



Lesson 5

RG and the CHRISTIAN LIFE

THE BIG PICTURE - THE *Story*

As noted in our last lesson, “The Cross,” the person and work of Jesus produces the Christian life. *There is no fruit if there is no root.* Again, as we begin, let us not forget to constantly work from and drive back to the gospel, for Jesus is the gospel.

The *Story* God told/tells is one of progression and movement. It begins with God in the Garden and moves toward the end where all things created will glorify Him in the final Garden. The Christian Life, broadly speaking, is the unfolding of the *Story* from its beginning with creation, rejection, redemption, re-creation, and toward its fullest expression in worship. This chapter notes the progression of the *Story* within the individual’s story. Just like the larger *Story*, so also the smaller story within the individual. God is moving each of us from creation, through fall, to worship.

“We are not struggling *for* our sanctification. We are struggling *through* our sanctification.” [Joe Herriges, 2020]. Sanctification is something we already have.

INITIAL TRUTHS TO REMEMBER

It is important to see the link between THE CROSS (Cf. Lesson 4) and THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. The Christian Life grows out of the Gospel. They are not two different things, but two sides of one coin.

BASIC IDEAS:

1. The Christian Life from start to finish and everything in between is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.
2. Resting in the Finished Work of Christ is the means producing our sanctification.
3. The Christian Life is Christ’s Life.
4. The Christian cannot stop God from completing what He began (1 Thess. 5:23, 24; 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5).
5. What God gives to us [i.e. His life], He works in us and through us to those around us. Thus, Christians live righteous lives.

One of the reformer's summary statements reads as follows: "Faith alone saves; but saving faith is never alone."¹ The apostle James says as much in James 2:14-27.

Words like sanctification, good works, and discipleship might have their own distinct nuances, but they are working synonyms. If this is true, then it will shape how we look at each of these ideas.

OVERVIEW OF THE LESSON

In light of who we are in Christ, what does this look like in our daily lives? The answer lies in the area of, "Sanctification." Sanctification is the theological word for what we call the *Christian Life*. **It is the experiential side of the Christian.** For many of us, the idea or word "sanctification" appears foreign to our vocabulary. Yet it is a biblical word that needs explanation.

Before embarking on the study, we must remind ourselves never to lose sight of Him. First Corinthians 1:30 tells us that Jesus Christ is our sanctification.

²⁶ "for consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; ²⁷ but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, ²⁹ so that no man may boast before God. ³⁰ **But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,** ³¹ so that, just as it is written, 'LET HIM WHO BOASTS, BOAST IN THE LORD'" (1 Cor. 1:26-31).

Because this is true, the sanctified can never boast in themselves. Sanctification as an action is God working Himself in us and through us to those around us. **Sanctification as such is not about us, but Him.** The Bible does not emphasize what we do for God, but rather what God does for us. It is essential that we never lose sight of this truth.

With this in mind, let us begin our study.

Q1 - Where [or What] is our focus in Sanctification?

I. What is Biblical Sanctification?

Sanctification is one of those thousand-dollar theological words that many use and few understand. This has led to ask the question, "What is sanctification?" However, before we can answer the question we need to provide some background material so the question can be asked in its proper theological context.

Salvation as an idea is broad, inclusive, and generic. We use it to describe what happens to an individual who trusts the finished work of Christ for his or her deliverance from sin's penalty and inauguration/adoption into the family of God. However, the umbrella term "salvation" has

under it several very exact and definite ideas such as redemption, forgiveness, propitiation, justification, etc. [Lesson 4]. The One who begins the process in our justification guarantees the outcome in our sanctification.

²³ “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴ Faithful is He who calls you, and **He also will bring it to pass**” (1 Thess. 5:23, 24).

