

## Things to Know About Sanctification

For some Christians, sanctification is something you might have heard about, but only have a vague idea about what it is. They know it as the frustration of dealing unsuccessfully with temptation. A student of theology is aware of some problematic views of sanctification, but it is important to mature believers because of the challenge it represents.

### 1. The call to holiness and sanctification

Simply put, the word *sanctification*, as well as *sanctify* and *holy*, means to be separated. The Jews were to live a life separated from the lost world by their geography, their relationships, and their spirituality. Peter challenged us to that sense of holiness.

1Pet 1:15-16 But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;  
16Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

In that sense of holiness, we automatically think of the righteousness and goodness of God. It has been suggested that holiness is the chief characteristic of God because the quality of any and all of His attributes are separate, *exceeding* anything we can perceive in our finiteness. In our call to holiness, know that we are supposed to *emulate*, or imitate, that righteousness and goodness. The call to holiness is to be like God. We are called to be different than the way we were born and according to our base human nature.

Even the world appreciates the need for change and improvement. In a positive way, the world has long ago tapped into people's desire for improvement and filled that need with all kinds of beneficial self-help books.

For the Christian, improvement extends beyond becoming more competent to achieve success in this world. Holiness is achieved through

*sanctification*. In Eph 1:3-5 we can see the there ways in which the Bible speaks of sanctification which goes beyond competence and success.

Eph 1:3-5 Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ:

4According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:

5Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

In v. 4 we see the call to holiness.

- Positional Sanctification

In v. 3, 4, we see that we are holy and sanctified because of the *position* we have: we are *in* Christ. In Eph 5 we see that there was a change in our nature because of Christ.

Eph 5:5-8 For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

6Let no man deceive you with vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience.

7Be not ye therefore partakers with them.

8For ye were sometimes darkness, but now *are ye* light in the Lord: walk as children of light:

At first, it might look as though one is judged because of their disobedience and sin. The Greek word for *disobey* encompasses more than non-compliance to a command. In Greek, there is a word for simple belief and a different word

that suggests believing to the point of being convinced to the point of receiving the Gospel. The Bible even uses the phrase "obey the Gospel," meaning that we should believe to the point of accepting Christ as Savior. The word for *disobey* speaks of a rebellious nature. Before we were saved we were the *children* of disobedience. We *were* darkness, not just *in* darkness. Our nature was dark and sinful. Once we were saved, we *became* light, not just *in* the light. All of this is because of our position *in* Christ. So, *Positional Sanctification* speaks of being born again. The reason we refer to being born again as *Positional Sanctification* is because we are separated from the world by our position *in* Christ.

- Ultimate Sanctification

In Eph 1:5, we see that we are predestinated to the adoption, the resurrection, where we will receive our new body. Paul then points out how we are then *sealed* with the Holy Spirit.

Eph 1:13 In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

We will one day be separate from all of this world in the resurrection when we receive our glorified body and be absolutely free from temptation and live in the presence of God. This is known as *Permanent, or Ultimate, Sanctification*.

We also see that our sanctification is based on our faith in Christ as our Savior. We are sealed and separated *after* that we believed.

- Progressive Sanctification

In between the day of our being sanctified by being in Christ, and the day when we will have the ultimate sanctification, comes our life on earth when we are becoming more like Christ while we are in this sinful flesh. In 1Pet

we read how we are called to holiness, but especially notice in 1Pet 1:14,15 that the sanctifying of our conversation, lifestyle, is a process.

1Pet 1:14-16 As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance:

15But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;

16Because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy.

We are to *fashion* ourselves in our conversation, or lifestyle, according to holiness. Paul described it this way in Romans 12

Rom 12:1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, *which is* your reasonable service.

2And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

This aspect of sanctification is known as *Progressive Sanctification*.

There are a number of different issues about Positional, Progressive, and Ultimate Sanctification to look at, but we are going to focus Progressive Sanctification because that is where some significant issues arise. In fact, the issues arising out of sanctification have provided the biggest challenge to the theological core of modern denominations.

