



Chapter 13: Of Sanctification

Now that we were elected, called and justified we enter into the Christian life, which is one of growth in holiness with ups and downs. In this chapter, we will deal with the question concerning what sanctification is and how it works.

§1 Through The Virtue Of Christ's Death And Resurrection, Are Also Farther Sanctified, Really And Personally

1. They who are **united to Christ**, effectually called, and regenerated, having **a new heart and a new spirit** created in them **through the virtue of Christ's death and resurrection**, **1** are also farther sanctified, really and personally, **2** through the same virtue, **3** by **His Word** and **Spirit** dwelling in them; **4** the **dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed**, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified, and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of **all true holiness**, **5 without which no man shall see the Lord**. **6**
 1. 1 John 3:3-8; 1 John 2:29; 3:9-10; Rom. 1:7; 6:1-11; 15:16; 2 Cor. 1:1; Eph. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 3:12; Acts 20:32; 26:18; 1 Cor. 1:2, 6:11^[1]
 2. 1 Thess. 5:23; Rom. 6:19, 22
 3. 1 Cor. 6:11; Acts 20:32; Phil. 3:10; Rom. 6:5-6
 4. John 17:17, Eph. 5:26; 3:16-19; Rom. 8:13
 5. Rom. 6:13-14; Gal. 5:17, 24; Rom. 8:13; Col. 1:11; Eph. 3:16-19; 4:22-25; 2 Cor. 7:1
 6. Heb. 12:14

United, Called and Regenerated

I refer the interested reader to the previous chapters where we dealt with these things. I lightly touched upon our [union with Christ in chapter 8 paragraph 5](#). We dealt with the [effectual call or Irresistible Grace in chapter 10](#) and [Regeneration and Justification were dealt with in chapter 11](#).

Sanctification

What is sanctification? Wayne Grudem defines sanctification in this way:

Sanctification is a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives.^[2]

In sanctification, God works in us to make us more Christ-like. It is a process throughout our whole Christian life on earth where God works to conform us to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:28-29). Throughout our Christian life, we will by the grace and work of the Holy Spirit learn to hate and forsake our sins and

follow Christ more faithfully. We should not think of sanctification as happening in one moment as some have done who believe that the Christian can be sinless. Nor should we think of sanctification is a line going only upward. But rather, sanctification is a process of ups and downs.

Obviously, once we come to know Christ, especially if we had lived a gross life, we will realize that it is no longer acceptable for us to do certain things and we will try to stop doing them. Therefore, there is a direct growth and going upward in a sense, but as we read the Word of God and learn God's will for us we will discover more and more sin in us and we should call on the Spirit of Christ to help us in our war against sin. But Christians do sin and fall into sin, we sometimes have seasons of disobedience and negligence to the means that God has ordained to bless us and sanctify us as for example the Word of God, prayer, corporate worship, etc. Therefore, there are also downs in our Christian life. It is not a straight line gradually going upward, rather a sort of zig-zag or flatline.

Romans 8:28-30 is a life passage for me. I love it and I take great comfort in it. Let us look at this passage and see what it says about sanctification.

Rom. 8:28-29 And we know that for those who love God **all things work together for good**, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined **to be conformed to the image of his Son**, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

For those who are God's, whom He has pleased according to His sovereign pleasure without anything in them to incline Him to save them, God the Sovereign Lord works in all things for their good. Whatever tragedy, whatever sin, whatever evil, whatever pain, whatever suffering I can cling to this verse because it gives me comfort and hope in God. It is God who is Sovereign and works all things according to His will and everything is under His control, therefore my suffering and evil too. But what is amazing about this passage is that the promise is made only for those who are called according to His purpose, i.e., the elect. It is alone to them that God promises that all things will work for good. But what is the "good," then? I don't believe the good means to live a comfortable life, have no problems, have a good education, have a good job or any other worldly thing. I believe the good which God is working for us is namely that we "be conformed to the image of his Son." The good that God has in mind is ultimately to make us more like Christ. Through our pain and suffering, God is molding us to be like Christ and this is a long process and it is not a one time action. God desires and works in us His will so that we will hate our sin and love Him instead more and more every day.