Biblical sanctification recognizes the fullness of God’s work in behalf of His people as constant and unchanging. It speaks of who they are in Christ because of what He did in their behalf. **There is nothing done by them to secure for them what only He could do.** Moreover, nothing they do can change what He did. The New Testament describes sanctification (salvation) with three tenses: past, present, and future.²

- **Past Sanctification**

(1 Cor. 6:11; **Col. 1:13, 14**; 2:12-14; Heb. 10:10, 14 [justification {delivered from the *penalty* of sin}])

¹³ “He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:13, 14).

- **Present Sanctification**

(1 Cor. 1:2; Rom. 12:1-2; **2 Cor. 5:17; 3:18** [sanctification {being delivered from the *power* of sin}])

¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

- **Perfect Sanctification**

(**1 Cor. 15:52-58**, 1 John 3:2, Phil. 3:20, 21 [glorification {will be delivered from the *presence* of sin}]).

⁵¹ Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, ⁵² in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. ⁵³ For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” ⁵⁵ “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” ⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain” (1 Cor. 15:52-58).

Each of the previous thoughts are all generated by God for His people. There is nothing done by the recipient except to accept what God has done. Our past sanctification speaks of our

present perfect standing before the Father as we are in His Son. Our perfect future sanctification is what we will be **experientially** after the removal of our old nature. Our present sanctification is the outworking of what we currently are in the context of our dual nature (i.e., old and new [Cf. Lesson 3]).

“While we struggle with residual sin and unbelief as individuals, sanctification like justification is complete in the church as Christ’s body. Though from our perspective our good works are incomplete, from God’s perspective they are complete.”³

This movement from our past to our future happens in and through our present. This present is progressing, it is growing, and it is being transformed.

Q2 – Is our sanctification something we do or something He does? Please explain your answer.

Q3 – Can we rest in His finished work even in our sanctification?

II. What Exactly Does the Word “Transformed” Mean (Rom. 12:2)?

The word *transformed* in the Greek is our English word *metamorphosis*. It is used four times in the New Testament. Twice it is used with reference to our Lord’s transfiguration on Mt. Hermon (Matt. 17:2; Mark 9:2). In addition, twice it is used of the believer being transformed or changed (Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 3:18). It means, “To change into another form.”

“And was **transfigured** before them: and his face shone as the sun, and his garments became as white as light” (Matt. 17:2).

“And do not be conformed to this world, but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom. 12:2).

“But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being **transformed** into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit” (2 Cor. 3:18).

The change that took place in our Lord was not a change of essence but one of appearance. The transfiguration simply showed to others what was inside, what was already true. It was a reversal of the incarnation. The veil of flesh lifted and they saw what He was like in His pre-incarnate state. **So also, is our sanctification. It is a change in appearance.** It is not a change of essence. Thus, our sanctification does not change who we already are in Christ. In regeneration, there is not a changing of the old nature, but a giving of the new nature. Moreover, it is this new nature seen through our earthen vessels (2 Cor. 4:6-12).

At the resurrection, the believer’s transformation will be complete. He will exchange the perishable for the imperishable (1 Cor. 15:50-54). The old vanishes and the new is manifested unhindered. At that moment “we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). In light of this, let us go back to the idea of sanctification.

Q4 - Does our sanctification change who we are in Christ?

Q5 - What part of us is changed in sanctification?

III. Revisiting the Idea of Sanctification

As noted earlier, salvation as a whole cannot be dichotomized and separated. Each part must be examined in light of the whole. When considering the area of justification, it must also include sanctification. The two, although distinct, are inseparably linked. This is equally true concerning the idea of progressive sanctification and perseverance. The sanctifying work of God in and through His people looks like the perseverance of the saints. The whole action rests in the immutable activity of God. Thus, **those whom God preserves persevere.**

Sanctification is the present outworking in and through our dual natures of what is true as to who we are in Him. The Bible makes sanctification a work of God in and through His people. If, however, sanctification is the work of God, then what do we do?

Q6 - Is it possible for the sanctifying work of God to fail in His people?