2. We are already completely accepted by God

One of the concerns people have as they strive for sanctification is whether they are very good enough before God or not. That is not the point of sanctification. On occasion, I have

counseled those who have come to me feeling defeated and discouraged about how bad they are as a Christian. They feel like God can't love them. That part of the counseling is very easy. I can look up to heaven and ask, "God, is so-and-so good enough?" Then I can with all truth look back at them and report, "Yep. God says you're good enough." How do we know this? First God *is* love.

1John 4:16 And we have known and believed the love that God hath to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

Secondly, the Bible says that in Christ, God has *made* you acceptable.

Eph 1:6-7 To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

7In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace;

*We* did not make *ourselves* accepted, *God* made us accepted. It was not because we had to prove ourselves good enough. We are accepted because *Jesus* is good enough and we have been redeemed by Him and place *in* Him.

Sanctification is not about becoming good enough *for* Him, it is about growing *in* Him. This does not mean to say that our worldliness or lack of holiness is merely ignored. What we look at, our language, our reading material, what we laugh at, the message of the lyrics we listen to, the people we fellowship with, the things we allow as entertainment, should all be characterized by their holiness.

### 3. We are not striving for salvation

On a related point, we are not looking to become good enough to have earned our way into heaven. Paul explained this to the Galatians.

Gal 3:1-3 O foolish Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

2This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

3Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

We were not placed into Jesus by our works, neither are we perfected by our works.

Eph 2:8-9 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God:

9Not of works, lest any man should boast.

4. We are looking to be more excellent in service

Eph 2:10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

There are so many Scriptures to this effect:

2Tim 2:15 Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

Phil 1:9-10 And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and *in* all judgment;

10That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;

Rom 12:6-11 Having then gifts differing according to the grace

that is given to us, whether prophecy, *let us prophesy* according to the proportion of faith;

7Or ministry, *let us wait* on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;

8Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, *let him do it* with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

9*Let* love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

10*Be* kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

11Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;

2Pet 1:3-11 According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that *pertain* unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

4Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

5And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge;

6And to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness;

7And to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

8For if these things be in you, and abound, they make *you that ye shall* neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

9But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

10Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:

11For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

## 5. Discipleship: planned sanctification

As we respond to the problems and challenges of life in a Godly way, we will be undergoing the process of sanctification. However, we can't just wait for life to happen to experience sanctification. In fact, that can be a hazardous way to grow. If we depend on our spirit in our immaturity, we run the risk of making some well intended but unwise decisions. Sanctification by plan is better called discipleship.

Eph 4:11-15 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

14That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, *even* Christ:

This is why it is important to be part of the planned Bible study in the church. Certainly there is a blessing as you go to hear your favorite media preacher. However, getting God's message on a



catch as catch can basis has a problem. I assume that those preachers are preparing their messages to be preached in a certain order to meet the needs of their congregation, just like the preaching schedule here is tailored to our needs. When we go to plan a series of messages, we take into consideration what has been preached or taught and also how it fits into our need for growth. When I preached on Fellowship recently, it was not just because fellowship is an interesting topic, it was because at the stage we are at in *this* church we need to be challenged for fellowship. We each might have a pet subject that we like to hear about, but we need to have the Bible applied to the context of the challenges we face together.

We also need to *schedule* time as a church for outreach. We need to *schedule* a time for prayer. We need to *schedule* a time for our *personal* service for the Lord, reading, praying, and reaching out.

We must be deliberately and purposefully seeking holiness. We cannot drift or coast to it. Are we attending to our sanctification as much as we are to the upkeep of our homes, cars, and computers? Are we attending to our sanctification as much as we are to our health? People neglect their eternal health; should we take them seriously when they fret over their temporary physical health? Are we attending to our sanctification as much as we are trying to get promoted at our worldly employment?

1. The call to holiness and sanctification 1Pet 1:15-16, Eph 1:3-5, 13, 5:5-8, 1Pet 1:14-16, Rom 12:1-2
2. We are already completely accepted by God 1John 4:16, Eph 1:6-7
3. We are not striving for salvation Gal 3:1-3, Eph 2:8-9
4. We are looking to be more excellent in service Eph 2:10, 2Tim 2:15, Phil 1:9-10, Rom 12:6-11, 2Pet 1:3-11
5. Discipleship: planned sanctification Eph 4:11-15