Notice that with the definition given by Grudem that he says that sanctification "is a work of God and man". In this process of sanctification, which is throughout the Christian life, man and God work together to bring about the result that we would be like Christ. Unlike regeneration, which is *monergistic*, i.e., there is only one power at work, sanctification is *synergistic*, i.e., there is a "together" working of man and God. Philippians 2 is an interesting text on this point:

Phil. 2:12-16 Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, **work out your own salvation** with fear and trembling, 13 **for it is God who works in you**, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. 14 Do all things without grumbling or disputing, 15 that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, 16 holding fast to the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I may be proud that I did not run in vain or labor in vain.

At the beginning of the chapter, Paul points to the Lord Jesus as the great example of humility whom the believers should model. He sets Christ as the example of the perfect faithful servant of God, Whom all

believers should seek to be like. Now Paul is telling the believers to work out their salvation (not work *for* their salvation), namely—to bring the full perfection and implication of their salvation by following Christ's example as the servant of God. They are to work out their salvation and bring the fruits thereof by doing God's will, "*for,*" or "*because of the reason*" that it is, in fact, God who is working in us. It is God who works in us to do His will. It is He who supplies us with all that is necessary to obey Him (Heb. 13:20-21), therefore, all glory goes to God. It is He who will cause us to obey according to the promise of the New Covenant (Ezek. 36:27).

Then we move from verses 12-13 to the rest of the passage quoted above and we see that Paul is commanding and encouraging the Philippians to persevere and do the will of God by obeying Him and doing good to each other. They are not to grumble about the things they are called to do, the reasons for that is that they may be blameless and innocent. That they may become more and more obedient to God and therefore, more and more like Christ. They are to shine as lights in the midst of utter darkness holding fast to the word of life, i.e., the Gospel, the Word of God wherein they find the will of God.

Sanctified and Being Sanctified

There is both a past and an ongoing aspect about sanctification. First, there is the fact that we have been set apart by God from all eternity to be saved and the Holy Spirit, in time and space, accomplishes that eternal plan in the lives of people where they're regenerated, given the Spirit, come to faith and repentance, are justified and so on. And thus the believers are set apart for the purpose and use of God (e.g. 1Cor. 1:2; Col. 3:12; Acts 26:18). Thus, there is a sense in our sanctification which is past and that is that we are no longer slaves of sin, but slaves of God. God is now working in us His good pleasure and has set us apart not for destruction, but for glory. But, as we discussed above, there is still a sense in which should still strive for holiness (Heb. 12:14) and seek to be sanctified now at the present time. Both of these senses come forward in a passage in Hebrews.

Heb. 10:10-14 And by that will **we have been sanctified** through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. 11 And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. 12 But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, 13 waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. 14 For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those **who are being sanctified**.

Through the perfect obedience of Christ to the Father, we have been sanctified and set apart for God's purpose and use on the cross when the High Priest offered Himself as the spotless sacrifice. Then the writer to the Hebrews contrasts Christ's superiority to that of the priests under the Old Covenant. Then in verse 14, he says that His once-for-all-time offering has perfected all of those who are being sanctified. Notice that in verse 12 the writer used the word ἡγιασμένοι (hegiasmēnoi, G37), which is a perfect passive participle verb. The perfect tense describes a *completed verbal action in the past*. The passive voice means that the action is being done *unto* the subject and not by the subject. Here we see the verb ἡγιαζώ (hagiazō, G37) being used as describing something that happened in the past. But we see a few verses later that the same verb in a different form is used again. In verse 14, we have the present passive participle ἡγιαζομένων (hagiazomenous). The present tense is the same as the English, it describes something that is happening at the present time when the author is writing. Those who are perfected are the ones who at the present time are being sanctified. We have been set apart for the purpose of God from all eternity and when we come to faith. But even at the present God is at work in us to do His good pleasure and conform us more into Christ's image.

