

Sanctification in the Life of the Believer

Selected Scriptures

1. The Differences Between Sanctification and Justification:

- A. Justification: This is an action by God wherein He declares that a sinner is now righteous because of the imputation of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. This happens at the moment of salvation (temporally coinciding with regeneration, faith, adoption, etc). Words that help distinguish this from sanctification would be: Initial, Instantaneous, Finished.
- B. Sanctification: "The work of God by which a person is set apart from sin and unto God."
 - I. Sanctification in the Past: This can also be understood as 'initial sanctification', and it is what occurs when a person first believes (1 Cor. 6:11; Acts 20:32).
 - II. Sanctification in the Present: This is also referred to as 'progressive sanctification' and it is the continuing process of greater conformity to Christ-likeness which takes place throughout a believer's life (1 Th. 4:3-4, 7; 1 Ti. 2:15).
 - III. Sanctification in the Future (in glory): This is referred to as 'perfected sanctification' and it is completion of the individual's being set apart unto God with the eradication of sin (Heb. 12:23; 1 Th. 3:13).

2. Related and Important Biblical Truths

- A. Perseverance: Simply stated, when this term is used in relation to the entirety of a Christian's life, this expresses that all true Christians will continue in the faith throughout the duration of their lives. Also referred to as perseverance in the faith, or the perseverance of the saints.
- B. Preservation (or Eternal Security): This is the idea that God has forever secured and unalterably preserves the Christian in order that he or she will forever abide with the Lord (Jn. 10:27-30; cf. Jn 14:1-6).
- C. Assurance: This is the believer's "subjective awareness" of the reality and certainty of his or her salvation (Rom. 8:16; 1 Jn. 5:13).

3. Is Progressive Sanctification *Necessary* for the Christian?

This is a highly charged question that elicits equally highly charged responses.

The way in which one answers this theological question impacts all areas of the Christian's life.

A. Answers from Evangelicals:

- I. Yes: The Bible clearly describes Christians as those who bear fruit and those who do not as non-Christians (Jn. 15:1-16)
- II. No: The Bible divides humanity into three categories of people: natural, carnal and spiritual. The natural man is the lost or unsaved person, the carnal man has been saved but is living as if he were not, and the spiritual man who is saved and bearing fruit (1 Cor. 2:13-3:3).

B. Evaluating the Other Answer:

- I. Answering "Yes" means you are preaching works salvation (Gal. 3:1-4).
- II. Answering "No" means you are preaching antinomianism (i.e. a faith that endorses lawless behavior; cf. Rom. 6:1-2).

C. Examining Key Texts

- I. 1 Corinthians 2:13-3:3
 - a. The Natural Man (1 Cor. 2:14)
This is a man who lacks both the desire to accept and ability to understand the things of God. This is the unsaved person.
 - b. The Fleshly Man (1 Cor. 3:1, 3)
Paul refers to these men as brethren and describes them as infants in Christ (v.1), but describes them with two different words ('men of flesh' and 'fleshly') which indicate their behavior is inseparably connected to the flesh and is distinct from the activities of those who are spiritual.
 - c. The Spiritual Man (1 Cor. 2:15; 3:1)
This is the mature and faithful Christian living in obedience to Christ.
- II. John 15:1-16
 - a. Two Kinds of Branches (Jn. 15:2 5, 6)
These branches are defined by their activities, whether they bear fruit.
 - b. Two Different Results (Jn. 15:2, 5, 6)
The fruitful are pruned to produce more fruit whereas the unfruitful are discarded and burned.
 - a. The Relationship Between Abiding and Fruit Bearing (Jn. 15:8, 10)
Obedience (i.e. keeping the commandments of Christ) is a condition of abiding in the love of both Christ and the Father and it is the proof that one is a disciple of Jesus.