

Sanctification

by Luke Keefer, Jr

Sanctification means “to be set apart for God.” Two basic and interrelated ideas are contained in this. One is consecration in which Christians are to consider themselves to be God’s property, purchased with the price of Christ’s blood (I Corinthians 6:19-20). They are to devote themselves to doing His will in all aspects of their lives. From the time of their conversion until they enter the world of eternity, they are servants of God to do the work He assigns to them for the good of His kingdom.

The other concept is that of purity. Because God is holy, if we are to serve him acceptably, we too must be holy (I Peter 1:15-16). Christians can no longer live as they did formerly in the practice of sin. Nor can they allow the desires that once motivated their lives to determine their purpose for living or the manner of their conduct. Both the outward conduct of life and the innermost motives of the heart must be made pure by the grace of God. God’s power and his promises guarantee to the Christian the possibility of purity in heart and life (2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; I Thessalonians 5:23-24; 2 Peter 1:3-4).

God’s Will

It has always been God’s desire to have a people who would fellowship with and faithfully serve Him. This is why God created people in the beginning. But when Adam and Eve sinned, the subsequent course of history was altered. The human race lost its original righteousness. Since then all people have been born with the stain of a sinful nature and have become guilty of sin before God by their personal deeds of wickedness.

But God in great mercy and love chose not to abandon people to their just fate. Instead, God sent Christ, His only Son, to redeem human beings from the cause and the consequences of sin. Christ’s death on the cross provided forgiveness for the sins each of us has committed. His blood also provided for a cleansing from the perverse bent toward sinning that has such a firm hold upon our hearts. Subsequently, the resurrection of Christ from the dead provided that the penalty of death would be set aside in the gift of eternal life.

The life, death, and resurrection of Jesus does more than remove the symptoms of sin. It destroys the very sickness of sin. Medically, we may suppress the symptoms of a disease for some time without really curing the sickness. Or, we may treat the cause of the illness so that in due course the illness and all its symptoms disappear. The true picture of the Christian life is the grace of our Lord dealing with the very root of the problem, bringing true health to our souls. There is no need for us to sin continually.

God wills that His people experience His power to release from sin. Ultimately, He intends to have His followers stand before Him in perfect spiritual health-of both soul and body, without defect and without blame. The culmination of the process of sanctification is the glorification of the body. Jesus’ Sanctifying Death

Jesus became human in order that He might redeem fallen creation. First, He demonstrated that it was possible to be fully

human and live without sin. Second, at the cross the sinless Christ took upon himself the whole burden of human sin - its penalty, its defilement, and its power (2 Corinthians 5: 21). Through His atonement the consequences of sin are set aside in the life of the believer. Third, His victorious resurrection made possible a completely new way of life. Finally, in His gift of the Holy Spirit, He puts at our disposal all the power for godly living that He Himself knew in the days of His flesh. No longer does the Christian labor to keep God's holy law, always frustrated because of the persistent presence of indwelling sin. For the law of the spirit in Christ Jesus frees us from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:1-4).

Scripture, exulting in this complete victory of Christ over sin, sums up His work of atonement as completed in the sanctification of His people (Hebrews 10: 10). Jesus has become to the believer "wisdom...righteousness and sanctification and redemption" (1 Corinthians 1:30, NKJV).

The Holy Spirit

God is spirit, and those who worship him must do so in spirit and truth (John 4:24). God is holy in nature (1 Peter 1:16). The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, is uniquely operative in making believers what God wills them to be and what Jesus makes possible for them to be.

The Holy Spirit is the active agent in the ministry of sanctification (Romans 15:16; 2 Thessalonians 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2). By the Holy Spirit, believers not only become aware of sin but also find the power of God available to deal with it effectually (Romans 8:13). The Spirit produces in one's life the fruit of righteousness that is found pleasing to God (Galatians 5:22-26). The Spirit makes the Word of God effective, changing us into the very image of God (2 Corinthians 3:17-18). The Spirit equips the believer with special spiritual gifts so the Christian might minister with effectiveness to the church (1 Corinthians 12).

The Spirit moves us to consecrate ourselves to God's will and his work (Romans 12:1-2). He gives wings to our prayers (Romans 8:26-27; Jude 20), voice to our witness (John 15: 26-27; Acts 1 :8), and heart to our worship (Acts 2:37-47; Ephesians 5:18-20). This is what the Scripture means when it commands us to live in the Holy Spirit.

The Role of Christians

The Holy Spirit enables Christians to become what God intends them to be. They are not thoughtless participants forced to do God's will with no involvement of their own. Scripture says that holiness is something that we must pursue with single-minded diligence (Hebrews 12:14; 2 Peter 1:5-11). Sanctification comes through the truth of God's Word (John 17:17), but we must place ourselves under the influence of the Word. We must take sides with God against all sin, whether act or attitude, in order to be purified from its corrupting influence and dominating power (Ephesians 4:22-24; 2 Timothy 2:21).

We need to pray for God's searching of our lives to locate and redeem us from the secret sins hidden even to our own consciousness (Psalm 19:12-14). It is our duty to consecrate ourselves to God's will (Romans 12:1-2).

When we avail ourselves of the grace that God has provided, we find sanctification becoming a reality in our lives. There are two Scriptural conditions: He will "give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:13), and He gives the Holy Spirit to those who obey Him (Acts 5:32). Praying and obeying - walking in the light as He is in the light (1 John 1:7) - purifying and consecrating our lives before God-these are the ways to realize the sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit. Then God opens to us the fullness of the redemption that Jesus has provided for His people, a life pleasing to God.