By the Spirit and Word

God works to sanctify us and make us more like Christ through the Spirit Whom He has given us and the Word that His Spirit has written for our benefit. Paul says that we were washed, sanctified and justified by the Spirit (1Cor. 6:11). Our regeneration, justification, and sanctification are the work of the Spirit. In 2 Thessalonians 2:13 Paul says again that our sanctification is through the Spirit of God within us. If the Spirit was not given to us we would have been hopeless. But it is the Spirit through Whom God works in us. It is the Spirit whom He has given to us (Ezek. 36:25-27). It is the Spirit who works in us fruit that is acceptable to God (Gal. 5:22-23). It is through the Spirit that the war against the flesh and sin is waged (Rom. 8:1-13). See more on the [Spirit in chapter 12](#).

The Lord Jesus prays to His Father that His people may be sanctified in the truth and this truth He identifies as His Word (John 17:17). The means whereby we are sanctified and become more like Christ is through meeting the God revealed in Jesus Christ in the Word that His Spirit wrote down for us (1Sam. 3:21). In Acts 20:32 Paul commends and puts the Ephesians into the hands of God and the word of His grace, which Paul says that it "is able to build [us] up". Where would we find the will of God except in the Word of God through which we are made more like Christ? Both through the Spirit and the Word that the Spirit inspired humans to write down as the rule of all faith and practice, God sanctifies us and makes us more like Christ.

Dominion of Sin Destroyed

We wrote of this in chapter 9 on the [Will in the State of Grace](#). There I wrote about the fact that we are no longer under the dominion of sin, but there still remains corruption and sin in our body. We are no longer slaves to sin, but that does not mean that we no longer sin, but it does mean that we cannot live in a continued lifestyle of sin and still be regenerate (1Jn 3:9-10).

Paul writes:

Rom 6:14 For **sin will have no dominion over you**, since you are not under law but under grace.

This is a continuous process wherein we battle and are at war with our lusts and sins, here we through the means of grace as the Word and Spirit continually war against our lusts. It's not something that happens at one moment as justification, but it's an ongoing continuous process throughout our life on earth.

Man Made Able to Obey God

Before regeneration and faith we were unable and unwilling to do that which is pleasing to God, but now we are made able by God and His Spirit to walk in His ways and do that in which He has pleasure. Ezekiel 36:25-27 is my favorite passage on this regard because it addresses my depravity and provides a solution for my helplessness. It is God who promises to work in us His pleasure and to cause us to walk in His ways. It is God who has given the regenerate His Holy Spirit through Whom the fruits pleasing to God are brought forth (Gal 5:22-23). It is He who has made us a new creation (2Cor 15:17) with a new nature, i.e. a new heart and a new spirit which desires to do the will of God and is no longer a slave of sin.

To similar effect is Philippians 2:11-12 which we briefly looked at above. Another passage is Hebrews 13:20-21 which is a source of great comfort:

Heb 13:20-21 Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep, by the blood of the eternal covenant, 21 **equip you with everything good**

that you may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.

It is the God of peace, thanks to Whom we too who have been justified by Christ's blood have *shalom* (Rom. 5:1), Who works in us His will. It is He who gives us everything that is necessary so that we may do His will. Meaning, that our obedience to God does not spring forth from ourself, but instead it is worked in us by God the only Sovereign as we seek His face in prayer and in the Word. God gives us and equips us with everything good, so that we will walk in His statutes and rules, and so that we may do His will to the glory of His name. Ultimately, it is He who is "working in us that which is pleasing in his sight." It does not mean that we are passive and we do not do anything (contra the anti-Calvinists), but it means that those things did not spring from our nature and nor are they for our glory, but the glory is to God alone.