IV. What Part Do We Play in Our Sanctification?

The issue here is whether the idea of progressive sanctification is a monergistic act (i.e. work of one) or a synergistic act (i.e. to work with, the work of two). Before attempting to define the two ideas, let us preface our thoughts by saying **God's work of sanctifying His people does not bypass their intellect, their volition or will, or their emotions or affections.** God works in the individual in order that the individual is fully working toward the divinely established goal of complete glorification. With this thought in mind, let us consider the two ideas of monergism and synergism.

- **Monergism defined**

Monergism is a compound word literally meaning "one work." A monergistic work is the work of one. Evangelicals believe initial salvation (i.e. our justification) is the singular work of God. God works alone.

"Jesus is as much the doer of the good works as he is the recipient."⁴

Even though initial salvation is considered a monergistic work, it still includes an expressed faith on the part of the individual as the agent or means of securing God's provision. Yet, many within evangelicalism see the expressed faith as being sourced in God and energized by Him. In justification, neither the intellect, will, nor affection of the individual are overlooked or bypassed by the Holy Spirit. The response of man to God is real and necessary.

- **Synergism defined**

Synergism means “work with.” A synergistic work is the work of two. Unlike initial justification, most evangelicals view progressive sanctification as a synergistic work whereby the believer *cooperates* with God and God works through the obedience of the individual for his sanctification.

Inside of a synergistic mindset, without obedience or the fruit of the Spirit, the individual would never be progressively sanctified. This raises the question as to whether or not obedience is optional or necessary. I will examine this idea thoroughly under the New Testament Commands (Cf. Lesson 7), but initially I would state that although obedience is not automatic, it is inevitable. By saying it is not automatic, it is implied that God’s sanctifying activity does not bypass the intellect, will, or affections of the individual. “Believers are thus both passive and active in their sanctification.”⁵ A concern we have with a synergistic sanctification is the division often created between our justification and our sanctification. If “our” faith was not a synergistic work in our justification, why would “our” faith/obedience be a synergistic work in our sanctification? In sanctification, neither the intellect, nor the will, nor affection of the individual are overlooked or bypassed by the Holy Spirit. **The response of man to God is real and essential, although not necessary.**

Regardless as to whether or not one uses the word monergism or synergism for either justification or sanctification, **the issue is on whom the emphasis is placed.**

“Self-sanctification, that is, somehow generating holiness by one’s own efforts, is an impossibility. We can no more self-sanctify than we can self-deify.”⁶

“Holiness is a 100% God thing and a 0% human thing.”⁷

Thus, in justification and in sanctification neither the intellect, will, nor affection of the individual are overlooked or bypassed by the Holy Spirit. The response of man to God is real and necessary, yet it is God who works both to will and to do according to His good pleasure and nothing man does or can do can stop God from finishing what He has begun.⁸

²³ “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. **Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass**” (1 Thess. 5:23, 24).

¹² “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ **for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure** (Phil. 2:12, 13).

Q7 – Does God’s work of sanctification bypass our will?

Q8 – Is God’s work of sanctification dependent on our will?

V. The Means of Sanctification

Often, we view the New Testament imperative/command as the means of achieving sanctification or measuring sanctification (Cf. Lesson 7). This, however, is a misunderstanding of the imperative. Consider the following Biblical descriptions.

- Sanctification is said to be by God (1 Thess. 5:23, 24)

“We are not the active doers but the faithful recipients of the divine gift of sanctification.”⁹

“Sanctification is a Trinitarian act. God dwells in the believer in order to accomplish what He wants.”¹⁰

- Sanctification comes from union with Christ (1 Cor. 1:2)

“Sanctification is first christological, that is, it is Christ’s own life in God and then our life in Him.”¹¹

“Christ is as much our sanctification as he is our righteousness.”¹²

- Sanctification comes by the Word of God (John 17:17)
- Sanctification comes through the death of Christ and the shedding of His blood (Heb. 10:10; 13:12)

