

SANCTIFIED BY THE POWER OF GOD

(SUNDAY, JANUARY 17, 2016)

Scripture Reading: Ps. 32; Phil. 2:1-16

INTRODUCTION

Consider God's glorious plan of salvation and what role you played in the different parts of God's great work.

What role did you have in your eternal election? Quite obviously you had nothing to do with your election.

What role did you have in your regeneration?

Again, nothing. Dead men cannot choose anything but death.

What role did you have in your justification?

It was nothing you did, but again God's gift received alone by faith.

The same thing is true of your adoption.

What about sanctification?

Here we do see a difference.

Your sanctification is by God's grace like every other aspect of salvation. Your sanctification is according to God's power. But you also are called to now obey and follow after Jesus Christ.

It is not that God does half and you do half.

But sanctification unlike election and justification takes place over time.

Scripture does not command that you earn God's love or forgiveness. These you could never earn.

You are commanded to grow in grace, to grow in obedience, and to live in holiness.

We are going to spend at least two weeks on the doctrine and grace of sanctification.

God is sanctifying you by His grace and power. Grow in obedience and holiness.

We will consider three main points this morning.

- 1) What is sanctification?
- 2) Is sanctification complete in this life?
- 3) Is there any growth and victory for the believer?

1) WHAT IS SANCTIFICATION?

I have included in the bulletin a great quote from Martin Luther regarding justification and sanctification.

We in Christ = justification; Christ in us = sanctification.

This does not explain everything, but I think it is useful as we think about sanctification.

Christ in us is the basis for our sanctification.

Listen to the definition given by the Westminster Shorter Catechism.

Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness.

- Renewed in the whole man after the image of God
- Die unto sin
- Live unto righteousness

I stated last week that in God's work of adoption we have the high point in terms of our earthly relationship to God.

Sanctification does not make us more a child of God. In sanctification, we by God's grace more and more live as children of God.

Now, I don't want to complicate or confuse things, but Scripture does use the word sanctification in two ways that are related but not identical.

Theologians use two terms — Definitive and Progressive Sanctification.

The difference is that one happens immediately in our conversion – definitive. The other, progressive, occurs over the course of the believer's life.

Definitive sanctification deals with the believer's break with the totally controlling force of sin and that we are now God's holy people.

Listen to three passages from Hebrews that speak of this.

Heb. 9:13 For if the blood of bulls and goats and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling the unclean, sanctifies for the purifying of the flesh, **14** how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

Heb. 10:10 By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*.

Heb. 13:12 Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people with His own blood, suffered outside the gate.

Listen to three other passages that speak of our death to sin, again part of what we call definitive sanctification.

Rom. 6:11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Gal. 2:20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Col. 3:3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Passages that stress this decisive break with sin that the believer enjoys, we understand not as sinless perfection, but the basis for growing in true holiness.

Progressive sanctification is not a term that you will find in Scripture but it helps us understand passages that speak of the continuous battle and pursuit that believers face and which they can only fight by God's grace. Most often the word sanctification refers to progressive sanctification.

Phil. 3:12 Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me.

1John 1:8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

1Th. 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus

Christ.

Heb. 13:20 Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, **21** make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.

Now it is very important to know that although you are commanded to obey and put to death the deeds of the flesh, you are not sanctified by your own efforts.

You are sanctified through the power and work and God.

Listen to the words of Paul regarding the power of God that is at work in the lives of His children.

Eph. 1:19 and what *is* the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power **20** which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated *Him* at His right hand in the heavenly *places*,

Yes, you are commanded to obey. As a church we are commanded to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, because it is God who works in us both to will and do of His good pleasure.

The good news of sanctification is that God is at work in the lives of His people.

How else could the dominion of sin be destroyed?

How else could lust be weakened?

Could you do this in your own strength?

Can you strengthen yourself in saving graces?

Now, you do have a duty in sanctification.

A. A. Hodge speaks very helpfully of inward and outward means that you are called to exercise.

The inward means is faith.

Faith is the instrument of your justification.

Faith is also the basis for your continued sanctification as you trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and His promises.

Faith as Hebrews 12:2 describes it is:

looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of *our* faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

The only way to battle against your remaining sin and temptations is to know who you are in Christ. In looking to Him, in resting in Him, you are able to grow in grace and see His power at work in your life.

God has also given other, outward means.

These include:

1. God's Word.

John 17:17 Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

1Pet. 2:1 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, **2** as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, **3** if indeed you have tasted that the Lord *is* gracious.

Psalm 119:10 With my whole heart I have sought You;

Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments!

11 Your word I have hidden in my heart,

That I might not sin against You.