The Differences Between Sanctification and Justification

Grudem makes some helpful observations concerning the difference between justification and sanctification in the table below which is good to keep in mind and not mix these two things. In sanctification, unlike justification, man works together with God for his sanctification. But he can only do so because of the grace of God which is working in him to do God's pleasure (Phil. 2:12-13). This phraseology (God working in us) is used to not lead men to a passive mode where they do nothing in their sanctification, but all the more to encourage them. We are commanded to be holy. We are commanded to endure to the end. By the grace and will of God, we will.

Justification is a one time act, while sanctification is an ongoing process which will have its completion in heaven (we will stop sinning and be perfected) and in the resurrection (when we will receive a body like His). The following table from Grudem may help us to see the difference between justification and sanctification:

Justification	Sanctification
Legal standing	Internal condition
Once for all time	Continuous throughout life
Entirely God's work	We cooperate
Perfect in this life	Not perfect in this life
The same in all Christians	Greater in some than in others ^[3]

§2 This Sanctification Is Throughout The Whole Man, Yet Imperfect In This Life

2. This sanctification is **throughout the whole man**, yet **imperfect in this life**; there abideth still some **remnants of corruption** in every part, **1** whence ariseth a continual and **irreconcilable war**; **2** the flesh lusting against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. **3**
 1. 1 Thess. 5:23; 1 John 1:8, 10; Rom. 7:18, 23; Phil. 3:12
 2. 1 Cor. 9:24-27; 1 Tim. 1:18; 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7
 3. Gal. 5:17; 1 Peter 2:11

Remnants of Corruption

I have already dealt with this in [chapter 9](#) on Free Will in [the State of Grace](#). The interested reader may check our discussion on [Romans 7 and remaining corruptions here](#).

Irreconcilable War

Gal 5:17 For the **desires of the flesh are against the Spirit**, and the **desires of the Spirit are against the flesh**, for these **are opposed to each other**, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.

As long as we live in this body of sin (Rom. 7:24) and in this sinful and fallen world we will never have complete victory over sin, in such a way that we will no longer sin. But the war will be on throughout the whole Christian life. In the passage above we have two sorts of desires and those are the only desires that exist. There is no middle road of fleshly-spirited desires. The desires and fruits of the flesh are listed for us in Galatians 5:19-21 and the fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. Paul sets these desires against each other. There can be no mixing and there can be no compromise between these two types and sources of desire. Whenever these two come together they will clash and one will prevail. This is the type of war which Christians throughout their Christian life on earth will have to deal with. There is no Christian, no matter how holy from the outside, if asked honestly will say that they do not struggle with sin and do not experience this "irreconcilable war." Sometimes it is easier to choose the way of the Spirit and other times it is much easier to choose the way of the flesh. The way to avoid that the desires of the flesh overcome us says Paul is by "walking by the Spirit" (Gal. 5:16, 25; 6:8; Rom. 8:4-5, 12-14). To walk in the Spirit means to have a close relationship with the Spirit and a lifestyle characterized by the work of the Spirit. When we, through the Spirit, behold the beauty of God we no longer carve and lust after sin, but our joy and satisfaction is found in God alone. But when we are weak and are not satisfied in God, we will seek the "fleeting pleasures of sin" (Heb. 11:25).

§3 The Regenerate Part Doth Overcome

3. In which **war**, although the remaining corruption **for a time may much prevail**, **1** yet through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the **regenerate part doth overcome**; **2** and so the saints grow in grace, **perfecting holiness in the fear of God**, pressing after an heavenly life, in evangelical obedience to all the commands which Christ as Head and King, in His Word hath prescribed them. **3**
 1. Rom. 7:23
 2. Rom. 6:14; 1 John 5:4; Eph. 4:15-16
 3. 2 Peter 3:18; 2 Cor. 3:18; 7:1; Matt. 28:20

We have already touched on the fact that sanctification is a life-long process of ups and downs, and therefore there will be times when our remaining corruption will get the best of us, but also when we by the grace of the Holy Spirit get the victory against our sin. The way to avoid and achieve victory against the flesh and sin is to walk in the Spirit (Gal. 5:17) and use the means that God has given for our sanctification such as reading the Word, prayer, corporate worship and communion with the people of God.