“The sanctified life constantly needs to be fully and only informed by Christ’s life and death or our personal holiness will soon deteriorate into a degenerate legalism and barren moralism.”¹³

- Sanctification comes through faith (Acts 26:18)

The emphasis cannot be on us, but always and forever on God. If the union with Christ and the life of Christ is not primary, then “it allows us to talk about the Christian life as something that we practice in fellowship with the Spirit, without really forcing us to pay attention to who we now are in Christ. In doing so, it allows key elements of the gospel to be assimilated, without our recognizing it, to a modern individualism that will always compromise our Christian growth. At some point, we must ask ourselves whether we are still playing the original tune or are, perhaps without recognizing it, playing something else, something different.”¹⁴

The New Testament command is the outworking of something that is already true. The believer does not work for his sanctification; he is working from his sanctification (1 Cor. 5:7).

“Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, **just as you are in fact unleavened.** For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed” (1 Cor. 5:7).

For the people of God, their justification, sanctification, and glorification are a sure work. God has rendered certain what He alone determines (Rom. 8). God has never wasted one moment, event, decision, or expenditure of energy. The means of sanctification show the singular story of Scripture with Jesus at the center.

Q9 - Are “means” necessary for sanctification?

CONCLUSION

God is working in us and through us, His perfect will. Every aspect of our lives is a reflection of a wise, gracious, and loving master artisan. Let us live our lives believing that He is finishing what He has completed. Let us see our obedience as a consequence of what is already true. Moreover, as always, let us continue to dance in the reign of grace!

Q10 - What did you find helpful from today’s study?

Q11 - What are some questions coming from this study?

NEXT LESSON - RG and the Law

¹ John Calvin's *Antidote to the Council of Trent* (1547).

² <http://www.ligonier.org/blog/3-tenses-gospel/> “John Stott has argued that when Paul reasoned with Governor Felix about “righteousness and self-control and the coming judgment” (Acts 24:25), he was pointing out the three tenses of salvation. The moment we drift away from the gospel, we perish. At every stage—justification, sanctification, glorification— we come with empty hands, seeking mercy from our heavenly Father. Even at the point of our obedience as Christians—we are to “work out [our] salvation with fear and trembling” (Phil. 2:12)— we do so only because God works “in [us], both to will and to work for his good pleasure” (v. 13). And when we enter the Pearly Gates of heaven, wisdom will dictate that we show our empty hands and say with Edward Mote: On Christ the solid Rock I stand; All other ground is sinking sand.”

³ David Scaer (2015) “Sanctification,” *Concordia Journal*: Vo..41: No. 3, Article 6.

⁴ David Scaer (2015) “Sanctification,” *Concordia Journal*: Vo..41: No. 3, Article 6.

⁵ *New Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. “Sanctification,” by K. Bockmuehl, 614.

⁶ <https://www.1517.org/articles/what-is-sanctification-revisiting-the-old-testament-for-the-answer>

⁷ <https://www.1517.org/articles/what-is-sanctification-revisiting-the-old-testament-for-the-answer>

⁸ For perhaps one of the best articles written on this subject see <https://www.thoughtstheological.com/is-sanctification-synergistic-or-monergistic/>

⁹ <https://www.1517.org/articles/what-is-sanctification-revisiting-the-old-testament-for-the-answer>

¹⁰ https://www.issuesetcarchive.org/issues_site/resource/archives/scaer.htm

¹¹ https://www.issuesetcarchive.org/issues_site/resource/archives/scaer.htm

¹² David Scaer (2015) “Sanctification,” *Concordia Journal*: Vo..41: No. 3, Article 6.

¹³ https://www.issuesetcarchive.org/issues_site/resource/archives/scaer.htm

¹⁴ Grant Macaskill, *Living in Union with Christ*, BakerAcademic, 2019, pp. 4, 5.