:30-31; 2Tm.2:1

5. *Its elements.* Though passive in initial sanctification, the soul is active in progressive sanctification. These activities are two - mortification and vivification. "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness" (Shorter Catechism). "He saved us, through the washing of regeneration (negative) and renewing of the Holy Spirit (positive)" (Tit.3:5). "Mortification and vivification make up the whole of the divine work in the new-born soul" (Whitfield). [1] Mortification. This refers to the process of putting to death the deeds of the body or flesh. It entails two parts, the starvation of the flesh, and killing or restraining of actual sin. [a] The starvation of the flesh. The "flesh" is the principle of sin that remains in every Christian. Every faculty remains in part fallen, and this fallen principle is the flesh, "the body of death" (Rom.7:24). "Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul" (1Pet.2:11). "Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation" (Mk.14:38). [b] The killing or restraining of actual sin. "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you...and if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you" (Matt.5:29-30). [2] Vivification. This refers to the process of animating (enlivening) or strengthening the positive graces of holiness. "For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith virtue, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, love" (2Pet.1:5-7). This vivification concerns the whole soul, the mind, affections, and will. "May the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and

⁵ When the apostle says: '*Be not conformed to this world, but be ye transformed by the renewal of your mind, that ye may prove what is the will of God, the good, the acceptable, and the perfect,*' he defines for us the pattern [of our sanctification] in terms of the will of God. But what is of importance is to note how he characterizes this will. He does not describe it simply as good, and acceptable, and perfect, but as that which is '*the good and the acceptable and the perfect.*' The will of God is that which for us in the epitome of the good, the well-pleasing, and the perfect. It is that which defines the zenith of good, acceptable, and perfect. And such characterizations would be impossible if it were not the case that the will of God for us reflects that which God is, as alone ultimately good and perfect—John Murray [*Collective Writings*, vol.2, 307-308]

may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Thess.5:23).⁶

- (1) Rom.8:12-14; Rom.12:1-2; Rom.14:11-14; 2Cor.7:1; Gal.5:16-17; Col.3:1-5, 12-14; Heb.12:1-2

6. *Its cause.* Christians are sanctified by the Spirit and by faith. [1] The Spirit of God is the *direct* (immediate) cause of sanctification. The NT speaks of those "sanctified by the Spirit" (Rom.15:16), and "the sanctification of the Spirit" (1Pet.1:2). The Spirit sanctifies as "the Holy Spirit" (2Cor.6:6), and "the Spirit of holiness" (Rom.1:4). [2] The grace of faith is the *instrumental* (mediate) cause of sanctification. "Faith is the mediate or instrumental cause of sanctification...It unites us to Christ and keeps us in touch with Him as the Head of the new humanity, who is the source of the new life within us, and also of our progressive sanctification, through the operation of the Holy Spirit" (Berkhof). We work out what the Spirit works in. This work is by faith. "We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith" (1Thess.1:3). Sanctifying faith is both receptive and active. It receives FROM Christ and works FOR Christ. We live, stand, walk, obey, and overcome by faith (Gal.2:20; 2Cor.1:24; 2Cor.5:7; Rom.1:5; 1Jn.5:4; 1Tim.6:12). The heart is "purified by faith" (Acts 15:9), and "sanctified by faith" (Acts 26:18). "Faith accepts a *whole* Christ; not only as Priest to atone for us, but as a King to reign over us. Faith, then, is the *instrument* of our sanctification. Faith is the eye which perceives the gracious provisions which God has made for His people. Faith is the hand which appropriates those provisions. Faith is the mouth which receives all the good that God has stored up for us in Christ. Without faith it is impossible to please God, and without the exercise of faith it is impossible to make any real progress in the spiritual life" (Pink).

- (1) Rom.5:1-2; Acts 15:9; Acts 26:18; Gal.2:20

7. *Its means.* The Spirit uses means to promote our sanctification. "These means may be said comprehensively to be God's truth, His ordinances, and His providence" (Dabney). [1] The word of God. "The principal means used by the Holy Spirit for our sanctification is the Word of God" (Berkhof). The word shows us what holiness is, provides examples and motives, and nourishes the soul as bread and milk. [2] The ordinances of God. By ordinances is meant the public and private means of grace. Prayer, singing, hearing the word read/preached, and the sacraments, are the means by which the Spirit communicates grace and strength to the believing soul (Ps.84:7; Heb.4:16). [3] The providences of God. God's providence is an indirect means of sanctification, in that trial and hardship drive us to a more diligent use of the word and ordinances. "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word" (Ps.119:67, 71). "God's providences, both favorable and adverse, are often powerful means of sanctification. In connection with the operation of the Holy Spirit through the Word, they work on our natural affections and thus frequently deepen the impression of religious truth and force it home" (Berkhof). The word is central to these latter two means (ordinances and tribulations), "so that the word is the means, after all, in all other means. Where the word is not, there is no holiness" (Dabney).

- (1) Acts 20:32; Jn.17:17-19; Rom.5:3-5; 2Cor.12:7-10; Eph.5:25-26; Heb.12:7-11

⁶ Strictly, indeed, the body is not the subject of sanctification, because, being a material substance, it is susceptible neither of virtue nor of vice; but it is sanctified in this sense, that it is dedicated to the service of God, and its organs and members, which were formerly employed in sinful actions, and were excitements to them, are converted into the instruments of righteousness. It is called in Scripture, 'the temple of the Holy Ghost'—John Dick [*Lectures*, vol.3, 434-435]