A local church is essential and necessary for the growth of every Christian. It is there where you will meet people with whom you will spend all eternity worshipping God. They can minister to you through the things that God has taught them and you can minister to them. We do not have to wage this war all alone, but we have brothers and sisters who likewise wage this irreconcilable war. It is there where the Word of God is preached and it is the church which is the center of God's love. All true Christians are waging war against their flesh. It is good to be in company. Holy Writ tells us that we already are conquerors in Christ. John writes:

1 John 5:4-5 For everyone who has been born of God **overcomes the world**. And this is the victory that has overcome the world— our faith. 5 Who is it that **overcomes the world** except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

Our victory against the evil world system, which would include sin and the flesh, is guaranteed by the fact that we have been born of God. Just as our Lord Jesus conquered, so likewise we are promised that we will conquer and overcome (Rev. 3:21). Paul applies this language of overcoming and conquering even to physical persecution. It doesn't matter how badly we are persecuted in the world, it doesn't matter how much we are hated for His sake, our identity is found in Christ and in Him, we are more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37). As we wage this spiritual war we should seek to more and more be obedient to God from the heart and grow in His grace that we may not wander from Him, but cling tightly to Him and shun the thought of sin. Peter encourages Christians to grow in the knowledge and grace of Jesus Christ (2Pet. 3:18). We should seek Him more earnestly and more frequently in the Word and prayer, that our love and devotion for Him may grow and at the same time our love and devotion for sin and the flesh decrease and die out.

The writer of Hebrews tells us to strive "for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14). We are to pursue God and seek to be conformed to His will and to be like His beloved Son. As we behold, enjoy and worship Christ, the Spirit changes us into His likeness (2Cor. 3:18). This holiness the gracious Lord works in us by His grace through discipline. In verse 10 the writer tells us that the purpose why God disciplines (not *condemns!*) His children is so "that we may share his holiness." He disciplines us for our own good so that we will be purified from sin and seek Christ instead of the fleeting pleasures of sin. He makes us more like Christ through His fatherly discipline.

As we seek to be more and more in love and satisfied with the Triune God, and as we seek to reverently fear Him we will realize that the "fear of the LORD is hatred of evil" (Prov. 8:13). Hated for sin and evil begins with an acknowledgment of the God against whom all our sin is committed (Ps. 51:4; Luke 15:18). It is the Triune God who created us, owns us and has graciously redeemed us from the power of sin! As we seek to set His fear before us, not fear of condemnation (Rom. 8:1), but a healthy and reverent fear of disrespecting or dishonoring the God who graciously saved us, we realize that we will not take pleasure in our sins anymore as we did before, because we have through our sin displeased the God who saved us. We will be displeased with ourselves and troubled in our spirits when we realize that we have sinned against God. This is the Holy Spirit's work convicting us of our sin. When we realize this, we should go to the throne of grace and seek forgiveness and ask that God would cleanse us from our sins (Heb. 4:14-16; 1John 1:8-9). In times of temptation, we should pray to the Spirit of grace that He may grant that we do not sin against our Lord. We should pray that God grant us victory against our sin; that God would keep us from sinning against Him (Gen. 20:6). Our goal should always be to strive and pursue after holiness and to be conformed to the image of Christ. We look up to our Lord who obeyed His Father in every way and prayed that God's will be done. Our goal is to be like Him and be conformed to His blessed image according to God's will.

Heb 12:1-2 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us **run with endurance the race** that is set before us, 2 **looking to Jesus**, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.

Gracious Holy Spirit of God whom Christ has given us, please make us more like Christ that God may be glorified in us. Amen. SDG.

And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

(Hebrews 10:10)

Footnotes

1. [^] Many Scriptural references have been supplied by Samuel Waldron's [Modern Exposition of 1689 Baptist Confession of Faith](#) which was apparently supplied by the [Westminster Confession of Faith 1646](#).
2. [^] Wayne Grudem. *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994). Chapter 38, p. 746.
3. [^] *ibid.*, p. 747.