2. God has also given to His church the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper.

They are signs of God's grace and also God uses them to seal that is to confirm His grace in your life.

3. God has also given the means of prayer.

It is important to state that prayer by itself is not holiness.

You can pray as a hypocrite or as the Pharisee did in Jesus' parable.

Long times of prayer is not necessarily a sign of how spiritual or holy you are.

However, we can also say that without prayer, you are not living as you are called.

Pray without ceasing or pray constantly we are commanded in 1 Thess. 5:17.

We pray because we recognize our great need!

We pray not because we are so holy, but because we desire to grow in holiness and obedience.

4. God also uses as another external means His gracious discipline and correction.

Not all discipline is because of specific sin in the believer's life.

Discipline is the loving work of our Father so that you will grow in recognizing you can do nothing without Him.

John 15:2 Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every *branch* that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. **3** You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. **4** Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me.

God is sanctifying you by His grace and power. Grow in obedience and holiness.

2) IS SANCTIFICATION COMPLETE IN THIS LIFE?

I know I have shared the story from the life of Charles Spurgeon who interacted with two people who believed you could reach a state of sinless perfection in this life.

As the story is told, the two men approached Spurgeon and announced to him, "Spurgeon, we have reached sinless perfection."

"Really?" he asked.

"Yes," they said, "We are absolutely perfect."

Spurgeon was holding a pitcher of water at the time, and he poured it on their heads. When they began to react like any other sinners would, he found out just how perfect they were.¹

The doctrine of perfectionism at times has had a strong following.

John Wesley and others taught a view sometimes called entire sanctification. Some even today in Nazarene, Church of God, and Pentecostal Holiness Church denominations apparently teach something similar.²

Now some people who believe this might say, we don't mean absolutely and totally sinless.

Well, then you should choose another name to explain your view.

The idea is very dangerous – that you can somehow reach a point of perfection.

¹ <https://www.harvest.org/devotions-and-blogs/daily-devotions/2004-01-27>

² <http://www.theopedia.com/wesleyan-perfectionism>

We might think for example that the writer of Psalm 119 would claim to be perfect as He praises God for His law in just about every verse.

What does the last verse of Psalm 119 say?

Psalm 119:176 I have gone astray like a lost sheep; Seek Your servant, For I do not forget Your commandments.

God does not bring us to the point of perfection in this life. The best is still to come!

G. I. Williamson points out wisely, that the greater progress one makes in sanctification the more you will be distressed by the sin that is still present.³

Gal. 5:16 I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. **17** For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. **18** But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

It is also very important to realize that growth in sanctification does not mean that the battle against sin becomes any easier.

There is no autopilot or cruise control with respect to sanctification.

Rather, daily you are called to live by faith.

Daily you are called to seek to grow in obedience using the means that God has appointed.

3) IS THERE ANY GROWTH AND VICTORY FOR THE BELIEVER?

The answer to this question is yes!

The believer will grow in grace. There is no question about this.

The WCF in 13.3 states:

13.3. In which war, although the remaining corruption, for a time, may much prevail; yet, through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part does overcome; and so, the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

War does not mean the absence of victory or growth!

If you are discouraged because you see still the presence of many sins and are aware of your many failures, take courage!

³ Williamson, 115.

Now, we certainly do not want to cover sin by saying, well it is forgiven.

We don't want to excuse our laziness by simply claiming grace.

But be encouraged and challenged by the presence of the Holy Spirit and the change that God is bringing.

Eph. 4:15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— **16** from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

1John 5:4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith.

2Cor. 3:18 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 by the Spirit of the Lord.

2Pet. 3:18 but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him *be* the glory both now and forever. Amen.

2Cor. 7:1 Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

God is sanctifying you by His grace and power. Grow in obedience and holiness.

CONCLUSION:

I want to close by having us look at the amazing account of our Lord walking on water and calling for Peter to do the same.

Turn to Matthew 14:22-33.

I don't believe the main purpose of this passage is to teach us necessarily about sanctification, but there is an object lesson.

Peter initially was by the power of Christ able to walk on the water.

Verse 30 indicates that Peter took his focus off of His Lord and rather focused on the boisterous wind! Filled with fear he began to sink.

Our Lord was merciful to Peter even though He rebuked him.

In sanctification, your focus must always be on the power of God, the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

In this you will grow according to grace.

John Calvin states also the following:

And we too, though enduring just punishment, ought to betake ourselves to him, that he may have compassion on us, and bestow the aid of which we are unworthy.

What a merciful God and Savior we serve. It is by His grace that you are being sanctified! May all the praise and glory be to Him. Amen.

Prayer

Hymn: 463

Benediction – Hebrews 13:20-21

Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* glory forever and ever. Amen.